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Dropping In: The emergence of skateboard culture in urban Nepal

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Dropping In:

The emergence of skateboard culture in urban Nepal

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South Asia, Nepal, Kathmandu, Hetauda, and Pokhara

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Abstract

Since its inception less than a century ago skateboarding has epitomized youth counter culture. In recent years, this fringe sport has emerged in urban Nepal. Through in depth interviews with members of the skateboarding community and supplemental observational research, this study attempts to illuminate how social identity is realized for the skateboard community and how that conceptualization fits within the larger Nepali society. The following research suggests that skateboarding needs to overcome key economic limitations to truly become a cultural more in society.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my aamaa who made me a home away from home.

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible by the kindness of the Nepali skate community. In particular I would like to thank Cryptic Crew and Yuwa for Change for their hospitality and for letting me join in on all their adventures. This project would not have been as successful without your help. I would also like to thank Dan and Peter for their guidance and my Nepali gurus for their daily encouragement. Lastly, thank you to my roommate Rachel Devine for her unrelenting support and friendship throughout my research.

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Introduction

Known for breaking physical boundaries imposed on urban spaces, skateboarding can also break social boundaries, representing a unique space of cross-cultural interaction among typically distinguished social, economic, cultural, and gender groups. The concern of this research is two-fold. First, this study functions as ethnography of the skateboarding scene in urban Nepal—specifically in Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Hetauda-- defines which and why specific youth populations participate in the fringe, relatively un-studied sport. Secondly, this research critically investigates how Nepali skateboarders conceptualize its social identity – whether skateboarding culture challenges dominant norms and values or simply reinforces normative socio-economic hierarchies. In this way, this study can provide a lens through which to observe how and to what extent the subculture struggles for socio-economic power and cultural within Nepal’s existing cultural and social hierarchy.

Theoretical background: Youth Subcultures

In constructing its arguments the theoretical basis for this research draws from insights on both subculture and class formation in Nepal.

Generally, subcultures are recognized as “relatively distinct social subsystem[s] within a larger social system and culture” (Williams, 2007, 574). Relevant research argues that subcultural participation is form of resistance that reflected larger class, cultural, and political struggles (Williams, 2007). As a result urban social formation has received growing attention as opposed to a traditional standardized city landscapes that produce convergence (Daskalaki and

Mould 2013). Emerging urban practices are typically constructed as “oppositional” but are now imbued by recent research with the power to “redirect and even oppose the predetermined usages of urban spaces” (Daskalaki and Moud 2013, 1).

Existing literature on “delinquent” or subversive subcultural youths assert dissonance between mainstream cultural goals and working-class youths’ marginalized opportunities arguing that subcultural participants inverted mainstream cultural values and have “the ability to create new alternative subcultural frames of reference” (Williams, 2007, 574, Daskalaki and Moud, Chiu, C, 2009, Beal, B and Weidman, L. 2003, Vivoni, F. 2009). Within a youth subculture the presence of a community of participants “inevitably creates a set of practices that are gradually formalized and adhered to by others” that impart new norms, boundaries and practices (Daskalaki and Moud 2013, 5).

Skateboarding has been an arena in which political discourse and practices have been previously explored. Skateboarding has been commonly epitomized as a “transgressive activity that challenges the regulations not only imposed on a urban space, but also societal norms and values” (Chiu, 2009; Daskalaki and Mould, 2013, 2). The physical movement between city, suburban, and neighborhood boundaries is alleged to disrupt the city by obscuring the boundaries used to differentiate people of different economic and social classes (Chiu, 2009). Conclusions by recent studies denote a political potential of skateboarding that challenges the privatization of urban spaces and contributes to developing a more inclusive city (Vivoni 2009). In fact, it can be argued skateboarding promotes individualism through the provision “an outlet for

creativity and individual expression” and has arguably increased ability to challenge social standards through strong tenets of empowerment, and nonconformity that can subvert the status quo (Beal, Weidman 2003, 344)

Skateboarders have been historically portrayed as outsiders, in part, because of an underdeveloped conceptualization of subcultures fails to see these entities as rooted within larger social and cultural networks (Williams, 2007). Moreover while youth subcultures has been studied in some parts of the Western hemisphere, at large it has remained a marginal subfield within cultural sociology—indicative of the way in which youth trends have been excluded or disvalued in formal discourses (Williams, 2007). As a result a more comprehensive understanding of youth collective behaviors needs to be developed.

The two opposite—and arguably conflicting—manifestations of skateboards as corporate and mainstream or skateboarding as alternative, artful and rebellious signals the potential for the sport to intersect with norms, broadly, in a variety of ways. Furthermore, youth culture is an interesting space in which to examine identity because the rhetoric of youth is so frequently used as a for the anxieties about new ways of being, current ideologies, and the state of the nation—particularly in regard to the possibilities of resistance.

The Landscape of Class in Nepal

This research is informed by insights on how subculture identity is produced in the specific context of Nepal-- a nation of the global south faced during a time of increasing globalization. My arguments ultimately find its foundations on the principle that cultural and economic identity formation is intersectional. This

research defines class as a cultural process, drawing from theorists like Weber who contends “while power is almost always rooted in economic privilege, it is also always exercised and reproduced culturally.” (Weber, 2003)

Additionally, this research feels that it is integral to address paradox whereby a ‘Western’ conception of modernity is instantaneously the object of intense local desire and apparently unachievable, seemingly by definition of an unattainable condition for those in the Global South. For the purpose of this study a basic understanding of class structure in Nepal is relevant. According to renowned academic on economic construction in South Asia, Mark Leichy, class does not replace or beget caste division, but is a new formation in Nepal that emerged leaving gaps “to construct entirely new forms of cultural practice,” like skateboarding (Leichy, 2003, 7). As the expanding international economy becomes ever more relevant to national economies, so do the global class divisions and economic trends it imparts. In particular, Nepal’s “massive ideological and financial stakes in an international economy of ‘development aid has securely tied the state to the expansion of the growing global consumer economy. As Nepal is on the receiving end of the hegemonic global trend, traditional or ‘undeveloped’ forces in Nepal’s culture still remain (Leichy, 2003). New classes are tasked with the reconciliation their traditional status with their desires and pressures to claim a legitimate place within modernity-- leaving class and culture as a constantly renegotiated space. As a result, although caste is an important informant of social divisions in Nepal, I chose to focus on class instead.

Through this lens, the following research of an emerging culture in urban Nepal can address one of the paradoxes of global modernity -- where by social identity is formed by the larger global trend of commercialization and globalization while attempting to retain local integrity and tradition. Skateboarding emerges at a complex and critical time in Nepal's history when the growth of remittances coupled with the earthquake effect on tourism and the challenge the Indian blockade as created for imports has 'downsized and outsourced' the collective agency of much of Nepal's middle and lower classes. Thus, the subculture emerges during a flux of several important trends.

This research also takes this position in light of deficits in existing literature. At present, the topics of class, cultures, and youth have typically been examined in isolation. Instead, this research will draw on Leichter's argument that class and culture is a domain of competing "strategies, systems of prestige and forms of capital." (Leichter, 2003, 5). In total, the cultural and economic equity are both important to skateboard cultures formation and intersections should be evaluated.

Methodology:

This study uses an ethnographic design to examine characteristics of the skateboarding culture in Nepal. Ethnography describes a culture and provides an understanding of that culture from an insider's perspective (Neuman, 2003). Evidence for analysis was ascertained through semi-structured and un-structured interviews conducted with skateboard community members, community leaders, and relevant skateboard organizations. A secondary emit perspective of outside observation of skate parks, skateboard competitions, and relevant workshops

were collected. Originally, this research intended to ask youth skateboarders questions pertaining to age, family social network (caste, class etc), skateboard community, and reasons for participating in skateboarding, as well as reception among other community members (family, police etc). However, initial interactions with members lead me to reassess my methods to reflect a more authentic ethnographic approach that gives more interviewee agency in leading the conversation.

Given the nuances of this topic, the unstructured interview format that collects interviewee-lead narratives reveals a more accurate portrayal of how skateboarders conceptualize the scene and their role within it. I draw on research method's value of William Laurence Somers who posits that narratives most accurately illustrate how individuals create understanding in their lives (Somers, 2003). As an outsider, it is likely that any prepared questions would be limit the authenticity of the answer and risks the exclusion of key topics. Cultural narratives are how people learn who they are; often exist in relationship both with other people and other times (Somers, 2003). Therefore, by having participants locate themselves within their own lives (or skateboarding) in relation to a multitude of factors—I can best assess how people make sense of how the culture of skateboarding is conceptualized.

Once initial connections with select skateboarders were established in Kathmandu, I was introduced to the skateboarder larger community and skateboard crews both in and out of the valley. I benefited from the fact the skateboard scene is still relatively small and interconnected between various loci. Skateboarding's large social media presence also permitted me to seek out key

individuals and skateboard locations via Facebook pages and groups. This study made an effort to interview subjects spanning different ages, castes, ethnic groups, gender and other social groups. Undertaking a random sample was not be entirely feasible because of the lack of a sample frame and many some skateboarders may be unwilling to participate. Moreover, many participants were under the age of consent.

In total, this research draws on six key interviews with eminent members of the skate community as well as observations at skate parks, competitions, and relevant skateboarding workshops and trainings to which I was invited. Research was conducted in Kathmandu, Hetauda, and Pokhara. In each urban setting I engaged in interviews and attended local skateboarding sites to familiarize myself with community. Guiding topics were prepared prior to meetings but typically interviews followed the natural flow of conversations and drew from particular interests of the interviewee. Given the prevalence of English language instruction for Nepali students, study participants had relative English fluency and translation. In total, ethnographic narrative collection and supplemental observations allowed me to examine a variety of skateboarding elements while maintaining a spotlight on the relationship between individuals and socio-cultural conception.

It is important to recognize my potential biases which include my own participation in the skate community in the unite states and general like of the sport. However, I do not consider myself a skater nor do I skate. My participation in my hometown skate scene is only due to its connection with the surfing community there. Moreover, the following researching did not present possible

risk for my subjects and thus did necessitate particular ethical protection. Participants were very forthcoming in their stories and experiences with skateboarding.

Research Findings: Overview and Analysis

Assuming that class does play a role in the construction of particular modes of cultures and conceptualizations of social identity, the following research examines the cultural formation of skateboarding in Nepal specifically in regard to its capacity as an agent of subversion and change.

The following findings examine skateboarding in urban Nepal and how the cultural space is negotiated by themes relevant to its socio-cultural identity. These findings also consider how skateboarding fits within the larger context of Nepal. To insinuate that the emergence of skateboarding culture in urban Nepal is the explicit the result of key movements or trends is provincial. Instead in my findings I attempt to interpret skate boarding's 1) existing state 2) factors of its rise and themes of social identity within 3) and how it relates to the larger urban community. Findings will be used to draw conclusions relevant to the possible implications of skateboarding subculture for Nepal's larger socio-economic reality.

Based on my research, the skateboard scene in urban Nepal has positioned itself as a resistive counter culture vis-a-vie typical class and cultural values that attempts to mediate the space between traditional and contemporary social divisions. These findings look specifically at the effect of global and local trends relating to commercialization, class formation, and social justice. It should be

noted that the cultural site of skateboarding is a process and task rather than a rigid cultural entity or a theoretical condition. The intent of the following findings is not to develop a condition in which skateboarding operates but instead to present a narrative

Current State:

According to Samip Jung Khadka, a leading community member in the Kathmandu skateboard scene and manager of nonprofit Skate n' Donate, the “whole skateboarding movement as a very natural progression for Nepali youth and society.” (Khadka, 2016) Over the past five years Nepali skateboarders like Khadka have witnessed the unprecedented rise in the interest in sport within their landlocked nation.

Skateboarding's origins in Nepal are unclear but are generally attributed to tourists who brought skateboards during their visits. The sport's short history in Nepal is marked by an exponential growth in participation despite a crucial lack of resources and space. As candidly noted by a 2013 article-- by the Kathmandu post, one could logically see many more reasons why one would not skate in Nepal than why one would. Notorious for its rugged roads, Nepal has little smooth asphalt and only one small skate park in Pokhara can provide refuge from the congested and rocky urban sprawl. Furthermore, the market for skateboards is virtually absent despite efforts of existing skate shops. As a result Nepal's skateboarders rely on a “DIY” mentality, as articulated by Anshu Mahat, one of Kathmandu's only female skaters. While skate boarders' ability make

almost any urban space their stage is a hallmark of the sport—Nepal’s growing skateboard community has to be particularly enterprising to find to grind.

Urban foci of Nepal have become natural sites of skateboard interest, offering the limited stretches of smooth asphalt terrain that do exist in the country. Kathmandu is generally regarded as the center of skateboarding in Nepal and home to an estimated 400 skateboarders (Various Interviews, 2016). The site of the only skate park, Pokhara, boasts the second largest population of skateboarders, with 100 participants citywide and 15-20 regularly skating in the park each day. Hetauda and Chitwan have also popped up as locations of skateboard growth. The scene at each site is generally my individuals 12-23 years of age (Mahat, 2016). Participants are predominately male and lower-middle class (Pahadi, 2016).

Location	Numbers (estimate)
Kathmandu	400
Pokhara	100
Hetauda	30
Chitwan	20

These numbers have substantially grown from the handful of skateboarders that occupied the crowded streets of urban Nepal only five years ago. Original skateboarders like Khadka and Ram Koirala, Pokhara skate park owner, attest to a rapid transition of skateboarding from solitary pastime to community event (Khadka, 2016).

While a small sector of society, the skateboarders — young boys and a few committed girls — express many of the frustrations and thoughts held by

their generation in Nepal, though theirs seem to be particularly felt and critical (Mahat, 2016). Skateboarding still exists on the fringes of acceptable society, viewed as socially subversive and publicly disruptive. Since skateboards have been on the streets it has been subject of a crackdown — the reason mostly unknown but generally chalked up to ‘gangster’ police— at popular skating sites, forcing the various members skate in the congested and arguable dangerous streets of their city or not at all. But more so, for the growing number of young people participating in this unlikely sport in Nepal, skateboarding reflects important ways in which the youth generation is reacting to and conceptualizing Nepal and their place within it.

Self-conceptualization: Skateboarding and the New Nepal

Although members undoubtedly hold a variety of beliefs, as a collective, the skateboard community demonstrates the widening chasm between the old and new generation. Specifically, many skaters argue that this divergence has begun dismantling of long-existing socio-economic divisions, even if only within the skateboard community.

This phenomenon can be tied to the strong sense of social justice with which members are imbued— fighting determinism (a word I heard surprisingly often)—i.e. seeking freedom from coercive powers ranging from governmental antagonism and familial expectations. The following subsections explore a few key themes that inform this identity, specially youth, individualism, social change, and globalization.

Youth Production:

Most obvious is the way in which youth production positions skateboarding as a progressive culture movement. Dominated by individuals younger than 20 years of age, Nepal's skateboarding scene is typified by its youthfulness. To skaters this makes sense. According to Khadka, "The growth of individualistic thinking of the youth [opposed to] the more family and community oriented lifestyle of the past generation is a drama that plays out here on a daily basis" (Khadka, 2016).

For Nepal's skateboarders their positionality as youth serves both as a point of challenge and advantage. When asked if she thought if the government would ever support a skate park in Kathmandu after explaining to me that government land is an obstacle to her dream skate park, Mahat says no because "They think we are just kids." (Mahat, 2016)

The phenomenon of youth disenfranchisement is by no means unique to Nepal. Moreover, large tensions between older and younger generations do not necessarily beget heightened unity or solidity among youth groups. In fact, in my own experience I often see media portray young people as the apathetic agents of an incipient demise of democracy. However, Nepali skateboarders' pride in the community they have fostered suggests that, in their case, their age does make them any less legitimate. In fact, to most, the fact that one is simply young means they are more likely to challenge negative societal norms.

Ram Khoirla: "You can see this in the way they share everything, the way they take care of each other and the way they come together to help and support

each other... But the kids come here and they share their known tricks to each other and they are really kind to each other and they are very helpful and they are very care for each other.”

Observations collected at the skate park reinforced the culture of sharing within the scene. The numbers of hopeful skateboarders routinely outnumbered available boards. Regardless, boards were willingly shared between friends and strangers. Even the simple act of walking with a skateboarder would often elicit a circle of children asking to borrow the skateboarder’s board.

Logically how youth respond to new trends and are cultural mores can be important to future contexts. For Founder of Yuwa for Change, an organization dedicated to youth empowerment via skateboarding, Jagrit Pahadit this makes sense.

“Youth are making changes but the seniors are staying the same, and the government are staying the same. Youth are making changes but other things and systems in society are the same.”

The fact that young people are the group that most explicitly straddles the vying worlds of modernity and tradition in Nepal can very well position them to be the drivers of change in Nepal. The rise of the internet coupled with the popularity of going out of country for educational and work opportunities as youth has produced a generation of young people more in tune with the ‘western world’ while simultaneously existing under control of their parents.

It is important challenge inherent assumptions about the capacity of young people to make change and acknowledge how young people are making change in new ways that often are not recognized. Tackling youth participation as an interconnected piece of all participation has the potential to not only bring

issues that disproportionately effect young people to the forefront of political agendas, but can also redefine participation. In Nepali skateboard culture, young people represent not only a group expressing possibly divergent though but also, and perhaps, more importantly a community that has believes in its ability to cooperate and thrive despite dominant ideologies. Consequentially, the role of youth production in the emergence of skateboard culture is important to its identity and relation to society at large.

Individualism Through Replication:

Skateboarding is both a sport of individual showmanship and a trending lifestyle. The attributes of individuality and replication were important to the growth of the sport. Those like Khadka believe while “[young people’s] need for self-expression and self-determination will always be shunted and suppressed by the Nepali society at large...in the skate family they have found a place where they can really be who they want to be. “ (Khadka, 2016) Similarly, Koriala believe that the fact that skateboarding is so free “ you make your own rules” (Koriala, 2016).

Interestingly, the sports capacity to draw individuals in who home to imitate a lifestyle is equally powerful. Pahadi suggests that the sport has grown so exponentially in the past few years because it is so unique but also because Nepalese youth like to copy new style and fashion. In fact, Pahadi intentionally tries to make each event he hosts in conjunction with Yuwa for Change as public and visible as possible to other youth. (Pahadi, 2016)

For Pahadi “By providing gear and sharing my thoughts and examples of

similar skaters and similar social services and lifestyles.“ (Pahadi, 2016). At once, skateboarding become a cite of individual expression and an space in which to exercise influence through replication. Toggling between group and individual identification, skateboarders produce and reproduce their identities in relation to the culture of skating.

According to Khadka skateboarders “know what they like, they know how they want to be and in the skate community they have found a place where they can find others with a similar mindset and using skateboarding as a launching pad go on to bigger and better things.” (Khadka, 2016)

Social Change:

Most interesting, skateboarding in Nepal is commonly viewed by its members as equalizing sport although socioeconomic status among skateboarders varies subtly (most are identified as low-middle income class and only few are dalits).

The theory of change articulated by relevant organizations like YUWA for Change and Skate n’ Donate and community leaders like Mahat and Koirala underlines skateboarding’s ability to capture a wide audience, create a space of diverse participants and then promote a better more equality style of life. Organizations supporting the skateboard community were good examples of this conception, specially Yuwa for Change and Skate N’ Donate.

Yuwa for Change is a non-profit and non-government organization established by a group of young people in Kathmandu with the objective “to advocate, lobby and facilitate mainstreaming of youth issues in the national agenda.” Specifically, Yuwa for Change uses skateboarding as a medium to

attract a wide scope of individuals from a diversity of backgrounds to then engage in series of workshops that promote social equity for Dalit and otherwise marginalized or disenfranchised youth. At a workshop in Hetauda during a skateboarding trip, Pahadi told attendees “our aim is to help you keep your passion for skateboarding alive and help it grow in a positive way.” (Pahadi, 2016) According to Pahadi “You need to learn about society. You need to stop certain things in society.” (Pahadi, 2016). And for him, skateboarding is the medium.

Established less than two years ago, Skate n’ Donate is a burgeoning nonprofit that creates a channel for international skateboarding gear and donation to reach youth in Kathmandu and surrounding areas (e.g. Chitwan, Pokhara). The organization is also responsible for many local competitions and other skateboarding productions. The inception of Skate n’ Donate Nepal was originally motivated by the lack of access to gear for young skaters and the articulation of hierarchical disparities between youth and the general population and within youth groups themselves. Skate n’ Donate Nepal’s founder Khadka hones what he recognizes as a “generational evolution of the status quo,” denouncing the expectation that life—particularly given that this status quo excludes a large portion of the population from social mobility. According to Khadka, Skate n’ Donate, can confront as an “oppressive dominant ideology.” (Khadka, 2016)

Both Yuwa for Change and Skate and Donate use the platform of skateboarding – a sport typified for its rebellious stereotype— as a cross-cultural space to promote diversity of social, economic, cultural, and gender identities.

Each organizations relies strongly on the theory of development as freedom popularized by thinkers who posit that development requires the removal of major sources of “unfreedom”, particularly imposed on counterculture populations (Sen 1999, 3). In this case, the unfreedom are often imposed by the older generations complacency as illustrated in the grievances of earlier subsections.

“I want to see everybody involved in skateboarding— not only dalit youth or marginalized youth,” explains Pahadi, “I want everybody— I will support everybody. But I want to just motivate them and just welcome them to society”. (Pahadi, 2016)

Although Pahadi admits that only very few skaters – not more than 10— fall into the categories of the most marginalized socio-economic groups, they still have captured an audience to which to give trainings regarding topics of empowerment and equality because simply put: “even though we are skaters, even though we are BMX riders, even though we are longboarders— we need to do something.”

And most skateboarders would argue they are doing something. Khadkha goes so far as to say that “a kind of socially responsible business philosophy has developed among the kids....If kids can develop and think and operate at this level when they are still teenagers or younger then I feel like social change is inevitable.” (Khadka)

Global Influence:

The tension between mainstream and subversive trends has typified the growth of the skateboarding globally. In contrast, for the Nepali skateboarding scene, global trends and globalization itself is incredibly important to how the community subverts existing norms and aids the scene. Most significant, is how skateboarding in Nepal relies on global trends for both sustenance and motivation.

Skateboarding is a direct production of this regional and global phenomenon. Although the culture is produced locally, it is driven externally. Also have not note that skateboarding is part of a for-profit industry epitomized by businesses like Vans and Shorty's that sell a lifestyle. Historically, commercializing bodies whose incentives are to mainstream the culture for profit rather than support the existing scene has created tensions between skaters. Commercialization is an important way to legitimize a sport; for Nepal you need the market to be created so skateboarding can be more widely available. The fear of being 'sold-out' is either not yet an issue for Nepali skateboarders or will not be.

Financially, the Nepali skateboarding scene is incredibly dependent on foreign support. "We get donations from all over the world and when people who skate or know skaters stop by they are always so eager to get involved and help out in any way," explains Khadka and Pahadi explains that he has spent a lot of time reaching out to foreign organizations for support and donations. At present, Yuwa for Change is supported by two foreign organizations—one based in Brooklyn, New York and the other in Estonia— in addition to funds out of

Pahadi's own pocket. In fact, the majority of gear used by Nepali skateboarders is the result of foreign in-kind donation.

Throughout my interactions, Nepali skateboarders consistently reference foreign skateboarders- both a desire to receive their sport as well as compete abroad. In a motivational speech for a group of Hetauda skateboarders, Pahadi enthusiastically explain that “with a little bit of hard work we can try to send a team from Nepal to compete in the biggest international event in the world. The key to achieving this is your passion and dedication to skateboarding.” (Pahadi, 2016) Although Nepali skateboarders are undeniably concerned with the realities afflicting their country, many are motivated to participate by skateboarding's potential to link them to the wider world. When asked about will hopefully be on the horizon for Nepali skateboarders most skateboarders wished for international competitions.

Outside of Nepal, foreigners are also viewed as the instigators of movement. When asked how India's skate scene had become so successful, Mahat responded that she thought it was because of a foreigner who had first built the skate part or the ‘international community’ (Mahat, 2016).

Both these ties to global influence center around on thing: money. The outside world appears to be revered as a source of success and sustainability.

Limitations

The above-mentioned overarching themes lend to how the scene is conceptualized. However, the subculture's cultural strength is tested by its

present inability to reconcile economic barriers with cultural values of equity and sustainability as well as larger societal obstructions.

Cost Barriers and Sustainability:

An important aspect of skating culture in Nepal is the limitations imposed by a lack of gear. If a board breaks or is taken away it could mean an indefinite end to skating, unless he's lucky enough to have a back up with spare parts or a friend willing to lend him one. While the occasional visitor is aware of the still burgeoning skating culture and brings decks, wheels, trucks and shoes to fortify the skating groups, any sort of aid exists within relationships of provision and advantage taking prevalent throughout the country.

Koirala has attempted to devise various business models to sustain the park and promote skateboarding will keeping the sport as accessible to as many people as possible through free park entry for underprivileged kids and those under 16. Koirala had originally hoped that the tourism typical to the area would increase the number of paying customers at the park by cites low tourist number since the earthquake—a phenomenon that has effected all businesses in the area. Regardless, Koirala is still trying to create a market of good boards at affordable prices by importing his own materials. Despite these efforts, the Pokhara park 'is hardly recovering the repairing cost,' let alone the cost of rent and other fees. (Koirala, 2016)

Khadka concedes that skateboarding presents a cost barrier that “definitely limits the reach of skateboarding to all levels of society. The poorest

skaters that we have in the community were just lucky enough to be at the right place at the right time. “ (Khadka, 2016)

The economic costs and challenges to skaters boarding raises questions regarding not only to what extent is skateboarding culture actually subverting socio-economic divisions (specially class) and to what extent skateboarding has the capacity to growth beyond its current state.

Skateboarding and the larger society:

Locally skateboarding is in opposition to dominant culture and institutions. Common skateboard rhetoric championed the belief that “ Everything is possible.” Only to concede that “Its just the systems and government” that are impeding complete success. The government and the family emerge as the two main forces, which appear conflict with the growth of skateboarding and create challenges to

Government:

It is impossible to illuminate all the shortcomings of the Nepali government. My findings reveal that the cooperation of the government is important to skateboarding for two crucial reasons.

Obstructive laws -

Khadka explains that access to gear is really made an issue by the government’s customs and tariff laws. The inefficiency of imports was made clear to me in a trip to the Kathmandu post office to pick up a board sent to Nepal’s first

sponsored skater, Milan, from his sponsor. The process took several hours and required various forms of identification and documentation.

Laws that discourage imports and stifle local markets can be endemic of a larger issue. Failures of trade in other comparable small-landlocked nations, such as the trade of bananas in Central African Republic, form a fatalistic narrative of “economic claustrophobia”(Hartford, 2005). Frequent checks by Indian border security, customs, shortages of containers, differential tariff rates, and delays impede Nepalese export. On average, Nepalese traders pay an average of 20 percent from the high cost of transport, damage, pilferage, custom formalities, fees/charges/bribes, and the time-cost of one-three days (Sharma, 2014).

Need for government land-

When asked what the next step for Nepal’s skate scene way, Mahat was adamant that the first thing is like needed is governmental land. In urban spaces like Kathmandu land is scarcer and thus more expensive. According to conversations with various skaters, Government land would not only allow the community to receive land at a possibly lower cost but also be an import symbolic gesture that legitimizes the sport.

In the coming years, Koirala hopes that young people continue to push for “go to the government officials and write formal letters, what is happening, what is the state of skating at the present.” (Koirala, 2016) At present the government “should realize they are their citizens, they are their kids. And they are not safe in the street. So that’s what they should realize and they should provide spaces around the city. Which makes the city beautiful. And of course more attraction for tourists.” (Koirala, 2016)

Parents:

Most skateboarders would argue that skateboarding does not fit in with familial expectations and traditional family roles —particularly for girls— who are “stuck at home.” (Pahadi, 2016). Although some like Khadka argue “that parents still “cling this archaic notion of superiority or inferiority and pass it along to their children.” (Khadka, 2016) Others like Pahadi are more optimistic that “there will be changes and families will support them so we are not the only ones that work to support skaters. I guess slowly there will be changes” (Pahadi, 2016) Estimates from skateboarders suggest that half of parents might support skateboarding but might not understand how it fits into an individuals long term plan.

Conclusion:

This research examines skateboard culture as a valid emerging social formation within a larger diverse, albeit constrained, socio-political environment that denotes a possible generational change to how individuals approach social divisions. Youth interaction with global trends and skateboarding’s individualistic yet replicable appeal appears to position the subculture as a progressive force however serious economic limitations and massive societal opposition makes unclear the extent to which skateboarding can actually be a subversive and altering force in Nepali culture.

The present fluidity of power in global system engenders values in subculture movements like skateboarding that are inspired and sustain by global commercial trends. In this new global dynamic, Nepal’s skateboarders have an

opportunity to leverage foreign skateboard scenes to advance its interests capitalizing its latitude in the global skate scene. Globally, skateboarding has become particularly resonant both as a referent within popular culture that produces particular ideologies of race, gender, and youth and as a material practice that inspires civic debate about young people's use of public space but also public ideological domain.

Ultimately, this research's main concern is with how this emerging group construct themselves as a cultural entity and how it's cultural life alters their interaction with how they perceive their social life (or hides societal privilege behind a guise)- like other commodity based subcultures have in the past (i.e. Heavy Metal). More specifically, the way in which Nepali skateboard culture's values of resistance to traditional oppressive hierarchies prevents them from realizing their own privilege within society. The above-discussed research findings imply that Nepali skateboard culture is mediated by tension between old and new generations, creative expression, and global trends, and market access. At present, specific cost barriers and reliance on international based growth undermines the extent to which the values of Nepali skateboarding subculture can dismantle discriminatory ideological practices like class to create a more equitable and mobile community and/or society.

Although Nepali skater's global outlook and frustrations with social, political and economic realities in Nepal are valid and inform the community, however it remains to be seen whether or not the community can reconcile clear barriers to entry, access, and growth which effect its existence. In all, there is something undeniably progressive and regressive at work. Nepali skateboard

culture's economic reliance on global handout and existing economic barriers to access belies a lack of concern with issues of social equality and structures of power, but their passionate explanations of skate boarding's appeal—its acceptance of difference (within particular parameters of class especially), its space for self-expression, its cooperative nature—suggest just the opposite. Youths' capacity to critique and reimagine everyday cultural mores is reflected in skateboard culture.

Looking Forward

Culturally and economically, cities tend to favor convergence towards a status quo. Instead this study, in addition to mapping a generally un-studied group in Nepali society, attempts to investigate the social identity is realized for member's of Nepal's skateboard community, potentially revealing emerging conceptions of how class is conceived in this community. Understanding the culture of skateboarding can be insightful particularly as it pertains to generational perception of social status, empowerment, and self-expression. The emergence of new culture like skateboarding can suggest social changes within Nepal. Ultimately, the size and diversity sample cohort limited this study's ability to represent the entirety of the skateboarding community. In the style of a true ethnography, there is no true end, per say, to what is observed about skateboarding culture in Nepal but instead is a continuation of existing information. At present, if skateboarding is able to find economic stability and equity then it can more likely promote the culture norms it upholds.

Future areas of research that would supplement this work should look more specifically and critically at the role of government in skateboarding. This research could be expanded by a larger volume of interviews with those affiliated with the skateboard community but engage in other ways- as viewers, parents or cameramen. It would also be interesting to look at the intersection of skateboarding and other social activities like BMX, tattooing, or graffiti.

Glossary of Definitions

Youth-

While the Nepali census typically refers to youth population as those 16-40 years

of age this study defines to the youth as been defined by the World Health Organization as the period of life spanning between 12-24 years of age (note). Interviews we not conducted with individuals under 18 years of age due to ethnical restraints.

Urban-

Urban refers to a geographical area defined by high human population density and many built facilities explicitly distinct from rural areas surrounding it. According to recent census information, Nepal's urban populations have experienced growth rates of nearly seven percent and the government has declared its intentions to increase infrastructure within and linking the nation's urban sprawls.

List of Interviews:

Khadka, Samip Jung. Interview with author. Kathmandu, April 3rd, 2016.

Conversation with author. April 21st, 2016.

Pahadi, Jagrit. Interview with author. Kathmandu April 9th, 2016. Conversation with author. April 11th, 2016.

Mahat, Anshu. Interview with author. Kathmandu, April 4th, 2016. Conversation with author. Kathmandu, April. Conversation with author. Kathmandu April 29th, 2016.

Korjala, Ram. Interview with author. Pokhara, April 17th, 2016.

Mongol Cheemsay. Interview with author. Kathmandu, April 9th, 2016.

Conversation with author. April 12th, 2016.

*Countless conversations

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