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Sengupta, U. (2018). Ruptured space and spatial estrangement: (Un)making of public space in Kathmandu. *Urban Studies*, 55(12), 2780–2800. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017727689>

Published in:
Urban Studies

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:
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Ruptured space and spatial estrangement: (Un)making of public space in Kathmandu

Journal:	<i>Urban Studies</i>
Manuscript ID	CUS-031-17-01.R1
Manuscript Type:	Article
Discipline: Please select a keyword from the following list that best describes the discipline used in your paper.:	Planning
World Region: Please select the region(s) that best reflect the focus of your paper. Names of individual countries, cities & economic groupings should appear in the title where appropriate.:	Asia
Major Topic: Please identify up to two topics that best identify the subject of your article.:	Urbanisation and developing countries, Built environment
Please supply a further 5 relevant keywords in the fields below.:	Public space, institutionalization, Militarization, Informalization, Kathmandu

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9 **Ruptured space and spatial estrangement: (Un)making of public space in**
10 **Kathmandu**
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15 **Abstract:** Public space is increasingly recognized to be central to spatial discourse of
16 cities. A city's urbanism is set in display in public spaces representing myriad of
17 complex socio-cultural, economic, and democratic practices of everyday life. In cities of
18 the global south, especially those with nascent democracies, different values attached to
19 a space by various actors – both material and symbolic – frame the contestation, making
20 the physical space a normative instrument for contestation. Tundikhel, once believed to
21 be the largest open space in Asia, is an important part of Kathmandu's urbanism, which
22 has witnessed two civil wars popularly known as Jana Andolans, and the subsequent
23 political upheavals, to emerge as the symbolic meeting point of the city, democracy, and
24 its people. The paper argues that the confluence of the three modalities of power –
25 institutionalization, militarization, and informalization – has underpinned its historical
26 transformation resulting in what I call 'urban rupturing': a process of (un) making of
27 public space, through physical and symbolic fragmentation and spatial estrangement.
28 The paper contends that unlike the common notion that public spaces such as Tundikhel
29 are quintessentially public, hypocrisy is inherent to the 'publicness' agenda of the state
30 and the institutional machinery in Kathmandu. It is an urban condition that not only
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9 maligns the public space agenda but also creeps into other spheres of urban
10 development.
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12 **Keywords:** Public space , institutionalization , Militarization , Informalization ,
13 Kathmandu, planning, Urbanisation and developing countries, Built environment
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15 **Introduction**

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21 Public space is increasingly recognized to be central to spatial discourse of cities. Particularly in the
22 global south, city's urbanism, defined by the milieu of different urban components that provides order and
23 contestation, is set in display in public spaces representing myriad of complex socio-cultural, economic,
24 and democratic practices (or lack thereof) in everyday life. The material and symbolic values attached to
25 space by various actors frame these practices, making the physical space an instrument for contestation
26 and domination. Increasingly, contestations emerge from the conscious or subconscious desire to
27 introduce a sense of order and control by the state (Benjamin, 2008; Mitchell, 1995; Mitchell and
28 Staeheli, 2006), informal insurgent forces (Appadurai, 2001, 2000; Hackenbroch, 2013; Perera, 2009) and
29 the military (Dovey, 2001; Padawangi, 2013; Samara, 2010), creating new forms of governance, network,
30 and dominance. These modalities of power establish a claim on the space as they see this as a way to
31 connect to the city, its history, and the space itself. Much less understood, however, is their impact, which
32 determines the nature and the extent of a space being public (or not).
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45 In nascent democracies such as Nepal, Tibet, Vietnam, or Sri Lanka suffering from fledgling economy,
46 weak governance, or longstanding ethnic or political conflicts, authoritarian and political deliberation
47 become the chosen mode of governance to establish hegemonic rights. Boundaries are blurred between
48 civil and military, private and public, formal and informal simultaneously displaying both 'order' and
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9 'chaos' built into everyday life and practices. The militancy psyche (and the 'fear' that results) is not
10 always that of the 'outsiders', but very often stems from the war at home arising from authoritarian rule or
11 religious, ethnic and political conflicts. The 'ordered' view is challenged by the invasion from a city's
12 urban poor and informal enterprises (Brown et al, 2010; Hackenbroch, 2013; Hackenbroch et al, 2009)
13 consistent attempts to occupy the space defying the bourgeoisie's control of the space through policies,
14 regulations, and coercion. Where unequal power relations prevail, informality helps to balance the
15 concentration of power, introducing redistributive practices into the use, ownership, and concept of
16 'public space', giving it a new meaning. Both authoritarian deliberation and democratic practices are thus
17 seen merging into a single frame to govern the public space, its configuration, and the extent of its
18 publicness thereby making it important to examine them together.
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29 Tundikhel in Kathmandu offers interesting insights into the complex interplay of powerful forces against
30 the backdrop of longstanding conflict. Once believed to be the largest open space in Asia, this central
31 public space is an important part of the city's urbanism, which has witnessed two civil wars, popularly
32 known as *Jana Andolans*, and the subsequent political upheavals¹ to emerge as the symbolic meeting
33 point of the city, its democracy and people. It has been at the epicenter of the democratic movement of
34 Nepal, which is rapidly emerging from 300 years of absolute monarchy and is trying to find its feet in
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42 ¹ In 1990 the popular people's movement or the *Jana Andolan* led to the restoration of multiparty democracy. New
43 constitution limited the monarchy's role, retained Nepal as a Hindu kingdom and paved the way for parliamentary system
44 and grants fundamental rights. However, the radical left parties rejected the constitution ultimately launching people's war
45 which is called Maoist movement. In the process, in 2001 King Birendra and his immediate families were massacred. The
46 official investigation indicts crown prince Dipendra amid widespread speculation of a conspiracy. Birendra's younger
47 brother Gyanendra took over as the monarch. A brief interlude of peace was observed with the ceasefire (brokered by
48 India) which soon collapsed with the Maoist attack on the barracks of Nepal army. The King dissolved the government
49 and declared emergency and deployed Nepal army and civil war intensified. The second *Jana Andolan* in 2006 lasted for 19
50 days of people's movement and King Gyanendra conceded the sovereignty to rest with the people. Consequently, the
51 monarch was reduced to become a constitutional monarch and Nepal army was brought under civilian rule and the
52 country was declared a secular republic. The political crisis still continues with frequent government changes fuelled by
53 internal differences. In recent years, various factions of pro-India Madhesi parties are at loggerheads with the government
54 alleging widespread discrimination. (See Jha, 2016)
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search of democracy. Historically, Tundikhel played an important role as a space for religious, cultural, social, and political activism signifying Lefebvre's (1991) spaces of 'representation and representational space'. Since the abolition of the monarchy on 28 May 2008, Tundikhel has witnessed a greater constellation of forces – institutional, military, and informal insurgency – competing to establish the sovereign rights to occupy and govern this space. The extent of their control, however, highlights the concurrent identity and political structure of the city, displaying a distinct characteristic of (dis)order. It also manifests the dominant spatial modalities, opening up fresh new insights into public space discourse not only in Nepalese case but also in other cities emerging from similar contexts where public space as an instrument of contestation is transforming into an instrument of domination.

The purpose of the paper is twofold. Firstly, the paper seeks to expand on scholarship from a relatively lesser-known city of the world by presenting an in-depth discussion of Tundikhel, the largest urban public space in Kathmandu. Secondly, the paper examines what I call the 'estranged spatialities' that resulted from three strands of contemporary discourses – institutionalization, militarization, and informalization – coming together not only to dismantle the very purpose of Tundikhel as a public space but also to rupture the 'space' as we know it. The paper argues that the current public space construct in Kathmandu must be seen as an entanglement of complex, multilayered, and multifaceted conditions, where conflicts come naturally into play, leading to contradictions and estrangement of spaces. The incidence of spatial rupturing has intensified during the political transformation from absolute monarchy to republicanism, signifying new forms of inequality in the public sphere and an affront to the democratic aspirations of the 'New Nepal'².

² The 'New Nepal' became the popular anti-establishment slogan during the recent political struggle to describe the new democratic conditions that would follow the transfer of powers from the monarchy to civilian government.

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In the next section, the paper begins by piecing together some of the recent literature on the current debates on public space, particularly in terms of different modalities of power that the paper posits – institutionalization, militarization, and informalization. The third section examines each of these discourses in turn against the backdrop of Tundikhel. In the concluding section, the paper draws together strands from the discussion and argues that the contestation has led to ‘spatial estrangement’ – a process of (un)making of public spaces through ‘urban rupturing’. In this transition, oddly we are left without a conception of public space that is distinctly public. Information was collected using both structured and unstructured observations³, spatial-combing, and archival research including a stakeholder workshop⁴ held in Kathmandu in 2015.

Framing space and the city: Public space in contestations and spatial evocations

Historically public spaces are considered timeless, transformational and an elusive entity in a city’s urbanism. The scholarship on public spaces in recent decades has centered on the transformation of public spaces that underpins their celebrated and contested nature based on various processes of urban interventions. This section will focus on three strands of interventions in the public space – institutionalization, militarization, and informalization – that typically underpin and help define the contestation, especially in cities experiencing longstanding conflict and political transformation *per se*,

³ The fieldwork comprised structured observations which involved activity mapping for different parts of Tundikhel to establish the extent of public access and use. Tundikhel was surveyed both in the weekday and weekends, three times a day for a period of one month. Unstructured observation included recording activities and behaviour patterns using field notes, photographs and videos where possible at any time of the day/week throughout the fieldwork period.

⁴ A symposium on Tundikhel was organized in September 2015, which was attended by academics, policymakers, KMC representatives, UNESCO Officials and urban historians. The symposium was immensely beneficial to capture the ‘unofficial’ views of administrators and stakeholders.

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8 absolute monarchy to democracy or aristocratic dominance to more democratic 'people-centric' regimes.
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10 Each has a story. Each contributes to our understanding of the new spatial and spatiotemporal conditions.
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12 Now it should not be thought that the conflation of these three discourses is merely an empirical issue. On
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14 the contrary, it has practical political consequences that construct the new 'urbanism' in these cities. They
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16 might appear as fragmentary forces, but together they demonstrate multiple spatialities and temporalities
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18 within the dynamic city system. The uses of the space are continually shifting and expanding to
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20 accommodate constantly changing functions, agencies, and meanings. For example, this happens when
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22 agitational campaigns and *dharnas* against an oppressive political regime are confounded with 'disorder
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24 and crime', or when struggle to install the vending barrows by the rural migrants is equated with
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26 'commodification' of space. In both cases, the result is to occlude the question whether to subject public
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28 space to the logic of the insurgent urbanism or the state is to promote a freely admissible and a democratic
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30 public space. Despite this heterogeneity within the public space and disjunction between various agents
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32 and functions, it ultimately functions as a whole and we read it accordingly.

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34 Institutionalization of public space is rooted in the notion that public space is primarily a responsibility of
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36 state authority, which engages in its re-appropriation to create order and security (Benjamin, 2008;
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38 Mitchell, 1995; Mitchell and Staeheli, 2006) administered through regulations and rights. An institutional
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40 framework not only defines boundaries, controls access, and grants publicness but also extends control
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42 over public spaces for sovereign rights. Marvin's (2013) analysis of Chinese colonial rule over Tibet
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44 describes how sovereign rights are executed through the creation of 'presumptive' spaces, which are not
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46 just symbols of restrictions but also the centers of conflict between Chinese authorities and Tibetans who
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48 are deprived of any instruments of democracy. For indigenous Tibetans, the use of the public space is
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50 related to their 'natural' and 'civil' rights despite being fully aware their most important and holy public
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52 space in Barkhor is ringed with surveillance. Likewise, Chinese authorities are aware that they are
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vulnerable to international criticism if their confrontations with Tibetans catch the attention of international media, revealing the structure of force that represses Tibetan protests and religious activity. More importantly, it endangers the touristic romance that translates into revenues in Lhasa (Marvin, 2013:1471). The enterprising Chinese state sees the space as a potential neoliberal object. This makes Barkhor a presumptive space with multiple meanings, imaginations, and agencies. Real spaces with ordinary qualities turn into celebratory spaces – a shift from an ‘ordinary’ to a ‘celebratory’ or ‘cherished’ space – where ‘non-ordinary’ behavior becomes the norm. In such transition, however, space is usurped by the dominant groups and over time lost from the public domain altogether. Padawangi (2013) laments Jakarta’s subjection of public space provision under the authority of the ruling power to turn celebratory spaces of displaying power within the context of a fundamentally unequal society. Such institutional assertiveness is made more complex by the advent of neoliberalism that sees entrepreneurial states altering their modes of operation to become de facto landowners and formidable economic actors looking for ways to re-appropriate the public space for economic gain. The institutional influence on public space appears to hold grounds regardless of nature of the state it is connected to. Especially in countries riddled with conflict such as Nepal the boundary between democracy and autocracy is often blurred and even within the democratic envelope, splinter autocracies appear to exist as certain institutions and organisations can still choose to operate in autocratic ways and vice versa.

Not bound by geography, the expansion of neoliberalization takes its own cultural forms. Hackenbroch (2013), in her study of access to public space and water supply in Dhaka, describes how poor voters support the formal system to gain political support to produce exclusionary and discriminatory outcomes leading to “organized encroachment of the powerful”, represented by the strong network of relations between institutions and individual actors of political society (416) where they all have some neoliberal agenda. This manifests itself in all groups of the society. For the ordinary citizens,

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9 this 'encroachment' is about gaining access to urban amenities and services, but for institutions, it is
10 about gaining power and political supremacy by controlling access to resources. Interestingly, however,
11 such political inimitability can even produce quasi-state powers⁵ to enforce moral and cultural code, as
12 executed by Shiv Sena in Mumbai or the Maoist cadres in Kathmandu, suggesting informality to be
13 inseparable from formality. The profound upheavals that ensue from political struggle quickly raise the
14 prospect of de jure informal insurgency that seeks to counter-balance dominant spatial modalities. In
15 apparent public takeover of space, the post-independence Jakarta witnessed public spaces evolve into
16 'megaphones' for grass-roots movements (Padawangi, 2013), while in Bangalore, public space
17 engendered what Benjamin (2008) calls 'occupancy urbanism'. Both underscore powers of informal
18 insurgency in subverting the logic of military urbanism and institutionalized dominance – deemed
19 formalization of space that allows groups to make democratic claims, demands, and protests, where
20 spatialities, sovereignty, and rights are constructed, negotiated, and contested (Dovey, 2001, Marvin,
21 2013). Informality is thus useful because, considered as an active agent in social and physical production,
22 it provides us with the liberating force to enable us to experience public space in alternative ways. People
23 make cities. In such formulation, informality by virtue of being people-driven, is seen as a tool for non-
24 spatial consciousness to the materiality reflecting our inherent humanistic relationship with space (public
25 space) in universal ways.

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42 Owing to the heterogeneity of actions of diverse groups and the difficulty of offering a uniform response,
43 state institutions tend to rely on traditional methods of control and order through both soft and hard
44 measures. Soft approaches often take the form of municipal by-laws that interestingly are routinely
45 applied to what Samara (2010) calls a 'surplus' population – the poor and vulnerable – but relaxed for

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50 ⁵ Shiv Sena is a Mumbai-based Hindu Right Wing political party, that proclaims itself the defender of Indian values. The group
51 regularly made headlines by mobilizing its cadres against, Valentine's Day celebrations, Mumbai dance bars and beauty pageants
52 using coercion and intimidation (See, Varughese, 2014). Likewise, Maoist splinter called Youth Maoist League (YPL) opposed
53 street festivals, westernization of culture and quite significantly, private school operations (See, Refugee Review Tribunal, 2008).
54 Whilst the YPL in Kathmandu has now been dissolved, the Shiv Sena in Mumbai continues to exist and exert cultural defence.

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9 elites in the dominant position. According to him, “the creation or expansion of municipal by-laws
10 targeting the urban poor and informal economy, aggressive enforcement of law and order, and the literal
11 or de facto privatization of public space all contribute to spatial fragmentation and a massive fortification
12 of the spaces between rich and poor” (199). As an intersection of people and power, public space
13 naturally plays a prominent role in establishing order and paving the way for implanting hard measures
14 that articulate policification and militarization. State institutions enforce regulations and deliver welfare
15 provisions often with support from the police and, in some cases, the military. The massively militarized
16 elections in parts of the global south only corroborate how democratic functions are supported by the
17 military and how they are played out in the public sphere. On the other hand, the logic of state
18 militarization is often situational (effective in certain contexts) and relational (they only exist in
19 opposition to other categories) (Castro, 2013). For instance, the military has played two important roles in
20 the history of conflict in Nepal. Up until the 1990s, the military played a crucial role in protecting the
21 Royals and royal institutions; however, post-1990s, they helped the state in diffusing the Maoist
22 opposition. Thus, the same agency is seen as having multiple identities and roles in the history. A central
23 paradox, however, is the ‘military-encroachment of the public space’, as inevitably, the presence of the
24 military in the city embodies transfer of sandbags, check posts and barracks from the borders into the
25 streets and public spaces, creating new frontiers of barriers and divisions. These divisions are both visual
26 and spatial, a common byproduct of persistent political instability. Over time these barriers start to
27 achieve a sense of permanence, with high walls and barbed wires rupturing the space.
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45 Literature is rife with allusions to public space shaped by complex structure and differentiated symbolic
46 discourses. The heuristic intervention of state and military in public spaces is deemed both real
47 (restriction of access, speech, and action in everyday life) and metaphorical (emblematic of the death of
48 the values of free society); the resurgence of grass-roots, be they informal traders or political activists, is
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8 beset with realism (livelihood) and idealism (counter-movement). Despite these contributions, the
9 construction of public space in nascent democracies remains unexamined. More importantly, a coherent
10 framework to explain how public space is connected with state spatialities warrants a deeper
11 understanding of the confluence of the three discourses discussed above that position public space at the
12 historic crossroads where the sum of parts is greater than the whole. They comprise, what Bridge and
13 Watson (2010: 371) call, the confluence of the publics and cultures, deeply entwined offering up
14 complex, sometimes conflictual, relationships that define the politics of the urban in general. The three
15 discourses are not mutually exclusive. They are sometimes complementary and sometimes in conflict, and
16 together they create an urban condition that fosters contestation and eventual rupturing. However, what
17 remains unexamined is the eventual rupturing of the space as a result of the modalities of power it helps
18 to sustain.
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30 In order to demonstrate the spatial discourses of power, people, and sovereignty, I shall now focus on
31 Tundikhel in the following section.
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38 **Tundikhel: A brief spatial history**

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42 The traceable history of Tundikhel goes back to medieval times, when Kathmandu was a mercantile and
43 intellectual center. Anecdotal evidence exists from that ancient period, of Kathmandu being on the trade
44 route between India and Tibet (Shrestha, 1981) and Tundikhel providing a camping ground. Successive
45 rulers such as the Licchavis (300 AD-879 AD), the Mallas (1200 AD-1769 AD), and the Shahs (1769
46 AD-1846 AD) regarded palace squares and public spaces as the center of cultural, military, and social
47 functions. Public spaces became multifunctional spaces with extended involvement of 'royal institution'
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9 in the society (Sengupta and Upadhyay, 2016). The power of the palace was provided with cultural
10 rationales through the co-option of religious festivals by the royal family (Routledge, 1994).
11 Contemporary history marks the important milestone in Tundikhel's function as a site for displaying
12 might and sight. Use of central space for a military and authoritarian display of power was the hallmark of
13 successive Rana rulers (between 1845 AD and 1951 AD). The need for ostentatious displays of power
14 and pride grew stronger to save the monarchy, resulting in growing military use of Tundikhel as a training
15 ground for Nepalese (Gurkha) soldiers.
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30 The Early Shah Period also marks an important phase in spatial history, with the expansion of the old city
31 of Kathmandu, which would eventually bring Tundikhel from its peripheral location to the center of the
32 city and reinforce its role as the central space through which political hegemony was established. The
33 Rana Period, which spanned 105 years, further strengthened this spatial expansion. Seen by many as a
34 feudal-fascist regime that thrived on instituting oppression against its citizens, Rana rulers learnt the imperial art
35 of instrumentalizing urban space and monumental architecture to lay claims on power and dominance over
36 space. End of Rana rule in 1951 was marked by the advent of modernity and liberation and the power returned
37 to Shah Kings that effectively reinstated the same fascist approach to governance. Military, staying very close
38 to the Royals, was rewarded with spaces of premium in the city including parts of Tundikhel The
39 construction of the army Headquarters in 1989 formally established the permanent claim on the city's
40 only remaining urban open space. Since 1996, the country witnessed a seismic change in political
41 landscape fueled by Maoist uprising leading to abolition of monarchy and eventual accession to power as a
42 political party. Although paradoxical, the Maoist dominance in political sphere, economic sphere has remained
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8 independent attributed (mainly) to the pressures from donor agencies. In recent years the government has
9 instituted liberal economy and opened up to new investments firmly adopting neoliberal ideals.
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13 Tundikhel thus symbolizes different layers of planning and development achievements of different
14 political periods to which the turn of the century added a new dimension. The struggle for democracy that
15 continued well over a decade saw Tundikhel playing an important role, from being a 'royal ground', it
16 evolved into democracy's 'battleground' where all forms of political power, including military and
17 democratic forces, collide. The exclusionary process of class formation instituted by the 'Royals' and the
18 respect they commanded for centuries was challenged by a defensive informal outbreak. With the
19 ubiquitous media presence capturing the political struggle by transmitting images and actions,
20 Tundikhel's visual and metaphorical appeal as a space of emancipation has surpassed its appeal as a space
21 of grandeur and beauty in the public imagination'. Tundikhel became a public space in a true sense that
22 showed great potential to renew the value of social life quite in line with the Lefebvrian (1991: 38) notion
23 of "lived space as co-created common life". The open field of about 30ha of land sandwiched between the
24 new and old quarters of the city (Figure 1) simultaneously became the site for liberation and royalty – a
25 mediator between the power and the powerless. However, the specter of control has never been absent
26 from Tundikhel, reflecting the complex hierarchical socio-economy of the time, on which the fascist
27 regime was run. As argued by Drummond (2000) in her study of public spaces in Vietnam, the country
28 had a little history or concept of public space – it was a social vacuum that had been filled by the
29 authority of the emperor/state with little place for Western-style public discussion or expression. This
30 exclusionary operation was considered an essential mechanism to control the 'public', and exclusions
31 were rooted in the process of class formation⁶. The resultant chaos was of our own imagining – the
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51 ⁶ This was necessitated by the society that was divided into four main castes – Brahmins, Chettris, Vaishyas and
52 Shudras with clearly defined roles, which however has been the source of sublime tension across the castes hierarchy
53 due to its discriminatory connotation. The four classes - varna - encompassed a total of 64 castes *jat* within it.
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9 product of royal or at times the institutional addiction to mechanical order – here we see the order of life
10 in development.
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18 **The unmaking of Tundikhel: Ruptured spaces and estranged spatialities**

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22 Tundikhel today is the largest civic precinct in Kathmandu, surrounded by some of the busiest routes and
23 builtform that reflects the predominance of commercial and institutional uses interspersed by monuments
24 and temples from the medieval period. Until about the middle of the 19th century, it existed as a single
25 expansive open space, uninterrupted by either buildings or road network. Currently, two major roads
26 flank Tundikhel, built during the Rana Period as the first set of through roads linking Singha Durbar and
27 Narayanhiti Palace marking the advent of modernism in Kathmandu. A trunk road bisects Tundikhel in
28 the north, marking permanent severance in historical association of Ratna Park with Rani Pokhari
29 (Queen's Pond). To the south, Tundikhel is separated by Shukra Path, a road built in commemoration of
30 martyrs with the historic sculpture locally known as Shahid Gate built right in the middle of a four-lane
31 carriageway (Figure 2). This symbolized an indelible disconnection with space to the south (occupied by
32 Nepal Army) from
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17 the greater mass of Tundikhel. Rai (2002) noted that the historic shrinkage of Tundikhel is striking as
18 space shrank from 60ha to 30ha over the span of 100 years. Segregation and fragmentation are two
19 enduring trends of this transformation, created using both symbolic and physical barriers instituted by
20 wider interventions resulting from institutionalization, militarization, and informalization. These
21 interventions have come together to become a formidable force that breaks the linearity of the space into
22 smaller pockets (see figure 3), that are either controlled or out of bounds. They enclose discrete pockets of
23 space introduce relative solidity to the space itself affecting the impression of its orientational thrust.
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32 **Institutionalization**

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35 Institutionalization provides a framework to bring resources into the public domain. In a regressive step, it
36 can also introduce control, which reverses this process. In an ideal world, institutions provide basic
37 provision in the interests of all citizens (Mitchell, 1995), closing the gap between the rich and the poor,
38 the privileged and the powerless. In Nepal, historically the state/institution's role has been minimal in
39 welfare provisions such as healthcare, housing, or access to resources and amenities including open
40 spaces, due to budgetary constraints and lack of vision. It is one of the least developed countries in the
41 world, with over 30 percent population living below the absolute poverty line earning less than US\$14 per
42 person, per month, according to the national living standards survey conducted in 2010-2011. There are
43 regional disparities in the poverty rate ranging from 25 percent in big cities such as Kathmandu to 50
44 percent in some parts of the country. Arguably, the 'welfare deficit' fuelled by growing disenchantment
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9 with the state and its policies manifested in a 'democratic deficit' that Maoists sought to address through
10 the insurgency. While the government response to the insurgency was marked by failure to
11 institutionalize democracy by promoting inclusion, representation, and responsiveness (Thapa and
12 Sharma, 2011), the Maoist insurgency had its own economic cost as the state was forced to redirect
13 resources to fight it at the expense of dwindling resources in developmental areas and political
14 organizations such as Kathmandu Municipality. In recent decades, democratic transition was
15 accompanied by the concept of devolution and self-governance guided by the country's commitment to
16 economic neoliberalism. Donor agencies, which funded up to 30% of the country's budget, insisted on
17 embracing self-sustenance and wider partnership – a transition marked by the adoption of neoliberalist
18 thinking in state institutions that put organizations such as Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) in the
19 spotlight as they increasingly look for ways to strengthen their institutional role and fiscal capacities⁷. The
20 stage was set with the Local Self Governance Act 1999, which provides wider autonomy and a legal
21 framework for the local governments to take various decisions independently in a more enterprising way
22 that apes the market mechanism, particularly in areas of local taxation, parking permits, and licensing.
23 Buildings and open spaces within the Municipality are seen as bankable assets and an apparatus for
24 maximizing municipal revenue. Not bound by geography, the expansion of neoliberalization has taken its
25 own cultural forms, particularly in a context where there is relative fluidity of the urban condition, and
26 'surplus' people who are either poor or indifferent to the state. Going by Hindman's (2014) account,
27 Kathmandu's neoliberalism is a 'DIY capitalism' that emerged in the post-conflict society and reflects not
28 the return of the proverbial government intervention but a call to survive on your own. For grass-roots the
29 problem is not conflict, but the effect of conflict on people's lives and livelihood, and a rejection of the
30 state apparatus. The notion of rejection is entrenched in the government machinery as well. The local
31 election has remained suspended for the last 10 years, and as a result, the governing structure in municipal

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52 ⁷ The centrally allocated budget for the KMC has been dwindling in recent years as evident from 22% reduction in
53 2016-17 (from NRs 4.07 to 3.66 billion) over the previous year.
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bodies lacks political mandate. For instance, Kathmandu city has not had an elected Mayor since 2006, and the powerful political parties at the center remain the custodians of public policies and public funds.

Early efforts to institutionalize Tundikhel aimed at appropriating the Royals' vision to modernize the city. The construction and expansion of perimeter roads resulted in Kathmandu's first tree-lined boulevard, where social mores and elite values were enacted and embodied. They were the major routes frequently barricaded for visits from foreign dignitaries and sites for religious processions involving the Royals. Subsequently, new features were added in Tundikhel to strengthen the notion of the state as a provider and the people as receivers. The introduction of Ratna Park in 1962, *Khula Manch* (open assembly) in 1973, and rebuilding of the parade ground (1983) contrasted with the invisible social barrier that historically existed in Tundikhel. However, counter-intuitively this led to the fragmentation of this linear space, creating boundaries and helping to strengthen institutional controls. These efforts brought together two institutions – KMC and the Nepalese Army – with a diametrically opposite vision, purpose and reasons for their existence in instituting shared control and ownership over the space. While not explicitly highlighting the mechanisms underlying such a connection, it can be argued that the imposition of regulatory instruments across different parts of Tundikhel firmly established institutional control over it. For instance, *Khula Manch*, once a legitimating image for democracy, open to all its citizens, has been re-appropriated with frequent barricading and access restrictions. This space was founded in 1973 by the late King Birendra and conceived as an open-air stage for holding political rallies, public talks and to voice discontentment. The name, signifying symbol of freedom (*Khula* means open and *Manch* means Platform) was given during one of the most draconian times in the country's political history. This designation, designed to be viewed as the state's repudiation of space for interactive, discursive political gathering was however, a shrewd move that sought to contain the dissent by allocating a central space

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8 that is always under surveillance. In 1984, the perimeter roads were widened, and *Khula Manch* was
9 cordoned off, with high fences and police posts created at the entry and egress to make it easy for the
10 police to swoop in at any sign of disorder. The presence of the army at the adjacent parade ground
11 signalled the readiness of the authorities to clamp down on dissent. *Khula Manch* is, therefore, a
12 quintessential space masterfully crafted by the Royals so that the demonstration or performance of dissent
13 is naturally curbed. This firmly places *Khula Manch* into what Marvin (2013) calls a ‘presumptive space’,
14 where the state withholds full rights of expression, but conceals this fact for political ends, and power is
15 served by the illusion of public space.
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24 The institutional transgression continued in Ratna Park, which was established some four decades ago, as
25 the only park in the heart of the city. During the conflict period, the park was well used by new migrants
26 and low-income people looking for a place to rest. However, in 2012, KMC abruptly closed the park,
27 citing unauthorized encroachment from informal traders engendering crime and prostitution. What we
28 observed is a new pattern of governance that uses policing and institutional control, not just for
29 reinforcing the historical dimension of ‘control’ legitimized on the grounds of urban surveillance but
30 also to achieve economic gain. Samara (2010) asserts that the use of policing under the new neoliberal
31 governance, in which the understanding and practice of security are closely linked to the growth
32 requirements of the market, raises important questions about the rights and citizenship of the people that
33 call the city their home. The economic drive behind the closure of Ratna Park had been known to all⁸.
34 Accordingly, the park was reopened in August 2015, and in the first month of its reopening KMC
35 collected NRs 700,000 (US\$ 6,560) (Ojha, 2015). This neoliberal interjection brings the park under the
36 exclusive domain of elite residents, excluding the city’s poor and informal traders or the homeless
37 creating its own lists of gentries who are worthy to be called ‘the public’. Excluded from Ratna Park, the
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52 ⁸ Interview with KMC officials revealed it has also tendered for a construction of an upmarket café with Wi-
53 Fi provisions which are signs of provision geared towards affluent people.
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9 legitimacy of the poor and vulnerable people as the public is held in-doubt. The dominant culture thus
10 institutionalizes exclusion of particular groups under vastly different conditions, and ideology, depriving
11 citizenship of its emancipatory possibilities. The claim that the park has been a haven for drug use and
12 anti-social behaviors, however, not only ignores the possibility of self-correction but also prevents other
13 legitimate political, social, and economic functions to take place (Drummond, 2000). In fact, the state-
14 driven silent closure of public space was a feature of the urban landscape long before the culture of urban
15 surveillance and control began. For instance, Rani Pokhari, built in the 16th century (Figure 2), has
16 remained out of bounds for nearly 100 years, with vertical 10-foot-high iron bars obstructing both view
17 and access. On the pond there is a Shiva temple, a Hindu god in the middle, which is accessed from a
18 bridge many have not crossed in this generation. In a strange paradox, the pond, along with the temple
19 and the deity, remain locked up in a society that is frequently energized through Hindu activism⁹. In a city
20 that is famous for its public baths and *Dhunge Dharas*¹⁰, Rani Pokhari remains just a visual treat.
21 However inexplicable the reasons might be, the century of restrictions in accessing Rani Pokhari has
22 successfully erased a landmark public space from memory.
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38 The institutionalization of parts of Tundikhel offers an insight into power relations that create hierarchical
39 spaces in the society, given that the latter is linked with notions of oppression and domination. Against
40 the backdrop of centuries of autocratic rule, democracy in Kathmandu is in its infancy, and it still borrows
41 from the legacy of the past and is rapidly gaining strength. Strangely enough, everything the state does (or
42 not) is ‘*Sarkari*’ – ‘stately’ – in Nepal. A *Sarkari kam* is a purpose or action that still carries an impression
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48 ⁹ Protests from Hindu activists demanding to declare the country back into a Hindu Nation are common in
49 Kathmandu. Activists frequently clash with Police and the demand has political support from pro-monarchy
50 parties such as Rastriya Prajatantrik Party (Kathmandu Post, 2015).

51 ¹⁰ The traceable history of *Dhunge Dharas* or public baths goes back to 550 AD when Bhairavi, from Lichhavi
52 period, built the first *Dhunge Dhara* in Hadigaon (Pradhan, 1990). There are 117 *Dhunge Dharas* in Kathmandu
53 and another 40 in Patan making them a consistent feature of city’s urbanism in the old city quarters.
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8 of being above the law, and this has changed very little in post-conflict Kathmandu.
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10 11 12 13 **Militarization** 14

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17 Tundikhel's first spatial militarist was the legendary General Bhimsen Thapa¹¹. It is said that he had
18 French advisers come to Nepal to train Nepalese soldiers. Over the years, this legacy led the country to
19 become one of the world's largest troop contributors to UN peacekeeping operations. Barracks were
20 constructed on the east and north sides of Tundikhel, where the Government Employee's Provident Fund
21 Office now stands, and a foundry was built to manufacture cannons on the south-western side. The
22 army's presence first became apparent with the ritual of firing cannon at Tundikhel, every day at 12 noon;
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24 however, with the cannon came a military guard and with the guard came a guardhouse, and thus began
25 the occupation by the military.
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35 The militarization of public space in Kathmandu is a hard reality, legitimized through the historical
36 association of ruling monarchs with the city's cultural practices and rituals, making military presence in
37 the neighborhood a common sight. The aspects of royalty and security featured rather strongly in
38 residents' psyche. The current debate on civilian supremacy over military is the result of the military's
39 controversial history in curbing democracy¹² (Pathak and Uprety, 2011). In the wake of the Maoist
40 conflict, the ubiquitous presence of the military and the police became a necessary evil as a
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48 ¹¹ Bhimsen Thapa erected palatial residences built for himself, such as Bagh Durbar (constructed in 1805) on
49 the south-eastern edge of the old city, and Sil Khana in Lagan and Sil Khana in Chhauni (both probably
50 erected between 1815 and 1820). His decision to construct a palace for himself in Lagan Tol, south-west of
51 Tundikhel effectively brought soldiers much closer to Tundikhel.

52 ¹² The military-monarchy tie was consolidated by King Mahendra through Military Act 1959 when the King
53 quashed the democratically elected government and declared himself the Head of the government.
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9 counterinsurgency to restore law and order, and justifiably so; therefore, it elicited far fewer adverse
10 reactions than would have been expected had this not been the case from the people and the political
11 parties. Both were bestowed with a lot of powers at the expense of civil liberty¹³. Since the ceasefire in
12 2006, the political events leading up to constitutional crises, instability in governance, and frequent
13 threats of ascendancy of paramilitary forces have continued to justify the military presence. Tundikhel
14 today remains the most visible example of urban militarization justified as a measure to protect the
15 security in urban spaces.
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23 The fact that militarization embodies imposition of controls using physical features such as barbed wire
24 and high fences sets itself distinctively apart from, let's say, the normative control administered by KMC,
25 discussed in the previous section. The military's heuristic control and expansion in Tundikhel suggest that
26 hegemony and political subjugation remains alive in public spaces of nascent democracies. The
27 magnitude of military controlled parts of Tundikhel has doubled in the span of the last two decades (see
28 Figure 3) and now exceeds one-third of Tundikhel. It began with the establishment of army headquarters
29 in the 1980s in the southernmost part of Tundikhel, and subsequently the city witnessed a gradual
30 encroachment of Tundikhel by the army, using clever designations. The spaces went through a transition
31 of being army sports and training grounds, and ultimately the location for new buildings effectively to a
32 muted opposition. In an effort to permanently seize the space, the army has constructed new extensions to
33 its headquarters in Tundikhel, exploiting the loopholes in the legal system. Under the Nepalese law, state
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47 ¹³ The Organization and Association (Control) Act, 1962, proscribed political parties, demonstrations,
48 political meetings, public expression, and the publication of articles. Offenders could be imprisoned for up to
49 three years. The Police Organization Act provided the police with wide powers of arrest, search, and
50 detention, and the Press Act banned the independent media and brought the news media under government
51 control (Baral, 1977).
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8 agencies (*Sarkari* offices) are not required to obtain buildings permits from the Municipality prior to the
9 construction of new buildings.
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14 Accurately and precisely assessing the impacts of encroachment is a difficult task, but over time, a
15 question that consistently features in intellectual and civilian forums is why should the military occupy
16 central public space? And why does it not relocate to the periphery of the city, where more land could be
17 available for its extending activities? In 1997, the Birendra International Convention Center in New
18 Baneshwor (now the seat of the Constituent Assembly) was built, relocating the army cantonment. This
19 question points towards the classic feature of military existence that is beset with contradictions. The
20 important role the army has played in counterinsurgency and subsequently internal domestic conflict
21 between those still hung up on the historical legacy (pro-monarchy) and everyone else (anti-monarchy)
22 has led to the army seeing itself playing a prominent role in Nepalese society. On one hand, rebel
23 infiltration continues to pose threats to Kathmandu, and on the other, frequent enforcement of emergency
24 laws, restriction of freedom of movement, etc. have legitimized the army's penetration into public
25 spaces. In response to the Maoist insurgents using key urban spaces as a material location for hegemonic
26 claims, the army saw the occupation of central areas as being equally important to retain its own symbolic
27 supremacy. Routledge (2010: 1296), in his study of urban protest and democracies in Nepal, asserts that
28 public space is a more hybrid version of the civil society that incorporates elements of both liberal and
29 radical democracy – an integral part of the state and a sphere of hegemony, wherein consent is
30 manufactured (albeit through extremely complex mediums, diverse institutions, and constantly changing
31 processes).
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48 The severity of power split and its manifestation in public space in Kathmandu could not be fully
49 comprehended if the historic power of the military was not taken into consideration in the public space
50 discourse. The whole political history of Nepal since medieval times until the abolition of the monarchy
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9 in 2008 can be summed up in the powers of the military being elevated through harnessing the autocratic
10 rule of the monarchs. This 'elevation' of power underwent spatial manifestation as the military was
11 granted guardianship of some of the strategic monuments and central sites in Kathmandu. The powers of
12 the army remained 'above the law', with just one figure-head above them – the King, popularly believed
13 to be the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Since 1744, the military institution in Nepal was known as The
14 Royal Nepalese Army (RNA). The integration of the military with royalty that existed for centuries
15 displays the characteristics of the triumvirate of nation/religion/king observed in Bangkok. In discussing
16 the power hierarchy in Thailand, Dovey (2001: 268) argues that "all forms of political power, including
17 military coups and democratic constitutions, need to honour the triumvirate to succeed". The triumvirate,
18 however, came to an abrupt end in 2008 with the abolition of the monarchy, and the term 'Royal' was
19 subsequently dropped from its name, signifying its new purpose to be the protector of the newfound
20 democracy. The name may have changed, but the army's loyalty to the aristocrats has remained intact,
21 and with that, their presence in the public space has remained unchanged. In fact, their growing tendency
22 to keep civilians out of the central public space questions their real motives in the new context.
23 Padawangi (2013), in discussing urban activism, states that Jakarta's Thamrin-Sudirman corridor, which
24 has been the site for public rallies or demonstrations, has been regularly subject to militarization in order
25 to prevent the 'unwanted people' from demonstrating there, particularly during the New Order. Thus, the
26 subjection of public space provision under the authority of the ruling power makes those spaces more
27 prone to becoming celebratory spaces of power and wealth in an unequal society.
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45 In addition to being 'politically-led', the army's current role in the socio-political setting in Nepal and its
46 resistance to any diffusion of power should also be seen as being 'neoliberal-led'. In the recent decade,
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9 the military has seen its size grow three times amid widespread budgetary retrenchment¹⁴. This has meant
10 that the army increasingly faces a compulsion to run its own welfare (its own hospitals and schools) and
11 find different ways to generate revenue. The Nepalese Army already runs commercial ventures (such as
12 petrol pumps, banquet halls and, more recently, garment factories) (Kathmandu Post, 2016), and is known
13 to harbor real-estate interests. Some see this as an emergence of a new public-private and military
14 partnership as the new paradigm in the new democratic Nepal (Bhandari, 2014). This puts the army into
15 the same existential dilemma as a poorly managed state enterprise searching for new ways to survive.
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22 To sum up, the military acting as the key institution of guardianship, vigilantly preserving law and order,
23 is common across many countries in the global south. However, what is unique about Kathmandu is that,
24 far from receding into the societal backdrop, while helping the government uphold its intentions, in the
25 process the military uphold their own privileged socio-political status. This, coupled with their tricky
26 organizational existence amid the ongoing political conflict in Nepal and neoliberal penetration, is the
27 major influence in (re)shaping Tundikhel.
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46 **Informalization**

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51 ¹⁴ The number of soldiers grew from 45,000 in 2001 to 90,000 in 2005 when the army was mobilized to counter the
52 insurgency (Pradhan, 2009) and the total spending has increased to 1.4% of GDP in 2010 from 0.99% in 1988
53 (Rogers, 2012).
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10 Informality in public space is a claim-making process and can be characterized as an eruption of informal
11 activities that can range from informal trading and homeless people living on the streets or public spaces
12 to cars and vehicles parked under the Municipality's 'No parking' sign. They could also be impromptu
13 sports activities or a range of other activities lacking any designated space. In most cities of the global
14 south, informality regularly intersects with formality. For instance, it is completely accepted that the
15 'formal' use of spaces is controlled to introduce a series of other (informal) activities (political rallies),
16 functions (informal trading zones), or religious parades (such as *Durga puja* in Kolkata, *Gai Jatra* in
17 Kathmandu, and *Ganapati Bappa* in Mumbai) for which state institutions do not allocate formal space.
18 Thus, the 'laws of people' take precedence over the 'institutional laws' as guardians of these public
19 spaces. Ultimately, in the global south, the publicness of its cities and spaces is measured from the extent,
20 efficiency, and effectiveness of these crossovers.
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32 In Kathmandu, there are no designated public spaces, but any space that is not privately owned is called
33 *Sarvajanik*. Such spaces are mostly state-owned and go beyond their legal definition. *Sarva* means 'all'
34 and *Janik* means 'people' in English, so any space that is accessible to all people is actually *Sarvajanik*,
35 or *Sarvajanik sthala* – a place that is 'accessible to all'. Publicly owned land and spaces tend to be above
36 the law in Nepal, and all, in their capacity as users, are "citizens" and have the same rights over the space.
37 The occupation of such space, by ordinary people, goes beyond the mere behavioral response to the
38 context; it simultaneously shows what Perera (2009: 54) calls "a form of adaptation, questioning,
39 resistance, and transformation". Through observing discursive practices in both sides of the municipal
40 laws, informal rules and norms develop both independently of and in combination with formal rules,
41 making informality part of the institutionalization process and a strong contender for space. Historically,
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8 right through the 1990s, the city saw the *Panchayati*¹⁵ regime allowing an explosion of informal markets
9 as a mechanism to curb political discontentment brewing under the covert operations of Maoist soldiers.
10 Subsequently, a large swathe of *Khula Manch* turned into a thriving flea market that catered not just to the
11 crowd gathered for political assemblies but also to the wider public. These markets were fostered under
12 the controlled conditions of the Municipality and in tandem with the democratic movement that revolves
13 around occupancy. The occupancy refers to not just physical space but, as Benjamin (2013: 724) argues,
14 “is an appropriation of spaces through the ‘embedding’ of municipal government into popular society.
15 Such practices fuel an autonomous political process at the municipal level that reflects a new alliance and
16 coalition politics”.

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26 Following the political ceasefire in 2006, KMC moved to regularize the city’s public spaces as part of the
27 city’s environmental improvements and beautification program¹⁶. KMC’s subsequent move to ban
28 informal markets from Tundikhel was fiercely contested by two principal groups – Nepal Street Vendors
29 Association and Street Market Association. The conjoined organizations resulted in the development of a
30 powerful informal force, often supported by the left-wing politicians who were promoting the rights of
31 the informal traders. While such resistance recognizes that the informal actors are here to stay and
32 somehow need to be made part of the new democracy, their access to Tundikhel is dependent on the
33 strength of their negotiation with KMC. Benjamin (2013) aptly calls it vote bank politics in his study of
34 Indian cities such as Bangalore and Delhi. The power dynamics are not always visibly manifested, but as
35 Appadurai (2001: 42) argues, informal actors also build deep democracies through their organization and
36 development of temporary infrastructure. Such democracies and infrastructure are regularly ruptured in

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47 ¹⁵ The *Panchayati* system of governance was introduced in the Nepalese political context by the late King Mahendra
48 through a new constitution in 1962 following dissolution of democratically elected government. *Panchayati* system is
49 a vernacular form of local governance that sees one party rule and election through political nominations. *Panchayati*
50 political system prevailed in Nepal until 1990.

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52 ¹⁶ KMC adopted ‘beautification’ as part of the city’s environmental agenda since 2003 when the city hosted SAARC
53 summit. The imposition of state emergency by then King Gyanendra during that time helped to ward off any
54 opposition and sustain the program.
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Tundikhel as informal vendors are denied access to public spaces, relegating them to the footpaths of the perimeter roads. A string of informal vendors is visible on the periphery, waiting to lay their claim on Tundikhel. The testimonies from vendors located in Tundikhel reveal a concern with livelihood strategies dependent on the locational value of Tundikhel.

Paradoxically, the process of eviction and encroachment may have been cyclical, the process itself is random and the outcome unpredictable. Brown's (2004) study of street traders in Kathmandu observed an uneasy relation with Municipal police who at times evict and at other times demand payment at cut price. Under such circumstances, power is associated with domination, and the Municipal police becomes yet another actor of such statutory instrument. Brown et al (2010) argue about the role of the Municipal police in the enforcement of law, questioning to what extent such enforcement is apparent harassment and institutional policy as a livelihood strategy for the underpaid officials. Their act of taking money from the poor in the form of weekly or daily *haftas*¹⁷ should be seen as quasi-legal exchanges where multiple rationalized self-interests go hand in hand in the form of bribery and harassment as a by-product of institutionalization and the state's interests in 'control' and 'surveillance'.

Evicted traders keep returning to Tundikhel, each time better equipped and skilled, to defy Municipal regulations and operate illegally across major thoroughfares. Most recently on April 14, 2014, the Municipality issued a public notice urging all vendors to keep off Tundikhel, and active policing began. Kumar Sapkota, Chair of Self-employed Traders Association, laments the eviction of traders without a realistic alternative. He asserts, "Street vendors who are self-employed traders should not be evicted without a long-term alternative. There are 30,000 vendors in the capital of which 15,000 are women.

¹⁷ *Hafta* is a protection money charged by corrupt policemen or local goons to safeguard informal businesses. The term *Hafta* originates from week, indicating weekly collection of extortion fee.

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9 They should not be evicted without a long-term alternative” (Kathmandu Post, 2014). Thus, informality is
10 increasingly a formidable contender for the public space within the contested dimension, operating in
11 close entanglement with statutory institutions. Situated at the verge of legality, informality is constantly
12 intertwined with the Municipal law and is at the discretion of the political, institutional, or military power.
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14 In a strange paradox, KMC is yet to devise a policy on the use of, or what can be accommodated in, the
15 public space and very often, operate in an ad hoc manner¹⁸. Arguably, in Kathmandu, informality is
16 understood not just as a mode of the ‘ordinary’, but it has equally accommodated an elite informality
17 carried out often in complicity with statutory institutions.
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50 ¹⁸ The case in point is the emergence of the new religious complex in the space next to Rani Pokhari. In a classic
51 change of hands, Kathmandu Municipality dismantled informal markets to accommodate religious groups affording
52 permanent structures. Since both religious/social groups are part of the informal coalition of political and elitist
53 coterie, the interests of urban poor is easily displaced.
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Urban rupturing: (un)making of public space

Democracy or lack of it is manifested in the city's public spaces. In the process of restoring democracy in Nepal, the city has moved from war to peace, from monarchy to republicanism, from being a Hindu state to secularism and from a unitary to potentially a federal state in the last two decades (Jha, 2016). This transformation is ongoing and far from complete. Episodically, political cadres along with their leaders besiege the city and its epicenter, Tundikhel. The military steps in with barbed wire and batons. The ensuing struggle ends with an announcement by the Chief Executive of KMC, who claims *Khula Manch* has been closed for an indefinite period. Such framing of contemporary spatial politics in everyday life displays the confluence of three historically unique and intersecting powers of modalities: institutionalization, militarization, and informalization as described in the previous section underpinned Tundikhel's transformation. Institutionalization of parts of Tundikhel offers us insights into power relations that create hierarchical spaces in the society. As an example of 'exclusionary' space, pockets of Tundikhel have embodied urban relegation from their role as being prime social spaces to spaces within which militarization is being articulated and somewhat reinforced. On the other hand, situated at the verge of legality and at the margin, informality is constantly entangled with the Municipal law, well within the force field of Tundikhel. Drawing the three processes together to understand their transformative impact on Tundikhel seemingly presents many challenges. These challenges are conflicting because each process offers unique perspective on Tundikhel as observed in Marvin's (2013) Tibetan 'porous space' or Benjamin's (2008) 'occupancy urbanism' or Hackenbroch's (2013) 'organized encroachment of the powerful'. Since public space is never homogeneous, "the dimensions and extent of its publicness are highly differentiated from instance to instance" (Smith and Low, 2006: 3) and require wider study. Our study shows that together these processes point to the complexity around Tundikhel's transformation that

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9 is not easily explained by individual perspective. This complexity relates not only to the specific and
10 limited form of democracy that prevails in Tundikhel but also to how a differentiated power structure is
11 determining access and control, staking claims, disrupting activities, and ultimately rupturing the space.
12 The forces at play are both individual and institutional, formal and informal, civil and military. As a
13 contemporary urban space that enables the contestation of power relations (Routledge, 1994, 2010),
14 Tundikhel has become a physical space that itself is being contested.
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21 The paper argues that the confluence of the three dominant modalities of power results in what I call
22 'spatial estrangement' – a process of (un)making of public spaces through 'urban rupturing'. The
23 evolution of 'rupturing' is evident first in the 'fragmentation' of public space, both physical and symbolic.
24 Today, only one-sixth of Tundikhel is open to the public (see Figure 3), while other pockets of Tundikhel
25 remain symbolic sterile spaces, under either institutional or military control. Barbed wire, high iron gates,
26 army patrols, and Municipal wardens create boundaries and prevent access. It is no longer a pure,
27 autonomous repository of power, people, or institutions but instead divided with boundaries and infested
28 with significant apathy among the city's informal groups that are forced to sit just outside the boundary.
29 These spaces are adorned with hard boundaries that are quite defensive and lacking in civic engagement,
30 showing the state's approach to treating public space in the same way as buildings or objects – assigning
31 territories and boundaries that ignore the culturally shaped organic relations that existed for centuries.
32 Sennett's (2006) explanation to define edges is pertinent here, which states that they are of two kinds –
33 boundaries and borders. A boundary is an edge where things end; a border is an edge where different
34 groups interact. At borders, organisms become more interactive, porous membranes, due to the meeting
35 of different species or physical conditions. A boundary is a guarded territory where no transgression takes
36 place. Tundikhel witnessed borders morphing into boundaries to compartmentalize the space into six
37 pockets of various degree of control that are both political and institutional. Ironically, these boundaries,
38 once the hallmark of the conflict period, are being naturalized. The army's constant presence generates
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fear, dominating both public space and the everyday life of civilians. Paradoxically, on one hand, the new government-translated democratic ideas are embodied in *swatantra-sarbjanik* (which translates as freedom-public) dialectic, and on the other, they reproduce the authoritarian state's administrative habits and procedures (particularly from the time of the absolute monarchy) to realize law and order through the army. Current democratic deliberation pays a great deal of attention to controlling, dividing, and ruling but overlooks the balance between good governance and authority.

Beyond fragmentation, there are efforts to assign a sense of 'permanence' that takes the 'rupturing process' to the next level. By allocating specific use(s) and erecting structures, the 'publicness' is permanently taken away from Tundikhel, restricting social interaction, constraining individual liberties, and excluding the public, or public activities. The apparent imperviousness and impermeability across different pockets create spaces with new spatial identities that set them apart from the historic Tundikhel, which was 'one large space'. A large part of Tundikhel is already built up by the Nepalese Army, while in recent years new elitist outfits such as Hindu religious groups have built permanent structures. A creeping elitism in public space resonates Hackenbroch's (2013) 'organised encroachment' for which state colludes with institutions that may not always have the public interest in mind. Further, the neoliberal ambition of the current government (from the state's claims in ownership to introduction of entry fee in Ratna Park) reproduces that class hierarchy and governs who is allowed access and who is denied it. Thus, at the mezzanine level of the confluence of the triumvirate, we observe a tension between the formal regime and informality, a battle of access and privilege and luxury and livelihood. Ultimately, this urban rupturing points to the possible disconnection of Tundikhel from the city, its history, and wider culture. This ongoing process has the power to erase the history and legacy of the space from the public memory such that the public space is not recognizable anymore. These phenomena are manifested by

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different multiple actions: eradication of structure/ buildings, adding fences, and changing activities. The prolonged imposition of ‘control’ is, therefore, a condition, which leads to an urban amnesia towards the city’s history. In Tundikhel, Rani Pokhari’s access restriction and muted opposition epitomizes how spatial rupturing leads to the material deletion of public space from the public mind. The amnesia is all the more troubling since its mutilations are ignored and its role in the city’s urbanism rapidly loses relevance. Tundikhel was originally three miles in length and 300 yards in width, spreading from Rani Pokhari to Dasharath Stadium. Major parts of Tundikhel are now permanently lost through various developments and ever widening perimeter roads, barriers, and iron gates restricting access and rupturing the space. Ironically, space has shrunk by more than half in just 40 years, a fact that is deleted from the minds of the generation that is old enough to remember the past.

To conclude, the paper informs the current debates on whether the public space in global south is quintessentially public. It argues that Tundikhel remains tightly controlled by the interplay of the three dominant modalities of power, and this in part reflects the traditional social values and notions that uphold denial, restriction, and oppression in the use of public space. The paper advocates that judging by the ambition, depth, and extent of impact, the confluence of dominant modalities of power assumes a hegemonic character powerful enough to trigger fundamental shifts in the processes and relationships through which public space is fragmented, modified, and eventually deleted from the memory – a phenomenon of urban rupturing. The paper contends that hypocrisy is inherent in the public space agenda in Kathmandu witnessed through a gradual decline in the publicness of Tundikhel amid organized claims and interventions borne out of an urban condition that not only maligns the public space agenda but also creeps into other spheres of urban development. Finally, this empirical study exposes the limits to the specific form of democracy that people enjoy (or suffer) in contemporary Kathmandu. Perhaps it also

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inspires us to push those limits, sending warning signals to other cities in the global south with similar contexts. What is needed is an understanding of the distinctive nature and range of possibilities in public spaces in cities of the global south. The true benefits of public space thus lie in its becoming not just public but a place.

Acknowledgments

The research was funded by the British Academy/The Leverhulme Trust and Sir Ernest Cassel Educational Trust Fund (Grant No.: SG133061). The author is grateful to Prof. Bharat Sharma and Prof. Bijaya Shrestha for offering their insights and comments at various stages of the project. A special thanks to Architect Shyam Sunder Kawan for his input and for providing the field support. The author would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments on the earlier draft of the paper. The views expressed here are those of the author.

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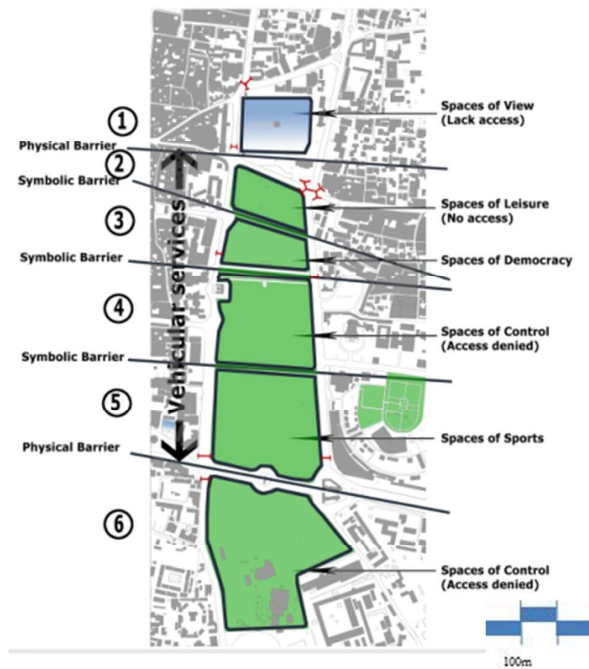
Figure 1: Tundikhel in the context of the city

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Figure 2: *Shahid Gate* (left) and *Rani Pokhari* (right)



Ranipokhari
Well maintained by KMC with small office on the south west corner of the site. Water level receding. Access closed for a century

Ratna Park
Lacks proper maintenance after the democracy period; main entrance from north side. Access with an entry fee.

Khula Munch
Symbol of democracy. Access given to political rallies through permit system

Parade Ground
Sporadic parade and some cultural practice too. Access closed.

Sports Ground
Not defined. Access open.

Army Quarter
Under army occupation. Army Headquarter and Sports Ground Access closed for civilians

Figure 3: The compartmentalisation of Tundikhel, Kathmandu