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# All the King's Horses, All the King's Elephants: The Fates of Royal Animals in Nepal's Post-Monarchy Period

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In May of 2008, Nepal's 240-year-old monarchy was legally dissolved. In the wake of this dissolution, the new interim government sought to replace royal institutions, procedures, and ceremonies with new, parallel processes. One unexpected royal legacy that politicians needed to resolve was that of the former royal animals that had been connected to the position of the King. The king of Nepal and palace institutions had been responsible for the welfare of a range of animals: private royal horses, a palace dairy herd, elephants in Chitwan, and an aviary of pheasants. Many of Nepal's ex-royal animals have survived for years after the monarchy's collapse, and many of them were left vulnerable, with no one clearly responsible for or dedicated to them in the new political context. The peculiar and marginalized fates of Nepal's ex-royal animals highlight the profound institutional complexity

the monarchy once entailed, and the far-reaching consequences of its dissolution. They also reveal the grudging and complex ways that parliamentary politicians and bureaucrats have handled some of the more inconvenient legacies of the institution they eliminated.

**Keywords:** Nepal, politics, Hindu kingship, national symbols, animal welfare, royal animals.

## Introduction

In May 2008, the First Constituent Assembly of Nepal voted to dissolve the country's 240-year-old monarchy. The now-former-king Gyanendra Shah, who had assumed power in the aftermath of the 2001 royal massacre,<sup>1</sup> was ordered to vacate Narayanhiti Royal Palace, and on 11 June 2008 (following some haggling over logistics), the deposed monarch gave a final press conference and drove off to assume a quiet life as a private citizen of the new republic of Nepal (Whelpton 2009). This was a momentous occasion in the history of Nepal—a country where the existence of a unified nation-state stemmed from the conquests of King Prithvi Narayan Shah (Stiller 1973, 1993; Whelpton 2005a, 2005b). It was also a momentous occasion in the history of the world, a situation not just where a monarch was deposed, but where the entire system of monarchy itself was peacefully eliminated (Thapa and Sharma 2009).

In the two years following the 2006 *Janandolan* (People's Movement), Nepal's interim government had set about remaking the political order, systematically stripping the king of executive functions, official assets, and ceremonial duties, all in preparation for his final 2008 dismissal (Mocko 2016). What became evident over this process was that the monarchy was not merely a political institution, nor was the king merely an individual charged with serving as the focal figure of the nation. Instead, the monarchy was a highly complex system of practices and institutions—meaning that its dissolution would extend far beyond firing an unpopular man from his job. The king had been a nexus around which a wide variety of people, resources, spaces, religious practices, and nationalist rhetoric had been oriented, organized, and institutionalized (Baltutis 2015). Deposing the king therefore required reorganizing all kinds of people, resources, spaces, religious practices, objects, and rhetoric—discontinuing them, appropriating them, or redirecting them (Zotter 2016; Mocko 2016). Over the course of the transitional period and the months that followed, the interim and post-interim governments declared the nation to be a secular state, redesigned the national currency, commissioned a new national anthem, and reworked the legislative process (Adhikary 2011; Sen 2015). They restructured the leadership of the national army, turned Narayanhiti Palace into a museum, and locked up the royal crown (Bhattarai 2012; Pande 2014).

The politicians who orchestrated the monarchy's downfall had uses for most of what they appropriated: palace spaces, desks and limos, staffers and advisers, and rituals. But there were also residual legacies of the monarchy that its opponents did not anticipate. In particular, the position of the king of Nepal had been connected to, or

responsible for, a variety of animals—animals which were not particularly useful or interesting to the post-interim politicians. Yet the needs of those animals were pressing; they required housing, food, and care, and they would die if ignored entirely. Their needs were markedly different from the needs of the inanimate leftovers of the old regime. Should a building or limousine prove unneeded by the new government, it could be safely left to moulder, but animals that have been domesticated or kept in captivity require at least minimal upkeep, and so it was imperative that the government decide what to do with them. The tasks facing government officials eventually included relocating a stable full of horses, finding a new system for naming baby elephants, and determining what to do with the king's private herd of dairy cows.

Many of Nepal's ex-royal animals were left vulnerable years after the monarchy's collapse, with no one clearly responsible for them or dedicated to them in the new political context. The assorted fates of former royal animals was about more than just determining the dispensation of property or simply satisfying animals' corporeal needs, however; each group of animals had their own entanglements that included both care givers and cultural meaning. The 'animal turn' in social theory entreats scholars to move animals from objects to subjects (Hobson 2007; Wolch 1998) and present animals as marginalized social groups (Hovorka 2015; Philo 1995; Urbanik 2012)—groups for whom the decisions of the dominant social group (humans) have real consequences for the fortunes and lives of those outside the centers of power. According to this 'animal turn,' it is imperative to take seriously the lived experiences, agency, joy, suffering, and culture of the animal other, and reflexively explore the varied implications of human-animal relationships—including nuanced and multidimensional ethical considerations (Gross and Valley 2012; Philo and Wilbert 2000; Wolch and Emel 1998). By examining Nepal's once-royal elephants, horses, cows, and pheasants as four marginalized non-human social groups, it is possible to see the complexities of their integration with human culture, their own care needs and their relationships with caregivers.

Viewed through this lens, the former royal animals each presented the interim government with the task of disentangling marginalized living beings from the entrapments of monarchy, a task that politicians and bureaucrats undertook in often grudging and haphazard ways. The fates of Nepal's ex-royal animals thus highlight the profound institutional complexity the monarchy once entailed, the enormous difficulties of discontinuing it, and the far-reaching ways that the dissolution of one system of

power ended up disrupting the relationships subject to it.

### **Animals of Traditional Hindu Kingship: Elephants and Horses**

Prior to the dissolution of Nepal's monarchy, the institution was fundamentally characterized as Hindu, and Nepal's kings strove to uphold core traditions of Hindu kingship that had flourished in the Indian subcontinent for millennia. While the recent kings of Nepal were also self-consciously modern heads of state (riding in private aircraft, or sporting modern military uniforms), they nevertheless retained many Hindu practices not just from Nepal's past but from Indic patterns of kingship more broadly. They attended festivals, received blessings from goddesses, received Vedic *abhisheka* (consecration ceremonies), and maintained royal relationships with the two characteristic animals most tightly associated with Indic kingship: elephants and horses. Elephants and horses are both commonly found in lists of kingly emblems and accoutrements in classical Sanskrit literature, alongside parasols and fly-whisks, and together with cows they form a classical list of markers of wealth. Elephants and horses are also paired together in classical Indic accounts of warfare and military strategy, such as in the *Arthashastra* (Rangaranjan 1992: 688, 698-703); additionally, the 17th century Mewari *Ramayana* shows a palace scene clearly identifiable as royal partly through the presence of both elephants and horses outside the gate (The British Library n.d.).

The connotations of each animal were slightly different, however. Elephants were extravagant, enormous animals, expensive to maintain and ponderous but impressive to ride. Kings would have been the only members of a society likely to be in a position to own multiple elephants, and they would use them on ceremonial occasions and as gifts. The *Brihataranyaka Upanisad* tells of King Janaka who tried to buy religious knowledge by offering elephants and a thousand cows to Yajnavalkya (Olivelle 1996: 53), and Indra, the king of heaven, rides the white elephant Airavata. The classic dharmasastra text *Manusmriti* recommends that kings use elephants for punishment, e.g. to trample thieves (Doniger 1991: 155). Some classical texts even provide instructions on how to use 'the state elephant' to select a new king in the instance of a power vacuum (Edgerton 1913).

Horses, like elephants, were key to the assertion of classical Sanskrit royalty. Horses were not indigenous or routinely bred in the subcontinent. They served as royal status symbols, highly valued for battles and processions, and were key to the South Asian prestige economy (Chakravarti 1999). For centuries, Indic kings poured

resources into acquiring and maintaining high-quality mounts (Chakravarti 1999; O'Hanlon 2007). Horses could mark kingship by participating in coronation ceremonies, such as the Royal Horse central to two early-20th century Indian consecrations (Mayer 1991). When the Buddha renounced his life as a prince, one of his last acts was to part from his faithful horse, Kanthaka. Horses also had a rather strange but ancient connection to South Asian monarchy: as far back as the *Rig Veda*, kings were encouraged to demonstrate their kingliness by offering horses up as extravagant animal sacrifices (Bhattacharyya 2005; Jamison 1996: 65-110).

Nepal's modern monarchy had thus inherited long-standing cultural symbolic patterns that encouraged them to assert their kingship in certain contexts by associating themselves with the canonical marks of royalty—riding elephants and possessing horses—and they needed to have access to appropriate animals in order to do so. Once the monarchy collapsed, however, the new government wished to assert a wholly modern, West-looking idiom of power, and had no particular desire to assert power through these animals.

### **Elephants**

Elephants provided the most highly marked, purposefully archaic idiom of royal processional, an extravagant and impractical option to show the king to his subjects. Only the king and his close associates traveled and were publicly displayed this way, meaning that the highest registers of royal ritual were tied to elephants, and elephants were at a deep level tied to kingship. The importance of royal elephant-riding was inscribed in the construction of the modern Narayanhiti Palace itself: the palace compound was built to include a full elephant shelter, even though elephants do not thrive at altitude, and were never routinely kept in Kathmandu for royal use for more than a few days.<sup>2</sup>

During Nepal's Malla, early Shah, and Rana periods, kings owned elephants directly, and they primarily used them as mounts during ceremonial occasions. They also used elephants as prestigious gifts, to curry favor with colonial authorities in British India or as a bribe to keep ex-King Rana Bahadur Shah exiled (Regmi 1995: 26; Regmi 1999: 17-18 ftnt. 8). However, when the Nepali government was reconfigured and modernized in the mid-20th century, the king stopped directly owning elephants. Instead, elephants were centralized as government property in a *hattisar* (elephant shelter) in Chitwan, and then integrated into the national park system established by King Birendra in the early 1970s. A ministry-funded national elephant breeding facility was constructed nearby in Sauraha in

the late 1980s. The elephants of the government's *hattisar* and breeding program were used to patrol and clear paths in the nationalized forest, as well as to provide park tours to visiting foreigners. Occasionally, elephants would be walked from Chitwan to the capital and back in order to carry the king, members of his family, or royal representatives for particularly elaborate royal rituals—such as King Birendra's wedding in 1970,<sup>3</sup> his *abhisheka* consecration ceremony in 1975 (Witzel 1987), or his *katto* funerary ritual in 2001 (Mocko 2016; Willesee and Whittaker 2004).

During this time, elephants were not the formal property of the kings, merely the property of the king's government. Nevertheless, the palace had a direct role in elephant oversight and maintenance. Not only were the government elephants at the disposal of the palace for ritual needs, the palace was also invariably consulted for help naming any elephants born to the government breeding center. In recent decades, when a new elephant was born, staff at the Sauraha breeding facility would notify the Chitwan National Park central office, which would notify the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, which would notify the palace. Palace staff would then examine the circumstances of the baby elephant's birth (especially its birth-month), and recommend a suitable name to the Ministry—which would then pass the recommendation back to the breeding center (via the Chitwan National Park central office) to officially name the elephant.

During the monarchy period, especially during the *panchayat* period of direct royal rule from 1960 to 1990, there was a strong preference for naming baby elephants after members of the royal family, appending "Gaj" or "Prasad" after the royal name of a male elephant and "Mala" or "Kali" after the royal name for a female. Thus, over time the palace handed down elephant names that included Birendra-Gaj, Aishwarya-Mala, Dipendra-Gaj, Gyanendra-Prasad, Komal-Kali, Mahendra-Gaj, Nirajan-Gaj, Dhirendra-Gaj, Paras-Gaj, and Himani-Kali—each sharing the birth-month and gender of her/his royal namesake. There were, however, more elephants born in Chitwan than royal family members available for name-giving, thus during the monarchy period many animals received names based on religious figures or natural features, such as Binayak-Prasad, Balmiki-Gaj, Gandaki-Kali, and Parbati-Kali. Even when a name that was not overtly royalist was bestowed upon an elephant, that name was still bestowed by the palace, through the elaborate ministry reporting system that located the palace at the pinnacle of the government.

Following the April 2006 *Janandolan* (People's Movement), however, the government ministry system began to

be disconnected from the palace. The May 2006 House Proclamation created a legal framework to enable the entire state apparatus to function without reference to the king,<sup>4</sup> and by January 2007 the government ratified the Interim Constitution,<sup>5</sup> which transferred all duties and activities formerly performed by the king to the prime minister. There was increasing pressure to discontinue any institutional connections between the national government and the palace, and any politician or bureaucrat who appeared to uphold the old palace-centric political order came under swift censure from the interim administration and national press.

In that new climate, from mid-2006 to mid-2008, it was not clear how new baby elephants should receive names—and with hundreds of pressing institutional, political, and procedural issues to settle, the interim administration had very little energy to spare for Chitwan megafauna. Each time an elephant was born, the Sauraha staff duly notified the central office of the Chitwan National Park, which in turn notified the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation—but then the Ministry staff did not know what to do.<sup>6</sup> It was no longer politically nor procedurally correct to refer the matter to Narayanhiti Palace, but no one else had claimed the right to name government elephants, nor had anyone given the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation instructions to assign animal names themselves. By December 2006, there were already sixteen unnamed baby elephants at the government facility in Sauraha, plus nine more elephant-pregnancies in progress, with no prospect in sight for how to handle the new situation (Shahi 2006).

In speaking to staff after the fact, it was clear that this protracted namelessness produced discomfort for the elephants' caretakers, who are accustomed to addressing the elephants as individuals when they approach, train, feed, ride, wash, or touch their charges. *Hattisare* (elephant caretakers) work intimately with the elephants in teams of either two or three men dedicated to each elephant, in what Piers Locke refers to as "a cross-species relationship within a multispecies community of practice... in which elephant and human bodies and lifeworlds are intertwined in fulfillment of their shared role" (Locke 2013: 87). The local sensibility that elephants should have names recognizes that elephants are social, albeit non-human, persons. Naming of elephants is thus a fundamental part of the care and training regimens, and the relationships of companionship, domination, and reverence that caretakers develop with the elephants (Locke 2011).

At some point in late 2007 or early 2008, the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation in Kathmandu finally began issuing elephant names itself,<sup>7</sup> a move that seems to have



Figure 1. Loktantra-Kali (“Democracy, the Elephant”) in center-foreground, with her mother, Aishwarya-Mala, left.

(Mocko, 2010)

become the standard procedure moving forward. Though there was now some resolution, ministry officials were often slow and inconsistent in this regard, according to frustrated elephant-center staff, and as a result many babies were spending weeks or months nameless. When they did issue names, ministry officials generally followed a pattern of issuing religious names or nature and geography inspired names. Interim and post-interim-period elephants received names such as Narayan-Prasad, Kus-Prasad, Karnali-Kali (after the local river), and a pair of twins, Ram and Laxman. More idiosyncratic elephant babies included the romantic “Love Prasad” as well as Tirthaman-Kali, who was named after the Director of National Parks at the time.<sup>8</sup> There was also the remarkable Loktantra-Kali, or “Democracy, The Elephant” (Figure 1).

The government continued to keep and house monarchy-period elephants after the transition to parliamentary democracy, and made no effort to rename elephants with royalist names. On a field visit in February 2010, the central government *hattisar* (elephant shelter) in Chitwan was still home to the elephants Dipendra-Gaj and Gyanendra-Prasad, and had been home to Birendra-Gaj up until his recent death. Aishwarya-Kali still lived at the government breeding facility, (where she had ironically been the elephant who had given birth to Loktantra-Kali, the “democracy” elephant), while Nirajan-Gaj, Paras-Gaj, and Himani-Kali were living in alternate government facilities within the Tarai park system where they were

put to work maintaining trails and moving logs. All the elephants were still called by their royal names, and had not been the subject of anti-monarchy opposition. When the Chitwan *hattisar* ran out of space in its covered sheds, however, the elephant they ‘kicked out’ and staked to an uncovered outdoor location was ironically Gyanendra-Prasad, namesake of the king that had been ‘kicked out’ of Narayanhiti Palace (Figure 2).

As of 2010, the government continued to maintain two elephants whose names were not royalist, but who had been directly connected to the king. Moti Prasad (Kha) had been a participant in the funerary rituals of Crown Prince Dipendra in 2001, achieving press notoriety for trampling a bystander to death while walking to Kathmandu, and then failing to cooperate during the *katto* ritual itself (Kropf 2002; Willis and Whittaker 2004). While there was a Moti Prasad resident at the Chitwan *hattisar* in 2010, and several staff members recounted lurid tales of the elephant’s violent past, that elephant was in fact a different Moti Prasad—designated ‘Moti Prasad (Ka)’. The other Moti Prasad (Kha) had apparently been too unpredictable to interact with tourists, which is the primary role of the elephants housed at the main facility—so he had long before been relocated, along with the elephant used for the *katto* ritual for King Birendra, to a *hattisar* near Nawalparasi, where both elephants performed heavy lifting work.<sup>9</sup>





Figure 2. Gyanendra-Prasad, staked outside the shelter.

(Mocko, 2010)

The Chitwan *hattisar*, however, continued to house an elderly elephant named Sundar-Mala, a petite and gentle animal who was the preferred elephant for carrying actual members of the royal family. She was also the clear favorite of *hattisar* staff, who petted her and brought her treats. Keepers recounted that she had routinely carried King Birendra in Chitwan and had gone to Kathmandu to carry him for his *abhisheka* (consecration ritual) in 1975. Given that Sundar-Mala was supposedly about sixty years old in 2010, it is entirely possible that she also carried Birendra during his wedding in 1970, and perhaps even carried King Mahendra in his 1956 *abhisheka* consecration (Mocko 2016, chapter 4).

When asked if Sundar-Mala had ever carried King Gyanendra, keepers hedged; they replied that she would have, if Gyanendra had ever needed carrying, but that ‘Gyanendra was usually busy’ and rarely came to Chitwan. He also never received *abhisheka* consecration, which would have been the most important time for him to ride an elephant. This meant that Gyanendra had not appeared in public mounted on an elephant since his wedding in 1970. Perhaps this relative lack of contact between state elephants and the last incumbent king explains why the Chitwan elephants never became major subjects of anti-royal sentiment: the elephants had not been part of Gyanendra’s public performances of his royalty, and so they did not need to partake of his downfall.

Whatever the reason, the elephants in the care of the Nepal Government have not greatly suffered following the end of the monarchy. While their names were bound up in the institutional life of the palace, the budgets supporting their food and shelter were not. Each elephant was recognized as a redoubtable individual agent, known by name and personality to teams of dedicated caretakers, and thus they remained enmeshed in clear social networks. Moreover, while various elephants actively participated in high-profile, monarchy-related events, the elephants as a group performed a wide variety of other tasks that were not political and that continued to have obvious utility to the post-monarchy government (including carrying tourists through the Chitwan forests and performing heavy lifting work). Thus, the elephants did not need to have their material welfare defended or re-funded; they simply needed an alternate system for receiving names, which, while a bit slow to develop, was not especially challenging for the post-monarchy government to provide.

### Horses

As noted above, horses had a long and significant relationship to South Asian monarchies in the premodern era, a relationship that melded in the colonial period with European horse-cultures and imperial military idioms. While pre-Shah military and royal practice had been less horse-centered than many parts of India, due to the mountainous geography of the country, Nepali political pageantry did include Ghode Jatra, the ‘horse festival,’



held annually in the Kathmandu Valley during the month of Chaitra. This festival, which had been celebrated by the Mallas for centuries, was co-opted and amplified by the Shah/Rana government. Under the Shahs and Rana, what had begun as a semi-religious event in which the cacophony of horse hooves was supposed to frighten and subdue demons turned into a quasi-colonial military parade of the kingdom's horse-based army expertise, a revue for the king to observe and approve his cavalry.

This escalation in the horse-pageantry at Ghode Jatra, and the overtones of colonial performances of power, mirrored a broader expansion of horse ownership and pageantry as part of 19th century politics, when the members of the government explicitly began to imitate the practices of the British Raj. The royal and Rana families began to be transported in lavish horse-drawn carriages for major occasions. All political figures owned extensive horse stock, and paintings or statues of major figures started showing politicians on horseback.

In the post-Rana period, general horse-culture has largely waned. Few Nepalis in recent government positions have owned or ridden horses, but horses continue to be part of the pageantry of the government. Ghode Jatra continues to be a major annual event, though now attended by the President rather than the king, and dignitaries still ride in horse-drawn carriages for special occasions. King Gyanendra rode in a carriage following his 2001 enthronement, for example, and new diplomats to Nepal are sometimes brought in horse carriages to their swearing-in ceremony. Traffic police in the Kathmandu Valley also often ride horseback, integrating horses into one of the daily expressions of governance. The political pageantry of horses has thus continued to be a feature of the performance of the modern state.

The multivalent political and royal importance of horses meant that when the Narayanhiti Palace complex was being built for the Shahs from the late 19th to mid-20th century, it was designed to include a large on-site horse stable, built adjacent to the cow barns near the north gate of the property and capable of housing two to three dozen horses. Particularly large numbers of horses were housed at Narayanhiti in the early to mid-20th century, when motorized transportation was still uncommon in Nepal. During this time, the palace kept as many as two dozen ponies and non-thoroughbreds for sending messages and documents locally by palace couriers. More recently, while the royal family pared down the horses it owned, the Army began using the Narayanhiti stables as an overflow facility for the Uttar Dhoka cavalry stables. This cavalry installation was located within the palace compound, separated only by a modest wall from the palace's stables,

spatially highlighting the longstanding closeness and permeability between the military and the palace.

In addition to the horses that were kept at Narayanhiti Palace for messenger purposes, the palace also maintained thoroughbred horses and ponies for the royal family's private use. All members of King Birendra's family rode well and frequently; Princess Shruti and Crown Prince Dipendra were particularly noted for their horse(wo)manship. It is likely that this enthusiasm for riding owed much to the modern Nepali monarchy's aspirations to British modes of prestige. The Nepali state had diplomatic and cultural ties to England going back to the British Raj, and both Birendra and Dipendra studied at Eton, where they would have been socialized into the practices and values of the British aristocracy. During Birendra's time, there were a number of high-quality horses acquired by the royal family and kept at Narayanhiti, including at least two stallions (named Bhagya and Damaru) purportedly brought over from Spain.<sup>10</sup> Damaru in particular was rated as a very fine animal by cavalry officers who remembered him, and Birendra had at least one portrait painted of himself astride the large white horse.<sup>11</sup> Also during King Birendra's time, the royal family acquired for their recreational riding at least two thoroughbreds that had been bred by the Nepali cavalry, a stallion and a mare named Manoj and Susma.

King Gyanendra, by contrast, was not an avid rider, nor was any member of his family. This may have something to do with the fact that Gyanendra was educated in India rather than in the United Kingdom (UK), but it may also simply reflect differing athletic abilities and interests between himself and his brother. After Gyanendra's accession in 2001, the Army dispatched cavalry officers to the palace to give the new king and crown prince some horseback lessons, as riding ability was apparently considered an important qualification for kingship. Neither Gyanendra nor Paras developed any particular enthusiasm for the sport, though.<sup>12</sup> The royal family and their staff continued to stable horses from Birendra's time at Narayanhiti Palace, but the animals were mostly left to graze near the stables and were only occasionally exercised by the Uttar Dhoka cavalry.

Following the dissolution of the monarchy in 2008, the four remaining horses belonging to Birendra's family (Bhagya and Damaru, Susma and Manoj) were nationalized along with the remaining contents of Narayanhiti Palace. They were assigned into the custody of the cavalry unit of the Nepal Army, and initially transferred from Narayanhiti Palace to the cavalry's main stables in the southwest corner of the Singha Durbar complex. They were not

provided any budget for upkeep; previously they had been supported by the Narayanhiti Palace budget, but now they were simply folded into the Army's budget for the cavalry. This was not a major burden, though. The cavalry had sufficient stable space, and with over 100 horses already in their care the addition of four new horses did not significantly impact their expenditures for food, bedding, or staffing.

The horses also did not need much long-term care. Damaru and Bhagya, the two Spanish horses, died of old age within two years of the transition. Manoj was sent to the cavalry breeding center in Bharatpur. The mare, Susma (widely identified as the late Princess Shruti's mount), appears to have been granted a quiet and coddled retirement in cavalry facilities. The location of that retirement, however, is in dispute, as each author of this paper was introduced to a different horse named Susma: one at the Singha Durbar cavalry facility in 2011, and the other at the Narayanhiti Palace stables in 2013.<sup>13</sup> The caretakers in both instances believed their charge to be *the* Susma, but unless the horse had been moved for inscrutable reasons, it seems likely that one or perhaps even both sets of caretakers was wrong.

If some of the caretakers were claiming spurious connection to a royal horse, it is likely for the same reasons that the elephant caretakers above wished to claim that their Moti Prasad was the famous Moti Prasad from the royal funerals in 2001: when there is local lore about the royal family's connections to a particular animal, the people caring for a plausibly similar animal may be eager to elevate their charge, rather than accept a mundane look-alike (or sound-alike). This plausible scenario would suggest that social valuation, including fame and notoriety, can pass in complex ways through social relationships—from human to non-human animal and back again. The royal animals might have been marginalized in many respects, but they were also highly prestigious.

In any event, the four main royal horses alive at the time when the monarchy was dissolved seem to have had relatively smooth post-monarchy transitions. All of them were elderly, and three were given quiet retirement while the fourth was sent for not-arduous stud. While the new government had limited use for them, there was nevertheless a logical institutional solution for their care by folding them into the national cavalry. The horses' situation in this way resembles the post-transition position of the elephants, who were able to have their daily needs met with relative ease even after the removal of their royal patronage, because the animals fit into institutions and infrastructures that were *not* changing or disappearing.

Such was not the case, however, for the other two major groups of palace-connected animals, which were left considerably more vulnerable in the wake of the monarchy's dissolution.

### Royal Animals, National Emblems: Cows and Pheasants

In addition to the animals connected with Nepal's monarchs through the symbolism of ancient Sanskritic kingship, there were also two types of animals that were linked to king and palace because of the official symbolism of the modern Nepali state: cows and pheasants. Since the 1963 Panchayat Constitution, there have been four national symbols identified in every legal charter: the national flower (rhododendron), the national color (crimson), the national animal (cow), and the national bird (*lophophorus*, or Himalayan monal pheasant) (Pant 1995: 258; Michaels 1997). The cow and the pheasant have accordingly held status as national identity markers in all iterations of modern state ideology.

As the symbolic center of Nepal's government, the king personally owned examples of both national animals—the cow and the pheasant—as part of his royal property. He kept a private herd of dairy cows on site at Narayanhiti Palace, and he owned a flock of pheasants that resided at one of his royal retreats. Because these animals were accommodated on royal property and because their needs were funded through the palace discretionary budget, they were institutionally more directly linked to the king than the animals discussed above. This meant that their disposition in the post-monarchy period was more complex and contentious than that of once-royal horses or elephants—and the individual cows and pheasants themselves were left more vulnerable and neglected than their luckier compatriots.

### Cows

As a national symbol, the cow helped establish and signify Nepal's Hindu nationhood (Michaels 1997). In Hinduism, cow veneration has long been woven throughout religious thought and practice. The celestial cow, Surabhi, is thought to be able to carry those lucky enough to grab her tail after death up to heaven, while Krishna is commonly represented as a divine cow herder. Here on earth, the cow represents one who gives more than she takes, and the various products of her body (including milk, ghee, and dung) provide not just practical daily substances but also materials for religious rituals. Additionally, Hindus across the subcontinent have long self-identified as a religious community through their commitments to the protection of cow lives. For centuries, Hindus have not only refused

to kill cows themselves, but have refused to countenance the killing of cows by others. Invaders and outsiders were commonly labeled ‘cow killers,’ and the safety of cows—versus the willingness to eat beef—has long been a sectarian issue between India’s Hindus and Muslims.

Cow protection was a state project starting from Nepal’s consolidation as a nation in the late 18th century (Michaels 1997: 82-84). Conqueror Prithvi Narayan Shah was identified as a cow-protector, and in his memoir, *Dibya Updadesh*, his commitment to cows serves as one of the justifications for his conquests. When Shah first conceived of the idea to seize the Kathmandu Valley, his aspiration was supposedly validated because “‘You, O Prince, have held at all times respect for cows, Brahmins, guests, holy men, the gods, and goddesses’” (as quoted in Stiller 1968: 39). In order to proclaim the Hindu-ness of subsequent Shah rule, the cow was afforded state recognition and legal protections. Nepal’s first Western-style legal code, the 1854 *Muluki Ain*, provided strong legal injunctions against human-caused injury or death toward cows. This was a crucial step toward legislating the Hinduisation of a religious and ethnically pluralistic society (Brown 1996; Michaels 1997).

In 1963, King Mahendra promulgated the new Panchayat constitution, replacing the *Muluki Ain* and making a bid to simultaneously modernize and neo-traditionalize the country (Brown 1996; Hofer 1979; Mocko 2016). The new constitution restructured the government, abolished political parties, placed the palace at the center of all politics, and declared the country “an independent, indivisible and sovereign monarchical Hindu State” (Pant

1995: 257). Article 2.6 defined for the first time Nepal’s four national symbols: the rhododendron, the color crimson, the cow, and the pheasant. This statement of national symbolism was retained nearly verbatim in the multiparty parliamentary 1990 Constitution following the first *Janandolan* (People’s Movement), and the 2007 Interim Constitution following the second *Janandolan*. The four national symbols were even retained for the current Constitution, ratified in 2015, which is somewhat remarkable given that cow-protection was explicitly a part of Hindu nationalism, and Nepal was declared a secular democracy upon the dissolution of the monarchy.<sup>14</sup> Because of the strongly Hindu connotations of cow-protection, the continued inclusion of the cow as the national animal in the latest national charter was intensely contentious, sparking assorted protests and resulting in one protest petition with a reported 500,000 signatures (Sherpa 2015).

In addition to its position as a symbol of Nepal’s Hindu nationhood, the cow was also tied in complex ways to the person of the king through royal ceremonies and daily palace operations. The Narayanhiti Palace compound, right in the heart of the capital, was home until 2010 to a sizeable royal dairy herd: approximately three dozen milch cows within a total herd of approximately five to six dozen cows and calves (Figure 3). The cows were typically given religious names, particularly names of Hindu goddesses such as Sita, Ganga, Kali, Uma, Ambika, Saraswati (Figure 4). These cows were the personal property of the king, and the products of their bodies were used by and for the royal family in a variety of contexts.



Figure 3. Former royal cows at Narayanhiti Palace barn, two months before being sent to Jiri.

(Barnhart, 2010)

The dairy operation was located in the northeast corner of the palace complex, with a brick-laid barnyard surrounded by multiple barns and stables. The main barn housed thirty cows, while a small adjacent barn served as an overflow facility for up to six more cows. This overflow barn had at one point been the palace's taxidermy facility, which was relocated in order to expand the dairy herd.<sup>15</sup> Calves were housed in separate stalls sorted by age. Approximately twenty livestock workers maintained the herd, ten for the day shift and ten for the night shift. A sign on the barn door prohibited anyone from entering if they did not have work to do.<sup>16</sup> This general rule apparently did not extend to the king himself, however. King Birendra was so fond of the cows, according to former palace employees familiar with their management, that he would inspect the barn during his morning walks on Saturdays and sometimes visit twice a week in order to brush the cows himself. The same staffers did not report a similarly warm relationship between the cows and ex-King Gyanendra, who apparently rarely if ever ventured back to the barns. These staffers appeared to consider the capacity to form warm and affectionate social relationships with the cows to be an important marker of strong human character, and perhaps accordingly, paradigmatic kingliness.

Throughout most of the monarchy period, staff were expected to maintain the barn and surrounding areas to high standards of cleanliness (though this reportedly declined in the years of Gyanendra's kingship, indicating that staffers saw the status of cow care at the palace as something of a marker of the institutional health of the monarchy). The brick-laid barnyard,<sup>17</sup> was maintained by hand by a worker who pulled the grass from between the bricks. The main cow barn exterior wall is adorned with a relief of a bull, dated 2016 BS (1959–1960 CE), depicting a reported state gift from the UK to Mahendra during a 1960 state visit.<sup>18</sup> Even the cows themselves were expected to help maintain their living space. After coming in from grazing on palace grounds, cows would walk through a corral with water to clean off their hooves before entering the barnyard.<sup>19</sup>

The cows were not separated from the rest of the palace, but contributed to routine practices of the king and those around him. The royal dairy herd was milked daily, and after enough milk had been distributed to the palace calves, the remainder was sent to the main palace. Some of the milk was sent directly for consumption by the royal family, and some was set aside for the routine ritual use of the palace's staff of royal priests. Afterward, any surplus was available for palace employees who requested it for *puja* (worship). In addition to milk used on premises or gifted by the palace for religious ceremonies, calves (or

sometimes a calf and its mother) were also periodically given away by the king as *go daan* (gift of a cow). One cow was ceremonially presented to the Kathmandu Royal Kumari every year during Indra Jatra, and an additional seven to eight animals went to priests annually for other services/occasions. Bulls produced by royal cows were also routinely given to farmers upon request, with the clear expectation that such bulls be used not for ploughing or farm labor, but for breeding.<sup>20</sup> Through these various gifting practices, the palace was able to maintain a manageably sized herd for the wellbeing of the cattle, while simultaneously creating and reinforcing human-to-human social relationships.

The royal dairy herd additionally provided an opportunity for experimentation with agricultural technologies—specifically biogas, a type of renewable energy derived from anaerobic digestion of organic matter such as cattle dung.<sup>21</sup> A national biogas program was launched in 1975/76 as part of Nepal's Agriculture Development Year, and King Birendra displayed an avid interest in this and similar 'small farmer technologies.'<sup>22</sup> At his direction, the Gobar Gas Tatha Agricultural Equipment Development Company (GGC) eventually built a 50 m<sup>3</sup> biogas unit at Narayanhiti Palace, adjacent to the primary dairy barn. Reportedly, the king had hoped that once the biogas plant was tested in the palace, it could spread throughout the nation,<sup>23</sup> however, the successful national biogas program launched in 1992 appears to have been linked more to market changes than to royal support (Barnhart 2014).<sup>24</sup>

At peak use, gas harvested from the royal biogas unit operated five stoves—two in the primary cattle barn, two in the small overflow/ex-taxidermy barn, and one in the horse stables—as well as a backup light fixture in the center of the main barn. The stoves were used to prepare staff meals, snacks, and tea, as well as heat water for sick cows and prepare traditional *khundo* (cooked cattle feed). In addition, the digested biogas slurry was available for fertilizer. Most of the slurry was used to grow vegetables and mushrooms near the biogas tank and livestock area; this produce was consumed by the livestock staff, who particularly remembered the very big cauliflowers.<sup>25</sup> A small portion of slurry was used when King Birendra planted a camphor tree on site, and the remaining slurry was available for staff workers at the palace or other government offices to take for their own private gardens. The biogas facility, or rather the cow dung which powered it, created another layer in the human-animal relationships tied to the royal dairy herd.

Given that the king's cows were so useful, and also given that even the post-monarchy secular government continued to uphold state-sponsored veneration and

protection of the cow, one might presume that the royal cows in the post-monarchy period would fare well in the state restructuring process. This would not turn out to be the case. Even as interim and post-interim politicians were defending the rights of cows in the abstract in their deliberations surrounding the new constitution, they were reluctant to deal with the very real cows on Narayanhiti Palace property.

There were three main problems in handling royal cows after the monarchy's dissolution. First, there were a lot of them, meaning they had sizeable needs for food, shelter, and care. Second, they had previously been paid for directly out of the palace budget, which no longer existed. Third, they were actually housed at Narayanhiti Palace, now abandoned by the ex-royal family and pending its repurposing into a museum, temporarily used for nothing more than warehousing inconvenient leftover royal possessions. These awkward realities had to be dealt with.

The problem of where to put the cows was initially easiest to decide, and they were temporarily left in their barn on Narayanhiti grounds. Formal ownership of the herd was given to the Ministry of Agriculture, but daily management of the animals was given over to former army personnel deputized to the task.<sup>26</sup> These caretakers maintained the

cows, and also kept the biogas plant in operation until late 2009, at which point they concluded that it was easier to cook with a combination of purchased cylinder gas and collected firewood from fallen trees on compound grounds, and they abandoned the mechanism.<sup>27</sup>

The cows continued to produce milk on a daily basis, but the milk was no longer needed for the royal family's meals or rituals, nor to facilitate the palace's social relationships. With no one particularly interested in overseeing or distributing ex-royal milk, the cows' caretakers purportedly let a portion of each day's milking go first to palace staff for tea, then to the palace calves, (for which they were chastised by our tour guide). The surplus was then sent to the government-held Dairy Development Corporation (DDC) facility in nearby Lainchaur for processing and public sale.

With the milk transformed into a government asset, it would seem that the cows had demonstrated some utility to the secular parliamentary government, but their housing and care remained awkward and problematic. Upkeep costs outweighed the profit from the milk, and no one endorsed housing government cows on palace grounds. Eventually, the Ministry of Agriculture determined that the cows should be removed from



Figure 4. List of cow names as posted on Narayanhiti Palace barn wall.

(Barnhart, 2013)



Narayanhiti. On 18 June 2010, the remaining thirty-four palace cows were put on a truck and sent to a government dairy operation in Jiri. Eleven cows died within the first two weeks after relocation. Within three months, the Livestock Development Firm in Jiri reported that even the surviving cows had stopped giving milk and would be auctioned (*Republica* 2010).

The dairy complex at the palace is now abandoned (Figure 5). Overgrown weeds encroach on the buildings and the once meticulously maintained barnyard. The barn stands empty and littered with decaying and molding manure. The gas lines have been cut from the biogas unit, and the ball valve on the outlet is now rusted open. A handful of army horses graze in the dairy area and wander through the barns at will. A framed list of cow names still hangs on the barn wall, along with a sign indicating the night shift, but the cows that once served as living symbols of Nepal's Hindu monarchy and agricultural identity are long gone, an inconvenient royal legacy finally auctioned off as common cattle.

### **Pheasants**

Perhaps the most inconvenient living legacy of the monarchy period was the flock of royal pheasants, housed near the royal bungalow in the Shivapuri Nagarjun national forest, just at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley. To symbolize his nationalism, the king had owned an entire flock of *lophophorus*—a flock that had apparently been built up over many years, and included dozens of birds by the time of ex-king Gyanendra's departure from Narayanhiti

Palace. Like the herd of royal dairy cows, the pheasants' housing and maintenance had long been provided directly through royal infrastructure: the pheasants' cages were located on royal land, and the pheasants' food and care were paid for out of the palace discretionary budget. Unlike the royal dairy cows, however, there was no conceivable new role for the pheasants in the post-monarchy institutional context. While the national dairy corporation could at least employ ex-royal dairy cows for milk production, and an auction would eventually result in willing buyers for the cows, neither the overall Ministry nor the National Parks had any use for the royal pheasants, and no one beyond the government had any desire for them.

The history of how the royal pheasants came to be housed at the royal bungalow in Nagarjun Forest is murky, because discontinuity in their care has led to significant loss of institutional memory. The national Ministry system rotates its staff members through different positions every few years, and so the current caretakers of the pheasants today are not the same people who were caring for them at the time of the interim transition, much less in the years preceding the transition. It is not even clear precisely who was caring for the birds during the kings' time, whether palace employees or national park staff, or someone else. Even if the birds' original caretakers were known and available, however, there is no guarantee that even those individuals would know exactly why or how the royal family acquired the pheasants: the monarchy's institutional procedures were often deliberately kept opaque to low-level staff, and so caretakers might well



Figure 5. The abandoned cow barn at Narayanhiti Palace, about 3 years after the remnants of the former royal dairy herd were sent to auction.

(Barnhart, 2013)

have only known that their task was to provide for the birds' needs.

The pheasants' recent caretakers believe, however, that the flock began from birds that were either received as gifts to the royal family on the occasions of state visits, or bred by the royal family in order to give away on similar occasions. It is customary for heads of state of all modern countries to exchange presents when they visit one another, an international practice involving complex and sometimes peculiar statements of relationship, affection, and nationalism (Oksman 2016). Heads of state often try to give gifts exemplifying their own country. Thus, King Mahendra presented Queen Elizabeth with a small model of Pashupatinath Temple when he visited the UK in 1960 and received in return a collection of animals including three Shetland ponies (Cowan 2015).<sup>28</sup> On a later occasion, King Birendra reportedly presented one visiting dignitary a one-horned rhinoceros.<sup>29</sup> It is entirely possible that the royal pheasants were both received and given as gifts in this international gift culture. It would be reasonable for them to have been received from the heads of state over any of the other Himalayan territories where the *lophophorus* can be found, such as perhaps India, Bhutan, or Burma; it would also make sense for the king to raise examples of his country's national emblem to give away to other countries. However, national records of royal gift giving and receiving are unavailable.

By the late monarchy period, the pheasants were occupying six large enclosures at a fifteen to twenty minutes' walk from the royal bungalow, in an area referred to as *Raniban* (the queen's forest). The birds were reportedly fed cashews, perhaps a sign of their favored status; in the post monarchy period their diet was changed to corn and wheat (Sharma 2015). It is unclear how the kings would have interacted with the birds other than holding them as status symbols (Shamra 2015). The cages were not visible from the bungalow, so they were not primarily on site to visually please or interact directly with the royal family, or to beautify the royal quarters. At the same time, however, the cages were close enough to the royal bungalow that they were off-limits to public visitors on the nearby national park trails, meaning that the birds were not obviously present to help perform the monarchy to outsiders either. One caretaker claims to have witnessed King Gyanendra visiting the cages while residing at the bungalow, but there does not seem to have been a general staff narrative about royal interactions with their charges (as there had been at the Narayanhiti cow barn). All caretakers agreed that there was no royal tradition of eating the pheasants.<sup>30</sup>

In the post-monarchy period, the bungalow was nationalized and placed under the jurisdiction of the national park service, part of the Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation. The Shivapuri Park Service accordingly deputized a staff of three to feed and muck the birds, (including a formal staff position titled 'in-charge of the bird section'), but no one routinely visited them or cared much about them. The bungalow was inhabited by ex-king Gyanendra for several months following his ouster—its temporary use having been one of the conditions of his peaceful departure—but in subsequent years the bungalow has stood empty and unused.

By spring of 2015, there were approximately 160 birds in the flock. National Park staffers were unclear about how this number compared to the monarchy-period population, or even whether the flock had increased or decreased in more recent years. It is possible that a significant proportion of the flock might still date to the monarchy period. While pheasants in the wild often fall early as prey, *lophophorus* in captivity can live up to 10-12 years ("Himalayan monal" n.d.). Moreover, staff in 2015 indicated that the captive pheasants tended to be careless of any eggs they laid, and that growing or maintaining the size of the flock would require staff members to collect eggs and send them to the government hatchery—a level of effort that no one from the post-monarchy government or park staff seemed inclined to pursue.<sup>31</sup>

In early 2015, park service staff spoke with journalists about the state of the birds, particularly about the lack of clear and sufficient budget for their maintenance, leading to a stark headline, "Nepal ex-king's prized birds 'starving' in royal lodge" (Sharma 2015). The journalists reported a story of the government's failure to provide for vulnerable dependents—which fit comfortably into a much broader narrative of public dissatisfaction with the government's delivery of goods and services—and there was a brief public outcry over the pheasants. As a result, the national government approved a million-rupee budget line for the pheasants' upkeep, and public attention died down.<sup>32</sup>

At that time, however, there was still no formal long-term plan for how to resolve the ex-royal pheasant flock, merely an ad-hoc policy of least resistance. The basic consensus appeared to be that the pheasants alive on the premises should be maintained in captivity for the remainder of their natural lives, but that no measures should be taken to purposefully expand, sustain, or shrink the size of the flock. There was no desire to kill the birds, (either by culling or abandoning them), and the birds were understood to lack any of the survival skills necessary for being released into the wild. Early in the post-monarchy period, the government suggested that



perhaps the National Zoo could take the birds, but the zoo declined, citing the large size of the flock and the consequent financial and practical burden of trying to house and maintain them. Park staff seem to have received informal directives to maintain the pheasants, but no further instructions, and it appears that everyone involved eagerly anticipates the day when all the pheasants have died of old age.

It is important and interesting to note that the pheasants seem to always have been treated collectively as a flock rather than as individual birds. Unlike all the other royal animals discussed above, the pheasants did not receive individual names, nor does there seem to have been individualized intimacy between any given bird and its caretakers. Where elephants, cows, and horses need to be fed, mucked, moved, trained or brushed one at a time, and are routinely addressed by name when this is happening, the pheasants get fed en masse and appear to simply be moved around as a group when cages need to be cleaned. The cross-species social bond seems to be much weaker between the birds and their caregivers in comparison to the megafauna discussed above, and this weaker social bond may have negatively impacted the level of investment and moral obligation that the humans experienced toward them.

## Conclusion

As Henry Beston reflected in 1928, animals “are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendor and travail of the earth” (as quoted in Wolch and Emel 1998: xi). These “fellow prisoners” become “animals” in their relationship to humans: that is, they are defined by how humans define what we are *not*. The process of “becoming animal [is] a relational process in which animal subjects are configured through particular social bonds, bodily compartments and life habits that are complicated, but neither originated nor eased, but the various ways in which they may be enmeshed in the categorical and practical orderings of people” (Whatmore 2002: 37).

But what happens when the “practical orderings of people” change, as in, for example, when a monarchy is dissolved, leaving dozens of animals of multiple species behind? The king of Nepal was after all not so much an individual person as he was a symbolic and logistical center of gravity, orienting and organizing a vast system of ideas, objects, and relationships that could not always be easily reoriented. In the years since the formal dissolution of Nepal’s monarchy in 2008, the animals once linked to the king have faced a variety of fates, ranging from the practical security but awkward namelessness

of once-royal elephants to the general neglect of the royal pheasant flock.

The fates of these various animals curiously divided more or less cleanly along the lines of whether the animals in question were tied to the monarchy because of their Sanskrit connotations or because of their status of national symbols, with horses and elephants faring better than cows and pheasants. But it seems unlikely that the symbolic valences of the animals determined their fates. The key instead lies in the institutionalized mechanisms of relationship and care. The animals that were integrated into flourishing institutions experienced little disruption to their routines or well-being: the elephants remained in place within basic care structures organized under the Ministry system, while the horses could transition easily to the cavalry. By contrast, the animals that were stranded on royal properties, the cows and the pheasants, were now subjected to sparse or transitional staffing and non-priority lodging. Indeed, what it took for the pheasants to flourish was public attention through a mass-media story.

As human-animal relationship theory moves into a posthuman period, it becomes crucial to take into account the experiences of animals themselves, rather than only the human experience with an animal as object. In explaining the ‘animal turn’ in social theory, Urbanik (2012) argues that the shift to re-imagining animals as marginalized social groups paralleled the shift by scholars to recognize the experiences and realities of marginalized human groups. This shift to marginalized human experiences is intended to recognize that certain groups are “treated differently over the course of history around the world” and that “understanding this treatment is part of understanding the collective experience of human societies” (Urbanik 2012: 16). Expanding this approach to include the animal other deepens the human understandings of the individual and collective experience of human, animal, and trans-species societies. In the case of the varied fates of the once royal animals of Nepal, understanding the ways in which they became disentangled from the practices of monarchy, and yet remained enmeshed in the daily practices of their caregivers, demonstrates that even when the “practical orderings of people” change, an ethics of care and interspecies relationships can provisionally remain.

In what ways, then, might we characterize the moral valences of the ways in which Nepal’s ex-royal animals were marginalized? There is broad consensus among moral theorists and animal rights scholars that at a minimum, whenever and wherever humans hold power over animals by domesticating them into their care, they hold an ethical

obligation to the animals to help them flourish (Bostock 1993; DeGrazia 1996; Gruen 2014). To be fair, the Nepali palace and broader government had previously had systems in place to ensure the basic flourishing of royal elephants, horses, cows, and pheasants. This suggests that, unless one holds a very hardline view against domestication, holding the animals in the first place was not necessarily unethical. Rather, the problems arose as part of the reconfiguration of political institutions and practices, or in the words of Whatmore (2002), when the “practical orderings of people” changed. This change in the human systems necessarily created changes in the animal relationships and animal systems that depended upon human power structures, and it became necessary to shift or disentangle the nonhuman beings that had been integrated into the prior status quo.

The ethical implications of such a change appear to be consistent with Korthals (2002), who points out that confusions and dilemmas particularly arise from transposing animals between different types of practices; while he primarily imagines these changes in the context of shifting technological and globalization patterns, the observation stands also with reference to changing political practices. The central problem, then, was not that the king had been connected to animals, but that when kingship disappeared, no one had a strategic plan in place for what to do with post-royal animals. This left it up to individual segments of the transitional government to improvise, with perhaps predictably irregular results.

In *A Perfect Harmony*, journalist Roger Caras argues that globally, humans have been dependent upon “animals as the facilitators of our own cultural evolution” (2002: 19). As Nepal had, over the course of decades and centuries, developed its politics around the institution of monarchy, animals were one of the idioms through which that evolution could take place. The relationships between king and cows/pheasants/horses/elephants helped articulate who the king was and how he was socially important. When it came time to demote the king, it was again relationships to animals that helped in part to envision and effect that alteration. Relationships with animals helped facilitate processes of making and unmaking the king, even while the process left the animals themselves marginalized and vulnerable. The disentangling of once-royal animals from prior organizations of power and sociality thus helps to shed light on the practical and institutional complexity of politics and of human-animal systems of practice more generally.

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## Endnotes

1. The royal massacre, on June 1, 2001, claimed the lives of King Birendra, Crown Prince Dipendra, and eight other members of the royal family. The extended royal family had gathered for a dinner party at Crown Prince Dipendra's bungalow, and the official narrative contends that the crown prince shot his father, then other members of the family, then himself. This catastrophic event propelled Gyanendra to the throne to succeed his brother,

but hugely damaged the institution of monarchy in the process. Indeed, Gyanendra would only be king for five years before the nationwide protests that toppled his government and initiated the process of his demotion.

2. Author interviews with Narayanhiti Palace staff, 27 April 2010.

3. For footage from King Birendra's wedding (including the then-crown prince riding on an elephant), see <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSPtzG3t4jQ>> (last accessed 27 September 2016).

4. The full text of the House proclamation can be read, among other places, at <<http://www.jurist.org/gazette/2006/05/nepal-parliament-sovereignty.php>> (last accessed 18 September 2017).

5. The full text of the 2007 Interim Constitution is provided, among other places, at <<http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/np/np006en.pdf>> (last accessed 18 September 2017).

6. Author interviews with staff in Sauraha and Chitwan, 19–21 February 2010.

7. It is unclear, however, whether they took this initiative on their own, or were directed by the Cabinet or Prime Minister to handle the problem.

8. Author interviews with staff of Sauraha breeding facility, 20 February 2010.

9. Author interviews with Chitwan *hattisar* (elephant shelter) staff, 19–21 February 2010.

10. The cavalry officer who provided this information specified that they had been a gift to Birendra, but not who had given the gift. The implication seemed to be that they had been sent by the nation of Spain or the Spanish royal family, but it would be somewhat more likely that the gift came from the United Kingdom, which historically has had a stronger diplomatic relationship with the Nepali royal dynasty. See Footnote 20.

11. This painting was hanging in the cavalry office at Singha Durbar as of 2011.

12. Author interview with cavalry captain, 19 October 2011.

13. During one author's visit to the Singha Durbar cavalry facility in 2011, a petite elderly horse grazing in the courtyard and being petted by the soldiers was identified as Susma, horse of late Princess Shruti. The other author of this paper encountered a horse identified as "Shruti's favorite mare" during a 2013 visit to the Narayanhiti

Palace stables in 2013. This horse was under the care of the army cavalry staff, but was wandering on Narayanhiti Palace grounds. Staff from the Narayanhiti Palace museum discussed the health and fatness of this horse as though she were a familiar fixture.

14. During the Constitutional Assembly process in 2015, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal submitted an amendment to declare Nepal a Hindu state, which was roundly defeated by a voice majority vote. However, on the same day a Hindu state was rejected, a vote for an amendment to replace the cow with the one-horned rhino as the national animal failed. The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities argued that replacing the cow with the one-horned rhino as the national animal would demonstrate the new government's commitment to secularism while recognizing the great successes in Nepal's rhino conservation efforts.

A revision of the Civil Code followed in September 2017 and is slated to come into force in August 2018. It is unclear if the ban on cow slaughter remains in the new code. As late as September 2017, Nepali media and minority rights groups covered stories of Nepalis facing legal action due to accusations of cow killing, with proposals put forward by lawmakers to change the current sentence from 12 years imprisonment to 3 years. The authors were unable to secure a copy of the new Civil Code to determine the current legal state of cow protection; however, popular Nepali media indicates that cows are afforded protection through their status as national symbols.

15. According to palace staff, the taxidermied animals now on display were hunted by the royal family or found dead in the woods and prepared onsite at the taxidermy building before it was converted to a barn.

16. Author interviews with palace staff, 27 December 2013.

17. The condition of the barn area has deteriorated markedly in the post-monarchy period. During a December 2013 visit, the entire livestock area was overgrown with weeds and clearly was not receiving the same type of maintenance it had previously even during our 2010 visit. The all-brick courtyard was hidden by grass that had grown between and over the bricks. Horses were grazing in the abandoned barnyard area when we arrived. The staff, who have seen the changes over time, lamented the deteriorated condition of the facilities simply stating: "You should have seen it during the King's time."

18. According to palace museum staff, the relief represents the state gift of a Spanish bull who then became a sire for the royal herd.

19. Author interviews with palace staff, 27 December 2013.

20. Author interviews with palace staff, 27 April 2010 and 27 December 2013.

21. Biogas technology utilizes decomposing organic matter to create a useable energy source, predominantly methane. In Nepal, the majority of biogas is generated from decomposing cow manure that is stored in an underground tank, with the gas being captured for productive purposes, such as lighting or cooking, and the digested manure being utilized for fertilizer.

22. Birendra was repeatedly documented in connection to biogas in national newspapers and official video productions, such as the 1988 documentary “Their Majesties at Farmers’ Door,” about King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya’s visit to the Eastern Development Zone, or coverage of his attendance at the Agricultural Development Bank - Nepal’s Appropriate Small Farmer Technologies Expo in the early 1980s, (where he was photographed remarking on a display of biogas).

23. Author interviews with palace staff, 27 December 2013.

24. A former GGC executive claimed that King Birenda was skeptical of biogas due to the technological shortcomings of the early designs. Only after seeing the improvements of the then-new Chinese dome design, and talking with farmers who utilized biogas (who also reportedly told the King that biogas elevated their lifestyle to that of royalty), did the King then build the 50 m<sup>3</sup> plant at the palace in 1990 (Author interview 22 March 2010).

25. Author interviews with palace staff, 27 December 2013.

26. Author interviews with palace staff, 27 April 2010.

27. Author interviews with palace staff, 27 April 2010.

28. Extensive government records regarding Mahendra’s state visit (and the negotiations over the state gifts of animals that also included a bull, two cows, and a black mare), are available at the UK National Archives. Scans of selected documents were graciously provided to the authors by Bryony Whitmarsh.

See also <<https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/search#/1/collection/70138/model-of-pashupatinath-temple>> (last accessed 27 March 2017). It is worth noting that the Spanish bull given to Mahendra by the British royal family is likely the bull that appears in the relief on the Narayanhiti Palace barn.

29. Research assistant interview with staff in charge of the birds at Shivapuri Nagarjun National Park, 2 June 2015.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

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