GAṆATANTRA SMĀRAK (REPUBLIC MEMORIAL): THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

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The damage caused to the perimeter wall of the Narayanhiti Palace compound by the 2015 earthquakes revealed the construction site of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* (republic memorial), to anyone walking past its north east corner (Image 1).[1] These glimpses, snatched between strands of barbed wire, are representative of the lack of public visibility this project had throughout its design and construction.[2] The design competition for a memorial "to symbolize [the] people's victory over the autocratic monarchy system in Nepal" was launched in 2009 with initial fanfare by the (then Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist [CPN-M] led) government. In April 2009 five shortlisted design teams were invited to give presentations to a jury. The winning design was that proposed by Abhishek Bajracharya and Shekhar Dongol of John Sanday Associates. Since 2012 construction and design has continued under successive coalition governments, concealed behind the walls of the palace compound. The *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was due to be

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[1] The earthquakes that struck on April 25 and May 12, 2015 caused around 9,000 deaths and around half a million families in the central region of the country lost their homes. Buildings and infrastructure across Kathmandu was destroyed.

[2] Writing about local memorialization projects in Nepal, Simon Robins (2013, 2014) states that there are no official memorial projects in progress, despite the fact the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was already under construction. (Robins worked in the field and headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC]). At the Constituent Assembly meeting on July 25, 2014 Narahari Acharya (the Minister for Law, Justice, and Peace) and Shankar Pokhrel (the central committee member of Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist [CPN-UML]) said the victims of the decade-long insurgency should be "remembered through various articles, songs, memorials, parks, and monuments that celebrate them and the sacrifice they made as a part of the post-conflict memorialization initiative." No mention was made of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* (The Kathmandu Post 2014)*.* At the time of writing in April 2019, the project has started to pick up some coverage in Nepali print and social media in expectation of its opening in May 2019 (Luitel 2019).

inaugurated on May 28, 2016, Republic Day,[3] but construction has been delayed and at the time of writing in April 2019 the memorial is not yet open to the public.[4] This article examines the design competition, design process, and memorial-making process between 2009 and 2016 to reveal the politics of a memory project that embodies the problems of re-imagining the nation and proposing a credible resolution to the recent conflict.

Image 1: View through the palace compound wall to the Gaṇatantra Smārak construction site, looking west (Photograph by author, July 25, 2016).

Museumizing the Narayanhiti Palace enabled Nepal's government to deactivate the site as a marker of monarchical power. The intention was to ensure that the palace and other accouterments of power associated with

[3] Republic Day was first celebrated on May 29, 2009 (Jeṭh 15, 2066 v.s.) on the anniversary of the Constituent Assembly's decision to abolish the monarchy and found a new republic, and has been celebrated every year since.

[4] Notices declaring the government's intention to open the site on the next Republic Day and subsequent notices announcing the delay by one year have been an annual occurrence in the national Nepali press since 2014.

the monarchy were no longer seen as the possessions of the king of Nepal, but as the property of the Republic of Nepal (Whitmarsh 2018a). In this article I will argue that the space of the palace is being used to support the exchange of one national identity for another as the construction of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* inscribes a new interpretation of the past onto the national landscape. It is not just the consigning of the monarchy to the past through the Narayanhiti Palace Museum, but also the fact that Nepal's monarchical past can be forgotten at all that is in part constitutive of the new republican identity (Ankersmit 2001). As a final attempt at dissociation from the monarchical past, the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* is to mark the adoption of a new Nepali national identity and the beginning of a new phase in the meaning of the palace.

Through examination of the period that pre-dates the *Gaṇatantra Smārak*'s completion and opening to the public, this article aims to make visible the activity of a state-sponsored memory that aims to affirm the righteousness of the new Republic and thereby the civil war through the construction of a symbol, in the form of a monument. Modern nations, as demonstrated by Benedict Anderson (2006), are bound together by imaginative, narrative, and symbolic means. In order to be imagined, of course, they must be represented, and the more precarious or contrived the national community is that is being imagined, the greater the burden on representation will be (Mumford 1949). Such imaginary representations are always called upon to perform the well-nigh impossible task of eradicating any sense of the nation as a constructed entity. Anderson notes the particular way in which the nation transforms "fatality into continuity, [and] contingency into meaning," for example through the construction of cenotaphs and tombs of unknown soldiers (2006: 11). Nation-building in Nepal during this period was precarious precisely because the political transition from monarchy to federal republic revealed the end of the Hindu kingdom and the start of another national formation. By commissioning a national monument, the post-conflict CPN-M led government sought to utilize the past selectively to portray a unified national narrative that put the people rather than the monarchy at its heart. The presentation given by the winning architects to the panel of the jury mentioned above described the purpose of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* as being "to celebrate the victory [of the new republic] and to memorialize the *anonymous* heroes of the country"

(italics added),[5] thus signifying unity through the emblem of sacrifice and enabling the nation to be both *new* and *historical* or to use Anderson's words, "loom[ing] out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glid[ing] into a limitless future" (Anderson 2006: 9–12).[6]

The burden of representation on the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was threefold. First, to present the new republican Nepal as timeless would not be easy because the historic processes of State formation and nation-building centered on the model of Hindu kingship embodied by the Shah monarchy (Burghart 1996). Second, a national monument conceived in 2009 was also obliged to address the concept of an inclusive "New Nepal" to represent all Nepalis. The idea of Nepal had for centuries been built in the image of a narrow ethnic and caste elite and the sub-text of the transition was that of a challenge to their power. The conflict and the subsequent incorporation of the leaders of the Maoist insurgency into Nepal's political establishment brought about a rise in political consciousness evidenced in the public expression of multiple loyalties along regional and ethnic lines (Hachhethu, Kumar and Subedi 2008). The construction of a national monument presupposed a singular national identity, but debates over competing forms of federalism led to a prolonged process with lack of agreement between the political parties. There was no singular view on what an inclusive "New Nepal" would mean or be constituted of. This article is concerned with how the construction of a new national formation impelled a state-sanctioned reinterpretation of history and how that history came to be staged within the grounds of the Narayanhiti Palace. Finally, the monument was intended to represent an end to the civil war, both as a "monument to heroism and a memorial to tragic loss" (Young 1993: 3). This task was compromised both because all parties to the conflict were responsible for violations of humanitarian and human rights law and also because those responsible for the monument's commission

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[5] Anderson writes specifically about the anonymity of the dead (2006: 10). He states that this avoids the need to specify the nationality of the often-absent occupants of tombs to unknown soldiers. This is one way in which states deal with the aftermath of conflict in order to avoid the state being blamed.

[6] See Booth (2006) and Edkins (2003) for further discussion of this trope in post-conflict memorials.

and implementation sat at the highest levels of the political structures of the state and the CPN-M during the conflict.[7]

I draw upon the work of James Young in order to structure this article. Young treats monuments as a subset of memorials: "A memorial may be a day, a conference, or a space, but it need not be a monument. A monument, on the other hand, is always a kind of memorial" (1993: 4). He adopts a biographical approach to the study of Holocaust memorials across four countries in order to acknowledge the life of a memorial in order to make visible the "activity of memory" and thereby recognize its significance as a "never-to-be-completed" process. Young believes that the best way to do this is to "enlarge its life and texture to include its genesis in historical time, the activity that brings a monument into being, the debates surrounding its origins, its production, its reception, its life in the mind" (2016: 16).

Young's biographic approach draws attention to the debates surrounding a monument's existence and understands memory as relational, dynamic, and related to the present (1993: 14–15). His comparative work explains the function of a monument in the creation of national identity and how its performance is embedded in the local context. In 1989 he highlighted the "viewer's responses to the monument, how it is used politically and religiously in the community, who sees it under what circumstances, how its figures are used and re-cast in new places" (1989: 67). He went on to conceive of the life of a memorial in multiple dimensions as revealing what he defines as its "texture of memory" (1993): its conception and literal construction; its form; its place in the constellation of national memory; and its ever-evolving life in the mind of its community over time (2016). These dimensions will frame the perspectives discussed here and help to address three interrelated questions: How is the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* intended to shape the memory of the recent past (including the civil war and the political transition from monarchy to republic)? How does this memory of the recent

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[7] During the period in question, the Nepali government became subject to criticism by human rights agencies for a lack of political will to implement meaningful transitional justice measures and for the extent of state-sanctioned impunity (Sharma 2012, 2017). Whilst an individual's membership of a party does not necessarily mean that they were actively involved in lethal conflict or that they committed rights abuses, Sharma notes that 80 percent of the members of the Constituent Assembly in 2008 were members of the three largest political parties involved on either side of the conflict.

past shape understandings of today's post-monarchical Nepal? And for what purpose is this memory (re)told?

Much has been written about the civil war and its effect on Nepal (Hutt 2004a; Thapa 2012; Adhikari 2014); including internationally supported peace-making and peacebuilding efforts (Martin 2012; Adhikari 2017) and local perceptions of the limited transitional justice mechanisms put into place, such as the integration of ex-Maoist combatants into the Nepal Army (2006–2012), and the establishment of a Ministry for Peace and Reconstruction in March 2007 (Hutt 2004a; Neelakantan, Ramsbotham and Thapa 2016). There is a limited amount of material available on memorialization of the conflict that focuses on the CPN-M's use of martyrdom as a political tool (de Sales 2003; Ogura 2004; Lecomte-Tilouine 2006; Shrestha-Schipper 2012). Simon Robins (2013, 2014) explores the nexus of local memory practices in the Tarai region and transitional justice, critiquing elite-led institutional recognition processes and the work of journalist Kunda Dixit (2007) attempts to address the conflict from the victim's perspective.[8] Michael Hutt's (2012) analysis of the process of writing the new national anthem in 2006–2007 addresses the post-conflict re-representation of the nation, but no research has been published to date on national-level memorialization initiatives following the conflict.[9]

Post-conflict Nepal

This article begins with a brief recap of the chronology of post-conflict Nepal, in order to situate the discussion that follows and help with analysis of the memorial's present perception. The civil war saw the loss of at least 13,000 lives and has left 1,347 people unaccounted for in the period 1996 to 2006 (INSEC 2010; OHCHR 2012; Adhikari 2014: 243; ICRC and NRCS 2014).[10] The 2005 state of emergency instituted by King Gyanendra Shah

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[8] Robins (2014) gives a detailed account of local memorialization initiatives supported by the ICRC.

[9] Whilst the national anthem could be argued to be a memory project, this frame of analysis was not used for the only detailed analysis I am aware of the process of its creation, see Hutt (2012).

[10] I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for alerting me to the suitable data sources, bearing in mind the lack of clarity around figures that exist because of a lack of verification from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to date. UN OHCHR uses data collated from different organizations' records.

pushed the political parties and the CPN-M together and the *Jana Āndolan* of March-April 2006 led to the cessation of hostilities between the CPN-M and the Nepali state. Gyanendra reinstated parliament, and direct talks followed between the Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and the Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda). The official end of the conflict came in November 2006 when the CPN-M and the Nepal government signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), bringing the Maoists into mainstream politics. The king's executive powers were formally transferred to the prime minister, cabinet, or parliament in the interim constitution in January 2007.

In April 2007 the Maoists joined the interim government[11] and then promptly left again as they negotiated the terms of the transition with the mainstream political parties.[12] The CPN-M re-joined the interim government in December 2007. During 2007 CPN-M fighters assembled in cantonments; a UN mission arrived in Nepal to monitor the arms and armies of both parties, and to assist in preparation for elections to the Constituent Assembly (CA) (Martin 2012), the body expected to serve for a two-year term as both the parliament of Nepal and the creator of its new constitution. All elections were postponed during this period as a result of the protests and riots in the south from those fighting for regional autonomy that came to be known as the *Madhes Āndolan* (2007–2008).[13]

Elections to the CA were held in April 2008, and brought to power a CPN-M led coalition with Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal as prime minister. At its first meeting on May 28, 2008, the CA declared Nepal a federal republic and formally abolished the monarchy. The first President,

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ICRC and NRCS_(2014) figures account for those who returned after 2012 and families who accepted information that their family member was dead.

[11] The Interim Constitution set out membership of the new legislature parliament, as 330 members overall: 209 members of the seven political parties who were existing elected members of the reinstated House of Representatives and National Assembly, plus seventy-three members of the CPN-M (to be selected by the party), and forty-eight members from under-represented groups, including indigenous ethnic groups and women (UNDP 2009: 108).

[12] The Maoists demanded the abolition of the monarchy. Amendments were made to the interim constitution at the first meeting of the CA on May 28, 2008 that enshrined a commitment to federalism.

[13] For the background, see Jha (2014).

Ram Baran Yadav, a Madhesi politician from the Nepali Congress (NC), was elected in July 2008. It was at this time, in late 2008 that the design competition for the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was launched.

By the time the final foundation stone was laid in the grounds of the Narayanhiti Palace in 2012, the situation was far from stable; there had already been four prime ministers in four years.[14] Pushpa Kamal Dahal resigned in Spring 2009 after a controversy over the leadership of the army, and a series of governments followed, headed first by the CPN-UML and then again by the CPN-M. Following two extensions to its initial two-year term which greatly eroded its credibility, the CA was eventually dissolved in May 2012, with no agreement on the constitutional framework for the new republic, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Khil Raj Regmi took over as prime minister. A second set of elections were held in November 2013, the NC emerged as the largest party and the NC President Sushil Koirala was made prime minister in February 2014 in partnership with the CPN-UML. It wasn't until September 2015 that the government promulgated a new constitution, fast-tracked in the aftermath of the earthquakes that hit Nepal in April and May, killing over 9,000 people. By December 2016, when the *Smārak* was due to be completed, Nepal had a further two changes of power. Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli (CPN-UML) led a coalition government from October 2015 until July 2016, when Pushpa Kamal Dahal (CPN-M) took over, again leading a coalition. The vulnerability of the project that resulted from the shifting patterns of political control is a thread that I will follow throughout this article.

The Design Competition

The proposal for the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was announced by Maoist strategist Baburam Bhattarai, then Finance Minister in the budget for the fiscal year 2065–2066 v.s. (2008–2009) under the heading "Institutional Development of Federal Democratic Republic and State Restructuring" and second only to the commitment that a new constitution would be written within two years. In his speech, he declared:

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[14] CPN-M's Pushpa Kamal Dahal (May 2008–May 2009), CPN-UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal (May 2009–February 2011), CPN-UML's Jhalanath Khanal (February–August 2011), CPN-M's Baburam Bhattarai (August 2011–May 2012).

> A Statue of Republic with distinct design will be erected within the vicinity of Narayanhiti premises to mark and long memorize the day that ended feudal monarchy through people's extraordinary courage and sacrifice-led struggle. I have allocated Rs. 50 million for this Statue which will be made using Nepali technician and Nepali design. Likewise, the Narayanhiti premises will be developed as a modern museum. I have anticipated that the Statue of Republic and the museum will turn the Narayanhiti vicinity to an attractive touristic site. (GoN 2008: 11)[15]

The CPN-M election manifesto from the CA elections set out their objective of "creating a new history" bringing "[t]he dark era of feudalism and monarchism" to an end (von Einsiedel, Malone and Pradhan 2012: 371). At the beginning of the speech, Bhattarai first refers to the monument as *Gaṇatantra Pratimūrti* (republic statue), then in the final sentence when setting out the concept, he uses the phrase *Gaṇatantra Smārak* (republic memorial). The language used in Bhattarai's speech conceived of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* as a way to repurpose political history and institutionalize the CPN-M contribution to this pivotal moment, a shift in the center of balance of the nation from the monarchy to the people.[16]

In 1977 Bhattarai completed an undergraduate degree in architecture at the Chandigarh College of Architecture in India.[17] He was fully cognizant of the relationship between architecture and political power and his speech makes explicit the symbolic significance of constructing the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* within the premises of the Narayanhiti Palace, to mark the people's

[15] The full text of the English translation can be found at www.mof.gov.np/uploads/document/file/Final%20Translation%20Bud%202008-09%20(1)_20141228082419.pdf. The full text of the Nepali document can be found at www.mof.gov.np/np/archive-documents/budget-speech-17.html?lang; both accessed April 23, 2016.

[16] Later in the document under the heading "Building New Nepal Campaign," the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* is listed under item K, "Erecting the Republic Statue and honouring the Martyrs programme." It appears as the first item, followed by the Ichchhuk Cultural Academy, the Ram Briksha Yadav Memorial Center, and the Suresh Wagle Memorial Cancer Center (Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital).

[17] He later earned a PhD in regional development planning from Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi. For full education details, see: http://baburam-bhattarai.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/dr-baburam-bhattarais-biography.html; accessed April 23, 2016.

victory over the monarchy. He claims to be the primary instigator of the memorial project.[18]

The design competition was then advertised in national Nepali-language newspapers by the Department for Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC) on behalf of the CPN-M led government.[19] In his budget speech Bhattarai stated that the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* would be built to a Nepali design, by Nepali technicians (see GoN 2008). The design brief asked for submissions from Nepali architects to reflect:

- Nepal's geographical beauty, national unity, equity, progress and diversified language and culture
- Various courageous and political movements in different timeframes, people's movements and martyrs' contributions AND
- People's republic system[20]

I suggest the focus on "Nepali design" was not intended to indicate the development of a new architectural language for a federal republic. Rather, the use of the term "Nepali" followed a twentieth-century pattern that was used to confer authenticity and therefore authority to architectural designs (Whitmarsh 2018b).

Those who wished to enter the competition registered their interest with the DUDBC. As part of the process they took an organized tour of the Narayanhiti Palace Museum, and thereby took part in a performance of the official narrative that relegated the monarchy (and its symbols of office) to

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[18] Those involved in the process regularly referred to the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* as not just the Maoists' but Bhattarai's pet project. He reiterated this claim in response to a question by the author at a seminar given at the London School of Economics on November 14, 2016.

[19] This was confirmed in my first conversation with Abhishek Bajracharya on April 19, 2012 though there was some suggestion from Uday Shrestha that the competition was publicized more than once, finally in *Spaces* magazine, as there was little response to the first call (Shrestha 2009). Personal communication, July 14, 2014.

[20] I have been unable to locate a copy of the original brief in Nepali and this extract comes from a summary of the competition published in *Spaces* magazine in 2009. I have confirmed with three architects who entered the competition that these words are an extract translation from that document (Anonymous 2009b).

the past.[21] Five finalists were selected from fourteen entries and each was invited to present to a jury led by the Society of Nepalese Architects (SONA) behind closed doors.[22] The finalists were A-Not Architecture and Architects; Akriti Rimal and Anuj Shrestha; Bijay Singh and Anil Maharjan; Abhishek Bajracharya and Shekhar Dongol of John Sanday and Associates; and Sarosh Pradhan and Associates.[23] Three of these teams had graduated from Nepali universities within the preceding three years and all were based within the Kathmandu Valley.[24] The winning design by Dongol and Bajracharya of John Sanday Associates (Image 2) was publicly announced at the concept design competition award ceremony held at the office of DUDBC on April 13, 2009.[25] Whilst the firm is owned by a British architect, both entrants were Nepali and had been working for the firm for one year.[26] They were awarded a cash prize of NRs. 200,000. The runners up were each awarded consolation prizes and NRs. 50,000 (Anonymous 2009b). At this point, the winners of the competition handed over their working drawings and estimations to the DUDBC.

All the design teams stated their intention to mark the moment of transition and the figurative design devices proposed by most included the exaggerated height of proposed structures to emphasize victory over monarchy and challenge the palace; the use of light to signify hope, and the use of form to reveal the disruption of previous hierarchies of power and control (Anonymous 2009b). For example, the design entry by Rimal and Shrestha of A-Not Architecture described their decision to use circular

[21] None of the design teams spoken with could remember the exact date of this visit but they recall that the museum was open, placing it after February 26, 2009.

[22] Whilst no details are given, this is confirmed on the SONA website (http://sona. org.np/archive/). Sudarshan Raj Tiwari recalls that the jury was not very interactive. Personal communication, July 24, 2013.

[23] I have not seen all fourteen entries, only those shortlisted. See Anonymous 2009b.

[24] The exceptions are A-Not Architecture, and Sarosh Pradhan and Associates, both established practices in Kathmandu.

[25] The event was presided over by Sunil Babu Shrestha, Member, National Planning Commission; Purna Kadariya, Secretary, Ministry of Physical Planning and Works; Uma Kant Jha, Secretary, Ministry of Physical Planning and Works; Indra Bahadur Shrestha, Director General, DUDBC; and Bishnu Panthee, Vice President, SONA.

[26] They studied together at the Pulchowk Campus, Institute of Engineering between 2005 and 2008.

space to "breakdown any forces that oppress" (Anonymous 2009b). Notably, all of the shortlisted designs included memorial elements to the victims of the civil war in particular (as opposed to martyrs in general), for example through the inclusion of a wall of names. The winning design concept was built around the language of martyrdom, to be executed in concrete and steel, emphasising the *Gaṇatantra Smārak's* role as a memorial.[27]

Image 2: Gaṇatantra Smārak design concept drawing, April 2009 (Courtesy of Abhishek Bajracharya, John Sanday Associates).

The Winning Design

As specified by the design brief, the design submitted to the competition by Bajracharya and Dongol was intended to be approached through the southern gate to the Narayanhiti Palace compound, from the top end of Darbar Marg (Image 3).[28] Once within the Narayanhiti site, visitors would be free to choose how to explore the monument, but visitors were intended to pass through the wall of the palace compound directly ahead of the *Smārak*, which would appear "as a rift in the earth, a long gray stone wall, emerging from and receding into the earth" in front of the palace.[29] Two ramps, one rising

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[27] Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, April 19, 2012.

[28] Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, April 19, 2012.

[29] Architect's presentation given to competition jury in Nepali with English text on slides, April 2009. See Bajracharya and Dongol (2009). Kindly shared with the author by Abhishek Bajracharya.
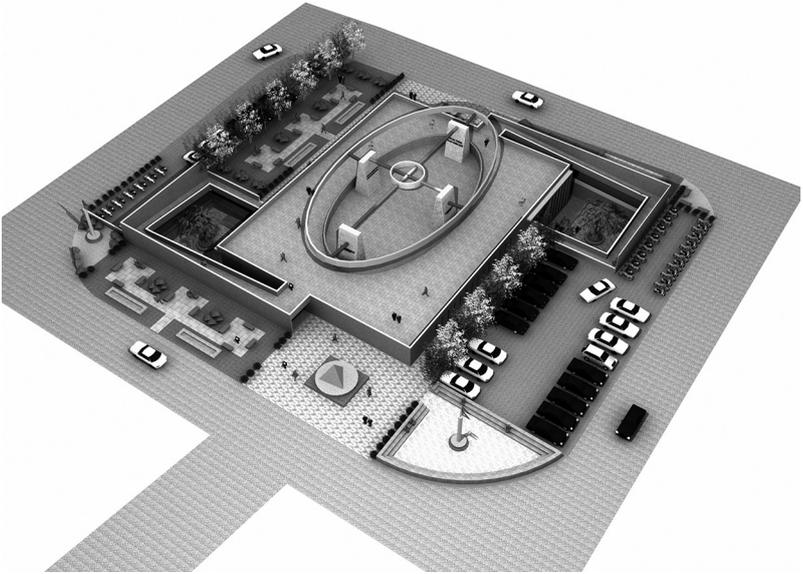
Image 3: Gaṇatantra Smārak design concept drawing, April 2009 (Courtesy of Abhishek Bajracharya, John Sanday Associates).

from the south side and one from the north, were to guide visitors around the perimeter of a large, square courtyard, raising them to the level of the memorial plaza. An elliptical space was then marked out on the plaza by four *stambha*s (columns) at each of the cardinal points connected together at their highest point by an elliptical steel band inscribed with the words of the national anthem.[30] Each of the *stambha* was also connected to the one opposite by a steel pipe and the intersection of the two pipes was marked by a circular steel band inscribed with the words "you will never be forgotten" (in English). Lights would shine from the outer elliptical band, refracting off the circular band at the center to illuminate a map of the country set into the granite floor below (Image 4). Each *stambha* was intended to represent a group of people, "*stambha* 1 the ones who were lost, *stambha* 2 the ones who lost their lives, *stambha* 3 the ones who were abducted, *stambha* 4 the

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[30] The national anthem will no longer be inscribed on the elliptical steel band that links each *stambha* to this model of the country. Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, July 25, 2016.
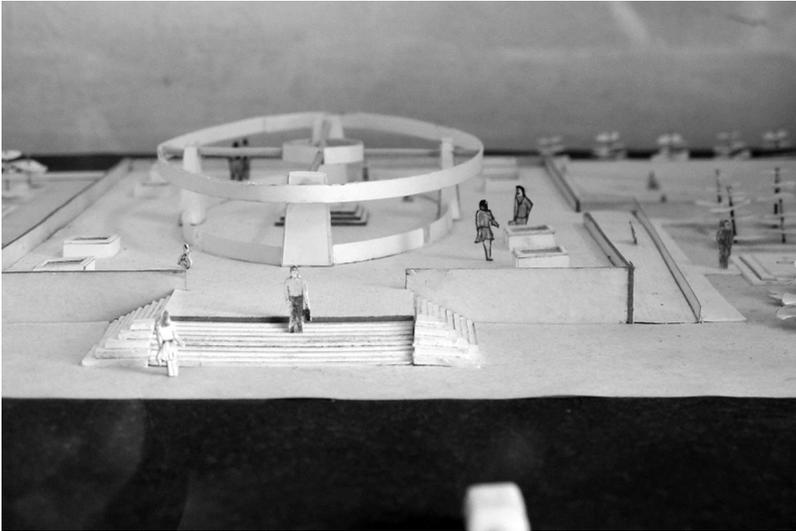
Image 4: Gaṇatantra Smārak design concept drawing, October 2009 (Photograph by author, courtesy of John Sanday Associates).

ones who were handicapped,"[31] and was to be covered in small empty niches to represent the absence of individuals. The whole design was intended to be circumambulated and the sacrifice of the people who have suffered, died, or disappeared to be interpreted as enabling the country to move forward "in a positive and bright direction," literally holding the light that shines down on the map.[32] Directly underneath the raised memorial platform sat an elliptical 300-seat conference hall to include a gallery space "with photographs, important events and time being carved on the walls" (Image 5).[33]

[31] With thanks to the anonymous reviewer who observed that these categories do not correspond to the usual categorization of victims used in the transitional justice sector: the killed, the disappeared/missing, the victims of torture, those injured/made disabled, and the victims of sexual violence. Architect's presentation given to competition jury, April 2009. See Bajracharya and Dongol (2009).

[32] Architect's presentation given to competition jury, April 2009. See Bajracharya and Dongol (2009). Abhishek Bajracharya cited the team's architectural precedents as the work of Eisenman in Berlin, Correa in India and the Gandhi Memorials in Ahmedabad and Delhi. Personal communication, April 19, 2012.

[33] In addition to setting the parameters for the symbolic content of the design, the design brief included a specific set of accommodation requirements, including

Image 5: Auditorium Level, inside the Gaṇatantra Smārak (Photograph by author, July 25, 2016).

Locating the *Smārak*

The site for the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was changed four times between 2009 and 2012. After the original location in front of the Narayanhiti Palace, on May 29, 2009 the first foundation stone was laid within the public space of Ratna Park in the center of Kathmandu as part of the first annual republic day celebrations (The Kathmandu Post 2009b). In late 2009 the site was again changed to Tinkune, on a triangular plot of land located outside the city center towards the city's airport (The Kathmandu Post 2010b) and on March 27, 2012, the final foundation stone was laid in the north east corner of the Narayanhiti Palace compound (The Kathmandu Post 2012b).

The pragmatic narrative suggested by representatives of the DUDBC managing the process is that SONA, who chaired the judging panel for the competition, raised concerns about the archaeological importance of the

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a 300-seat conference hall, and a not insignificant amount of parking. The design of the contents of the gallery space was to be subject to a separate contract. Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, April 19, 2012 and July 27, 2014.

Narayanhiti site,[34] the congested nature of the city center, and the negative impact of removing public space for different activities in the name of the people. The latter concern was also cited with reference to Ratna Park and there is some suggestion of public protest (Adhikari 2012). An ownership dispute made the Tinkune site untenable and the government was more easily able to requisition 35 *ropanī*s (4.5 acres) of land in the north east corner of the Narayanhiti Palace grounds, hence the *Gaṇatantra Smārak's* return to ex-royal land.[35] Articles in the Nepali press, however, reveal this narrative as anything but straightforward.

This letter to the editor was published in *The Kathmandu Post* in the aftermath of the May 2009 resignation of Pushpa Kamal Dahal and collapse of the CPN-M led coalition:

> Why does Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal want to change the venue of its [the *Smārak's*] establishment at this point of time when he needs to focus on several other pressing national issues, including the Cabinet expansion? This is just not understandable. He keeps saying he wants to do something concrete so that people will remember him even after his tenure. But let me tell you Mr. Prime Minister, people are looking for some real change that would make their everyday lives easier. They want to feel a sense of relief. Do you think establishing the monument at Ratna Park would make them happy? More important for them is for the peace and constitution-writing processes to move ahead smoothly. It doesn't matter wherever the monument stands. What matters is whether we are a republic state in the real sense or not. (The Kathmandu Post 2009c)

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[34] Personal communications with Sudarshan Raj Tiwari (July 24, 2013) and Uday Shrestha (July 14, 2013) who both attended the *Spaces* seminar. They confirmed that the site in front of the Narayanhiti Palace was a major point of contention and referred to the site's use since the Licchavi period in the eleven–twelfth centuries CE (Tiwari 2002).

[35] The request made to Ministry of Defence for eighty-five *ropanī*s of land on December 17, 2012 and thirty-five *ropanī*s were granted on March 21, 2013 (NPMMPPC 2014).

The author of this letter explicitly links the change in proposed location of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* with the change in political leadership:[36] They reference a CPN-M accusation levelled at the new CPN-UML Prime Minister, Madhav Kumar Nepal, that the *Smārak* site was shifted from the palace in order to enable the restoration of the monarchy (The Kathmandu Post 2009a). The author's call to the government to "come on, wake up, address something real for a change" highlights the discrepancy between the political elite's focus on state building at a time when the people were more concerned with peace and stability (Hachhethu, Kumar and Subedi 2008).

Each repositioning of the monument was accompanied by government requests for design changes, ostensibly to adapt the *Smārak* to its new location. Associated as they were with changes in political leadership, these requests reveal competing views over the performative intention of the *Smārak*.[37] The design brief included in its schedule of accommodation a 300-seat auditorium, a place in which memory would be actively and audibly forged.[38] Under the premiership of Madhav Kumar Nepal (May 2009–June 2010) there was a request to edit out the conference hall, revealing that the plan for large-scale memorial events, for example on Republic Day, was subject to discussion.[39] The re-inclusion of the auditorium in the contract for construction in early 2012, when Baburam Bhattarai was Prime Minister, firmly associates this proposal to actively re-forge national memory with CPN-M ambition.

It is not a coincidence that it was after Baburam Bhattarai became Prime Minister in August 2011 that the final foundation stone was laid in the north east corner of the Narayanhiti Palace compound on March 27, 2012 (two months before the term of the first CA was due to end).[40] The *Smārak* was to be approached through the eastern gate to the compound from the road

[36] Confirmed by Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, July 17, 2014.

[37] Bajracharya reported proposing design changes for the site at Tinkune in a presentation to secretary of the prime minister. His team presented updated drawings by April 2011. Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, April 19, 2012.

[38] Abhishek Bajracharya and Macha Kaji Maharjan, recorded interview, July 28, 2015.

[39] Confirmed by Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, July 27, 2013.

[40] Bhattarai is reported to have chased the DUDBC for a location in January 2012 when he was conscious that there were just five months left of his tenure following the final extension of the CA for six months in November 2011. Abhishek

running north to Gairidhara from Nagpokhari, either on foot or by car (for VIPs) [Image 6].[41] Bhattarai is quoted as having stated that he was honored to lay the foundation stone of the republic memorial in a place where the authoritarian rule of the monarchs had come to an end, paving the way for democracy (The Kathmandu Post 2012b). The *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was positioned in the grounds of the Narayanhiti Palace in order to maximize opportunities for symbolic meaning; its juxtaposition with the Palace Museum drew attention to the transition between the two regimes (Image 7).
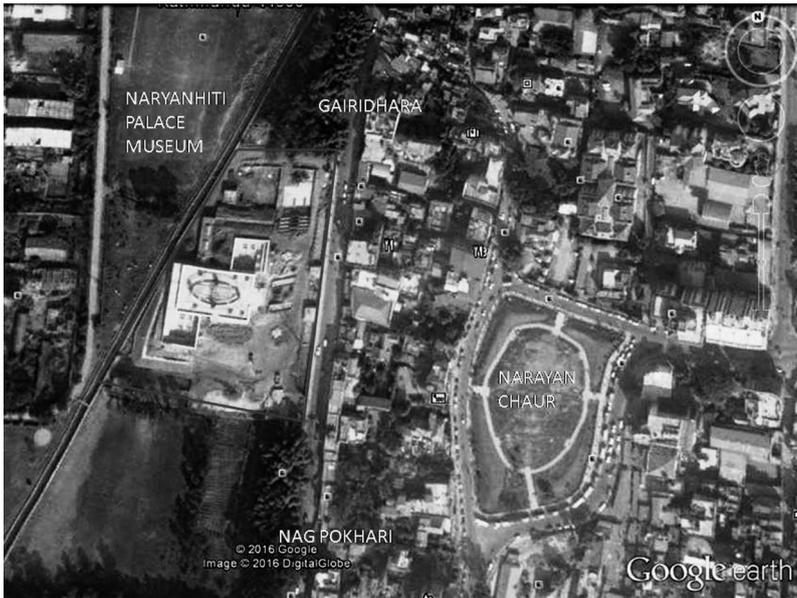
Image 6: Map showing location of Gaṇatantra Smārak (based on Google Earth image, September 5, 2018).

Bajracharya and Macha Kaji Maharjan, recorded interview, July 28, 2015. See also *The Kathmandu Post* (2012a).

[41] The east entrance to the Narayanhiti compound was installed by Gyanendra Shah. Hindu religious practice dictates that if a member of a family dies, the entrance through which their body was removed from the home should be blocked up. It is said that the bodies of Birendra and other members of the royal family were removed from the site from the west entrance, and whilst it was not practical to block this gateway, it might suggest the need for an alternative private entrance to the site. Sudarshan Raj Tiwari, personal communication, July 24, 2013.

Image 7: View across the Gaṇatantra Smārak memorial plaza looking west towards the Narayanhiti Palace (Courtesy of Abhishek Bajracharya, 2018).

The team at John Sanday Associates turned down a request to re-design the landscaping around the *Smārak*, and in September 2012 a tender was issued to design the landscape around the memorial in its final location.[42] The winning design submission by Vastushilpa Architects includes water features (ponds and fountains) in axial alignment with the *Smārak* at the center, pavilions and a gazebo to provide shade and seating areas, a cafeteria (and associated restrooms), and a large external amphitheatre (Image 8). Vastushilpa Architects' outline design document stresses their intention to maintain the original design concept of the *Smārak*, but projection drawings reveal elements more reminiscent of a pleasure park: for example, the use of neoclassical sculptures at the center of several water features and the grouping of seating areas around clusters of trees.[43] The large-scale open

[42] Abhishek recalled how his team from John Sanday Associates were not invited to the laying of the foundation stone, then were called the next day by the prime minster's office for design changes to adapt the design for the new site. Personal communication, July 17, 2014.

[43] Copy kindly shared with me by Abhishek Bajracharya, July 27, 2013.

gardens with their inclusion of communal spaces contrast with the original landscaping by Abhishek Bajracharya and Shekhar Dongol, which included small, abstract memorial gardens designed to offer a place "for personal reflection and private reckoning."[44] Bajracharya felt that the design changes transformed the *Smārak* into part of a public park.[45] In September 2012 the Constituent Assembly had been dissolved, no new constitution had been produced, and the legitimacy of Baburam Bhattarai's government was under question. The acceptance of this landscape design was a process managed by the civil servants in the DUDBC.[46]

Image 8: View of final landscaping of Gaṇatantra Smārak by Vastushilpa Architects. (Courtesy of Abhishek Bajracharya, 2018).

[44] Architect's presentation given to competition jury, April 2009. Unpublished document.

[45] His phrase was that an apple had been turned into a watermelon. Personal communication, July 27, 2013.

[46] Also costs had reportedly rocketed from NRs. 340 million to NRs. 400 million. Macha Kaji Maharjan, recorded interview, July 28, 2015.

A second basement level was proposed by Vastushilpa Architects to raise up the *Smārak* in reference to the high plinths of Newar temple architecture, and was initially to be used as a car park. Sometime in 2014 the decision was made to turn this into a gallery hall, and in 2015 decisions about the contents of this space were being directed by the office of the prime minister.[47] As a result of this additional level, Bajracharya and Dongol have reduced the height of the memorial plaza and this is now approached by steps that run across the length of the eastern edge of the platform. The ramps, originally designed to run up to the level of the plaza were used as a device to link the ground level to the auditorium below. A set of internal stairs leads down to the basement gallery hall.[48]

Construction began in December 2012 and was predicted to take three years, with the *Smārak* to be launched on republic day, May 28, 2016.[49] Construction has continued to date though progress was slowed by the earthquakes that shook the country in 2015 and the subsequent blockade of goods and services over the border with India by the United Democratic Madeshi Front (República 2016). The *Smārak* is currently due to open on Republic Day, May 28, 2019.

Young writes about the nexus between a monument and its location: "A monument necessarily transforms an otherwise benign site into part of its content, even as it is absorbed into the site and made part of a larger locale" (1993: 7). To build this memorial on what was formerly royal land was an expression of institutionalized power, a representation of history that in its location set in stone the way things were (feudal monarchy) and are (people's republic). It was a literal inscription of the transition from monarchy to republic into the landscape of the city. Plans exist for the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* to be managed by the staff of the Narayanhiti Palace Museum. The site is not intended to be freely accessed; visitors will buy one ticket to enter both sites and if the Nepal Army agrees to grant access between the two sites, visitors will ultimately be routed from the Palace Museum to the *Smārak* (reversing

[47] Abhishek Bajracharya and Macha Kaji Maharjan, recorded interview, July 28, 2015.

[48] I have visited the construction site of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* three times, July 2014, 2015 and 2016.

[49] Roshan Shrestha, executive director of the constructing company BKOI and SKY Bangalamukhi Joint Venture signed an agreement with the DUDBC on December 7, 2012. Macha Kaji Maharjan, personal communication, July 13, 2013.

the point of entry to the *Smārak* site).[50] This decision to monetize and control access to the site is indicative of the political need to place recent events into some cognitive order that reinforces community, creating a spatial narrative that tells the story of the transition from monarchy to republic.

In October 2009, under the premiership of Madhav Kumar Nepal, a second competition was launched, this time for a *Gaṇatantra Stambha* (republic tower) and this caused considerable confusion in the public reporting of both projects. After a similar bewildering array of proposed sites, including the land allocated for the UN Park in Gushi Gal, Kupandol (The Kathmandu Post 2010a). In April 2012 *The Kathmandu Post* reported that a foundation stone had been laid that week in Gaangkhel, Kirtipur, west of the Tribhuwan University campus (Adhikari 2012). The design competition for the *Stambha* was won by A-Not Architecture and Architects. Conceived as a *cautārā* (rest stop), with a tree at the center giving shade to all passersby, the tower was to be 94 meters tall and 60 meters wide. This would have made it taller than the Dharahara, the nine-storey structure, which despite its reconstruction following the 1934 earthquake, had remained the tallest structure in the Kathmandu Valley for over a century, until it again collapsed on April 25, 2015, killing and injuring a large number of people (Hutt forthcoming). Two levels were proposed: the first to house a gallery and the second designed as a viewing tower. The design includes features that overlap in their intended meaning with the design of the *Smārak*. It includes a republic corner that would be imprinted with a map and used to pay tribute to all martyrs on the occasion of republic day; a wall of names and a wall of stars (representing those unknown) as well as the tower itself, described as a "memorial tower" held up by three piers, each representing a geographical region of Nepal. It may have been initially intended by the CPN-UML prime minister, as a

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[50] At the time of my last field visit in 2016, this depended on reaching an agreement with the Nepal Army who currently base four regiments in the remaining space on the Narayanhiti site: Valley Pritana, Kali Bahadur, Purano Gorakh, Special Security Force. Macha Kaji Maharjan, personal communication, July 25, 2016. As of mid-May 2019, this is still a future intention, but it is expected that the *Smārak* will open on May 28, 2019 using the east gate. Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, May 18, 2019.

way to supersede the *Smārak* and assert his party's claim over the history of democratic struggle.[51]

The Translation of the New National Anthem into an Architectural Idea

Sudarshan Raj Tiwari, then Professor of Architecture at Tribhuvan University, described the way the task of designing the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was conceptualized by the CPN-M led government as "translating the new national anthem into an architectural idea."[52] The new national anthem replaced a melody composed as a salutation to the king and was selected by a national taskforce from an open competition in the previous year (2006) during what Hutt describes as "a brief window of opportunity for popular consensus" (2012: 320). The coordinates of unity in diversity, the country's natural resources, the record of debt to those who established the nation-state through their actions (and deaths) and the people-centered, forward-looking republic set out above for the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* were set by the lyrics of the new national anthem:

> *Sayaũ thuṅgā phūlkā hāmī, euṭai mālā nepali*
> We are hundreds of flowers, [but] one Nepali garland[53]
> *Sārvabhaum bhai phailiekā, Mecī-Mahākālī*
> Sovereign and spread out, [from] Mechi [to] Mahakali
> *Prakṛtikā koṭī-koṭī sampadāko ā̃cala*
> A zone of nature's myriad resources
> *Vīrharūkā ragatale, svatantra ra aṭala*

[51] In 2015, the *Gaṇatantra Stambha* project was being managed by the same team in the DUDBC as the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* and a model was on display at the Kirtipur campus of Tribhuwan University, but construction had not yet begun. Abhishek Bajracharya and Macha Kaji Maharjan, recorded interview, July 28, 2015. This project has not progressed since the 2015 earthquakes.

[52] Personal communication, July 24, 2013.

[53] As a set of coordinates, the national anthem represented an acceptable basis for re-imagining the nation, not a radical new vision. Hutt (2012) describes silences in the text. For example, Nepal's most famous landmark, Mt. Sagarmatha is not mentioned for fear of alienating different groups. This first verse refers directly to Prithvi Narayan Shah's (founder of the Shah dynasty) famous description of his kingdom in the eighteenth century as a "flower garden of the four *varna*s and thirty-six castes" and may be read as backward-looking.

Independent and unalterable, by the blood of heroes
Jnānabhūmi, śāntibhūmi Tarai, Pahāḍ, Himāla
Land of knowledge, land of peace, Tarai, Pahad, Himal
Akhaṇḍa yo pyāro hāmro mātṛbhūmi Nepal
Undivided this our dear motherland Nepal
Bahul jāti, bhāṣā, dharma, saṃskṛti chan viśāla
The multiple ethnicities, languages, religions and cultures are vast
Agragāmī rāṣṭra hāmro, jaya jaya Nepal
Ours is a progressive nation, Jaya Jaya Nepal[54]

The consensus that saw this characterization of the nation agreed in 2006 began to fade soon after the conclusion of the CPA in November 2006 and disappeared when the publication of Interim Constitution in January 2007 sparked the *Madhes Āndolan* (Hutt 2012: 320). The design brief for the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* issued in autumn 2008 adopted the encapsulation of the nation agreed through the national anthem two years earlier. It was conceived as a monument to a political moment that garnered consensus during an increasingly unstable period, "the day that ended feudal monarchy through people's extraordinary courage and sacrifice-led struggle."[55] The 2006 CPA included a commitment to the restructuring of the country "in an inclusive, democratic and progressive way by ending its present centralized and unitary structure" (CPA 3.5).[56] In 2008, when the terms of reference for the *Smārak* competition were drawn up, this process had barely begun.[57] Couched in identity terms, the specifications drawn from the design brief appear to show an attempt to avoid the issue of recognition of specific identities, but drew

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[54] Published translation by Michael Hutt (2012).

[55] Mocko's account of the first sitting of the CA confirms that there was unanimity over the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of a republic, but not much beyond (2012: 211).

[56] The full text of the CPA can be found at www.usip.org/sites/default/files/file/resources/collections/peace_agreements/nepal_cpa_20061121_en.pdf; accessed August 23, 2018.

[57] The CPA also included specific commitments to the establishment of both a National Peace and Rehabilitation Commission and a High-Level Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as a commitment to release the names of all those disappeared and killed on both sides. These processes did not begin until 2016 and even then, was without the support of the United Nations (Sharma 2012, 2017).

instead upon the common ground that existed between both the traditional political parties, the CPN-M, and the people of Nepal; the concept of an inclusive new republican Nepal (Hachhethu, Kumar and Subedi 2008: 2). The use of the coordinates set by the national anthem to frame the design brief enabled the government to present a unified national narrative.[58]

Following the publication of the competition for the national anthem, a challenge from the artistic community led the government to rethink its chosen selection process, which was made more representative and transparent (Hutt 2012). No such debate is visible in letters pages of national papers in the case of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak*.[59] This is not to say, however, that the competition and selection process were without controversy. The editors of *Spaces* magazine (an independent publication on architecture and design) organized a public seminar with the DUDBC later in April 2009 to give the local academic and design community an opportunity to discuss the competition, the choice of the Narayanhiti site, and each shortlisted design with the competition finalists and government officials (Anonymous 2009a: 16). Each of the five finalists repeated their competition presentation in front of an audience at the DUDBC.[60] Bharat Sharma (ex-Deputy Director General of the DUDBC) wrote that it was "like inviting the doctor after death to brief the status" (2009: 88) and the published summary of the event in *Spaces* remarked on the absence of any representation from the jury. Sharma wrote that the terms of reference, "looked very much like a dictated notion by political high muscle which was blindly followed by the department.... It was an extremely wrong start" (2009: 88). Although the attendees were representative of only a limited cross-section of society, the critique offered at this event reveals the precariousness of the government's projected image of national unity and of its ability to represent the views of Nepal's diverse

[58] For example, rather than present a map of the country at the center of the *Smārak*'s memorial plaza, at the start of 2016 (when debate around the demarcation of the federal states was raging) it was decided instead to build a topographical model of the country with the three geographical regions of Tarai, Pahad*,* and Himal marked using copper, bronze, and gold paint respectively. Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, July 25, 2016.

[59] I used the archives at Martin Chautari to check *Kāntipur, República,* and *The Kathmandu Post* for this period.

[60] No representatives from the Society of Nepalese Architects (SONA) were present.

population. Delegates at the seminar called upon the government to re-run the competition to invite submissions from a wider cross-section of society.[61]

Professor Sudarshan Raj Tiwari's characterization of the task of designing the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* as a physical manifestation of the national anthem was meant as a criticism and applied not only to the government's conceptualization of the task, but also to the design response. He stated that "the elements that evoke nationalism and unity seem to be missing in the designs."[62] All the finalists were criticized at the seminar for not taking up the challenge of developing an architectural language for a new Nepal.[63] Architect Devendra Nath Gongal criticized all of the design teams for adopting an "orthodox" approach and suggested a more effective source of inspiration for the design would have emerged from direct communication with the mass public (Gongal 2009). He is reported to have said about the winning design at the seminar that "[t]he design lacks the emotion that calls for unity to build a new Nepal." Further, he added, "The design, if implemented, could kill the spirit of the Palace, *ganatantra* itself, and of the country as well" (Anonymous 2009a: 16). In early 2010, Uday Shrestha (then editor of *Spaces*) reflected in an editorial that

> the Smarak...has objectives...worthy of commendation. But...stops short of anything further than that. [It] has failed miserably...its responsibility towards the country's citizens in general, as its objective has been marred by deep personal and political overtones, cutting short drastically the vision with which the monument should have been addressed. (Shrestha 2010)

Later in 2010, Nepali author and academic Shiva Rijal suggested in an opinion piece that this project was "the rarest opportunity in the architectural

[61] Uday Shrestha (one of the organizers of the seminar) suggested to me that government officials were of the opinion that the project should not go ahead, but that it had such high-level political backing their hands were tied. Personal communication, July 14, 2013.

[62] Personal communication, July 24, 2013.

[63] This was a feeling expressed to me by Sarosh Pradhan (recorded interview, July 15, 2013) and Uday Shrestha (personal communication, July 14, 2013) independently. Both stated that they felt entrants had taken it on as of a commercial project, not appreciating its significance.

history of the country" and in order to mitigate what he saw as a lack of "Nepaliness" in its design, the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* could be constructed voluntarily by young people, "since youths from different parts of the country find some good causes and meanings to come together and feel the glory of their nation and history together—the very thing that the martyrs wanted to see and died for" (Rijal 2010). Whilst Rijal pressed for a rethink of the selected design in order to ensure its authenticity, he accepted the symbolism of the state emerging from the "dreams and visions of the martyrs."

The use of the phrase *vīrharūkā ragatale* (by the blood of heroes) in the new national anthem deliberately placed the violence of the recent conflict into part of a historical narrative of a struggle for democracy. Historian Pratyoush Onta (1996) has written how the Shah monarchy (particularly throughout the Panchayat era between 1962–1990), promoted a *vīr* (brave) history of Nepal that eulogized the achievements of the Shah kings and promoted the idea of an independent nation. In this historical narrative, the hero was someone who died for king and country. In the winning memorial design, this hero was adopted by the young architects as a direct reference to the recent conflict. They intended to represent the sacrifice and suffering of those on both sides of the civil war and stated that key intentions for the design were for it "to memorialise the anonymous heroes of the country" and "to provide a place for family members and friends to reflect on the loss of their loved ones."[64]

Materializing a New Democratic History

The Narratives of Martyrdom

Abhishek Bajracharya felt that his and Shekhar Dongol's design was selected by the jury because it recognized the victims of the recent conflict through the inclusion of the four *stambha*s. Their initial proposal to represent victims using empty niches carved into the *stambha* was intended to recall the dead, injured and disappeared as human beings.[65] While the architects intended

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[64] These quotations are taken from a copy of their unpublished presentation to the jury in April 2009. I am grateful to Abhishek Bajracharya for sharing this with me. See Bajracharya and Dongol (2009).

[65] An original proposal to include a wall of names was quickly dropped. By 2015, all plans to include the names of victims on the site had stalled and the niches removed from the design. Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, July 28, 2015.

to offer a gesture towards the victims of the recent conflict, I argue that the design was selected as an attempt to construct a political memory (Assmann 2010) that would institutionalize a narrative of suffering and sacrifice, and present a triumphant history of people over the monarchy, highlighting the impact of the CPN-M.

For the CPN-M the civil war was fed by sacrifice (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006). It encouraged a culture of martyrdom and used memorialization as a political tool throughout the conflict.[66] The official memorialization of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* can be interpreted as an attempt to extend this practice, made possible by the status of the CPN-M leaders after the conflict. Lecomte-Tilouine (2006) describes how the Maoist movement leveraged Nepali traditions of the warrior's sacrifice by reference to Hindu traditions of martyrs' blood birthing new warriors, and valorized the families of martyrs by subjugating them to the cause. Anne de Sales' (2003) analysis of revolutionary songs reveals that the noble death of a martyr was portrayed as offering liberation from social inequality and a construct that created unity amongst those who remembered them. In 2003 the Maoist publication *Janaāwāj* elaborated: "The people who commemorate the martyrs have developed a new culture in which martyrs' doors and pillars are created, martyrs' photos are exhibited and villages, hamlets, companies, battalions and brigades are named with martyrs' names" (quoted in Lecomte-Tilouine 2006: 240). Analysis by Shrestha-Schipper (2012) of the Maoist gates in Jumla and Mugu between 2007–2009 reveals that this form of memorialization is divorced from the families of those being celebrated. Most were either built by Maoists or by villagers on Maoist orders and were located in areas where the state had lost control, and thereby demonstrated presence and authority. They were often decorated with communist symbols and slogans, portraits of leaders and the names of fallen comrades, reinforcing narratives of resistance. Recorded instances of the families invited to inauguration events can be understood not as an offer to recognize their suffering and loss but as an invitation to accept the martyrdom narrative.[67]

[66] Through literature, ceremonies, memorial parks, songs and poems (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006).

[67] Robins (2014: 7) quotes the wife of a missing man, unable to read the name of her spouse on a Maoist gate, in order to highlight the separation between this form of memorialization and the families of those being celebrated. He suggests that the

Memorials construct narratives that attempt to determine what kind of history will be written and spoken about victims, and the literal symbolism of the *Smārak* design defines how the dead should be remembered by explicitly (and physically) connecting the sacrifice of the people and the birth of the New Nepal.[68] An official leaflet produced by the DUDBC for the occasion of the laying of the *Smārak*'s foundation stone in 2012 includes the text summarizing the design concept from the architects' presentation (DUDBC 2012).[69] By recalling the martyrological refrain promulgated by the CPN-M (i.e., citizens who died so that the New Nepal could live), the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* design embodied particular historical interpretations of the civil war sanctified by the CPN-M led government (Young 1993: 2).

By commissioning the *Smārak*, the CPN-M led government gained itself the right to possess the memory of the dead and missing and to define who and how they would be remembered. It attempted to instrumentalize victims' memory for political purposes in two key ways. Firstly, the narrative of sacrifice and suffering substantiated political identity across ideological lines and was intended to be unifying. The Maoist recognition of martyrs during the conflict did not extend to the security forces killed, but the term here takes a more flexible form: Martyrdom does not require a definition of who was a martyr, just that they had sacrificed their lives for the nation—after all, the 2006 *Jana Āndolan* was a victory against the monarchy shared by both sides.[70] Because martyrs "act for the liberation of the people and the advent of a better world" (Lecomte-Tilouine 2006: 240), they support the collective and emphasize the strength and role of the people (as opposed to the monarchy). Secondly, the martyrs of the civil war were united with

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inclusion of the names of the missing did not acknowledge the particular emotional challenges of relatives dealing with the ambiguity of the fate of their missing relatives.

[68] See *The Kathmandu Post* (2012b) for Baburam Bahattarai's speech on laying foundation stone in 2012.

[69] I am grateful to Macha Kaji Maharjan from the DUDBC for providing me with a copy of this leaflet in 2014. I am uncertain whether another version exists in Nepali.

[70] The Maoist practice of identifying those who are missing as "martyrs" is different to the narrative of victimhood, prevalent in human rights and legal justice narratives (Robins 2013: 190). Robins (2014: 10) wrote that individuals could both accept the honor and respect from identifying their relatives as martyrs and the public identification of their relatives as disappeared in the pursuit of justice (and financial compensation).

martyrs from previous historical struggles, staking the CPN-M party's right to claim their place in history.

During the civil war in Nepal there were clear differences between different groups of Nepali society in the way that the conflict was perceived. This gap was reproduced in the narratives of historians, politicians and journalists (Hutt 2006; Lecomte-Tilouine 2006).[71] Accounts of how victims have attempted to advance their own narratives at a local level make it clear that the interpretation of the conflict is still contested (Robins 2014; Billingsley 2016; Sharma 2017). For example, Robins (2013: 190) describes the way in which a positive narrative about someone disappeared by the state can be perceived to require the discrediting of the narrative of someone taken by the Maoists. However, the dominant official language of government is one of all victims being equal, reflecting the political balance that exists between the parties to the conflict. As the Maoists were successful in mobilizing the *Janajāti*, they became more vulnerable to becoming casualties. For example in the Tarai, the Tharu were victimized by the forces of the state to the extent that in the Bardiya district, they constitute 80 percent of those missing despite barely being a majority (ICRC and NRCS 2012). According to Judith Butler (2009: 1–32), by making all victims "grievable," their lives are seen to matter. The passive wording used for the four groups of people on each *stambha* of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* presented all victims as "grievable," in a representation that didn't raise any questions about responsibility or causes. There are no standards of accountability for memorials and the use of these categories enabled the representation of all victims without the production of a list of names, therefore no research in order to identify those missing, injured or killed was required to complete the *Smārak*.[72] Whilst the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was not conceived by the

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[71] For example, the traditional political parties developed a narrative of "Maoist evil" during the conflict as revealed by Hutt's analysis of the Nepali print media in the latter half of 2001. Hutt located a particular use of language driven by official rhetoric: "military actions by the army brought about the deaths (*mrityu*) of Maoists, whereas Maoist killings of security officials were nearly always murders (*hatya*)" (Hutt 2006: 386).

[72] The document *Gaṇatantra Stambha ra Smārakmā Pradarśan Garine Sāmagrīharūko Sūcī Tayār Gariyeko Antim Prativedan* outlining plans for the galleries within the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* kindly provided to me by Macha Kaji Maharjan was rather tellingly missing its only annex: a list of names.

Nepal government as a transitional justice mechanism,[73] the extended period of design and construction of the *Smārak* ran concurrently with the government's failure to establish effective transitional justice mechanisms in Nepal. I argue that this therefore affects the meanings that people assign to the memorial.[74]

Work by Naidu on memorialization in post-conflict Africa demonstrates that discussions about the meaning, style, and shape of a memorialization activity and who is represented in the final product reveal the importance given to different sectors of society in the transitional justice process (Naidu 2014: 41).[75] During the ten years following the 2006 ceasefire, Nepal's governments opposed domestic judicial process and truth-telling mechanisms (Robins 2013) and made slow progress towards identifying and prosecuting those responsible for human rights violations and crimes under international law committed during the conflict.[76] Apart from the inclusion of the CPN-M in the political process, the make-up of those in power remained largely unchanged.[77] Elizabeth Jelin, writing about exclusion in public memorials in Peru, states, "memories and silences regarding the 'recent' past are woven into long-term historical structures of inequalities and injustices and into ingrained cultural practices" (2007: 189). The *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was conceived not as a way to recognize the loss of those affected by the conflict,

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[73] Transitional Justice is defined by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) as the ways countries emerging from periods of conflict and repression address large-scale or systematic human rights violations. The *Gaṇatantra Smārak* appears to have had no place in discussions about memorialization in relation to transitional justice, according to one reviewer of this article. See also Robins (2013, 2014).

[74] See ICTJ and Martin Chautari 2017, for example, on the importance of names to families and the educational role ascribed to memorials, for present and future generations. Interviewees felt they could enable stories to be told of the contributions made by victims and ensure their place in history.

[75] Naidu draws on fieldwork and research conducted in South Africa, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Kenya.

[76] Transitional justice was used as a bargaining chip between parties at different points during this period, with the CPN-UML generally perceived as less accountable, as NC had led the governments in power when key decisions were made about security force interventions during the civil war.

[77] This includes the Nepal Army.

but as a physical marker to turn the page after the rupture of violence and claim authority over historical struggles for democracy.

The anonymous people to be remembered at the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* are being harnessed to support a new historical narrative—one that redefines the heroes of the Nepali nation as people who have sacrificed their lives to build the Nepali republic. An official document outlining the proposed structure of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* gallery hall reveals the construction of a new historical narrative in which the people are the architects of the nation and the CPN-M as the instigators of the "revolution," the heirs of all previous struggles for democracy.[78] The story is punctuated not with the lives of successive monarchs (Onta 1996), but with events and political movements that mark the people challenging the authority of the monarchs (and where people have lost their lives), presenting a long history of democratic struggle. Ankersmit writes that

> the intense historicization and narrativization taking place at the occasion of a sublime historical event may completely dissolve the historical identity of a previous period and replace it by a new one. (2001: 320)

The historical narrative proposed for the gallery is preceded by the title "*śahīd*" (martyrs) and begins with the advent of democracy in 1951 when the Rana prime ministers were removed from power.[79] Significantly, the civil war is sequenced within a series of events that includes: the short period of multi-party democracy in 1959 before King Mahendra seized direct control and placed the monarch at the center of the Panchayat political system; the first *Jana Āndolan* in 1990 that saw the end of the Panchayat system; and the formation of the first CA in 2008. The conflict is presented as an essential and natural step towards the achievement of democracy that is equal to all

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[78] Title given in footnote 72.

[79] Commissioned in the late 1960s by Mahendra as the "Democratic Memorial," what later became popularly known as the Shahid (martyrs) Gate enshrined busts of the four men who were executed by the Ranas in 1941 after a failed attempt to overthrow the ruling regime: Dharma Bhakta Mathema, Shukra Raj Shastri, Ganga Lal Shrestha and Dasharath Chand (Anonymous 2002). The structure positioned their busts underneath a bust of King Tribhuvan, and thereby co-opted their deaths in the service of the monarchy and the nation.

the others.[80] All those who died as a result of these actions are transformed into martyrs. That this is an example of how Ankersmit's (2001) "sublime historical event" is made manifest by this attempt to adopt the figure of the martyr (*śahīd)*, and its associated tropes of sacrifice and struggle, to lay claim to a history of activism, and unite political actors in repurposing the national narrative of the brave (*vīr*) warrior, traditionally associated with the Shah kings.

Location of the Smārak *behind Palace Walls*

Monuments are physical sites where people are intended to meet, speak, and commemorate, often through formal ceremonies. Forty and Kuchler write that whilst those who create memorials can aim to communicate a particular vision, their "meanings are formulated in a social rather than a cognitive space" (2001: 23). It remains to be seen how the public will respond to the site, and this article has presented the concept in the context of what Young (1989) has referred to as the form of a public memorial and therefore deals with performative intentions rather than the function of the design.[81]

The *Gaṇatantra Smārak* was commissioned by the CPN-M led government in the name of the people of Nepal but it has not been widely discussed in the Nepali print media or on social media channels. Press coverage of the project does exist and its timing appears to correlate directly to press releases from the DUDBC, e.g., to announce the winner of the competition, the laying of more than one foundation stone, and to offer progress reports as the schedule slipped behind. In my experience, most Nepalis don't really know that the *Smārak* project exists: of those that live in Kathmandu, few are aware what the *Smārak* stands for; of those who are aware of its existence, many remain indifferent.

Whilst the second *Jana Āndolan* in 2006 culminated in Kathmandu, the civil war was fought in rural areas and Kathmandu was less directly touched by the conflict. The extent of the Maoist insurgency was made possible precisely by a disconnect between the ruling elite of the "Kathmandu-centric"

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[80] This narrative was written before the promulgation of Nepal's latest constitution in 2015, and rather than highlight the uncertainty of recent years, the narrative stops at the abolition of the monarchy.

[81] I draw from my own visits to the construction site of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak*, in July 2014, 2015 and 2016.

government and the rest of the country (Hutt 2004b: 17).[82] The location of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* in the grounds of the ex-royal palace in the center of Kathmandu did not attempt to address the needs of the victims of the conflict, and they were met only in so far as they overlapped with the needs of the authorities, i.e., that opinion had swung in favor of a republic (and against the institution of monarchy) [Hachhethu, Kumar and Subedi 2008: 6]. The urban landscape of Kathmandu is imbued with a political history of activism and past experiences of activism are invoked at Ratna Park where a democracy wall was constructed in commemoration of the 1990 *Jana Āndolan,* destroyed during by Gyanendra's government in 2005, replaced by a pedestrian bridge, and then re-built after the 2006 *Jana Āndolan* (Snellinger 2010: 123).[83] The Narayanhiti Palace compound remained surrounded by its high walls and continues to be associated with the authority of the state. Writing about memorialization of the civil war, Robins argues that for the victims of the conflict, this is ultimately about recognition:

> Memory after violence...concerns the representation of the events that led to disappearance and death and construction of narratives that will determine both how those most affected will live, and what history will be written about those who died. (2013: 186)

Whilst their construction of collective memory does not rely on state-led national narratives, they interact in important ways with local narratives and experiences.[84] Those who debated the *Smārak* in April 2009 saw the potential (albeit unintended) of the competition and final design to open up a space for public debate and discussion about the future of the nation (Anonymous 2009a; Rijal 2010). More likely, given the lack of public involvement in or ownership over the process and its distance from the majority of those most

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[82] With 30,000 fighters in April 2006, the Maoists had effective control of 80 percent of the territory of the state (through the use of parallel administrations) and an estimated 20,000 people under arms (Hutt 2004b: 17).

[83] Snellinger (2010) records the history of this democracy wall, linking its location to the office of the All Nepal National Free Student Union-Unified (ANNFSU)—a logistical hub during the 1990 *Jana Āndolan* and again from 2004. See also Snellinger 2018.

[84] Thanks are due to the anonymous reviewer for sharing her experience of the importance of both state and local narratives for the formation of collective memory.

directly affected, the project will be completely ignored. As entry will be both charged-for and controlled, certainly until the gallery is complete, as a new, well-maintained, outdoor space in the city center, it is likely to become a leisure destination.[85]

Conclusion

In 2009, shortly after the Narayanhiti Palace was opened as a museum, Nepali architect Sarosh Pradhan visited the site as a part of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* design competition process. After his visit, Pradhan wrote a short reflective piece:

> As I walked around the Palace—I felt the emptiness of Space.
> There was history made and remade and there was history destroyed.
> There was a sense of loss as well as this feeling....Am I really walking the steps of the Palace?
>
> This would perhaps be the feeling for many who would tread these steps.
>
> Democracy, Republic, Federation...Sovereign
> A monument to mark all these?
>
> A blank empty space—stared back at me...
>
> The royal massacre...the rise of the revolution, the fall of the Monarchy.
> Democracy, Republic, Federation...New Nepal. (Pradhan 2009: 2)[86]

[85] The *Gaṇatantra Smārak* formed the location for the music video *Bhijiṭ Bhisāmā* from the Nepali film *Dāl Bhāt Tarkārī,* released in January 2019. Those in the architectural community aware of the intended meaning of the site, turned to social media to protest against this usage, but comments from the general public reveal a lack of awareness of the intended purpose of the site, they are concerned only with the quality of the song, dancing, and production. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=hvvBJWYAHJs; accessed May 19, 2019. The Narayanhiti Palace Museum was also used as a location for the filming of *Jindagānī Darpaṇ Chāyā̃* in 2012 after the palace was opened as a museum. Available at https://xnepali.net/nepali-movie-jindagani-darpan-chhaya/; accessed May 19, 2019.

[86] Unpublished document shared by Sarosh Pradhan.

Pradhan used his reflections of his visit to the Narayanhiti Palace Museum to inform the development of his design concept for the *Gaṇatantra Smārak*.[87] His was the only design in the final shortlist to reflect the ambiguity of the contemporary situation (Image 9).[88] One of the more experienced entrants, Pradhan's design aimed to prompt a series of questions about the future and evoke multiple memories of the past.[89] His design drew attention to the reciprocal exchange between a memorial and its site, as a gentle landscape which foreshortened the distance between the Palace Museum and the *Gaṇatantra Smārak*. It was intended to be experienced as a reflective inner journey in which people would explore their sense of being Nepali, "It is important to absorb what is around you, so many things [we] don't understand, but time to reflect [on] them...can develop [our] understanding of [an]others' purpose."[90] At its heart he positioned the national flag, as a universal representation of the people of Nepal. I share this here (rather than earlier in the article) because in choosing to present a design that offered a space for reflection, and an exploration of the relationship between the past, present, and future at the Narayanhiti Palace, Pradhan acknowledged the position the Narayanhiti Palace site had found in the collective memory of Nepalis, memory that associated the palace with royal authority and that can be retrieved at any time and under any condition. Pradhan's proposed design was not successful perhaps precisely because it was too open to diverse interpretations.

This article has addressed a government-led attempt to disengage Nepal's monarchical past from the nation's identity: the objectified previous representation (the Narayanhiti Palace Museum) is woven into a historical narrative that places the CPN-M at the culmination of a story of the people's struggle for democracy. Through an analysis of the design competition and proposed form and content of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* (Young 1989), I argue that the physical juxtaposition of the *Smārak* against the Narayanhiti

[87] Recorded interview, July 15, 2013.

[88] Pradhan designed a memorial in the American Embassy, Kathmandu (competition won in April 2008) and the World Hindu Foundation monument for peace in Pipra, Birgunj in 2006.

[89] Pradhan protested against the government's intentions by following this with an entry to the competition for the subsequent *Gaṇatantra Stambha* in 2009 with a blank piece of paper. Recorded interview, July 15, 2013.

[90] Sarosh Pradhan, recorded interview, July 15, 2013.

Palace Museum was framing the transition from monarchy to republic. As a site around which the re-narration of the nation was to be contextualized (Bhabha 1994), the Narayanhiti Palace was chosen because it symbolized the monarchy. The *Gaṇatantra Smārak* and the Narayanhiti Palace Museum were intended together to enable visitors to clearly recognize the monarchical past as a world left behind, that could be discarded for the republican, mass future—a national identity borne of the people and led by the CPN-M or, as Ankersmit (2001) would describe it, a simultaneous dissolution of and transcendence from the monarchical period.[91]
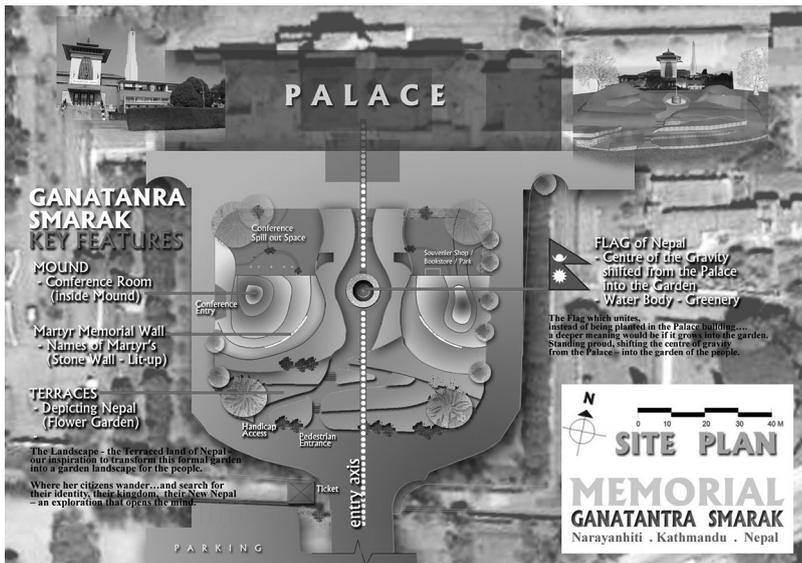

Image 9: Gaṇatantra Smārak Design Competition Entry, April 2009 (Courtesy of Sarosh Pradhan and Associates).

[91] When asked by the author at a seminar at the London School of Economics on November 14, 2016 whether the expense of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* can continue to be justified in 2016, Baburam Bhattarai made a direct comparison with proposals to reconstruct the Dharahara following the 2015 earthquakes. In contrast to the construction of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak*, proposals to rebuild the Dharahara garnered a significant amount of public attention. The reconstruction of the Dharahara plays to a reinforcement of the culture of the traditional elite (Hutt 2017) and therefore it is no surprise that Bhattarai confirmed that in his opinion the construction of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* would be a better use of scarce funds.

After the civil war, people whose identities had long been suppressed specified their differences as part of the debates about multistate federalism and the new federal structure. This rise in identity politics clashed with the state's view of itself as the legitimate authority offering equal rights for all citizens. The monarchy in Nepal was invested with a particular form of power—one that was unaccountable and above the law—and I argue that although post-monarchical Nepal had a vibrant civil society and a free press, it was in the ruling parties' interest to actively avoid the prominent creation of divergent historical narratives. This ingrained practice of governance helps to explain the use of the coordinates set by the national anthem adopted in 2007 in the conception of this public site of memory. Through the presentation of people's sacrifice for the nation and plans for the historical gallery to present the civil war as the ultimate struggle for democracy, Nepal's CPN-M politicians simultaneously re-narrated the past and attempted to offer a particular meaning of the conflict. In the absence of a republican constitution, Bajracharya and Dongol's design enabled the commissioning CPN-M led government to present a singular national identity that focused on the transfer of power from the monarchy to the people, presenting a picture of inclusion.

The constant re-positioning and adjustment of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* design represents the precarious balance of the alliance between the different political parties, including the Maoists. They reveal multiple, divergent, and often competing interests and different stakes in how histories are represented (Knauer and Walkowitz 2004). Whilst the project was set into motion by a CPN-M led government (both at the time of the competition and the final confirmation of the selected site), the transition period has seen coalition governments led by each of the major political parties and a period during which the chief justice performed most of the functions of a prime minister. The memorial-making process and the existence of two projects (the *Stambha* and the *Smārak*) reveals both the political struggle over how to re-imagine the nation as well as the advantages to all parties to cling on to the moment of transition. The fact that the *Smārak* project continued and plans for the historical gallery were drawn up after 2012 indicate agreement between Nepal's politicians of all parties that the best way to put the recent past behind is to inscribe it as part of a longer historical narrative of struggle. The *Smārak* is due to open in 2019 before work on the historical gallery has started, highlighting the challenges of setting history, quite literally, into stone.

The creation of a memorial necessitates decisions about whose stories are told and therefore whose are forgotten, or actively silenced. Whilst Abhishek Bajracharya and Shekhar Dongol intended their design to act as a site of remembrance, its narratives of martyrdom were adopted by the political elite in order to co-opt everyone's suffering and sacrifice equally to the creation of a new democratic nation. The categories of people avoided the language of victimhood and were linked to a history of struggle for democracy in a way that avoided the need to ask who was responsible and what caused the civil war. On my most recent visit to the construction site in July 2016, Bajracharya described a design intervention he had proposed, which he called "the Wall of Freedom." This would see the west wall of the memorial become a graffiti wall for people to add and erase thoughts, and therefore a place for new stories to come and go.[92] This acknowledges the contemporary role of monuments advocated by Young (2016), yet it would challenge the official desire to offer a fixed mode of viewing and, in enabling anyone to share their story, risks creating a space that might be contested. The fact that the government did not enable more public engagement with the design process re-emphasizes the hesitancy on the part of Nepal's politicians for both dialogue and reconciliation. Yet Nepal's politicians can't define the meaning of the *Smārak* and its meaning is not decided at this point. We have yet to see how the memorial will be used (or not) and how it will be re-used and re-cast by communities and victims, officially or unofficially. It is then that we will be able to assess how it lives in the minds of different communities over time.[93]

Acknowledgments

[92] He referred in particular to street art projects around the city where students from local art colleges are paid by NGOs to create street art. Abhishek Bajracharya, personal communication, July 28, 2016. This wall has not been included in the final design. Abhishek Bahracharya, personal communication, May 18, 2019.

[93] Whilst a judicial process remains at the center of demands of national and international human rights activists, but families also wish to confirm and have valorized the fate of their loved ones (ICTJ and CREHPA 2014).

than three major projects at a time and, with a young son, managed to fit me in and share the detail of the design and construction process. I wish to offer my congratulations on the achievement of his MA, and on the completion of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* whose place in the life of the city is just beginning. A separate thank you is due to both Macha Kaji Maharjan of the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction, for his preparedness in sharing the details of the design and construction process of the *Gaṇatantra Smārak,* and Professor Sudarshan Raj Tiwari of Tribhuvan University who shared his thoughts on the *Gaṇatantra Smārak* design competition with me. I thank the organizers of the 2016 Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and Himalaya for welcoming me to present an earlier version of this article.

Thank you also to the editors of SINHAS and two peer reviewers for sharing their detailed comments that have supported the development of this article. Last of all my thanks go to Kunal Tejbir Lama whose friendship and support, particularly during my periods of fieldwork, means more to me than he will ever know. Any factual errors in this article, or errors of interpretation are mine and mine alone.

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A Note from the Editors

The online version of this article was slightly revised after its publication in the printed issue. Readers are urged to treat the online version as the final one.