Nationalism and Ethnicity in Nepal

Edited by
David N. Bellner | Joanna Pilat-Grammatic | John Wheaton
Reprinted & published in Nepal 2008 by
Vajra Publications
Jyatha, Thamel, P.O. Box 21779, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel.: 977-1-4220562, Fax: 977-1-4246536
e-mail: bidur_la@mos.com.np
www.vajrabooks.com.np

Distributor
Vajra Book Shop
Kathmandu, Nepal

No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

First edition under the title
Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom
published by
1st Floor, 1079 LH Amsterdam, The Netherlands


Printed in Nepal

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Nationalism and Ethnicity in Nepal — (Studies in anthropology and history; v. 20)
I. Gellner, David N. II. Pfaff-Czarniaka, Joanna
III. Whelpton, John
305.8'91495

ISBN 90-5702-147-1 (softcover)

Front Cover
Joanna Pfaff-Czarniaka

In memory of Richard Burghart (1944–1994)
and
Harka Gurung (Leghey) (1935-2006)
"Do not leave your ancient religion. Don’t forsake the salt of the King ..."

Prithvi Narayan Shah
_Dibya Upadesh_ (Stiller 1968:44)

"... a subject of the king of Gorkha at the turn of the nineteenth century was entitled to change his political affiliation as freely as a citizen of the Kingdom of Nepal in the mid-twentieth century can change his employment ... [By contrast] a country [des] was a territorial affiliation that the native did not ordinarily give up; when he did, such emigration was likened to an act of renunciation (des tyāg ..."

"At the turn of the nineteenth century each of [Nepal’s ethnic] groups was thought of as a country, and in [the Legal Code of] 1854 as a species [jät]; now [in 1984] they are all registered in the census as language groups."

Richard Burghart
‘The Formation of the Concept of Nation State in Nepal’

---

Contents

List of Figures xiii
List of Tables xv
New Nepal, New Ethnicities: Changes Since the Mid 1990s xvii
Preface xlix
Contributors li

INTRODUCTION Ethnicity and Nationalism in the World’s only Hindu State
_David N. Gellner_ 3

Part One: Dominant and Diaspora Identities 33

ONE Political Identity in Nepal: State, Nation, and Community
_John Whelpton_ 39

TWO The King and Cow: On a Crucial Symbol of Hinduization in Nepal
_Axel Michaels_ 79

THREE Being Nepali without Nepal: Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora
_Michael Hutt_ 101

Part Two: Central Nepal 145

FOUR Caste, Communalism, and Communism: Newars and the Nepalese State
_David N. Gellner_ 151

FIVE Identity and Change among the Gurungs (Tamu-mai) of Central Nepal
_Al Alan Macfarlane_ 185

ix
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIX</th>
<th>The Heavy Loads of Tamang Identity</th>
<th>205</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ben Campbell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part Three: The Tarai</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVEN</td>
<td>Defining Maithil Identity:</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who is in Charge?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Claire Burkert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIGHT</td>
<td>Losing Ground, Gaining Ground:</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Land and Change in a Tharu Community in Dang, West Nepal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christian McDonough</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part Four: East Nepal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NINE</td>
<td>Hinduization: The Experience of the Thulung Rai</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N.J. Allen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEN</td>
<td>Identity Management and Cultural Change: The Yakha of East Nepal</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Andrew Russell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELEVEN</td>
<td>Changing Concepts of Ethnic Identity among the Mewahang Rai</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martin Gaenszle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part Five: The Northern Fringe</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TWELVE</td>
<td>Tibetan Pride of Place; Or, Why Nepal’s Bhotiyas are not an Ethnic Group</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Charles Ramble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part Six: Conclusions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIRTEEN</td>
<td>Vestiges and Visions: Cultural Change in the Process of Nation-Building in Nepal</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>FOURTEEN</strong> Nation-Building, Multi-Ethnicity, and the Hindu State</td>
<td>471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prayag Raj Sharma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>FIFTEEN</strong> State and Society in Nepal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harka Gurung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>References</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
New Nepal, New Ethnicities: Changes Since the Mid 1990s

by
John Whelpton, David N. Gellner, and Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka

GRASPING ETHNICITY IN A NEW POLITICAL CONTEXT

Nationalism and Ethnicity in a Hindu Kingdom (as the first edition of this book was titled) was very much a product of the time when it was written. Who, in 1997, could have predicted that a mere ten years later Nepal would no longer be calling itself a kingdom and would be on the point of becoming a republic? Based on an academic workshop held in 1992, the book was about – and itself reflected – the new openness about ethnic issues and the new political freedoms enjoyed in Nepal following the events of 1990. Those freedoms still felt fresh and surprising, and people were still grateful for them. It was evident to all those who had lived and studied under the Panchayat regime that the ‘People’s Movement’ of 1990 marked a major watershed in Nepalese history. Political parties, and in particular the two major parties, the NC (Nepali Congress) and the UML (Nepal Communist Party – Unified Marxist-Leninist, *e.m.a.l* in Nepali), were the new powers in the land. Suddenly, almost everyone appeared to be either Congress- or UML-aligned; trade unions split into separate pro-NC and pro-UML organizations; anyone who was non-aligned or equidistant found themselves in an awkward and difficult position. The new political situation had radical consequences for ethnic awareness and mobilization as well. Where, before, issues of ethnicity and cultural disadvantage could only be alluded to indirectly, now they could be addressed openly, publicly, and officially. Janajatis said that a great weight had been lifted from their shoulders. From a standing and tentative start in 1990, throughout the 1990s ethnic activism made rapid strides, both in organizational reach and in political influence.
Most of the contributors to the book had only known a Nepal where dissent was suppressed, where debate was allowed only within strict limits, and where there were only two national daily papers, both controlled by the government. Scholars were running to catch up with a fundamentally new situation, struggling to make sense of the transition from the Panchayat to the Multiparty system. We were seeking answers to the questions how much continuity there was between the movements for ethnic rights before and after 1990, and how much and what kind of support there was for activists’ demands on the part of the people the activists claimed to be representing.

In devising the book, no attempt was made to be systematic in covering different parts of the country or to have chapters on every single group within the country — but this did not stop it being criticized on precisely this point. The aim was rather to have good ethnography from as wide a sample as possible. Clearly, and especially given their importance in the late 1990s and to the Maoist movement, it was unfortunate that there was no chapter on the Magars. The sheer variety of situations in the Tarai deserved more than the two chapters, one on Dang and one on Maithil cultural nationalism. No chapter dealt with the very specific situation of Nepal’s Dalits, who are the most impoverished, disadvantaged, and excluded group in the country, nor with Nepali Muslims, who are also a very deprived group. In all these ways the book did not and does not claim to be encyclopaedic. It was necessary to work with the ethnographic accounts available at the time. Still today we lack the depth of ethnographic study — as opposed to grey literature that is ethnographically thin — on these communities.

Despite these gaps, the book did and does convey the sheer diversity of the country without falling into the trap of implying that Nepal is merely the sum of its constituent caste and ethnic groups. There was plenty of space for considerations of nationalism and national sentiment as well (if one may distinguish these two, which it is customary to do in academic parlance, if not in Nepalese English). As a baseline for the understanding of the modern period of Nepal’s history, we believe that the book is still valuable and worth re-issuing through a Nepali publisher.

DEMONOCRACY AND THE CONSTITUTION OF 1990

In 1992 the issues of ethnicity and exclusion had not yet acquired the centrality to political debate among the Nepalese intelligentsia that they have today but, as this volume itself makes clear, they were very much in the air. Although radical ethnic activism had been strongly discouraged during the Panchayat years, the regime had itself to some extent attempted to mobilize Janajatis and Dalits as a counter to its opponents amongst the Parbatiya high castes. In the slightly more liberal atmosphere leading up to and following the 1980 referendum, Janajati and leftist intellectuals (categories that often coincided) had begun openly to question the need for an officially imposed national language (Malla 1989: 462-3; chapter 2, below). This came on top of a longer tradition of concern with language rights within the Newar community of the Kathmandu Valley (chapter 4). Religion was also a significant concern for many Newar intellectuals and those who saw themselves as exclusively Buddhist resented the state’s special recognition and protection of Hinduism (LeVine & Gellner 2005). In the late 1980s these Newar activists sought out counterparts among Magar, Tharu, and Gurung activists in order to build an alliance for secularism and against a Hindu state. After April 1990 there was consequently an upsurge of demands, focusing particularly on the issues of mother tongue education and a secular state. The chairman of the Constitution Recommendation Commission, Upendra Upadhyaya, himself revealed that the great majority of suggestions submitted to the Commission had been concerned with these and related issues (Hutt 1994: 36). In June 1990, in the massive demonstration referred to below (pp. 178, 444), non-Hindu religious and ethnic activists came out in favour of a secular (religiously non-aligned) state.

Activists had always been concerned about the fact that upper-caste Parbatiyas enjoyed disproportionate access to employment and state resources. However, in 1990 ethnic demands appeared to focus more on issues of cultural symbolism. This probably reflected the immediate history of cautious Panchayat-period activism of the intellectuals making the demands. In contrast to the assumption seventeen years later, in 2006-7, that positive discrimination needed to be embedded within the constitutional framework itself, in 1990 it was felt that such bread-and-butter issues could be dealt with by legislation once the constitutional framework was in force.
Thus it was necessary only that the constitution leave the door open for affirmative action to help the more backward groups. The Constitution Recommendation Commission needed no pressurizing to do this and Article 11.3 of the new constitution stipulated that the guarantee of citizens’ rights to equal treatment did not prevent the taking of such measures.\(^8\)

Both the drafting body and the cabinet which finally approved the constitution were dominated by the erstwhile partners in the People’s Movement, the Nepali Congress and the United Left Front (an alliance of communist factions). They were under little real pressure to yield to ethnic activists’ demands because at this stage the latter lacked any mass following. The architects of the constitution were in any case mainly concerned with the three-way balance of power between themselves (Congress and the Left) and the monarchy, which still held the loyalty of the army. Predominantly Parbatiyaspeaking Brahmans and (in several cases) with a background in constitutional law, both the commission and many cabinet members were predisposed towards the ‘Westminster model’ as applied in the Indian constitution. They appeared to have given little or no consideration to the possibility of adopting a system of proportional representation that would have made it easier for minorities to gain a voice in the legislative process.\(^9\)

The document finally promulgated in November 1990 was a disappointment to ethnic activists for several reasons. The Constitution did go some way towards meeting their demands with the description of the country as multi-cultural and multi-lingual and of ethnic languages as “languages of the nation” and with the granting to communities of the right to organize schools teaching in their own language (Art 18.2). However, the state itself was not committed to funding such efforts, while the cabinet rejected the commission’s original proposal to reserve six seats for Janajatis and three for Dalits in the Upper House and also finally decided to retain Nepal’s status as a Hindu state, despite a suggested compromise that it should be the monarch alone who was required to be Hindu.\(^10\)

The retention of the Hindu state had been pressed for by Congress, partly, no doubt, because of pro-Hindu sentiment in the party itself but also probably because of a calculation that this might play well with conservative opinion across the country: if it was to beat off the challenge from the Left, Congress needed to build and maintain a broad support base including both the right and the centre. Finally, the Constitution also contained a direct ban on ethnic or regional parties, which were seen as a possible threat to national unity (see p. 59 below).\(^11\)

In the period between the 1991 general election and Gyanendra’s final assumption of total control in February 2005 ethnic demands were an increasingly prominent part of the intellectual scene at the national level and ethnic activism played a part in the rapid expansion of the Nepalese public sphere. For example, in 1993 the government decided to offer FM broadcast licences to the commercial sector. According to nepalradio.org, 254 licences had been issued by 1 February 2008 and there are currently 95 active radio stations, 27 of them in the Kathmandu Valley. Several stations cater to specific ethnic audiences with programmes in minority languages. They are mainly financed by donor-funded NGOs concentrating on marginalized populations. The role of radio stations is all the more important as Nepal TV and the six private TV companies, even using satellite technology, are only able to reach about 40% of the national territory. Increasingly, independent journalist organizations and NGOs reach out to audiences via audio-tapes, theatre productions, puppet plays, and posters. The Press Council of Nepal gives figures of 89 daily, 4 twice-weekly, 381 weekly, and 40 fortnightly newspapers, with many more than that registered but not appearing (presscouncil.org). A number of NGOs operating in district headquarters, in particular in west Nepal, are currently involved in ‘community press’ projects. Media and literary production has always been an important tool, perhaps the defining feature, of ethnic activism in Nepal; Nepal’s experiment with FM radio enabled activists to spread their message in unprecedented ways in the 1990s.\(^12\)

Successive governments have responded, to varying degrees, to ethnic demands. The highest-profile measure was probably the expansion by 2000 of news broadcasts on Radio Nepal to a total of seventeen local languages. Even more significant were moves to allow a place for languages other than Nepali in the school system. Despite the scepticism on this issue expressed in chapter one (p. 64 below), the 1994 report of the National Languages Policy Recommendation Commission was at least partly followed up. As mentioned below (p. 488), the UML government of 1994–5 already set aside some money to produce textbooks in minority languages, presumably following the 1991 report of the same commission. Further financial support for mother-tongue textbooks came from DANIDA. Several schools began to use the textbooks, though in others they mouldered untouched in cupboards in the principal’s office. Pilot programmes for the introduction of bilingual mother-tongue education were
launched in 2001. At local government level, the Kathmandu Metropolitan authority and Rajbiraj municipality announced their intention to use Nepal Bhasha (Newari) and Maithili respectively as working languages. It is uncertain whether this was much more than symbolic gesture since spoken communication was frequently in the local languages anyway and the written record appears to have remained largely in Nepali (Mainali 2000) but the issue became an emotionally charged one on 1 June 1999 when the Supreme Court ruled that the use of any other language violated the designation of Nepali as official language in article 6.1 of the constitution. The day on which this judgement was passed down has been marked with protests as a ‘black day’ by language activists ever since.

During the 1990s ethnic activists continued to organize, to forge international links, and to encourage those Janajati groups that did not yet have representative national bodies to create them. At its fifth national congress in August 2003 NEFEN changed its name to NEFIN (Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, Nepal Adivasi Janajati Mahasangh), in order to emphasize the claim that all Janajati groups are indigenous to Nepal. The delay in the incorporation of the term adivasi (‘indigenous’, literally ‘original dweller’) into the official register of ethnic activists’ discourse is witness to the dependence of that discourse on international initiatives (as opposed to South Asian exemplars), which impacted Nepal only after NEFIN’s foundation. The stress on indigenousness came with the UN declaration of a Year of Indigenous Peoples in 1993 (which then became a decade, 1993–2003). NEFIN argues that the two terms, ‘indigenous’ and ‘Janajati’, refer in the Nepali context to the same people, but this overlooks the awkward fact that many of the Janajati groups, or sections of them, have well-known myths locating their origin outside Nepal. Currently 54 out of the 95 government-recognized Janajati groups have set up their own representative bodies which have equal representation within NEFIN. The weakness of successive governments in the late 1990s and early 2000s opened up an opportunity for NEFIN, since meeting with them and conceding at least some of their demands could be represented as activity and progress by politicians.

Besides voicing political demands, more and more ethnic organizations are geared towards the welfare of ethnic people. Numerous development projects aimed to promote adult education as well as vocational training. Others erected religious structures or advocated social reforms such as cutting the cost of rituals or limiting the consumption of alcohol (see Table 1). At the supranational level, new kinds of networks and links were established. Ethnic activism is increasingly organized within international minority rights and indigenous peoples frameworks and oriented towards UN as well as ILO norms, and participates in Asian-Pacific networks (e.g. South Asia Pacific Bureau for Adult Education – SAPBAE). A number of ethnic organizations are beneficiaries of the World Bank and other agencies (for example, the Dutch SNV) as well as donor governments, in particular, the Royal Norwegian Government. NEFIN has benefited from capacity-building grants from the UK Department for Development (DFID) and others. Furthermore, ethnic activism is carried by transnational networks established by the former Gurkhas and other migrants. Among them are such organizations as the Nepal Ex-British Gurkha Sherpa Association, Thakali Research Centre, Magar Ex-Army Association, numerous Tamang organizations in the USA, UK, Dubai, Hong Kong, Japan, India, and Burma, Sunuwar organizations in Hong Kong, UK, and Singapore, and so on.

As with women and Dalits, the government accepted the need for a commission to look after Janajati interests. In 2002 the National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities (Adivasi Janajati Uthian Rastria Pratishthan or NFDIN) was set up and Professor Sant Bahadur Gurung, a development sociologist at Tribhuvan University, became its head. It initiated a series of projects to do with preservation of languages and cultures, providing education to backward communities, preserving indigenous knowledge, and so on. Professor Gurung pointed out, in conversation with Gellner in 2004, that of the 59 officially recognized Janajatis, only 43 were actually recorded in the 2001 census. Those who were recorded make up 37.2% of the population, so he estimated (perhaps optimistically) that the total indigenous population could be as much as 42%

In the early 1990s there was no immediate attempt to introduce reservations in public sector employment for so-called ‘backward groups’ and little enthusiasm for it. Congress remained for some time explicitly opposed to such a move. Although the UML was theoretically committed to the introduction of reservations, it did not act when in government in 1994 or in 1997. Discontent that Janajati concerns were being ignored was one factor in the 1998 split in the UML, when Janajati MPs within the UML largely backed Ramdev Gautam’s breakaway ML (Marxist-Leninist) Party. It was Surya Bahadur Thapa’s government that formally accepted the principle of reservations in 2003 and it was cited as one of his achievements on the government’s website. Educational institutions began to take
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the organization</th>
<th>Mission</th>
<th>Aims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Kirat Yakthung Chumling (chumlung.org.np) Registered 1990, re-registered 2002 | To promote and preserve the Limbu language, script, literature, culture, religion, and history | • To undertake various activities for the upliftment of the Limbus, their language including Kirat-Strigonga script, literature, religion, and culture.  
• To conduct research on subjects related to Limbus and promote awareness among them  
• To organize various activities of economic development in Limbuwan to improve the living standard of local people  
• To make the Limbus, as well as other ethnic groups of Limbuwan, aware of the constitution of Nepal, their constitutional rights and the prevalent laws of Nepal  
• To develop effective programmes to curb the destruction of environment and ecosystem and hence work for the consolidation of democracy, national unity, and preservation of the culture of the community  
• To plan and carry out appropriate programmes in order to eradicate superstition and ignorance of the people about health problems in rural areas. Also, to encourage them to make best use of available and possible means and measures in the field of the primary healthcare  
• To increase mass awareness among the people to protect them from AIDS and other fatal diseases. Also, to make them aware of safety measures and precautions against such diseases  
• To work for human rights, indigenous rights and women's and children's rights |
| Nepal Thami Society (www.geocities.com/thamisociety/getbidi.html) Registered 1995 | To work for the welfare of the Thami community and preserve its culture, language, religion as well as history | • To be a non-profitable, non-partisan organization and work for the welfare of the Thami community  
• To preserve and develop Thami culture, tradition, identity, and language  
• To establish networking among like-minded groups and work towards achieving common goals  
• To strengthen organizational and institutional development |
| Magar Association of Nepal (www.magar.org) Registered 1993, 2003 | To promote and preserve the Magar language, culture, script, religion, and history as well as to provide support to eliminate discrimination based on religion, caste, and race | • To provide support in the country’s development process  
• To maintain unity amongst the entire Magar community  
• To preserve, boost and research Magar script, language (of the Athara Magarat, i.e. eighteen Magar provinces, Kaite, and Bara Magarat, i.e. twelve Magar provinces), religion, literature, culture, history, etc.  
• To make efforts so that the Magar language can be taught and learned in schools and universities  
• To develop and promote friendly relationships with other ethnic groups and communities and help in their development  
• To raise the importance of education and spread awareness amongst the Magars |
| Nepal Tamang Ghedung (www.tamang.ourfamily.com/catalog.htm) Registered 1956, 1992, 1997, 1999 | To function as an autonomous and non-profit making Tamang People’s national organization and carry out development activities for the benefit of the Tamang community | • To preserve, promote the language, scripts, arts, skill, literature, history, religion, culture as well as the socio-eco-political and civil rights of the Tamang people in Nepal  
• To promote human rights, women’s, children’s, and indigenous people's rights on the basis of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Bill of Rights, and emerging rights in the international arena  
• To create awareness about the constitutional and legal systems and promote democratic rights  
• To develop and promote friendly relations and create networks with other ethnic communities to strengthen national unity and the all-round development of the country |
## Table 2: Classification of 59 official Janajatis by NEFIN and NFDIN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Endangered</th>
<th>HighlyMarginalized</th>
<th>Marginalized</th>
<th>Disadvantaged</th>
<th>advantaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mountain (18)</td>
<td>Shiyar (Chumba)</td>
<td>c. 1,000</td>
<td>Bhote (Bhotiya)</td>
<td>c. 2,000</td>
<td>12,973 (0.06%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shingawa (Lhom,</td>
<td>c. 2,000</td>
<td>Dolpo</td>
<td>c. 2,000</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karbi)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Larke (Nurupia)</td>
<td>c. 4,000</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thudam</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lhopa (Mustang)</td>
<td>c. 15,000</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mugali (Mugu)</td>
<td>c. 10-12,000</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Topkegola (Dhokpya)</td>
<td>c. 2,000</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Walung</td>
<td>1,448 (0.01%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankariya</td>
<td>Baramu</td>
<td>7,383 (0.03%)</td>
<td>Bhujel</td>
<td>117,568 (0.52%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hill (24)</td>
<td>Chepang</td>
<td>52,237 (0.23%)</td>
<td>Dura</td>
<td>5,169 (0.02%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thami (Thangmi)</td>
<td>22,999 (0.10%)</td>
<td>Pahari</td>
<td>11,505 (0.06%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phree (Free)</td>
<td>95,254 (0.42%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sunuwar</td>
<td>1,282,304 (5.64%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tamang</td>
<td>1,282,304 (5.64%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chhanjyal</td>
<td>9,814 (0.04%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gurung (Tamu)</td>
<td>543,571 (2.39%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jirel</td>
<td>5,316 (0.02%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Limbu (Yakthung)</td>
<td>359,379 (1.58%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Magar</td>
<td>1,622,421 (7.14%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rai</td>
<td>635,151 (2.79%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yakhcha (Dewan)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yolmo (Helambu)</td>
<td>579 (0.00%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Tarai (7)</td>
<td>Raji</td>
<td>2,399 (0.01%)</td>
<td>Bote</td>
<td>7,969 (0.04%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raute</td>
<td>658 (0.00%)</td>
<td>Danuwar</td>
<td>53,229 (0.23%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,963 (0.02%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Majhi (Bhumat)</td>
<td>72,614 (0.32%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarai (10)</td>
<td>Kisan (Kuntum)</td>
<td>2,876 (0.01%)</td>
<td>Dhimal</td>
<td>19,537 (0.9%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meche (Bodo)</td>
<td>3,763 (0.02%)</td>
<td>Gangai</td>
<td>31,318 (0.14%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,763 (0.02%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rajbansi (Koch)</td>
<td>97,241 (0.43%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,763 (0.02%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Talpuriya</td>
<td>13,250 (0.06%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,763 (0.02%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tharu</td>
<td>1,533,879 (6.72%)</td>
<td>17,003 (0.01%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Adapted from NEFIN (2004) and nefin.org.np.

Note: There are now only five Janajati groups without an organization holding membership of NEFIN: Bankariya, Hayu, Kusunda, Raute, and Phree. Figures and percentages (which are the percentage of the total Nepali population of 22,736,934) come courtesy of Prof. Sant Bahadur Gurung, director of NFDIN until 2006: these follow the 2001 census. Where there is no percentage this means that the group was not a category recognized by the 2001 census; thus the figures are either unknown or are based on an estimate (note that in some cases, e.g. Yolmo, the ethnic label is not widely recognized or accepted in the region, and therefore the figures are much lower than might be expected: thus while only 579 people returned ‘Yolmo’ as their ethnicity, 3,986 recorded that they spoke ‘Yolmo’).
measures to institutionalize reservations. Later that year, when the Maharajgani Teating Hospital reserved six seats for Janajati candidates and all six went to Newars, this was taken by Newar activists to vindicate their campaign to have the Newars included as Janajatis (at last, they said, other Newars who were sceptical would have to accept the wisdom of their inclusion). Non-Newar Janajatis took it quite differently, as evidence of the need to distinguish different categories of Janajati. An ingenious classification of five different categories of the different types of Janajatis was worked out and adopted by NEFIN and NFDIN, as shown in Table 2 (pp. x-xi). The principle was that reserved places should be offered in the first place to the most backward category and only if there were no candidates from the ‘disadvantaged’ group would they be made available to the next most backward category. Perhaps inevitably, there were many Janajati activists who became rather critical of this scheme once the implications of its implementation became clear.

In 2004, a year after Bamdev Gautam and most of his followers had rejoined the UML, the party joined a coalition which provided the ministers for a palace-appointed government led by Sher Bahadur Deuba’s Congress faction. Proposals were then made to reserve 20% of gazetted civil service posts for women, 10% for Janajatis, and 5% for Dalits. These plans were scrapped after Gyanendra’s final takeover in February 2005.

Throughout these years direct involvement in national politics by members of the Janajatis was generally channelled through the major parties, whose offices always attracted larger crowds than those of local branches of the various ethnic associations. Although the central leadership of the two main parties was dominated by Brahmins, party membership at local level tended to broadly reflect the local ethnic population balance and these individuals were linked largely through patronage ties to influential figures at national level. These powerbrokers were often Parbatyas but not invariably so; the percentage of Janajati MPs (30.3% in 1991, 24.8% in 1994, and 26.9% in 1999) was not grossly out of line with their 37.2% share of the total population, and figures such as the Newar Ganesh Man Singh and the Tarai Kayastha Mahendra Nidhi were both influential within the Nepali Congress. The clash between Ganesh Man and Girija Koirala that began in 1991 did have an ethnic aspect to it, with accusations of bahunbad, i.e. ‘brahmanism’ (occasioned by Ganesh Man’s candidates for ambassador posts being ignored), being answered with the charge of ‘Newarism’. But there was no question of Ganesh Man leaving and forming an exclusively Newar party and

In fact the Newar activists tended to support and encouraged people to vote for the UML. Those of Ganesh Man’s former allies who joined the breakaway Congress (Democratic) in 2002 were willing to accept the leadership of the Thakuri Sher Bahadur Deuba, just as Sahara Pradhan and most of the other Newar UML MPs followed the Brahman Bamdev Gautam out of the UML in 1998.

**MAOISM AND ETHNICITY**

Although ethnically based organizations did not bulk large at the centre, at local level ethnic dividing lines were of great importance, particularly where they roughly coincided with class divisions. It was correctly anticipated in the 1990s that demands from local groups would be aggregated by multi-ethnic parties rather than by ethnic or regional parties. Despite the theoretical ban on such parties, they were allowed to operate if their communal basis was not made blatantly obvious, but the Rastriya Janamukti Party never won any seat in parliament whilst the Tarai-based Sadbhavana party, although usually securing representation in coalition governments after 1994, never won more than six seats.

It was not, however, the mainstream parties but the Maoists who were most successful in appealing to ethnic discontent. The concessions made at the centre from 2002 onwards can be partially explained by the success of the Maoists in tapping into ethnic activists’ demands. Grievances amongst the Kham Magars in north-eastern Rolpa and eastern Rukum district played a vital role in building the initial support base from which they launched their ‘People’s War’ in 1996 (de Sales 2003a, Ogura 2007). In contrast to the Magars further to the east, the Kham were less Hinduized and much more likely to have retained their own language rather than switching to Nepali. Because the locally dominant Thakuri elite was directly connected by marriage and descent to the royal family, grievances against them were seen as grievances against the state. This made it much easier for Mohan Bikram Singh, who joined the fledgling Communist Party of Nepal in 1953, and his followers to convert the area into a Leftist stronghold. This support was transferred first to Singh’s Masal grouping, then to the Unity Centre set up by Singh’s erstwhile lieutenants in 1991, and finally, following the Unity Centre’s 1994 split, to the CPN (Maoist). As the Maoists spread their influence beyond their original core area they went on to make skilful use of
other ethnic divides including the Tamang and Tharu cases and also smaller groups such as the Thangmi near Dolakha (Shneiderman & Turin 2004) and also Dalits in the western hills and in the Tarai (especially downtrodden Dalits such as the Musahas and Doms).22

As well as the direct recruitment into the ranks of their core political and military organization, the Maoists also set up, or encouraged the setting up, of a range of affiliated organizations for different groups, such as the Newar Jatiya Mukti Morcha, the Tharuwan Mukti Morcha, the Limbuwan Mukti Morcha, and the Dalit Mukti Morcha (Ogura 2008). Whilst generally kept under the control of the parent party, their quasi-independent status provided a bridge between the Maoists and other ethnic organizations.

The relationship between the CPN (Maoist) and those whose ethnic aspirations they seek to harness is a complex one. In interviews, Prachanda has spoken of admiration for the egalitarianism of traditional Magar society and also (in terms which have reminded many of British colonial discourse on the ‘martial tribes’ of Nepal and India) of their great ‘sincerity’ of character. The Maoists have also argued on notions of blood sacrifice already prevalent among the Magars and among other hill communities to build their cult of martyrdom for the revolution (de Sales 2003a, 2003b; Lecomte-Tilouine 2006). At the same time, however, the Maoists - just like other reforming activists - are in opposition to certain aspects of the traditions of the ethnic groups they have sought to enlist, for example in their rejection of religious belief in general, their hostility to traditional ceremonies and rituals, and their restrictions on the use of alcohol.

Despite such ambiguities, from Mohan Bikram Singh’s time onwards the Maoist Left has laid special stress on ethnic autonomy. The right of ‘self-determination’ for ethnic groups was specifically endorsed by the Unity Centre in 1992 (see p. 61). As their ‘People’s War’ progressed the Maoists claimed to be redeeming this promise with the establishment of a number of autonomous regions, starting with that for the Magars in 2003. In a period of five months they held massive public ceremonies, with audiences marched from villages for days’ walk around, to declare eight of the nine autonomous regions (they were unable to do it with the Newar region based on Kathmandu). The country was thereby divided into nine regions, six of which would be ethnic homelands (for Magars, Kirats, Newars, Tamangs, Gurungs, and Tharus) and three regional (Madhes, Bheri-Kamali, and Seti-Makahali). There remains the question of how genuine any such autonomy was intended to be. Although the

Maoists are more ethnically balanced than many other parties, the most senior leaders, Prachanda himself and Baburam Bhattarai, are Parbatiya Brahmins and in the Tharuwan autonomous region in the Western Tarai the Maoist district commanders have not been non-Tharu. Personal ambition aside, suspicion amongst some of the Janajatis that they are being used by the Maoists without sufficient offered in return seems to lie behind recent tensions, including the breakaway of the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha in 2004 and that by Tharu leader Laxman Chaudhari in spring 2007. The Maoists have encouraged and drawn strength from ethnic revolt, but are finding it impossible to keep control of the result.

DEMOCRACY, CONSTITUTIONALISM, FEDERALISM

Ethnic questions have moved to the centre of the current constitutional debate for several reasons. One of these is, of course, the Maoists’ skilful use of the ethnic card but several other factors have been at work. For a start, general disillusionment with the performance of mainstream parties has probably increased the attractiveness of other bases for political mobilization. Also important has been the cumulative effect of years of work by ethnic activists, strengthened to some extent by their success at tapping into international discourse of ‘indigenous peoples’. The process, as it affected one young Magar in northern Gulmi, who first encountered ethnic activism at a Nepal Magar Sangh meeting in 1993 in the midwestern hills, is described by Lecomte-Tilouine:

Ram Bahadur started to send me stories copied from ethnic journals to help me in my studies, instead of reporting about what he had seen or heard from villagers as he had previously done. He also started to distinguish people on the basis of the form of their nose and became excited by the creation of the Magrant (the Magar autonomous region), which he compared to the Magar ethnic army battalion which, in 1995, he had dreamt of entering.

(Lecomte-Tilouine, forthcoming)

Finally, ethnic activists have benefited from the stand-off between different political forces and the continuing weakness of the state since April 2006. The major parties arguably seem less
important as sources of power and patronage. This has created an atmosphere in which pressure groups of all kinds feel emboldened to force their concerns on the community in general by direct action of various kinds.

At the time of writing (February 2008), the 8-party alliance (the Maoists plus seven parties which had worked within the 1990 constitution) are committed to holding elections for a Constituent Assembly on 10 April 2008 even though elections were twice postponed in 2007. There is general agreement on the need for better representation of the country's diversity and also for decentralization of power. In addition, since wresting power from the monarchy in April 2006 the parties have to some extent pre-empted the decisions of the CA on several points. First, in the same May 2006 resolution which asserted its own supremacy over the king, the restored 1999 parliament declared Nepal a secular state, a move which an April 2007 poll suggested did not represent majority feeling in the country (Hachhethu 2007: 85). Second, the Interim Constitution, promulgated in January 2007, made mother-tongue education something children were entitled to receive from the state. Third, the first amendment to the constitution, enacted in response to widespread protests in the eastern and central Tarai coordinated by the Madhesi Janadhirak Forum, at the beginning of 2007, included a commitment to a federal system. Finally, in December 2007 the third amendment actually declared Nepal a republic though leaving implementation of that decision to the Constituent Assembly.

There was, however, continuing controversy over exactly what system of representation should be adopted for the CA elections as well as for the longer term. The interim constitution originally provided for a dual system, with first-past-the-post elections in geographical constituencies and an equal number of members elected from party lists under a system or proportional representation (PR), with an additional 17 members nominated by the cabinet. The rejection of a purely proportional system (e.g. one with first-past-the-post seats ‘topped up’ to bring a party’s strength in parliament into line with share of the total vote) was presumably based on a calculation by Congress (and probably also the Maoists) that they were likely to win a plurality of votes in their core geographical areas and would therefore benefit from partial retention of the old system. Candidates included on the list are to consist of approximately 31% Madhesis, 11% Dalits, 37.8% for Janajatis, 4% from backward regions (viz. Achham, Kalikot, Jajarkot, Jumla, Dolpa, Bajhang, Bajura, Mugu, and Humla), and 30.2% from all other groups. Despite the increase in number of constituencies from 205 to 240 to bring the Tarai’s representation more into line with its population, the MJF was dissatisfied with the recommendations of the Constituency Delimitation Commission and continued demanding a purely proportional electoral system and a fresh census before the elections. In an atmosphere of uncertainty, where a plethora of groups are using strikes and bandhs to advance their cause, NEFIN had also begun agitating for a fully proportional system and a guarantee that each of the 59 officially recognized Janajati groups, however small, should have at least one member in the CA. After numerous bandhs and meetings, both NEFIN and then the MJF reached compromises with the government. In return for promises of a commitment to a federal system and the granting of the NEFIN demand for one guaranteed seat for each ethnic group, both organisations agreed to accept the 50–50 proportional-first-past-the-post split. However, just before this deal was finalized, the Maoists decided to renege on their own earlier agreement to the 50–50 system. Splinter groups both from the MJF and among the hill ethnic activists took the same line and the MJF and NEFIN leadership also showed signs of second thoughts. Once again the elections, rescheduled in June for 22 November had to be postponed and another chance to “bring closure to the constitutional debate” (Lawoti 2005: 205) was missed. Although the Maoists came back on board with an agreement on a ratio of 60% proportional representation and 40% first-past-the-post and the announcement of an election date of 10 April, calls for 100% proportionality continued among both Maoist and Janajati ranks and were also supported by most leaders of the Madhesi movement, whose ranks were strengthened by the December 2007 desertion of some senior politicians from Congress and other mainstream parties to form the Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party.

There is also the problem of representation within the civil service, security forces, and educational institutions, a major focus of the current Madhesi agitation. Opposition to the principle of reservations for backward groups has now been dropped by all major parties but, despite Mahendra Lawoti's optimism on the issue (Lawoti 2005: 30), it will be difficult to devise formulae that are accepted by all concerned as just and equitable. The argument that positive discrimination merely gives to others the state patronage which enabled elites to become advantaged in the first place is certainly an over-simplification as many minorities have outperformed those around them without any such advantage: obvious examples are Jews in Central Europe, Chinese in South-
Ethnic autonomy might perhaps be better served by devolution to small blocks of villages or, as suggested by political scientist Mahendra Lawoti (2005: 28, 218, 250–1), by a system of ‘non-territorial’ or ‘cultural’ autonomy. In 1991 Janajati activist Parshuram Tamang (see below, p. 61) also appeared to be recommending the cantonal approach. However, now he has recently argued for something more ambitious, taking into account, among other criteria, a group’s historic homeland (adhibumi arthātu purkhaunli bhū-kshetra) (Tamang 2006). Other ethnic groups within the region would be given a guaranteed share in the administration but the titular group would enjoy a ‘right of primacy’ (agraādhikār), with a guaranteed 51% of seats in the regional legislature. Tamang cites the parallel of ethnic autonomous areas in China where the head of an autonomous region is normally a member of the relevant ethnic group even though that group may be a minority in the region, as, for example, in Inner Mongolia whose population is only 11.13% Mongolian.

The ‘self-determination’ (ātmanirṇayargo adhiṣṭhā) envisaged by Tamang and other ethnic activists does not seem to extend to a right to secession, even though that is how the English term is generally understood internationally. Presumably aware of this nuance, Om Gurung, head of the NEFIN team negotiating with the government, claimed in London in March 2007 that while the Maoists wanted ‘self-determination’, NEFIN wanted only ‘internal autonomy’ because granting full self-determination would lead to the disintegration of a country in Nepal’s geo-political situation. In fact, the Maoists themselves, even if they did at one time understand ātmanirṇay as self-determination in the full-blooded sense, appear to be backtracking at the moment (ICG 2007b: 25). The two Janatantrik Tarai Muki Morcha factions, which have both been involved in violence against Pathais in the Tarai as well as against Maoist supporters, are probably the only organizations in Nepal currently envisaging independence for their region and some believe that even this advocacy is really only tactical.

The internal autonomy NEFIN is seeking would nevertheless be extensive, with the federal state governments responsible for all matters except currency, foreign relations, and defence. They would also have full control over natural resources within their territory and would be able to amend central government plans. Despite foreign relations being formally reserved for the centre, the states would have the right to enter into direct relations with foreign donors, with an obligation to notify Kathmandu but not to seek its permission, and would also be able to appoint commercial representatives abroad.

East Asia, Marwaris throughout South Asia, Thakalis and Newars in Nepal, or South and East Asian students within some Western school systems. Nepal’s Brahmans have obviously been beneficiaries of their superior status in the Hindu social hierarchy but also partly owe their success in present-day Nepal to old-established cultural orientations such as the high value they place on formal study. There is no way of determining which factor is more important in the case of a particular Brahman and reservations do therefore involve a degree of unfairness. Directing special provision on the basis of economic backwardness would be more equitable but with ethnic or caste background more easy to establish, a system of reservations on Indian lines will most likely emerge. One can only hope that most Nepalis will accept that reservations are necessary as a means of giving the elites of backward groups an incentive to work within the system.

The reconstruction of the country on federal lines, which has been under public debate for several years, is now enshrined as an objective in the Interim Constitution but is also a fertile ground for disagreement. Decentralization could be achieved by division purely on geographical lines but in the most publicized models, including the Maoist one already outlined, some at least of the units proposed have been ethnic ones. Given the large number of groups and their interspersed settlement patterns, it is virtually impossible to set up extensive ‘homelands’ with any degree of ethnic homogeneity.

A single caste or ethnic group constitutes fifty percent or more of the population in only 15 of Nepal’s present 75 districts: eight districts in the far western hills, six forming a contiguous block, are largely Chetri/Khas; Gurungs predominate in the sparsely populated districts of Mustang and Manang; and there are bare majorities of Tharus in the two adjoining Tarai districts of Kailali and Bardiya, Tamangs in Rasuwa, Magars in Palpa, and Newars in Bhadrapur (see map, p. xx). While the Maoists’ proposed Bheri-Karnali and Seti-Mahakali regions would have an overwhelming Chetri/Bahun majority, the population of titular peoples in their different ethnic homelands would range between a maximum of 48% Rai and Limbu in the Kirat Autonomous Region and only 23.8% Gurung in the Tamuwan Autonomous Region. The problem could be lessened by reducing the size of the homelands but that would leave large numbers of the group concerned outside the boundaries. Ignoring existing district boundaries and using VDCs as the building block would also reduce, but not eliminate the problem.
Proposals for ethnic states on these lines face very considerable difficulties. In the first place, granting ‘primacy’ within a state to an ethnic group whose members actually form a minority within the population could be a recipe for conflict. Tamang’s invocation of China ignores the fact that in the PRC the real power lies with the Communist Party hierarchy rather than the formal organs of government and party leaders in autonomous regions are generally Han Chinese. Within the multi-party framework that all political parties claim now to support, the system would only be workable if the ‘primacy’ were purely ceremonial and actual positions of power distributed by an electoral system that gave equal weight to all voters, whatever their ethnicity. Remarkably, resource, subsidy, and income issues have received very little discussion. Given the fact that many regions inhabited by large numbers of ethnic populations are remote and are subsidized by the state, the economic base of such plans remains to be clarified. This will be all the more important as for instance mother-tongue education would require additional funds. Obviously, the Tarai as well as some Himalayan regions deriving income from tourism are in a different position than most of the other parts of Nepal.

Even without legal privileges for a particular ethnic group, agreement may also be hard to obtain on the number of units and their boundaries, especially if claims are to be allowed on the basis of historic homelands as well as the actual present-day pattern of settlement. The homeland claimed by the Chepang Sangh, for example, falls within the area claimed by the Tamangs, whilst some Limbus are demanding a state of their own rather than inclusion in the Maoists’ proposed Kiranta Autonomous Region (Dixit & Pun Magar 2006: 36, 38). The problem is already fuelling conflict in the Tarai where the creation of a single Madhes district is demanded by the caste Hindus of the eastern and central sections but rejected by many Tharus in the west. Although division of the Tarai into western and eastern sections was actually originally proposed by the Sadbhavana Party, a high-caste-dominated Tarai regionalist party, the Maoist commitment to separate Tharuwan and Madhes Autonomous regions was one reason for the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha breakaway from the Maoist-affiliated Tarai Mukti Morcha in 2004. The issue also appears an embarrassment for the Maoists’ most prominent Madhesi leader, Matrika Prasad Yadav, who has recently been arguing that there should be a two-tier system of autonomous sub-regions within an autonomous Tarai. Both within the NEFIN and Maoist ranks there is now talk of dividing the region from east
recent years, however, this process has to some extent been reversed by the need to compete for special treatment under India’s Scheduled Tribes system (Shneiderman & Turin 2006). Is this the direction which should be paralleled in Nepal itself or is the real need for building a common ‘Nepaliness’ rather than focusing increasingly on caste and ethnicity?

NOTES

1. See Bhattachan (1998); also the reply by Gellner (2001). In this new introduction we can only indicate a part of all the new work that has been done on Nepal since 1997. In particular, there is no space to attempt to cover systematically what has been written in Nepali: see Gurung (2006) for a bibliography on Janajati issues, and also various anthologies of media articles, edited by Onta and others, in the Chautari series (see martinchautari.org.np). Of the English-language authors cited here, Chalmers, Hofstun et al., Hutt, Lawoff, Lecomte-Tilouine, and Whelpston all make use of Nepali-language sources and their bibliographies should also be consulted.


3. On Tarai Dalits there is no substantial ethnographic work. Even in the hills, there is nothing of monograph length and depth on Dalits, with the honourable exceptions of Caplan (1972) and Cameron (1998). On the Muslims, there is likewise nothing on the Tarai, but for hill Muslims, see Gaborieau (1977, 1993), and for summaries in English, Gaborieau (1972, 1978).

4. This situation is reflected in the current 25% Janajati share of central committee membership in the RPP, a party set up by former Panchas. Khagendra Jang Gurung and Bhadra Kumari Ghale, two of the founders of the Janajati Party in 1990, had been ministers in the Panchayat period, whilst another founding member, the Limbu writer Rajman Kandangwa, had served as a zonal commissioner. Some critics have alleged that they entered ethnic politics at palace bidding in an attempt to destabilize the new political order but they had probably seen themselves (and been regarded by the palace) as Janajati representatives in their early days also.

5. Muslim activists, who had been planning to participate, were persuaded by the Palace to abstain.

to west into five units: Kochila Pradesh, Mithila Pradesh, Bhojpur Pradesh, Awadh Pradesh, and Tharuwan Pradesh (Pradhan 2006; Tamang 2006). On top of this, there is the demand for a separate state by the Chure-Bhawar Pradesh Ekta Samaj, a group claiming to represent the Pahadi settlers concentrated near the East-West Highway. How are these claims to be reconciled?

The Constituent Assembly’s task will be to find solutions to all these questions acceptable to two-third majorities of its members and to do so within two years. Everyone must hope that the result will be a system that allows Nepal to deal more effectively with the challenge of its immense ethnic diversity but the study of that diversity, and of ethnic relations elsewhere suggests that the CA is no ‘magic bullet’ that will resolve all the ethnic and other tensions. The holding of a constituent assembly in India and the application of the twin remedies of federalism and affirmative action have arguably helped India to hold together despite the many strains on its social and political system. They have not, however, quelled discontent in India’s north-east, an area with many problems similar to those in Nepal. And the achievement of inclusion of lower-caste leaders in governments in northern India over the last thirty years has been a long, slow, and democratic process, but it has by no means regularly or even often delivered good governance.

Perhaps the most important truth for constitution builders to bear in mind is that ethnicity and ethnic boundaries were often consciously created,38 have been deliberately maintained, developed, and contested, and have changed over time. The extent to which political decisions taken at any one time affect this process can be exaggerated – too many authors, for example, write as if a rigid caste system was suddenly created for the Kathmandu Valley by Jayasthiti Mall’s reforms in the 14th century and for the country as a whole by Jang Bahadur Rana’s Muluki Ain in 1854. Obviously government action does have an effect. The question remains how far anchoring citizens’ rights around their ethnic or caste status will strengthen and rigidify the boundaries between groups.39

In his Mahesh Regmi Memorial Lecture delivered in Kathmandu in 2003, the late Harka Gurung, one of the contributors to this volume, hailed the emergence in Darjeeling of a true Nepalese nationalism untrammelled by caste hierarchy.40 One feature of Darjeeling society has been the extent of inter-caste and inter-ethnic marriage (a recent informal survey found 3 out of 4 couples with different ethnic backgrounds) and also an emphasis on a common, pan-Nepalese (or pan-Gorkha) identity within Indian society. In
Scepticism about the extent of support among ordinary Janajatis for the campaigns on such issues continues to be expressed, but the surge in numbers reporting 'Magar' as their home language after an appeal by the Nepal Magar Sangh in 2001 for Magars to do this (Leconte-Tilouine 2003b) suggests there was already some interest in the issue.

Thus the Indigenous Nationalities Declaration of 21 August 2006 referred to "the fact that the Nepalese people and especially the Indigenous Nationalities communities, displaced in the past from their own self-rule and humiliated, exploited, suppressed and oppressed ethnically, religiously, linguistically, culturally as well as psychologically by the 238-year old feudal, centralized and unitary Hindu monarchal state, and the struggle they have been carrying out in an organized and unorganized way for a long time has attained partial success" and insisted that there must be full proportional participation of indigenous people in the state and restructuring of the state in line with regional national autonomy with self-determination (i.e. some form of ethnic federalism).

Judging by the documents published later by Mukunda Regmi, a Congress nominee on the drafting commission, there was no debate on whether such a section was required but only over whether there should be a time limit to such reservations if they were introduced (Regmi 2004 I: 519–20).

Though political scientist Chitra Tiwari argued for PR, both mainstream politicians and most academics seemed uninterested at this time (Whelpton 1993: 49).

On all these points the Interim Constitution of January 2007 was as radical a break with the past as the 1990 Constitution itself had been: in addition to having the right to preserve their languages, minority communities were now given the right to receive primary education in the mother tongue (implying that the state would fund it); reservations were guaranteed; and neither Hinduism nor monarchy were mentioned, thus removing all special status from both.

On the drafting of the 1990 constitution see Hachhethu (1994), Hutt (1993), and Hofstun et al. (1999).

See Hutt (2006) for a discussion of newspaper production under conditions of censorship in Nepal. A substantial body of work on the role of the media, and particularly on radio before and after 1990, has been produced by Pratyush Ota and colleagues associated with the Martin Chautari in Kathmandu. See the publications listed at martinchautari.org.np, especially Ota et al. (2004), Ota (2006), and Humagain et al. (2006, 2007).

The Education Ministry formally requested Finnish technical assistance with the programme in December 2004 (see formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=82665&nodeid=15317&contentlan=2&culture=en-US, consulted 13/6/07). Bennett (2005: 33) noted a pilot project in five schools. The emphasis in development-oriented reports was on transitional bilingualism rather than the maintenance of a 'heritage' language for its own sake.

See Gellner & Karki (2007) for an attempt to chart the growth of all types of activism in the 1990s.

There is also the difficult question, not so far publicly raised, whether all Janajati groups are equally entitled to be called 'indigenous'. Some of the smaller and most marginalized groups, with a greater investment in and history of a hunter-gatherer mode of livelihood, might well argue that, by international standards, only they should have the special rights widely claimed by indigenous peoples.

For a preliminary attempt to describe the internal governance of ethnic organizations, see Gellner & Karki (2008).

When asked by Whelpton in 1992 whether he intended to introduce reservations on Indian lines, Girija Koirala replied, "We're not going to make that mistake" (interview, 10/8/1992).


When, in the 1994 general elections, the UML made a clean sweep of the Kathmandu seats, Ganesh Man is reported to have remarked, "We were defeated by language activists and religious activists (bhesanu ra dharmaoista)."

The Mongol National Organisation, which, unlike the RJP, did not even receive official recognition, has, had some modest success at local government level in eastern Nepal (see Hangen 1999, 2007a, 2007b).

For detailed discussion of this issue see references in note 2, plus Thapa (2003) and Gersony (2003).

In targeting Dalits they were imitating the strategy often followed by Naxalite groups in Bihar.


However, the Maoists' main reason for accepting the compromise may have been as a trade-off for Congress support for their receiving parity of seats in the interim legislature with the UML (Pun Magar 2007b: 31).

These percentages sum to 114%, because of the overlap in some categories; for example, Tharus could be regarded both as Madhesis (though they themselves often reject the label) or as Janajatis; similar a female Janajati could be counted in both categories.

The agreement was part of a compromise under which the Maoists were granted their demand for Nepal to be immediately declared a republic.

Lawoti (2005: 188) credits Govinda Neupane (2000) and Nilamshikhar Adhikari (2000) with starting serious discussion of ethnically based federalism and also notes the advocacy of purely regional federalism by Nepali Congress politician Narahari Acharya (2000). It is arguable, however, that the Sadbhavana party's long-standing advocacy of regionalism amounted to a federal agenda and Bir Nemweng, founder of the Limbuwan Mukti Morcha (and afterwards a collaborator with King Gyanendra's direct rule), called for a Limbuwan state within a federal structure as early as 1990 (Krämer 1996: 273).
On problems deriving from individual ‘democratic designs’, see Pfaff-Czarnecka (2005).


Figures for homeland population from Baral (2007). Those for districts are based on the 1991 census. For more on this problem, see now Rimal (2007) and Sharma (2008).

For a useful discussion of the Swiss case, which brings out the fact that minorities have no special protection there, see Wimmer (2002: chapter 8).

In subsequent conversation with Whelpton, Tamang appeared to backtrack slightly on these published proposals, stressing that details remained to be thought out and that in particular he had not yet decided whether the titular group should be automatically entitled to 51% of seats in the legislature or only to the posts of chairman and vice-chairman. (Interview, Kathmandu 6/8/2007).

Pun Magar (2006) claims the formula आमनिर्मायको अधकारस्थित जातिया राज्यā was first used by Bir Nemwang Nemwang was also careful to deny secessionist intentions, though he was sometimes accused of this by his opponents. Similarly, today, Madhesi Janadhikar Forum leader Upendra Yadav (quoted in Dixit & Pun Magar 2006: 38) argues that आमनिर्मायको अधकारस्थित जातिया राज्य should involve only internal autonomy and not a right of secession, because the latter would invite foreign interference. However, Mahendra Lawoti (2007) has argued that groups are morally entitled to a right of secession but that this would remain only an abstract possibility as no group in Nepal has launched a secessionist movement.


This is almost certainly so for the Jwala Singh faction of the JTM and even Goit, though apparently more uncompromising on the issue, probably realizes that independence cannot be an immediate goal (ICG 2007a: 10, 21).

Tan Leshan (himself a member of the Dai minority) writes: “In China’s power structure, the People’s Political Consultative Conference (PPCC), the People’s Congress, the People’s Government, and the CPP Standing Committee are supposed to have equal political status. Yet they are actually arranged in a hierarchy, with political power residing firstly with the Party, then, descendingly, the Government, People’s Congress, and PPCC. In what is to some extent a cosmetic measure, ethnic minority cadre in autonomous areas can serve as governor, head of the Congress or chairman of the PPCC, but few achieve the rank of first secretary of the CCP Committee. In Xishuangbanna, the Party secretary has never been a Dai. Former governor Zhao Cunxin, who has been a Party member since 1957, is not even a member of the Party’s standing committee in Xishuangbanna” (Tan 2000).

This applies also to areas in the far west not inhabited by large proportions of Janajatis. See Pfaff-Czarnecka (2008) for a discussion of the ways in which local politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen establish ‘distributional coalitions’ in order to skim off the subsidized goods provided by the state to such deficit areas.

But see Chapter 10 below, by N.J. Allen, which stresses how unconscious the process of Hinduization and the building up of its associated caste boundaries could be in some circumstances.

Gellner (2001b) argues that the current emphasis on group rights can be interpreted as a return to certain aspects of the caste-based traditional system after an interlude focusing on individual rights as Nepalese citizens.

On the evolution of Nepalese identity in the Darjeeling area, see Subba (1992), Onta (1999), Chalmers (2003), and, for brief summaries, Hutt (this volume) and Whelpton (2005: 80–1).

REFERENCES


Dixit, Kanak Mani & J.B. Pun Magar. 2006. ‘Jatiya Rajyama Prashnanchina’ (Question Mark over Ethnic States), Himal Khabarpatrika, 1 September, pp. 34–39.


Preface

This book had its origins in a one-day conference and an associated eight-week seminar series on culture, politics, and identity in the Himalayan region, held in the autumn of 1992 at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology (ISCA), University of Oxford. The papers by Whelpton, Burkert, McDonagh, and Gaenszle were commissioned afterwards in order to fill obvious gaps in a collection which we had decided would focus on Nepal. Prayag Raj Sharma and Harka Gurung were invited to provide Nepalese and on-the-spot perspectives as part of the concluding section of the book.

We thank ISCA for its support. We would also like to thank Charles Ramble for his help and diplomacy in Kathmandu, as well as for advice on all things Tibetan. Anil Sakya lent a hand with diacritics in a mammoth session preparing the final manuscript. Except where authors have explicitly stated that they follow for the system of Turner (1980), it has been attempted, as far as possible, to adopt the spellings of the Royal Nepal Academy's Nepāl Bhút Satabakoś (1983). We are grateful to Harka Gurung for supplying the computerized maps (Figures 1 and 48) and to Marcus Banks and his Mac for help in reading them.

The matters dealt with in this book are inevitably controversial and extremely serious for Nepalis themselves. It should be borne in mind that to describe events and movements does not in any sense indicate approval or support for any specific political position. As foreign academics our job is simply to provide a record and analysis. It is for the Nepali people themselves to determine their own political destiny.

The editors