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 global network player authority PewDiePie avatar WoW blessing noob kills demon fact body fight experience authentic mediatization Skill pvp contest  
 game rule system representation healing resurrection funeral undead wti op's spe ingame PS4 discussion digital  
 religion game analysis The Last of Us death resurrection funeral undead wti op's spe ingame PS4 discussion digital  
 simulation ludology death resurrection funeral undead wti op's spe ingame PS4 discussion digital  
 narrative



Local visitor at the India Gaming Show South 2018, Bengaluru / India. Photo by Xenia Zeiler, 20 January 2018.

















Figure 3. *PolyTricks* (Arcube Games & Animation, 2016).

The second critical challenge that arose during my ethnoludographic study was that I came to realize that game development in Nepal is not isolated, but rather part of a turbulent vortex of global flows (Appadurai 1990). Cultural flows describe the multidirectional movements of people, material objects, capital, images, concepts, information, and technologies within global, national, and regional areas. Traveling as they form different combinations of hybrid-interdependencies, which mutate existing social and political structures; the trajectories of cultural flows are not bounded territorially, but describe ever-changing cultural landscapes, that tend to erase imagined boundaries and reform existing institutions.

What do these transnational flows look like in the Kathmandu Valley? In many ways, Nepal's game development is similar to other Asian nations. It differs, however, because it is imagined through the fantasy of *Shangri-La*, a fictional place described in the 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* by British author James Hilton. As an isolated Shangri-

La, Nepal is posed as an underdeveloped traditional nation, full of picturesque poverty, over-determined with religious culture, and blessed with beautiful Himalayan landscapes. Reeking with a Romantic Orientalism, Hilton describes Shangri-La as a mystical, harmonious valley, gently guided by Buddhist Monks. The name has become synonymous with an earthly Himalayan utopia, a permanently happy land, isolated from the world.

The Fantasy of Shangri-La challenges Nepal game designers, but this myth of isolation has nothing to do with reality. The Kathmandu Valley is far from isolated – with tourists flooding in from developed nations, and Nepali guest workers flooding out to mainly work in Malaysia and the Gulf States (Liecthy 2017). I have not yet researched the effect of guest workers on video game design, and this will be a fruitful area for future research. What is important for the current study, however, is that the flow of people outward from Nepal shows that the nation is not an isolated country but actually has one of the highest rates of international travel in the world, and is heavily entangled with the global economy. Moreover, this is not only a modern phenomenon. For instance, for hundreds of years Nepalis have been long distance traders, and have also served as Ghurkas in the British Empire.



Figure 4. Rabin Shilpakar, Arcube's team leader. (© Gregory Grieve, 2017).

Using the ethnoludographic method to study locally designed Asian games illustrates the value-systems of actual people rather than the reiterated arid landscape of often-essentialized orientalist visions, such as the fantasy of Nepal as Shangri-La. While circulated as mere entertainment, local games such as *polyTricks* are weapons of the weak that resist the often-implicit dominant hegemonic view of Asia that many AAA-video games proffer. As Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter argue in *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*, gaming embodies the cultural, political, and economic forces of global capital, while also providing a means of resistance (2009). In short, video games are not something that has happened to Nepal, but are an encounter between groups that share complex, historically constituted mediascapes. Nepali game development is not derivate or imitative, but rather contemporaneous and active. The makers of *polyTricks* depict Nepal as underdeveloped, corrupt, and peripheral to the world economy, but a land of immense beauty (mountains), cultural heritage (temples) and potential for economic development. As Rabin Shilpakar, Arcube's team leader said, in an interview by Ashish Bikram Lamichhane,

“The main purpose to build this game is to uplift the gaming industry in Nepal. The gaming industry can be next career building opportunities for many IT students and artists. The gaming industry can help us to present our folk, mythological stories, our history, culture, [and] art in the form of the game. This can also educate our current generation, future generations to come and entertain them as well” (Shilpakar 2016).

## References

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