

MARTIN CHAUTARI INVITES YOU TO A LECTURE

How and Why Should We Study Roads in Nepal?

by

Katharine N Rankin

Martin Chautari Seminar Hall, Thapathali, 2 August 2015 (Sunday), 3:00pm

The connection between road building and state building arises out of a contradictory mix of investments in infrastructures of resource extraction and an unprecedented decentralization of governance, alongside federation and political stalemate at the national scale. Under these conditions, roads are being built at an accelerated pace throughout rural areas, with an emphasis on local resources and local planning, and with a significant infusion of global capital. Road building involves an assemblage of interrelated contractors, politicians and investors seeking to build capital and (re-)build the state. At the same time, much of the critical consciousness developed over two decades also manifests on and around roads – for example, in the form of demands for accountability, cooperative labor arrangements and protests against rollbacks to local democracy. Thus the research poses infrastructure development as a key terrain for the constitution of political space, through which multiple governance projects and political subjectivities improvise in the present their vision for a contested future. The talk will share how the research approach derives from previous research on local governance in “post-conflict” Nepal, situate it in relation to a typology of approaches to the study of roads in the literature (political economy/political ecology, mobility studies, anthropologies of infrastructure), and open it up for input at this early stage of the project.

Katharine N. Rankin is a Professor in the Department of Geography and Planning at the University of Toronto. She is the author of *Cultural Politics of Markets: Economic Liberalization and Social Change in Nepal* (Pluto Press and University of Toronto Press, 2004), and other academic publications related to research interests in the areas of the politics of planning and development, comparative market regulation, feminist and critical theory, neoliberal governance and social polarization. Current research projects investigate commercial gentrification in Toronto and the cultural politics of state restructuring in Nepal. She has recently been awarded a 5-year Insight Grant from the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council on the convergence of road building and state building, titled *Infrastructures of Democracy: State Building as Everyday Practice in Nepal's Agrarian Districts*.

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This is a public event and participation is open to all.