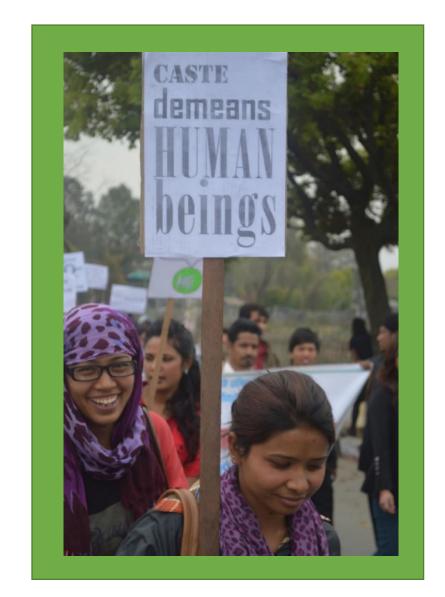# From being 'Untouchable' to being 'Dalit'

## A Minority's Boundary Shifting Strategy in Nepal

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*"I always say: We are all Dalits in Nepal, because discrimination between non-Dalit groups exists, as well."*

- Suman Poudel[1]

Picture on the front page:

A Dalit student participating in a rally for the elimination of cast-based discrimination and untouchability, organised by the Dalit civil society, on occasion of 21st March 2014, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The picture was taken by the author.

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[1] Author's interview with Suman Poudel, Executive Director of DNF, on 27 May 2014

*Dedicated to the people of Nepal:*

*That they may free themselves from the tight grip untouchability has on their lives.*

# Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to all the interviewees that gave me their precious time and shared their views and ideas with me. Without the support of these persons, this thesis would not have been possible.

Further, I cannot express the indebtedness I feel in regard to my dear colleagues at DNF. Many thanks to Suman, who had the patience for a second interview after I lost the recording of the original one and who assisted me in all phases of realising this thesis. Many thanks to Hasta and his inexhaustibleness to translate interviews and to drive me to the most hidden interview locations. Many thanks to the rest of my colleagues. Dhanyabad!

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# Abbreviations

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|---|---|
| **CA** | Constituent Assembly |
| **CPA** | Comprehensive Peace Agreement |
| **CPN** | Communist Party of Nepal |
| **DNF** | Dalit NGO Federation |
| **DWO** | Dalit Welfare Organisation |
| **FEDO** | Feminist Dalit Organisation |
| **ICERD** | International Covenent on the Elimination of All Forms of Racia Discrimination |
| **ICG** | International Crisis Group |
| **IDSN** | International Dalit Solidarity Network |
| **IIDS** | Indian Institute for Dalit Studies |
| **NEFEN** | Nepal Federation of Nationalities |
| **NFDIN** | National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **NDC** | National Dalit Commission |
| **PDRC** | Professional Research and Development Centre |
| **SPD** | Socialist Democratic Party |
| **UNESCO** | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| **UCPN** | Unified Communist Party of Nepal |

# Chapter 1

# Introduction

"Names are symbols. Each name represents associations of certain ideas and notions about a certain object. It is a label. From the label people know what it is. People must go by the name that is why all advertisers are keen in finding a good name."[2]

B. R. Ambedkar

Dalits of Nepal had been given many names, such as *paninachalne* ('water polluting'), *acchut*, ('untouchable'), *paune* ('three-quarter man') *doom* and *tallo jat* (both 'low castes'). These labels transcend the expression of 'negative connotation', since they are strikingly derogatory. Moreover, they refer to the position of certain occupational sub-castes at the bottom of the Hindu caste system that was legally ascribed to those groups by the *Muluki Ain* (Civil Code) of 1854. The elite used these negative terms to exercise social control and disempower these caste groups by manipulating their identity. Rather than merely affecting the self-perception, a negative label can also change the perception other people have about the categorized person. Thus, verbal violence can have real-life consequences (Retzlaff 2005:610). In the context of the Nepalese 'untouchables', it was accompanied by the practice of untouchability.

After 1963, when the caste system was formally abolished, the government and non-governmental organisations alike used alternative labels, including *uppechhit* ('ignored'), *utpidit* ('oppressed') or *garip* ('poor'), referring to the socio-economic and political condition of formerly so-called 'untouchables'. These non-derogatory names were, however, very vague and could easily be applied to other castes and ethnic groups of Nepal. In contrast, the term Dalit specifically refers to individuals that are treated as the so-called 'water polluting' caste groups. It was first introduced to Nepal in early 1956 by India's most famous 'untouchable', Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, and therefore, originates from India

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[2] This quotation was also used in the introduction of another article (see Ambedkar 1989:419 in Paik 2011:217).

where it emerged as a self-definitional concept of the so-called 'lower' castes' political struggle (Cameron 2007:16).

In contemporary Nepal, the term is widely disseminated and used in the NGO sector to facilitate horizontal solidarities and cooperation among 'low' caste organisations. It is also recognized as a legal category in provisions of the government, the Interim Constitution of 2007 being the most prominent one. However, due to the term's literal meaning 'downtrodden' and 'broken', its appropriateness and ability to counter hegemonic structures of oppression is contested among activists of the former 'untouchable' category, which has been addressed by a series of articles in the *Himalaya* journal (Cameron 2007; Folmar 2007; and Kharel 2007).

Therefore, it is acknowledged that different actors choose different approaches to emancipate themselves from state-imposed names or labels, or as Wimmer states, "different actors will pursue different strategies of boundary [shifting]" (2008:986) and Dalitness[3] is merely one of those strategies of former 'untouchables'. What makes Dalitness interesting, however, is that the boundary shifting strategy of actors belonging to a marginalized group was able to enter the dominant political discourse. In Wimmer's multilevel process theory, the notion of 'boundary' refers to the demarcation between ethnic groups. Those boundaries are not 'fixed', they can be shifted which is at the centre of Wimmer's argumentation.


## Research Question and Significance of the Research

It is exactly that shift, from being 'untouchable' to being 'Dalit', which is the focus of this thesis. The central question that is attempted to be answered is the following:

*Given that Dalits belong to a marginalized group that had been stigmatized as 'untouchable' in the past, how are actors within the Dalit movement shifting their boundaries in contemporary Nepal?*

This paper will attempt to answer this question through the following four sub-questions:

*1) What are the historical settings in which the 'untouchable' category was constructed?*

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[3] The term Dalitness is not an acknowledged word from the Dalit movement. It was coined by the author in reference to the boundary formation strategy of Dalits as well as Dalit identity.

2) *Under which conditions did/does the Dalit movement pursue its counterdiscourse?*

3) *Which boundary making strategy is used by the Dalit movement and what is the role of identity therein?*

4) *How are the boundaries negotiated, regarding inclusion into and exclusion from the Dalit category and who has the power to define?*

The research question as well as the operationalizing questions use the terminology of Wimmer's multilevel process theory, which is situated in the broader academic debate of social constructivism. His model will be the main theoretical framework for this thesis. Research on this question is important, because it sheds light on the boundary shifting strategy of a marginalised group and the conditions, under which the Dalits pursue their counterdiscourse. This is also a crucial question that is highlighted by Wimmer, although he focusses predominantly on the boundary shifting strategies of elites in the institutional setting of the nation state. Thus, the first objective of this research is to test the applicability of Wimmer's multilevel process theory on the boundary shifting strategy of a marginalised group.

The second objective is interrelated with the first one. Wimmer identifies power as one of the three social forces that determine which actor chooses which strategy. In the context of marginalized groups, the field characteristic of power is especially relevant and interesting due to the very fact that they are marginalized. Thus, the role of power in the negotiation processes of Dalitness will be emphasised. Moreover, it will be argued that the importance of power is most evident at the margins of Dalitness where inclusion and exclusion is contested. This is a great deviation from Wimmer's theory, in which the assumption is made that political networks determine the location of the boundary.

The third and last objective of this paper is the expansion of Wimmer's multilevel process theory with the concepts of identity politics and discourse. Although, Wimmer addresses the role of identity and discourses, it is argued that the addition of those concepts and ideas are necessary to comprehend the boundary shifting strategy of Nepalese Dalits. This will be explained in the following chapter, which focusses on the theoretical framework in more detail.

In a nutshell, this thesis aims at contributing to the social constructivist theory in understanding the negotiation processes of a marginalised group, the Dalits, to shift their

boundaries and the importance of power therein by expanding the theory with concepts of identity politics and discourse.

## Methodology

As Wimmer (2008:977) points out himself: "The framework outlined in later sections will identify these social forces—institutions, power, and networks—that are most likely to produce such effects of "structuration," to borrow Anthony Gidden's term." Thus, the multilevel process theory regards the 'structure' that manifests itself in institutions and discourses, and 'agency' that depicts the social practices of people (re)producing the rules, as mutually constitutive entities. As a consequence of using this theory, two different areas of qualitative inquiry are dictated.

The first area is the institutional framework in which the boundary making of Dalits unfolds. This will mainly be addressed in the third and fourth chapter that are attempting to answer the first and second sub-question respectively. In order to produce knowledge for these chapters, the data collection method is based on literature research that included academic literature on the genealogy of ethnicity and political transformations in Nepal. In addition, reports of non-governmental organisations on the rights of Dalits and contemporary Nepalese politics were consulted.

The second area of qualitative inquiry concerns the identification of the boundary shifting strategy of Dalits, the role of Dalit identity and the ways in which in-groups and out-groups are determined. This will be addressed in the fifth and sixth chapter that attempts to answer the third and fourth sub-question respectively. The data collection methods of literature research, field observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews are combined to produce knowledge for this part of the thesis. The sources for the literature research include academic literature on Dalit identity, articles of national newspapers and NGO reports. These articles and reports from different years document the transformation of the Dalit sub-caste list of the National Dalit Commission, demonstrating the ongoing negotiation process on Dalit inclusion.

Since I conducted a three-month internship at the Dalit NGO Federation, an umbrella organisation for Dalit NGOs in Nepal, and participated in various programmes, organised

by the Dalit civil society, field observations and unstructured conversations were another method of data collecting. Although, the results are less prevalent in the written paper, they provided first insights on the complexity of Dalitness and served as a preparation for the interviews.

Conducting semi-structured interviews was essential to obtain the data that literature research and field observations are not able to provide. In order to gain insights in identity issues and the boundary formation strategy used by Dalit actors, several representatives from Dalit NGOs, Dalit members of political parties and Dalit activists had been interviewed. The interviewees included Padam Sundas, president of the Samata Foundation and affiliated with the CPN (Maoist), Suman Poudel, executive director of DNF, Kamala Hemchuri, president of the PDRC and affiliated with the Social Democratic Party, J B Bishwokarma, independent researcher and employee at UNESCO, Durga Sob, the founder and president of FEDO, Amar Bahadur Bishwokarma, independent researcher, and Dil Bahadur Nepali, affiliated with the Federal Socialist Party and member of the constituent assembly. For counter-balance, Sambhu Rasali, the founder of the People's Development Party, had been interviewed, who is opposing the use of the Dalit term. All of them belong to different sub-castes that had been scheduled as Dalits by the NDC.

Another group of people was interviewed in order to gain insights into the ways that in-groups and out-groups are defined and determined. First of all, I conducted an in-depth interview with two board members of the NDC, Rukmaya Ranopal and Dan Bahadur Bishwokarma to identify the criteria for including sub-castes into the Dalit list. Furthermore, Nirmal Deula and Baburatna Deula who are politicians, affiliated with the Dalit sister wing of the UCPN (Maoist), Prakash Nepali, a retiree and Deula activist, and Maila Babu Deula, who is affiliated with the Deula society, the Newāh De Dabū and the National Federation for the Development of National Identities, had been interviewed to gain insights into the reasons behind the internal disagreement within the Newar sub-castes, especially the Pode caste group, regarding Dalit membership.

The above description of research methods demonstrates that I take an interpretative stance in terms of epistemology. At this point, it is important to note, however, that two interviews from the first group and all interviews from the last group had been conducted with the help of a translator, Hasta Sunar, who is one of the programme officers at DNF. Although,

Hasta might not be neutral or unbiased towards the discussed topic, he did not seem to have a strong conviction on the issues that were discussed during the interviews. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that a substantial amount of interview material had been lost due to technical problems. As a logical consequence, merely the transcribed interviews can be obtained for reference.

## Structure of the Thesis

The previous account has already mentioned certain aspects of Wimmer's multilevel process theory. In the second chapter, which is devoted to the "Theoretical Framework" of this thesis, the comprehensive theory of Wimmer will be addressed in great detail and the concepts of 'identity politics' and 'discursive continuities' are presented as additional ideas to Wimmer's theory. The third chapter "A Genealogy of the Caste System and the Construction of the 'Untouchable'" addresses the origins of the caste system and the way in which untouchability became a social practice in Nepal. In the following chapter "Structural Transformations and the Dalit Struggle", another historical account is presented that focuses on the structural transformations in which the Dalit movement was able to pursue its counterdiscourse. The fifth chapter "Dalitness" discussed Dalit identity politics in relation to self-identification as Dalit and the boundary shifting strategy of Dalits. In the sixth chapter "Negotiating Boundaries and Contesting Inclusion and Exclusion", the role of the NDC in identifying Dalit sub-castes as well as the contestation that results from certain decisions of the NDC are addressed. In the "Conclusion", the empirical findings will be summarized and linked to the theoretical framework.

# Chapter 2
# Theoretical Framework

In this paper, Wimmer's multilevel process theory is used as the theoretical framework to understand Dalitness as boundary shifting strategy and counterdiscourse at the same time. Since this theory is very comprehensive and complex, the following merely presents the essence of Wimmer's proposed model and highlights the aspects that will be important for the topic of this thesis. Moreover, the concept of identity politics and discourse are suggested to be complementary to the main framework and will be defined, as well.

## Wimmer's Multilevel Process Theory

In his article 'The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries – A Multilevel Process Theory', Wimmers touches upon the debate on constructivism versus primordialism, emphasising the importance of going beyond constructivist thought. For this purpose, Wimmer has developed a multilevel process theory in which he explains the varying features of ethnic boundaries as the result of the negotiations between actors whose strategies are shaped by the characteristics of the social field (2008:970). He describes the concept 'boundary' as having both, a categorical and a social or behavioural dimension. The former refers to acts of social classification or collective representation, while the latter depicts everyday networks of relationships that result from individual acts of connecting and distancing (2008:975).

The first strategies identified by Wimmer to shift such ethnic boundaries is expansion, a strategic move of actors for the unification of different ethnic groups into an overarching one. Contraction is the opposed strategy, which defines the narrowing of boundaries. In contrast to the previously mentioned boundary shifting strategies, inversion does not target the location of the boundary, but the hierarchical ordering of ethnic groups, also called transvaluation ('*Umwertung der Werte*'). According to Wimmer (2008:1007), Dalits have

adopted this strategy by using the discourse of "indigenousness". However, this statement will be challenged in this thesis. Repositioning is another strategy that is used by individuals who attempt to reposition themselves in another ethnic group. Wimmer also identifies the strategy of blurring boundaries which is adopted by antinationalist movements in order to overcome ethnicity as such (2008:986-989).

The selection of strategies is, however, constrained by certain social settings, including the characteristics of institutional order, distribution of power, and political networks, in which the actors are positioned (2008:993). Institutions form the historical context, in which the formation of boundaries takes place. In his article, he puts emphasis on the institutional characteristics of the nation-state. The second social setting that influence the process of boundary making is power which has a twofold effect. On the one hand, the actor prefers the level of ethnic differentiation that is perceived to further his or her interest. On the other hand, the endowment with power is not only relevant for the strategy, but also influences how consequential this will be for others.

At this point, Wimmer introduces the term *counterdiscourse* which is especially relevant for this research. He states that a counterdiscourse might be developed by subordinates, dividing the social world in other groups than previously propagated by dominant actors and he poses the question, which this research attempts to answer in the context of so-called 'untouchable' actors of Nepal: Under which conditions do subordinate actors pursue counterstrategies? However, while the institutional frameworks and power differentials explain if and what strategies of boundary making actors will chose, Wimmer argues that the reach of political networks define the location of the boundary (Wimmer, 2008:995). While the first and the second characteristic of the social setting are crucial benchmarks for the analysis, presented in this thesis, the third characteristics seems less applicable which will be explained below.

The previous section has shown that different actors will pursue different strategies, depending on their position in the social hierarchy and their political networks. The newly defined ethnic classification, however, also depends on the negotiation process between different actors. At this point, Wimmers introduces the concept of cultural compromise, defining a consensus between individuals and groups that can occur if interests overlap at least partially. Therefore, Wimmer puts emphasis on the existence of alliances between

different actors in a society in order to shift ethnic boundaries (2008:1000), an idea that had been introduced earlier by Kalyvas (2003). Wimmer also acknowledges the role of identity in the process of boundary formation.

Wimmers identifies social closure, political salience, cultural differentiation and the degree of equality as boundary features that shape the nature of the boundary. Where boundaries are politically salient, where degrees of closure and hierarchization are high, when cultural differentiation has produced an empirical landscape with clearly demarcated territories of cultural similarities, classification ambiguity and complexity will be low and allow for less individual choice. In short, the boundaries will change less easily.

In the last part of this multilevel process theory, Wimmer addresses the dynamics of change that can affect ethnic boundaries. First, the exogenous shift includes institutional structures, power relations and political alliances that may change. In addition, the involvement of international actors can affect processes of boundary making. Second, Wimmer identifies an endogenous shift, stating that boundaries may change due to the cumulative consequences, pursued by various actors. If political movements are successful, they may not only manage to shift the consensus over the location and the meaning of a boundary, but also destabilize and denaturalize the existing hierarchies of power, institutional structures and political alliances. Finally, Wimmer identifies an exogenous drift, where innovative actors adopt new strategies that were not included in the original repertoire.

## Identity Politics

Wimmer's comprehensive theory is a great tool to gain insights into the boundary shifting strategies of dominant actors. It is, however, argued that the theory is less intended to analyse the strategies of marginalized groups, since he focusses to a great extent on strategies of the elite to shift their boundaries in the context of the nation state. While Nepal is also a nation state, it is not the most relevant institutional order in which the boundary shifting of Dalits unfolds. Rather, it is the concept of identity politics. Although, Wimmer addresses the role of identity, it is insufficient to understand the importance of identity

politics for the negotiation processes regarding Dalit memberships. A definition of this concept is provided in the subsequent text.

Politics of identity refer to political arguments that focus upon the perspectives or self-interest of social minorities or self-identified social interest groups. The advocates of such groups will often have a self-belief or explanatory narrative that they are marginalized. Generally, those group identities are defined in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, gender or sexual orientation. Identity politics starts from the analyses of oppression, followed by the recommendation to reclaim, re-describe, or transform previously stigmatized accounts of group membership, instead of accepting the negative scripts offered by a dominant culture about one's own inferiority by transforming one's own sense of self and community, often through consciousness-raising.

Identity politics has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice among members of a certain social group. Rather than being merely organised around programmatic manifestos, belief systems, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant oppressive characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination (Heyes, 2007). This is very similar to the theory of contentious politics that describes the use of disruptive techniques by social movements. Addressing this theory in detail, however, would exceed the scope of this thesis.

## Discourse

Although, Wimmer refers to the term 'counterdiscourse' related to the boundary shifting strategies of subordinates, the concept of discourse seems to play a rather minor role in this model. It is, however, argued that this concept is important for this research topic. Especially, when it comes to the ways discourse was used by hegemonic groups in Nepal to shape the rules of social life which continue to be consequential for Dalits to date.

This thesis uses the definition of discourse that was given by Vivienne Jabri (1996:94-5):

Discourses are social relations represented in texts where the language contained within these texts is used to construct meaning and representation [...]. The underlying assumption of discourse analysis is that social texts do not merely *reflect* or *mirror* objects, events and categories pre-existing in the social and natural world. Rather, they actively *construct* a version of those things. They do not describe things, *they do things*. And being active they have social and political implications.

Thus, discourse is not merely words, it is action. The implications of the above citation will be illustrated in the following chapter that addresses the construction of the 'untouchable' and its continued consequences for a substantial part of the Nepalese population.

# A Genealogy of the Caste System and the Construction of the 'Untouchable'

Prior to analysing the boundary shifting strategies of actors belonging to the former 'untouchable' caste, this chapter discusses a part of Nepal's history with a twofold aim. Firstly, it is attempted, based on the scarce and often contradictory literature on the topic, to outline the genealogy of the Nepalese caste system. This is a crucial aspect of the research puzzle, since comprehending the counterdiscourse, according to Wimmer's terminology, of former 'untouchables' demands the understanding of the discourse used by dominant actors who created the 'untouchable' category in the first place. The second aim of this chapter is equally difficult, as an effort is being made to map, in a simplified way, the extremely complex caste system. This is characterised by the overlapping of multiple ethnicities, religions and castes that continues to be a dominant feature of the social rules in Nepal. Besides, special attention is given to the Newar community and the caste system within this ethnicity for reasons that are being discussed in later chapters.

## Hinduization

Nepal is a nation of tremendous ethnic and caste diversity, where people practice a variety of religions and many different dialects and languages are spoken. According to the National Population and Housing Census of 2011, 126 distinct castes or ethnic groups[4] can be found in the country and 123 languages are spoken while Nepali is used as first language by approximately 45 percent[5]. Furthermore, ten different religions were found to be

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[4] There is an enormous diversity in caste and ethnic identity in Nepal. It is impossible to give an exact number of the different groups as the boundaries of identity are often fluid, but the figures of the 2011 census provide an indication. Accordingly, Chhetri is the largest caste/ethnic groups having 16.6% of the total population followed by Brahman-Hill (12.2%), Magar (7.1%), Tharu (6.6%), Tamang (5.8%), Newar (5%), Kami (4.8%), Musalman (4.4%), Yadav (4%) and Rai (2.3%).

[5] According to the census 2011, Nepali is followed by Maithili (11.7% 3,092,530), Bhojpuri (5.98%; 1,584,958), Tharu (5.77%), Tamang (5.11%), Newar (3.2%), Bajjika (2.99%), Magar (2.98%), Doteli (2.97%), Urdu (2.61%).

practiced, Hinduism being followed by about 80 percent[6] of the population (National Bureau of Statistics 2012). Yet, despite this great linguistic and ethno-cultural diversity, the Hindu caste system succeeded in penetrating every layer of society, even regardless of religion which can merely be explained through history.

In the pre-historic period, the South Asian area, now known as Nepal, was populated by various ethnic groups or *janajatis*, practicing Bonist, Buddhist and animistic traditions and beliefs. These different groups, each having their own language, religion and culture, established separate but fluid political units that were mainly small chiefdoms and principalities. There were also larger political units such as the Lichhavis[7] and later, the Malla kingdoms based in the Kathmandu Valley, the Khas kingdom in the West and the various confederation of ethnic groups as the Magars and Gurungs in central and the Limbus in eastern Nepal (Pradhan 2007:7-8). Prior to the conquests of Hindu kings over these political units, various sources suggest that the introduction of Hinduism in this area, also referred to as Hinduization, occurred in the eleventh century, when a massive migration followed the Muslim conquests in Northern India (Singh Kansakar 1984:49; IIDS 2008:8).

A large section of the Indian population took refuge in Nepal in order to avoid proselytization into Islam as well as political prosecution for the refusal of conversion. The Indian refugees, most of them Hindus, were in such a large number that they were able to banish the *janajatis* from the fertile lands of the hill area to the slopes of the hills (Singh Kansakar 1985:49). Due to the introduction of the hierarchical features of the caste system and conversions to Hinduism, the immigration from India had the first impact on changing the social structures according to the Hindu caste hierarchy.

However, the first direct imposition of Hindu traditions and customs is believed to have occurred in the 14th century with King Jayasthiti Malla restructuring the Newar society into 63 different castes, based on the division of labour and occupation. The Newars are one of Nepal's indigenous ethnicities that are mainly living in the three cities of the Kathmandu Valley, including Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur. Later, due to the increasing influence

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[6]Buddhism (9%) is followed by the second largest percentage of the population in Nepal, followed by Islam (4.4%), Kirat (3.1%), Christianity (1.4%), Prakriti (0.5%), Bon, Jainism, Bahai) and Sikhism, as stated by the 2011 census.
[7] The Lichhavi refers to an ancient kingdom of the Kathmandu Valley that was in existence from approximately 400 to 750 A.D. The Lichhavis came from northern India and overthrew the Kirati descendants that were ruling the area. Recorded history in Nepal began with the Lichhavi period.

of Hinduism, the new caste structure of the Newar society evolved into a hierarchical one, creating so-called 'lower' castes as Pode, Chyame, Kusule and Kasai (IIDS 2008:8-9).

The monarchy's role in shaping the social structures of contemporary Nepal became apparent again in the sixteenth century, when kings claiming to be Hindus and Rajputs from India gradually conquered the small political unites, mentioned earlier. The final conquest by King Prithvi Shah of the Gorkha principality began from the second half of the eighteenth century and ended with the establishment of the Gorkha Empire, now known as Nepal. While the king, throughout his reign, defined his new kingdom as the "*Asali Hindustan*" (translated: 'Real India' or 'pure Hindu state'), demonstrating the further manifestation of Hindu religion, he also claimed the country to be "a garden of the four *varnas* and thirty-six *jats*[8]". This meant that he included all subjects, Hindus as well as the non-Hindus, into the nation-building project (Pradhan 2007:9).

In the post-unification period of the second half of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the process of Hinduization intensified with the successors of King Prithvi Shah. Since the monarchy was a hereditary institution, based on the traditional Hindu view of nobility of birth, it was in the kings' interest to spread Hinduism, the religion that provided legitimacy to the Shah regime (Hachhethu 2003:222). It becomes clear that the kingships along with the Hindu religion played a key role in the construction of the Nepalese state as well as the various identities. The process of Hinduization, however, reached its pinnacle in the middle of the nineteenth century during the Rana period (1846-1951) when the caste system was legally embraced in 1854 through the *Muluki Ain*.

## The *Muluki Ain* of 1854

The Rana period commenced in 1846 when Jung Bahadur seized power and had himself appointed as permanent prime minister of the Nepalese government. He was given the hereditary title 'Rana'. This resulted in the century-long reign of the Rana family, along with

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[8] The traditional Indian caste system divides society into four different *varnas*, the Brahmins (priests), Chhetris (warriors and kings), Vaishyas (farmers) and Shudras (labourers and service providers), which are then subdivided into various *jats* or castes. In this context, however, scholars suggest that the term *jat* refers to all castes and ethnicities of Nepal (Höfer 1979 in Pradhan 2007:9).

the *Parbatiya*[9] elite. The Shah monarch, on the contrary, was reduced to the rather symbolic role of serving as the figurehead of the country. Even after the first Nepalese king Prithvi Shah united Nepal territorially in 1789, which was merely the first step of the nation-building process, the Rana government was faced with the difficult task of uniting the Nepalese people (Levine 1998:71).

The Indian migration wave of the eleventh century and the restructuring of the Newar society by King Jayasthiti Malla had left their marks on the social structures of the newly united nation. At the time when the Rana family seized control over the state, the Nepalese society consisted of three historically and regionally autonomous caste hierarchies, culturally distinctive Tibeto-Burman speaking populations and peoples of Tibetan ethnicity on the northern border. As a response to this, the government created a national caste system, stipulating a place for each of those groups, guided by the rulers own notion of caste (Höfer 1979:43-46 in Levine 1987:72). The rulers' imagination of these social structures became manifest in a comprehensive legal code, the *Muluki Ain*, that was promulgated in 1854 by the Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana.

| Figure 1 | Nepalese Caste Pyramid[10] |
| --- | --- |



The area showing the different groups in the triangle does not represent population size. Dark red shows the Hindu caste groups.

This law dictated an overarching national caste hierarchy, incorporating all the different linguistic, religious and ethnic groups as well as castes that were subordinated under the four, ranked categories as illustrated by Figure 1. As the figure demonstrates, the *Tagadhari*, referring to wearers of the holy thread or twice-born, are located at the top of the caste pyramid. This category encompasses the

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[9] The Nepali-speaking Hindus are called *Parbatiya*. This religious group is sub-divided in so-called 'high' and 'low' castes as per the *Muluki Ain* of 1854. The term '*Parbatiya* elite' refers to individuals from the Brahmin and Chhetri caste group that were considered as the 'high' ranking group.

[10] This figure was taken from the book 'Unequal Citizens' by the World Bank (2006), pp. 6 (see bibliography for reference).

'high' caste Hindus, including the Brahmins, Chhetris and Thakuris, and 'high' caste Newars. The non-Hindu ethnic groups or *janajatis* are included in the mid-ranking category of the pyramid. In the civil code, they are referred to as *Matwali*, or 'Liquor-drinking' and sub-divided into a *Namasinya* ('unenslavable') and a *Masinya* ('enslavable') type[11]. Ethnic groups as the Magars, Gurungs and some Newar caste are included in the *Namasinya Matwali* category, while other *Janajati* groups such as Tharu and the general category of Bhote, including Sherpas, the group currently known as Tamang and other groups with close Tibetan cultural affiliation are ranked lower by the code as *Masinya Matwali* (Pradhan 2007:12).

As the above figure further shows, the two remaining categories or so-called 'low' castes are considered 'impure' to different degrees. While the water from members of the *Pani nachalne choi chito halnu naparne* category, including foreigners, Muslims and certain Newar service castes such as butchers, launders and tanners, is unacceptable, they are still 'touchable' in the sense that contact with them does not require purification through the sprinkling of water. The bottom category, the *Pani nachalne choi chito halnu parne* or *Acchut*, however, are the 'untouchable' castes of this constructed society model, which include Hindu or *Parbatiya* castes as Kami, Sarki, Damai and Sunar, and Newar service castes, such as Pode and Chyame. Water from members of these caste groups is unacceptable and contact with them requires a purification ritual, according to the instruction of the *Ain* (Bhattachan ed. al. 2009:2).

The above discussed legal framework demonstrates that the prime minister did not merely succeed in incorporating the different linguistic and ethno-cultural groups in one overarching model, he also ensured the subjugation of those groups by ranking them lower than the ruling *Parbatiya* castes which traditionally had the functions of priests (Brahmins) and warriors or kings (Chhetris). It is striking that the non-Hindu j*anajati* groups were ranked higher than the remaining occupational castes of the *Parbatiya* caste groups, which were grouped together under the third and fourth 'impure' category, next to the service caste groups of the Newars. Thus, for the majority of those groups, this system meant 'exclusionary inclusion' (World Bank, 2006:6).

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[11] Other sources state that the Civil Code of 1854 refers to five categories, treating the unenslavable and enslavable Liquor drinkers as separate categories, see Pradhan (2007:12) and Vasily (2009:217).

In his multilevel process theory, Wimmer (2008:987) addresses the process of classifying various ethnic groups into an umbrella category under "Shifting Boundaries through Expansion" as follows: "Many modernizing empires have created, from the 18th century onward, larger ethnic minorities out of smaller groups in order to tighten and centralize the system of indirect rule over their subjects." Although the different groups maintained their caste or ethnic affiliation as well as their religious belief, allocating them to one of these four categories provided them with membership to the Nepalese society. In order to keep these groups in their designated place, the *Muluki Ain* also contained instructions with regard to food, proscribing the consumption of beef, physical contact and acceptance of water, regarding untouchability and sexual relations (Bishwokarma 2013:8), since marriage[12] between the four categories was prohibited and even marriages between castes or ethnic groups of the same category were unacceptable, promoting a highly endogamous society.

Besides legal regulations and instructions on very personal matters such as physical contact and marriage partners, the hegemonic law also specified different punishments for the same offence depending on the caste status of the person involved. Likewise, government economic policies took caste ranking and ethnic group membership into account. As a consequence, different groups were granted different sorts of land tenure and trading rights, which "made membership in the name of an ethnic or caste group of major economic and political significance" (Levine 1987:72). It becomes clear that, although, all ethnic and caste groups were unified in one legal framework, different privileges and obligations were accorded to each caste and sub-caste.

Based on the above written account, it becomes apparent that the *Ain* had a number of important implications for the caste groups that were placed under the 'untouchable' category. First, they were not only ranked lower than certain other Hindu castes, but the legal code also subordinated these caste groups to non-Hindu groups or *janajatis*, foreigners and Muslims, placing them at the very bottom of society. Second, it created an overarching 'untouchable' category, subsuming all other regional and local identities. Third, and most importantly, it provided legal sanctions to caste-based discrimination and untouchability (Bishwokarma 2013:9).

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[12] In Nepal's social sector, marriages within castes of different categories or *varnas* are often referred to as 'inter-caste marriages', while marriages between castes or *jats* of the same *varna* are considered as 'intra-caste marriages'.

# Responses to the Hegemonic Structures

From an ontological perspective, the above written text presents a highly structuralist view of the genealogy of the caste system, given that it focusses on the social structures or legal provisions that dictated and, to a great extent, continue to dictate the rules of social life and the assumption might arise that the various ethnic groups simply followed those instructions. This is, however, not the case, since the social structures are transformed through interaction. Regarding the caste hierarchy in Nepal, Pradhan (2011:105) points out: "The spread of *Parbatiya* Hindu culture was, of course, not only a result of state domination and subjugation of the minorities, ethnic communities themselves responded in various ways to the new dispersion."

Thus, the location of ethnic boundaries as instructed by the *Muluki Ain* were challenged by various actors who opted for different strategies to shift these boundaries. The Magars, for instance, especially the elite among them, attempted to integrate themselves into the culture of the dominant *Parbatiya* community by celebrating Hindu festivals, using Brahmin priests for worshipping and opting for the Nepalese language (Pradhan 2011:105). This strategy is termed by Wimmer (2008:988-9) as "Shifting Boundaries through Repositioning" or "caste climbing". In the meantime, communities as the Sherpa who were living in remote areas and therefore, not within reach of the dominant state provisions, ignored the imposed caste system (Pradhan 2011:105).

Another example of a group ignoring the hegemonic social structures forms the indigenous population of the Kathmandu Valley – the Newars. According to Gellner (1986:104-5), the Newar community had not been easily absorbed into the caste hierarchy of the dominant *Parbatiya* elite, despite the fact that they were closely living together after the latter started settling in the valley. The reason for this is that a sophisticated caste system already existed within the Newar community, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Considering a simplified version of the Newar caste system, it is noteworthy that the top of the caste hierarchy is twin-headed with two priestly castes, the Newar Brahmins, following Hinduism and two priest-monk castes, practicing Buddhism. The following 'lower' rank is occupied by Shrestha and Uray castes, with Hindu and Buddhist identity respectively (Gellner 1986:106).

The rest of the 'lower' ranking castes do not have a strong religious identity that excludes either of the two mentioned religions, since those castes tend to participate in both, Hindu and Buddhist, festivals. These caste groups included the farmers, various artisan and service castes and the 'unclean' castes, consisting of the butchers that were considered as impure, but touchable and the sweeper castes, that formed the so-called 'untouchables' of the Newar society (Ibidem). The ranking of these castes had been adopted in the *Muluki Ain*. However, as a consequence of practicing their separate caste hierarchy, Gellner (1986:105) argues that 'they formed, and still form to a surprising degree, a society apart'.

While discussing a part of the Nepalese history that is crucial for understanding the genealogy of the caste system and the creation of the 'untouchable' category, the previous text has demonstrated that ethnicity in Nepal is the product of an interaction between governmental laws and the responses to those provisions by actors that produce and reproduce the social structures through social practices. Furthermore, the *Muluki Ain* of 1854 is a very suitable example to support Jabri's (1994:95) claim that discourse, indeed, is action. Although the caste system was a mere imagination of the Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana, the people of Nepal perceived it as real and acted according to these social rules and therefore, they had very real consequences for the 'untouchable' category, since the once imagined practice of 'untouchability' became a social reality. As Demmers (2012:125) points out, "This is the power of discourse" and this powerful discourse dominated the Nepalese society for many years and helped the *Parbatiya* so-called 'high' caste elite to maintain their superiority and to keep themselves in high-ranking governmental positions. The following chapter, however, will examine the structural transformations that have opened up the space for those members of the 'untouchable' category that currently refer to themselves as Dalits to engage in counterdiscourses and to shift their ethnic boundary as so-called 'lowest' caste of the Nepalese society.

# Chapter 4

# Structural Transformations and

# the Dalit Struggle

The previous chapter depicted the process of Hinduization or rather *Parbatiyasition*[13] of society, which was facilitated by the state, because the majority of the ruling elite since the time of King Prithvi Shah have been so-called 'high' caste *Parbatiyas*. The imposition of *Parbatiya* culture reached its climax in 1854 with the promulgation of the *Muluki Ain* that promoted a hierarchical, plural Hindu society, recognizing but devaluating the cultural differences in an attempt to make Nepal a "genuine Hindu" country in contrast to India where the ruling elite comprised Muslims as well as Christians (Pradhan 2007:8). This civil code also created the 'untouchable', subsuming various occupational caste groups together under one category, encouraging and even sanctioning practices of caste-based discrimination and untouchability.

An important focus of this thesis are the attempts of members belonging to this subjugated group to deconstruct or counter the hegemonic discourse of the *Parbatiya* elite. As mentioned earlier, the existence of counterdiscourse is also an important part of Wimmer's (2008:995) multilevel process theory, in which he states that one should not overstate the hegemonic power of dominant modes of ethnicity making, since subordinates may develop strategies of dividing the social world into groups other than those propagated by dominant actors. He further emphasises that the possibility of counterdiscourses is of crucial importance to his model, because it allows a significant question to be asked: Under which conditions do subordinate actors pursue counterstrategy? Since this chapter attempts to answer this question in the context of Dalits in Nepal, the following text will analyse the structural transformations of state institutions as well as other internal and external

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[13] The process of *Parbatiyasition* refers to the spread and imposition of the *Parbatiya* culture, most significantly their language, Nepali (originally known as Khas or Khas Kura), their version of Hinduism, and of course, the caste system (Pradhan 2006:8).

conditions that assisted in opening the space for counterstrategies of Dalits after the end of the century-long Rana rule.

## Homogenisation of the Nepalese Society

In the mid-nineteenth century, a newly emerging pro-democratic sentiment emerged in Nepal, backed by the various ethnic groups such as the Limbus and Rais. These groups played an important role in the anti-Rana movement and in the riots against so-called 'high' caste Brahmins and Chhetris that broke out in the eastern hills in protest against the caste hierarchy (ICG 2011:4). Then, in 1951, the despotic regime of the Rana family was overthrown by the Nepali Congress, currently one of the three major political parties of Nepal, with the support of the Indian government. From a geopolitical perspective, it is noteworthy at this point that Nepal is landlocked between two 'giants' of the Asian continent, China and India. While interaction with the first is hindered because of the Himalayas, the open border system in the southern plains enables extensive contact with and influence of the latter (Parajulee 2000:178-9).

However, the fall of the Rana family was followed by a decade of different political arrangement without major changes regarding the caste hierarchy and the relationships between the ethnic, caste and linguistic groups (Geiser 2005:18). Although, first regionalist mobilisation in the Tarai[14] emerged with the Nepal Tarai Congress, established in 1951, demanding an autonomous state, Hindi as administrative language and more government position for people of Tarai origin (ICG 2011:4), Nepal continued to be ruled by so-called 'high' caste *Parbatiyas* under a centralized government. Moreover, despite an Interim Constitution that prohibited caste-based discrimination, the *Muluki Ain* of 1854 remained in force (Pradhan 2007:13).

After a short-lived multi-party democracy that started in 1959, King Mahendra overthrew the elected government in 1961 and instituted an autocratic political system with himself as absolute monarch, known as the Panchayat autocracy (Geiser 2005:18). During this Panchayat period, the *Parbatiya* ruling elite attempted to implement the ideals of a modern

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[14] Nepal consists of three regions, including the Mountain, Hill and Tarai region. In complete topographic contrast to the Mountain and Hill region, the Tarai Region is a lowland tropical and subtropical belt of flat, alluvial land stretching along the Nepal-India border, paralleling the Hill region.

nation-state, characterized by a common language and culture. Thus, the king and the elite made a concerted effort at homogenisation of the diverse cultures into a single national *Parbatiya* culture, with one language, Nepali, and one religion, Hinduism (Pradhan 2007:14). Wimmer (2008:987) addresses this strategy under 'Shifting Boundaries through Expansion':

> Perhaps the most consequential form of boundary expansion in the modern world is nation building: "making French" out of peasants, Provençales, and Normands; Brazilians out of whites, blacks, and browns; Jamaican Creoles out of Afro-Caribbeans, Europeans, and Chinese; and so forth. Not all such strategies, it should again be noted, have been successful.

In the context of the Panchayat period, Wimmer's enumeration could be continued with 'making Nepalese' out of Gurungs, Sherpas, Tamangs, Magars, Limbus, Rais, Newars among dozens of other ethnicities and so-called 'untouchable' sub-castes[15]. As a consequence of replacing the caste hierarchy with homogeneity and repressing the pluralistic character of the Nepalese society by acknowledging merely the *Parbatiya* 'high' caste culture, the legal categories in the Constitution of 1962 and the new *Muluki Ain* of 1963 were no longer ethnicity and caste, but citizens (Pradhan 2007:14). Therefore, as citizens, all Nepalese people, regardless of their social identity, could claim equality before the law[16].

Nevertheless, the official abolishment of untouchable practices in 1963 was merely hypothetical as other provisions created a loophole, effectively permitting caste-based discrimination by statutorily upholding traditional practices, such as excluding 'untouchables' from entering into temples as an act of "disrupt[ing] social customs fraudulently" or banning the consumption of beef which was discriminatory against Muslims, any non-Hindu ethnicity and so-called 'low' caste *Parbatiyas*, since those groups do not perceive cow slaughter as a religious taboo (World Bank 2006:43).

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[15] Although, the majority of the so-called 'untouchable' category is considered to be 'low' caste *Parbatiyas*, certain cultural norms are different from the 'higher' castes. Brahmins and Chhetris, for example, do not consume beef due to religious conviction while other Hindu caste groups or so-called 'low' castes do not perceive cow slaughter as a religious taboo. Yet, this practice had been made illegal by Prime Minister Rana and during the Panchayat period, it continued to be punishable (World Bank 2006:43).

[16] Under 'Right to Equality' of the Constitution of 1962 it is stated that "no discrimination shall be made against any citizen in the application of general law on the grounds of religion, race, sex, caste, tribe or any of them".

The above written account demonstrates that contradictions were ubiquitous during the Panchayat period: On the one hand, the practice of untouchability was formally abolished and on the other, traditions that are based on caste-based discrimination were simultaneously nourished. Moreover, the Constitution of 1962 guaranteed all citizens of Nepal the 'Right to Equality', while, at the same time, discriminating ethnic and caste minorities by prohibiting their customs and traditions. This created a very challenging climate for cultural and ethnic organisations of subjugated minorities to preserve their space and prevented the emergence of Dalit politics, since political parties in general and identity-based political groups in particular were banned (Vasily 2009:219).

However, few organisations addressing issues of 'low' castes or 'untouchables' had been in existence during the Panchayat period, including the Nimna Samaj Udar Sang (translated: 'lower-caste people welfare organisation'), founded by Jandurbi Bishwokarma in Eastern Nepal and the Nepal Tailors' Union, started by a so-called 'low' caste Newar, Sarod Kumar Kopali, in Kathmandu. Both organisations were established as early as 1947, during the Rana rule, which marked the beginning of Dalit activism (Lawoti and Hangen 2013:22).

As it was the case with the organisation of other marginalized groups, Dalit activism remained rather inactive during the first two decades of the autocratic Panchayat period. In 1967, the Nepal Rastiya Dalit Jana Bikash Parishad (translated: National Council of Dalit People's Development in Nepal') was established, becoming the first organisation that employed the label 'Dalit' (Cameron 2007:16). They also demanded reservations for so-called 'low' castes for the first time (Lawoti and Hangen 2013:22). However, Panchayat officials strongly discouraged the use of caste-specific names, including the term 'Dalit'. When the Social Service Coordination Council rejected the usage of the Dalit terminology, the organisation was registered as Nepal Rastriya Samaj Kalyan Sangh (translated: Nepal National Social Welfare Organisation) (Bishwokarma 2012:14).

In the 1980s, when the environment was relatively open and the authorities allowed organisations to function as long as they did not become overtly political (Pradhan 2007:15), the Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organisation became the first explicitly Dalit named NGO to be registered in 1982 (Lawoti, Mahendra and Susan Hangen 2013:23). According to Cameron (2007:16), however, the term has only achieved wider circulation from the end of the twentieth century in Nepal.

# Democracy and the Momentum of the Dalit movement

In the previous section, Wimmer has been quoted for stating that expansion strategies are not always successful. This seems to be the case for the homogenisation attempt of Nepalese society by the ruling elite during the Panchayat period. According to Pradhan (2007:17), ethnic, cultural and linguistic discontent was simmering for decades and surfaced during the first People's Movement in the spring of 1990 which ended the absolute monarchy of King Mahendra and resulted in the establishment of a multi-party democracy, reducing the king's position to constitutional monarch (Hachhethu 2003:229).

Although the new institution formally recognized ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity, Nepal remained a unitary Hindu monarchy with Nepali as the single official language and the overrepresentation of 'high' caste elites in the government sector even increased. Nevertheless, the new political form of government opened the doors for the expression of ethnic demands and the number of ethnic organisations grew "exponentially" during the 1990s. The most prominent organisation founded in this period by eight ethnic groups was the Nepal Federation of Nationalities, which was a crucial stepping stone for the *janajati* movement that drew heavily on the global discourse on indigenous rights (ICG 20114-5).

Likewise, the Dalit movement experienced tremendous momentum due to the restoration of democracy (Geiser 2005:27) in the form of non-governmental organisations. Many of those organisations used the term 'Dalit' in their name, such as the Feminist Dalit Organisation and the Dalit Welfare Organisation, both established in 1994. Two years later, the Dalit NGO Federation was founded as an umbrella organisation to unite like-minded Dalit NGOs, which can be seen as an equivalent organisation to NEFEN[17]. Similar to the *janajati* movement, the Dalit NGO movement is using the Human Rights discourse to frame their demands. In January 1971, Nepal ratified the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, a key reference for the Dalit movement, to which will be returned below.

After 1990, other options for Dalit activism in the organised institutional sphere included joining one of the many political parties and rise through the ranks, which only few so-called 'low' caste people were able to achieve in ten years of multi-party democracy. There

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[17] NEFEN changed its name to Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities in 2003.

was only one so-called 'low' caste man who managed to be elected to the Parliament in the course of three elections held in 1991, 1994, and 1999. Since involvement in political parties was not very fruitful for so-called 'low' castes to address issues of untouchability, "the non-mainstream option available to politically inclined Dalits was to join the Maoist underground" (Vasily 2009:221).

## The People's War and Federalism

Violent resistance against the government emerged in February 1996 when the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) launched its People's War. The insurgents had drafted a 40 point demand in which they called for "the end of ethnic oppression in general and for a secular state, the equality of languages and regional autonomy in particular" (ICG 2011:6), appealing to the grievances of ethnic minorities. To what extent the 'low' castes were supporting the rebels is unclear, although there is the unverified assumption that many of them were fighting in the cadres of the insurgents due to the demands of the latter for the elimination of caste-based and other forms of discrimination (Cameron 2007:15-6; Vasily 2009:222).

In November 2005, the Maoist and the alliance of seven democratic parties had signed a twelve-point agreement to challenge the legitimacy of the king. One year later, when King Gyanendra gave up his throne, the decade-long war that resulted in approximately 13 000 deaths and more than 100 000 people being internally displaced, ended with a Comprehensive Peace Agreement. This was a time of rapid political change and the process of institutionalising the idea of federalism started. The CPA demanded a democratic restructuring of the state and socio-economic and cultural transformation through the decisions of a Constituent Assembly (ICG 2011:7).

The parliament passed the IC in January 2007 which announced state restructuring without mentioning it to be federalist, despite the lobbying of Madhesi[18] and *janajati* leaders within the CPN (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and NC for explicit commitment to federalism. This sparked outrage among Madhesi activists and protests had been organised by the Madhesi

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[18] The Madhesi people are the inhabitants the south-eastern region of Nepal, also known as Tarai. Similar to Dalits and *janajatis*, the Madhesi are considered to be a marginalised group.

Janadhikar Forum and the Nepal Sadbhavana Party, demanding the amendment of the IC and the establishment of the Tarai as single province. Although the latter demand was dismissed, the first was met on 12 April 2007, when the legislature-parliament passed the 1st amendment to the IC, calling for a restructuring of the state into a "democratic, federal system" (IC, Art. 138(1) in ICG 2011:8). Unfortunately, the CA failed to meet the deadline for a permanent draft of the constitution which had been extended for numerous times until date. Therefore, the question on the form of federalism – be it ethnic, identity-based or administrative – remains unanswered and according to the International Crisis Group (2011:1), "Federalism is now the most contentious issue in Nepali politics".

What do these institutional transformations reveal, regarding the conditions that facilitated the emergence of the Dalit movement? First of all, it seems obvious that the pro-democratic movement at the end of the Rana rule and the following periods of democratization have created a favourable environment for the so-called 'low' caste people to organise themselves in the form of non-governmental organisations. In particular, the second attempt of democratisation in 1990 opened the space for the Dalit NGO movement as many organisations had been established in the following years. This resembles a very different scenario from the one Wimmer (2008:992-3) is suggesting:

> "Democratization politicizes and deepens the boundary between national majority and ethnic minorities, as it provides additional incentives for politicians to appeal to the shared interest of "the people" and unravel the machinations of its ethnic enemies […]."

Although, the introduction of democracy in 1990 re-established the boundary between national majority, or in the context of Nepal hegemonic minority[19], and ethnic or caste minority, by recognizing ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity, this divide was actually welcomed or even encouraged by the subjugated minorities themselves. Especially Dalit NGOs could finally function as organisations that were acknowledged by the government. The latter even recognized the self-definitional terminology by including the word 'Dalit'

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[19] Although, Chhetri is the largest caste/ethnic group having 16.6% of the total population followed by Brahman-Hill (12.2%), no ethnic group has the majority rule. Thus, the majority versus minority divide is not applicable for Nepal. Rather, the ruling *Parbatiya* elite is referred to as hegemonic or dominant minority.

in the IC of Nepal. They were denied this privilege during the Panchayat period, when the existence of the 'untouchable' caste group had been negated in the first place while tolerating continued practices of untouchability.

Besides the process of democratisation, the j*anajati* and Madhesi movements have played a crucial role in influencing the dominant political discourse. Especially the protests of Madhesi actors for the inclusion of federalism into the constitution has contributed to the development that federalism became an important part of contemporary Nepalese politics. This set of new rules in the form of federalist restructuring is the new institutional framework in which Dalits attempt to establish their counterdiscourses. These counterdiscourses in the form of the particular boundary shifting strategy as well as Dalit identity politics and Dalitness will be addressed in the next chapter.

# Chapter 5

# Dalitness

Understanding the dynamics of boundary shifting among Dalits in Nepal requires the comprehension of the historical context, since this provides incentives for a group to draw boundaries of a certain type. Thus, the previous two chapters have introduced the reader to the most important historical developments of Nepal that are related to the topic. This is essential background knowledge for this chapter in which an attempt is being made to define Dalitness and identify the boundary shifting strategy on the basis of interviews with leaders of the Dalit movement. Another important focus is Dalit identity politics in comparison with the identity politics of the *janajati* movement.

## Dalit Identity Politics

The previous chapters have already indicated that the so-called "untouchable" castes were not the only group that faced structural violence throughout the history of Nepal. The various ethnic groups or *janajatis* had been marginalized by the government, as well. First, they had been subjugated to the *Parbatiya* elite in the caste hierarchy during the Rana rule and during the Panchayat period, when the king and his elite attempted to homogenise society, the ethnic minorities of Nepal had faced great obstacles to preserve their culture, language and religion. These cultural, linguistic and religious features are currently constituting the very characteristics on which the indigenous nationalities (*adivasi janajatis)* demand recognition. This is also at the core of Kruks' (2001:85) definition of identity-based politics:

> [A] demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is qua women, qua blacks and qua lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of 'universal

humankind' on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect 'in spite of' one's differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself as different.

Thus, these indigenous nationalities are narrowing their ethnic boundaries from being once included in an expanded *Parbatiya* category to their respective culturally distinct groups, by demanding recognition for the same characteristics that had been reasons for their marginalisation.

The Dalit movement, however, faces a very different reality as the majority of the so-called 'untouchable' sub-castes share the cultural, linguistic and religious characteristics with the *Parbatiya* elite, making the difference between them decidedly not ethnic. As the anthropologist Steven Folmar (2013:92) argues:

> Dalits can thus be viewed as part of the Parbatiya culture because their characteristics of language, territory, religion, culture and race are shared by Dalits and Bahuns[20] – the Nepali language, migration from India into the Middle Hills, Hinduism […] and the Aryan 'race'.

An important point needs to be illuminated in consideration of Kruks's definition of identity politics. Unlike the *adivasi janajatis,* Dalits cannot easily demand recognition for their difference, since they have not been discriminated for being different. Instead, they have been discriminated for being 'impure' due to their profession and therefore, they have been made 'untouchable'. Naturally, Dalits do not demand recognition for being *acchut*, yet the practice of untouchability is an essential part to define the term. The National Dalit Commission, a government institution that was established in 2002, defines Dalit as "those communities who, by virtue of atrocities of caste based discrimination and untouchability, are most backward in social, economic, educational, political and religious fields, and are deprived of human dignity and social justice" (DWO 2010). This definition entails the two identities that Folmar (2013:93-4) mentions, namely the "imposed" and the "generated":

> The imposed identity of Dalit precedes the use of the term, Dalit, and is associated with untouchable status (acchut) and the religious degradation, social discrimination and economic marginalisation that ensues […]. The generated identity of Dalit is one that derives from the first, but is of more recent construction and centres on

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[20] Bahun is the term used in the Nepali language to refer to the so-called 'highest' caste group, the Brahmins.

oppression, which morally qualifies Dalits for better treatment because the discrimination is arbitrary.

Thus, at the core of Dalit identity politics lies their claim for human dignity and social justice which they will be denied as long as the practice of untouchability will prevail.

Due to this very definition, however, Dalits as a group and as individuals have an ambivalent relationship with their identity. This became evident during an interview with Suman Poudel, a Dalit himself and the executive director of DNF. When he was asked about the Dalit identity, he stated: "It is a negative identity. Dalits do not want to preserve this identity. Rather, they want to avoid this word to a certain extent later." In the same interview, he takes a different stance and rejects that Dalitness is an identity, at all. According to him,

> Dalit is a condition and because of that condition, Dalits are suffering from many problems, mainly from caste-based discrimination that has been the root cause for Dalit exclusion from mainstream development […]. That's why we are saying, Dalit is not an identity, because we don't want to continue it in the long run. We want an equal society that is why we don't want to keep this word.[21]

Thus, the claim to equality is opposed to being a Dalit, because Dalitness refers to the condition of untouchability. This view contrasts with the opinion of Padam Sundas who emphasises the self-definitional nature of the term and the pride it will eventually carry:

> "That name is not given by others… that's our own identity. We made that identity ourselves. The indigenous people, Brahmins and Chhetris, *they* have their own identity. Then, why shouldn't *we* have our own identity, as well? […]. We have to change the status, not the name. […] After some time, when there will be no discrimination, the word will be honoured.'[22] (Emphasis added).

Especially in the previous quote, the interviewee makes a clear divide between "us" and "them", and explicitly refers to the groups that are not belonging to the Dalit category or "identity", namely the indigenous people, Brahmins and Chhetris. While the first mentioned group, the indigenous people, is an umbrella term for the various *janajati*

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[21] Author's interview, conducted on 27 May 2014.
[22] Author's interview with Padam Sundas, senior Dalit leader, president of the Samata Foundation and member of the CPN (Maoist), on 3 March 2014.

groups[23], the other two terms refer to the specific caste groups that have once been categorized as 'high' castes in the *Muluki Ain* of 1854. These different caste and ethnic groups are juxtaposed in opposition to Dalits. At this point the question might arise: Then who exactly belongs to the Dalit category?

## Dalitness and Self-Identification

The NDC has the authority to certify whether a caste group belongs to the Dalit community or not. Currently, the institution has listed 26 sub-castes (see Annex 1) as Dalits that are sub-divided based on the two main regions of Nepal, the Hills and the Tarai. The likeliness that the categorization as Dalit is turned into self-identification by the non-activist members of this category depends on the following aspects, according to Wimmer:

> When members of an ethnic category self-identify and are identified by others as 'belonging' to a 'group' with little ambiguity, when they share easy-to-identify cultural repertoires of thinking and acting, and when they are tied together by strong alliances in day-to-day politics, we expect strong emotional attachment to such ethnic categories to emerge (Brubaker 2004:46–7 in Wimmer 2008:1008).

The aspect of "easy-to-identify cultural repertoires of thinking and acting" as a clear indication for Dalit membership is problematic due to the similarities of Dalits with so-called 'high' caste Brahmins and Chhetris, as mentioned earlier. Furthermore, since the Dalit category subsumes multiple sub-castes that often have a particular association with a traditional occupation, as Kamis who are traditionally blacksmiths and goldsmiths, it is likely that they will identify in terms of their respective sub-caste. Another obstacle to self-identification is that the Dalit social structure, in reference to caste-specific identity, echoes the structure of the whole system in terms of hierarchization as described by Raj Pariyar in *The Kathmandu Post* (2014):

> Some Kamis and Sarkis don't take cooked food and water touched by Damais. Sarkis and Kamis don't take food and water from each other. In the Tarai region, some

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[23] In the Nepal Federation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act of 2002, 59 officially recognised *janajati* groups are listed (ICG 2011:5).

Tatmas think they are of higher caste then other Tarai Dalits. Similarly, […] Newar Dalits or indigenous Dalits are not exempt from intra-caste hegemony.

Accordingly, the so-called 'untouchable' castes are involved in the practice of untouchability themselves due to a perceived hierarchy that had actually been proscribed by the Civil Code of 1854.

Besides pointing out the practice of intra-caste discrimination within the Dalit community, the excerpt from the article also mentions the existence of overlapping identities. Regarding the enormous variety of ethnic and caste minorities in the context of federalist restructuring, the different movements have developed differing discourses about the divide of the Nepalese society. According to the *janajati* movement, the society is divided into hierarchical caste-structured groups (*jats*) and the lineage-based indigenous nationalities with an exception of the internally caste-structured Newars. The *madhesi* movement obviously claims the divide to be along regional lines, opposing the Tarai inhabitants to the people of hill origin, called *pahadis*. Although, the Dalit movement does recognise the existence of Hill and Tarai Dalits, their discourse of marginalisation emphasises the division between the so-called 'pure' and 'impure' or 'untouchable' castes (Pradhan 2007:6). In the above quote, however, the existence of indigenous or Newar Dalits is also mentioned which makes differentiation of the proposed boundaries very blurry.

While the boundaries of Dalits, *madhesis* and *janajatis* are vague in the above mentioned divides, there is one group that meets the characteristics to belong to the opposing category of all three movements: the *Khas Bahun* or Hill Brahmin. Since all three groups have a common target to shift the prevailing balance of power in combination with the already overlapping identities, it seems obvious for the three groups to shift their ethnic boundaries towards an expanded category. In reality, this is very hard to achieve due to the diverging demands. As mentioned earlier, the issues such as language, culture and religion are related to the identity politics of the *janajatis*, which has nothing to do with Dalits whose majority is part of the Parbatiya Hindu culture. Instead, they demand the transformation of their status as 'untouchables' in the Nepalese society. Key activities and agendas involve dining with non-Dalit people, entering into Hindu temples and rejecting traditional caste occupations as the disposal of dead animals. The *madhesi*, on the other hand, hardly distinguish between *pahadi* caste groups and *pahadi janajatis* (Hachhethu 2003:2355). These

differences create almost insurmountable obstacles for the unification of the three movements.

It is, however, misleading to assume that there is no collaboration, at all. Suman Poudel said that they were not working directly with other marginalised groups, but they have extended the work and solidarity on their issues.[24] This is very similar to the answer of Padam Sundas, when he was asked about the collaboration between Dalits and *janajatis*:

> We are working together, because they are discriminated by the government, too. They are oppressed on the basis of language in government services. […] But on the matter of the discrimination based on caste, the caste hierarchy, we are not together. Everybody was forced to adopt the caste system. Same as the Brahmins, the indigenous people discriminate us. We have to fight against them also.[25]

Sundas is highlighting another crucial point that makes fusion of both movements highly unlikely. Since indigenous people had been incorporated into the caste hierarchy by the *Muluki Ain* of 1854, many members of the *janajatis* are practicing untouchability, as well.


## Dalit Boundary Shifting Strategy

While the above written text has addressed the boundary shifting strategy of the *janajati* movement and discussed the possibility of a unification of the movements of the three marginalised groups, the actual boundary shifting strategy of the Dalit movement remained to be undefined. Therefore, the following section attempts to fill this void by consulting Wimmer's multilevel process theory.

In his theory, Wimmer (2008:986-9) mentions five elementary strategies of ethnic boundary making. Based on the above findings, two of these strategies appear to be applicable at first glance. When actors use "expansion", they "may create a more encompassing boundary by grouping existing categories into a new, expanded category" (2008:987). Dalit activists in Nepal, in collaboration with the NDC, are also trying to unite the different sub-castes that carry the stigma of untouchability into an overarching category. Yet expansion is not the

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[24] Author's interview with Suman Poudel, Executive Director of DNF, on 27 May 2014.
[25] Author's interview with Padam Sundas, senior Dalit leader, president of the Samata Foundation and member of the CPN (Maoist), on 3 March 2014.

appropriate strategy, because these sub-castes had already been grouped together by the *Muluki Ain* of 1854 as 'untouchables' that resulted in their perceived low status in the Nepalese society.

Therefore, the Dalit movement is not targeting the location of the boundary, but the hierarchical ordering of groups as they want to "change the status"[26]. In Wimmer's (2008:988) theory, the strategy in which an actor attempts the transvaluation of values is termed inversion. He provides an example of the Black Nationalist movement of the United States, in which its members claim the superiority of African-Americans over the 'white race'. Thus, they are turning the traditional hierarchy upside-down. According to Wimmer, Dalits have also adopted this strategy. However, based on the findings, it is argued that this strategy is not an accurate fit for the Dalit movement either, since its discourse frames are based on values as equality and social harmony (Pariyar 2014).

Thus, instead of claiming to be on the top of the hierarchy and degrading the former so-called 'high' castes, the Dalit movement attempts to abolish the hierarchy as such. Although, this has already happened on a legal basis, they are aiming to transform the social laws that prevail in everyday interactions between the Nepalese people. During the interview with Suman Poudel, he states that: "Dalit is a community, not a caste"[27]. Thus, the movement is distancing themselves from the traditional Hindu word *varna*, which broadly categorized people according to occupation. While emphasizing that the term Dalit refers to a community instead, they are redefining the category. It is therefore argued that the Dalit movement attempts to shift its boundaries through 'redefinition'. Regarding Wimmer's theory, the endorsement of this additional strategy is suggested to make it more complete.

Another part of the multilevel process theory addresses the reasons why certain actors select certain strategies or in the context of Nepal, why Dalit activists select redefinition as strategy to shift their boundaries. According to Wimmer, ethnic boundaries are the outcome of the classificatory struggles and negotiations between actors situated in a social field, characterized by the institutional order, distribution of power and political networks (2008:970). The institutional order provides incentives to draw boundaries in the first place.

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[26] Author's interview with Padam Sundas, senior Dalit leader, president of the Samata Foundation and member of the CPN (Maoist), on 3 March 2014.
[27] Author's interview with Suman Poudel, Executive Director of DNF, on 27 May 2014.

In Nepal, the democratization process after 1990 has re-opened the space for identity-based politics and thus, created a favourable environment for minorities to draw certain boundaries. This was also the time when Dalit NGOs were increasingly established and major political parties formed Dalit sister wings.

The specific strategy of boundary making, however, is determined by the distribution of power. Wimmer states that power has a twofold effect. First, an actor will prefer that level of differentiation that is perceived to further his interest. He is substantiating this claim with Hartmut Esser's theory of frame selection (Esser 2002; Kroneberg 2005 in Wimmer 2008:993): "It describes how actors first choose a cognitive scheme appropriate to the institutional environment and conducive to their perceived interest and then the script of action most suitable to attain the goals defined by the scheme." The Dalit NGO movement of Nepal has adopted the Human Rights frame in order to get the support of the international community. As mentioned earlier, claims to 'equality' or 'equity' are the most important frames in the movement. The Samata Foundation, a research and advocacy centre for Dalit studies, has the Nepalese word for 'equity' in its name[28]. The slogan of FEDO claims that they are working "for a just and equitable society"[29], using the social justice frame, as well. The latter is also employed in the slogan of DWO, stating: "A Movement for Social Justice"[30]. Thus, the goal to fight untouchability can be attained by using the human rights discourse, which determined the strategy of boundary making to be 'redefinition'.

Another important frame from the human rights discourse used by Dalit NGOs is the terminology of the ICERD (UN General Assembly 1965), in which 'racial discrimination' is defined as

> […] any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

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[28] Author's interview with Padam Sundas, senior Dalit leader, president of the Samata Foundation and member of the CPN (Maoist), on 3 March 2014.
[29] According to FEDO's official website, available at: http://www.fedonepal.org/ [Accessed 24 July 2014].
[30] According to DWO's official website, available at: http://www.dwo.org.np/ [Accessed 24 July 2014].

Since the practice of untouchability has not been addressed as human rights issue separately in any convention, Nepalese Dalit NGOs are using the term "descent" to link caste with race in order to get international support and recognition in their struggle against untouchability, regardless of the fact that caste-based discrimination and racial discrimination are perceived to have diverging natures by some Dalit NGO activists. Suman Poudel stated: "[I]n my opinion, racism and casteism are different"[31] and Amar Bahadur Bishwokarma, a Dalit researcher, even criticized the movement for using this terminology to get donor support.[32] Kamala Hemchuri is the only one of the five interviewed Dalit activists who claim that racism is the root cause of caste-based discrimination.[33] This demonstrates that frames are crucial for a movement to receive justification of the struggle. The appropriateness of the frame, however, is of lesser significance as long as it serves the interest of the group.

As the second effect of power, Wimmer (2008:994) states that

> "the endowment with power resources not only determines which strategy of ethnic boundary making an individual will pursue but also how consequential this will be for others. Obviously, only those in control of the state apparatus can use the consensus and the law to enforce a certain boundary."

How powerful the frame of the ICERD really was became apparent in 2002, when then-Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba (NC) announced the establishment of the NDC, in relation to the international treaty.[34] As mentioned earlier, this state institution has the authority over inclusion into or exclusion from the Dalit category. The consequences of Dalit membership are certain economic and political benefits as scholarships for Dalit students and the quota system.

Wimmer (2008:995) defines the political networks as the third characteristic of the social field that define the exact location where boundaries between "us" and "them" will be drawn. However, he focusses mainly on the elite networks within the institutional order of

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[31] Author's interview with Padam Sundas, senior Dalit leader, president of the Samata Foundation and member of the CPN (Maoist), on 3 March 2014.
[32] Author's interview with Amar Bahadur Bishwokarma, Dalit researcher and author of the book 'The Stigma of the Name: Making and Remaking of Dalit Identity in Nepal, on 23 April 2014.
[33] Author's interview with Kamala Hemchuri, president of the Professional Development and Research Centre and affiliated with the Social Democratic Party, on 21 March 2014.
[34] According to the NDC's official website. Available at: http://ndc.gov.np/vision-8-en.html [Accessed 24 July 2014].

the nation state. Despite Nepal being a national state, as well, this part of the theory seems less applicable for the Dalit movement. Instead, it appears that the decision over the location of the boundary is in the hands of the NDC which has a list of certain criteria that serve as the basis for including or excluding certain groups. The next chapter will address this in more detail.

This chapter has demonstrated that being affected by the practice of untouchability is at the centre of defining Dalitness. In terms of identity politics, the narrative of untouchability is crucial to support the claim that Dalits are a marginalized group and acknowledging its existence is the only way to abolish the discriminatory practice from the social structures. Yet, it seems unlikely that the term will transcend the mere categorical character and become a social identity, because identifying with a label should be desirable. On the one hand, self-identification as Dalit is desirable on certain occasions when it comes to obtaining state benefits based on one's Dalit membership[35]. This supports Brubaker's (2005) claim that ethnicity is an event or a 'category of practice'. On the other hand, the term Dalit still carries the stigma of untouchability and therefore, identifying as Dalit involves the risk of being treated as an 'untouchable' which causes many 'low' castes to choose the strategy of anonymity (Folmar 2013:94). Thus, different actors pursue different strategies. If actors want their preferred classification to be accepted by others and the associated boundaries of inclusion and exclusion generally enforced and socially respected, they have to enter a negotiation process with other actors that may prefer different boundaries (Wimmer 2008:997). These processes will be addressed in the following chapter.

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[35] Author's interview with Kamala Hemchuri, president of the Professional Development and Research Centre and affiliated with the Social Democratic Party, on 21 March 2014.

# Chapter 6

# Negotiating Boundaries and Contesting Inclusion and Exclusion

The previous chapter presented the varying discourses of marginalisation that are used by the Dalit, *janajati* and *madhesi* movements. It became apparent that the proposed boundaries of these three marginalised groups are very blurry and construct overlapping classifications. While the official list of Dalits only acknowledges the distinction between *madhesi* and *pahadi* Dalits, two of the *pahadi* Dalit sub-castes – Pode and Chyame – also belong to the Newar community that is enlisted as one of the 59 *adivasi janajatis*. Although, individuals have multiple identities, in regard to identity politics, actors might opt for a salient identity. This can be problematic in the context of the Dalit category, since membership is granted or ascribed to sub-castes, instead of individuals and actors within a sub-caste might prefer different classifications. In this case, interaction within the group is required to negotiate consensus which might also result in contestation. These processes as well as the crucial role of the NDC therein will be addressed in the following text.

## The NDC: Authority to Define

As mentioned earlier, the NDC was established in 2002 as "the sole institution for the specific purpose to protect and promote the human rights of the dalit community, and to assist the government while formulating and implementing policies and programs." At the time of its establishment, it functioned officially as an independent and autonomous institution without complete or proper legal arrangement in order to fulfil its mandate (NDC 2009:5). This changed in mid-2011 with the promulgation of the 'Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offence and Punishment) Act, a comprehensive legal provision that has the main objective to protect the rights of the so-called 'untouchables'.

The five board member of this institution are currently appointed every two years and membership of the Dalit community is compulsory for this position.[36]

During the formation of the NDC, one of its main tasks was to compile a list with Dalit sub-castes. Prior to the inception of this institution, the Uppechhit, Utpidit ra Dalitbarga Utthan Bikas Samiti (translated: Ignored, Oppressed and Dalit-class Upliftment Development Committee), established in 1996 under the Ministry of Local Development of the Nepal Government, had already identified 22 sub-castes as Dalits. This list, however, had various shortcomings. According to the IIDS (2009:13), the listed sub-caste Satar or Santhal was already included in the list of the 59 indigenous nationalities of Nepal. Likewise, the enlisted sub-castes Kasai, Kusule, Chyame and Pode belong to the Newars. In other cases, different surnames were incorporated that belong to the same caste group[37] and others were left out.

The board members and staff of the newly established NDC were trying to rectify these problems. Durga Sob, who was a staff member during that time, said that "they placed many question marks behind the Newar sub-castes", because certain actors were requesting the removal of their caste groups from the list[38]. In an article, published in *The Kathmandu Post* (Ekantipur 2003) after the release of NDC's Dalit list, it was stated that some Newar and Madhesi sub-castes had been removed because "those castes […] denied being Dalits" and other Dalit sub-castes were added, yet the list of 20 Dalit sub-castes was still incomplete.

The adjusted Dalit list of the NDC of 2008 was extended to 22 sub-castes and the caste groups from the Newar community had been removed due to their emphasis on being indigenous and no longer Dalits (IIDS 2008:4; Bhattachan ed al. 2009:14-5). It is striking, however, that the current Dalit list of the NDC counts 26 sub-castes, including the previously removed Pode and Chyame groups, as mentioned earlier, indicating the negotiation processes that are involved in creating consensus on the proposed Dalit boundary.

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[36] Author's interview with Rukmaya Ranopal, board member of the NDC and affiliated with the UCPN (Maoist), conducted on 19 May 2014.
[37] In some cases, multiple last names refer to the same sub-caste. (See Annex 1)
[38] Author's interview with Durga Sob, founder and president of FEDO, conducted 15 May 2014.

# The Location of the Dalit Boundary

It becomes evident that the location of the boundary that distinguishes people as Dalits and non-Dalits is not fixed. Rather, determining the boundary is an ongoing process in terms of including new caste groups into the list and removing others from it. At this point, the question might arise: Which criteria are defined by the NDC to determine whether a caste groups can be incorporated into the Dalit list?

In the interview with two members of the present NDC board, Rukmaya Ranopal and Dan Bahadur Bishwokarma were presenting the basic criteria that have to be met by a caste group to be included. As one of those criteria, the two board members mentioned the culture, customs and mother tongue as important indicators. Although, they were not indicating the specific culture and language that the NDC is anticipating, it appears to be Hinduism and Nepali respectively. This assumption is based on Bishwokarma's statement that "Dalits do not have an origin themselves. They are degenerated from the so-called 'higher' castes throughout history."[39]

Furthermore, he stated that they were also taking the economic status of the group into consideration[40], since so-called 'untouchables' tend to be one of the poorest people in Nepal (Bhattachan ed al. 2009). Another major criteria for recording certain caste groups in the Dalit list is their social status within the community and the forms of discrimination they face, especially from so-called 'upper' caste people in their locality. Thus, being affected by the practice of untouchability is a crucial indicator for being Dalit, as pointed out earlier, as well. Therefore, the surname of a certain group can be a decisive factor[41], if reference can be made to the caste names that had been scheduled as 'untouchable' in the *Muluki Ain* of 1854.

The board members further indicated that they recently carried out a research study in one of the remotest Himalayan districts in far-western Nepal, which identified 62 sub-castes that met the above mentioned criteria of inclusion. According to Bishwokarma, this report will be submitted to the government in order to expand the Dalit list. In contrast, they have also received requests from certain caste group that applied for inclusion, which had been

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[39] Author's interview Dan Bahadur Bishwokarma, board member of the NDC and affiliated with the UCPN (Maoist), conducted on 19 May 2014.
[40] Ibidem.
[41] Ibidem.

rejected as the NDC classified them as false. Bishwokarma stated: "Some people from so-called 'upper-castes', whose surnames resemble the surnames of Dalits, submit their application in order to get double benefits from the state".[42]

Despite the obtainment of economic benefits as Dalit, certain caste groups from the Newar community have appealed to the NDC for their removal from the list, including Kasai, Kopali and Dhobi[43]. According to the two board members, the NDC approved this request and there is "no further confusion" about their exclusion, since these groups do not face discrimination in terms of untouchability: "They are prone to be oppressed within the Newar community, but not found to be discriminated as 'untouchable'". They also stated: "For example, Kasais, they are the butchers and meat is sold to everyone and also Kopalis, they cut the hair of everyone".[44]

## Kasai, Kopali and Dhobi: The Unmaking of the Dalit Boundary

As mentioned in a previous chapter, an individual of the Kopali sub-caste was among the first to address issues of 'low' castes in the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, it was stated in interviews that members of the other two sub-castes that requested their removal from the Dalit list, Kasai and Dhobi, were involved in the inception of the Dalit movement, as well.[45] Thus, actors from these three caste-groups supported the making of the Dalit boundary and half a century later, members of these very same groups were unmaking it by opting for another ethnic boundary: membership in the Newar community. At this point, the question might arise: Why did these actors chose to change their boundary shifting strategy?

In Wimmer's theory, a change in the institutional order can be an incentive for actors to draw boundaries of a certain type. In Nepal, the introduction of democracy opened up the space for identity politics and various *janajati* groups were forming ethnic organisations to

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[42] Ibidem.

[43] In interviews and other sources, these caste names are varying due to the existence of multiple surnames that refer to the same sub-caste. For clarification: Kopali, Kusule and Darshendhari belong to the same caste group. Khadgi and Kasai are referring to the same caste group and Dhobi and Rajak also from a separate caste group.

[44] Author's interview with Rukmaya Ranopal, board member of the NDC and affiliated with the UCPN (Maoist), conducted on 19 May 2014; Author's interview with Babu Ratna Deula, affiliated with the UCPN (Maoist), conducted on 25 April 2014.

[45] Author's interview with Padam Sundas, senior Dalit leader, president of the Samata Foundation and member of the CPN (Maoist), on 3 March 2014.

collectively demand recognition for their culture, language and religion. The Newar community was also among these ethnic groups and according to Shrestha (1999:97-8), "The Newars were busy at their own pace to arrive at a consensus for a national organisation." In September 1995, they proclaimed the establishment of the Newāh De Dabū, the National Forum of the Newars.

According to Nirmal Deula, a Newar Dalit from the Pode sub-caste, the so-called 'low' castes within the Newars had their "united voice" until 'upper' caste intellectuals from the Newar community initiated a movement that propagated a united Newar ethnic group. They claimed that all sub-castes within the Newar community are equal and therefore, the Newars should not differentiate between Newar Dalits and Newar Non-Dalits.[46] Furthermore, Maila Babu Deula, the Pode representative in the Newāh De Dabū, recalled:

> After the National Commission was formed in 2058 BS[47] [2002], there was an interaction between the members of the NDC and the so-called 'lower' castes within the Newar in the presence of Human Rights activists [...]. These activists were intellectuals that fall under the Newar community, but they do not fall under the 'lower' caste category.[48]

Returning to the above raised question, it appears that the Newar 'upper' caste elite attempted to create a more encompassing boundary by grouping the existing categories that were previously differentiated by caste hierarchy into a new expanded boundary in order to present themselves as a separate ethnic group and jointly demand recognition for the their language, Nepālbhāsā. As it becomes evident from both statements, these Newar intellectuals negotiated the boundary expansion with so-called Newar 'low' castes that were scheduled as Dalits at that time. Representatives of these sub-castes accepted the proposed boundary and requested their removal from the Dalit category.

While the establishment of this expanded boundary has strengthened the Newar movement, the withdrawal of the three sub-castes from the Dalit category has

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simultaneously "weakened"[49] the Dalit movement. In times of identity politics and the prospect of federalist restructuring, Dalits are demanding proportionate representation in the government sector and the allocation of resources based on the representation size of a group's population[50]. As a logical consequence, the removal of sub-castes from the Dalit category impacts their population size.[51]

Nevertheless, Nirmal Deula claimed that the Dalit movement is not only fighting for the emancipation of the 26 listed Dalit sub-castes, but also include the removed caste groups in their struggle.[52] Suman Poudel also stated that he continues to regard them as Dalits as long as they face untouchability in the Newar community[53], which contrasts with the view of the NDC. Moreover, in a recent article in the national newspaper *The Kathmandu Post* (2014), Pariyar[54] writes about the "Valley Dalits, who are also called Newar Dalits": "There is extreme discrimination and untouchability between Chyames, Podes, Dhobis, Kusules and Kasais in the Kathmandu Valley". Thus, even in media, the self-identification of these caste groups is not accepted, as they continue to be categorized as Dalits, regardless of the fact that the removal from the list occurred more than a decade ago

## Pode: Contesting Dalitness

Pode and Chyame are the only Newar sub-castes that are currently categorized as Dalits in the NDC list. As aforementioned, however, these two caste groups had been removed from the list in 2008, according to a report of the IIDS. This indicates that the developments regarding these three sub-castes Dhobi, Kasai and Kopali had also affected members of the remaining Newar Dalit caste groups. Through unstructured conversations with representatives of Dalit NGOs, it became evident that the two sub-castes are fragmented by a pro-Dalit and a pro-*janajati* faction. The subsequent section mainly discusses interviews with members of the Pode sub-caste in order to gain insights into the nature of this

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[49] Author's interview with Suman Poudel, Executive Director of DNF, on 27 May 2014.
[50] Author's interview Dan Bahadur Bishwokarma, board member of the NDC and affiliated with the UCPN (Maoist), conducted on 19 May 2014.
[51] Currently, Dalits make up 13.5% of the total population, according to the 2011 census (Sollewijn Gelpke 2013).
[52] Author's interview with Nirmal Deula, affiliated with the Dalit sister wing of the UCPN (Maoist) and formerly employed at the NDC, conducted on 25 April 2014.
[53] Author's interview with Suman Poudel, Executive Director of DNF, on 27 May 2014.
[54] Pariyar is one of the 26 sub-castes that are identified by the NDC (see Annex 1).

contestation within their sub-caste. At this point, it should first be noted that the Pode caste group will be referred to as Deula community in the following, as all interviewees indicated that they perceive 'Pode' to be a derogatory term.

In the pro-Dalit faction, Nirmal Deula is arguing that the three sub-castes Dhobi, Kasai and Kopali did a "foolish act"[55], when they were leaving the Dalit category to stress their Newar identity. According to him, the leaders of these caste groups had been manipulated by the so-called 'upper' caste Newars and now that they are excluded from the Dalit community, they will "grow nowhere":

> All these castes within the Newar community, they may be fighting for preserving their culture, but they are also maintaining the status quo in which the so-called 'upper' castes are in good positions, financially, socio-economically and politically.

Furthermore, he stated that the Newar community treats these three sub-castes similar to Deula and Chyame and therefore, they should be fighting against untouchability in the Dalit movement.[56] Naturally, Nirmal Deula and his colleague, Babu Ratna Deula, are claiming that their community belongs to the Dalit category. The latter is justifying this claim by referring to King Malla who restructured the Newar social pattern along caste lines and the *Muluki Ain* of 1854 that mentions Pode and Chyame as 'untouchables'.[57]

In contrast to the aforementioned, Maila Babu Deula, the president of the Deula society[58], claims that the "Deulas are one of the oldest indigenous people of Nepal"[59]. According to him, this had been ascertained during an interaction programme in 2000, in which members of all Newar sub-castes that had been scheduled as Dalits at that time, including Kopali, Kasai and Dhobi, consulted with the geography expert Harpa Gurung, whether these caste groups fall under the Dalit category. This conclusion was based on the research of a German man, carried out approximately 2000 years ago. According to that research, the

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[55] Author's interview with Nirmal Deula, affiliated with the Dalit sister wing of the UCPN (Maoist) and formerly employed at the NDC, conducted on 25 April 2014.

[56] Author's interview with Nirmal Deula, affiliated with the Dalit sister wing of the UCPN (Maoist) and formerly employed at the NDC, conducted on 25 April 2014.

[57] Author's interview with Babu Ratna Deula, affiliated with the UCPN (Maoist), conducted on 25 April 2014.

[58] According to Maila Babu Deula, the Deual society is an umbrella organisation which aims to bring all Deula people together in order to educate them and empower them to fight against any kind of discrimination.

[59] Author's interview with Maila Babu Deula, affiliated with the Deula Society, Newāh De Dabū and NFDIN, conducted on 15 May 2014.

Deula community are believed to have fought for the Kirat dynasty, which was defeated by the Lichhavis. He further explained:

> Deulas are not Dalits at all. They are one of the oldest indigenous people of this country. We have our own identity, we have our own culture, our own customs, and our own social rituals. We have been socio-economically backward because we surrendered during the war and all our property was confiscated by the Lichhavis.[60]

It is remarkable that the actors of both factions justify their preferred boundary by a selected fraction of history that supports their claim. Since these historical fractions are not contradictory to each other, they are insufficient to exclude the opponent's assertion. Thus, Nirmal Deula refers to the low social status of their caste group within the Newar community due to the practice of untouchability, while Maila Babu Deula explains the backwardness of their sub-caste with the defeat of the Lichhavis and its consequences for the Deulas. The latter also emphasised the cultural and linguistic difference of the Deulas in comparison with other Dalit groups, while stressing: "Instead, their culture is more resembling to the culture of the Shakye Newar which is one of the so-called 'upper' castes within the Newari community."[61] This argumentation is very similar to what Wimmer (1008:989) describes as "caste-climbing" under "Boundary Shifting through Repositioning".

The above mentioned account has pointed out that these representatives of the two factions opt for different boundaries that are seemingly incompatible, making it difficult to negotiate about them. However, Prakash Nepali, a retired chef and Deula activist, who himself belongs to the Deula community, has stated in the interview that, shortly after the dissolution of the CA in May 2012, an interaction programme was held for the Deula community in order to clarify whether they should classify themselves as either Dalit or *Janajati*:

> Passed by the majority at that time, it was agreed that the Deula community is backward historically and they need freedom from all kinds of discrimination and oppression, but the movement should be led by replacing the word Dalit with

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[60] Ibidem.
[61] Ibidem.

another suitable word [...]. For that purpose, it was agreed that the Deula community should be regarded as backward or marginalised *janajati*, not as a Dalit.[62]

He further stated that even the strong supporters of the pro-Dalit faction agreed to replace the word in order to overcome the fragmentation of the Deula movement. This indicates that negotiation processes between the two Deula factions are taking place. Moreover, they seem to have come to an agreement or "cultural compromise" (Wimmer 2008) by rejecting the Newars as well as the Dalit group and categorising as marginalised *janajatis*, instead.

Nevertheless, it was unclear whether Nirmal Deula and Maila Babu Deula had been present in the interaction programme. Prakash Nepali merely argued: "I and Nirmal Deula are the oldest people with communist ideology. We are the leaders and should not fragment the society. Rather, we should try to keep the community intact."[63] However, when Nirmal Deula was asked whether negotiations were taking place between the two factions, he stated:

> It is not a matter to agree upon between the two factions. Rather, it is a matter to be discussed based on the reality that exists in society. [...] We want to fight against discrimination that is done to us based on the ground of caste.[64]

Nirmal Deula does not seem to be willing to compromise on the issue, while Maila Babu Deula is attempting for more than a decade to remove the Deula sub-caste from the NDC's Dalit list, because he regards the word Dalit as disrespectful and its continued use as a reason for the perpetuation of the practice of untouchability[65]. Furthermore, Ratnalal Deula argued: "Deulas are the priest, and do you believe that priests can be Dalits?"[66]

Based on these interviews, Dalitness appears to be a highly contested issue within the Deula community. When the two board members of the NDC were asked, why the Deulas continue to be in the list, Dan Bahadur Bishwokarma answered:

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[62] Author's interview with Prakash Nepali, retired chef and Deula activist, conducted on 7 May 2014.
[63] Ibidem
[64] Author's interview with Nirmal Deula, affiliated with the Dalit sister wing of the UCPN (Maoist) and formerly employed at the NDC, conducted on 25 April 2014.
[65] Author's interview with Maila Babu Deula, affiliated with the Deula Society, Newāh De Dabū and NFDIN, conducted on 15 May 2014.
[66] The author's interview with Maila Babu Deula, was conducted on 15 May 2014 in the presence of Ratnalal Deula. The above cited was his only comment.

Though, they are said to be worshipping as priests in temples, they are not allowed in the houses of so-called 'higher' Newar castes nor are they allowed to touch them. Therefore, it doesn't matter whether they are priests or not. If they are treated as untouchables, this is the basis for keeping them included in the Dalit list.[67]

He further stated that five to six years ago, a debate among the different factions of the Deula community had been held at the NDC, including Nirmal Deula, the former president of the Deula Society and political leaders from the Deula sub-castes. Based on this discussion, they have concluded that Deula should remain in the Dalit category.[68] This, however, contrasts with the account of Prakash Nepali, who claims that the Deula community has come to the conclusion that they want to be categorized as marginalized *janajatis*.

The aforementioned section attempted to give voice to some actors that are involved in the negotiation processes and contestation within the Deula community, regarding Dalitness. The analysis of these interactional dynamics allows certain assumptions to be made. First, despite the fact that membership in the Dalit category entails the allocation of state-benefits and is meant to uplift the former 'untouchable' community from its disadvantaged status, it is perceived as an imposed category by certain actors, who opt for another boundary. This is also interrelated with the second assumption that a differentiation should be made between "ethnic category, which may be entirely imposed by powerful outsiders [...] and an "ethnic group" based on self-identification and a shared sense of belonging." Maila Babu Deula is categorized as Dalit, but he identifies as Newar. At that point, the role of political networks in determining the location of the boundary comes finally into play. While the NDC has the authority to define the location of the 'ethnic category', actors can define their 'ethnic group' with the affiliation of networks. This is demonstrated by Maila Babu Deula, who is affiliated with the National Forum for the Newars and the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Identities. Third, it seems that negotiations on the categorisation of the Deula community are taking place on different levels of society. The NDC stated that their decision in keeping Pode in the Dalit list is based on an interaction

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[67] Author's interview Dan Bahadur Bishwokarma, board member of the NDC and affiliated with the UCPN (Maoist), conducted on 19 May 2014.
[68] Ibidem.

with the Deula leaders of both factions, including Nirmal Deula. Besides this negotiating on the political level, other actors at community level had also been negotiating the issue and concluded that the Deulas should be categorized as marginalised *janajatis*. This is in accordance with Wimmer's theoretical assumption that: "Cultural consensus is also negotiated at lower levels of social organization, however, including in environments characterized by face-to-face interactions and dense social networks". The NDC should also take these negotiations into account in order to guarantee this group the right to self-determination.

# Chapter 6
# Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to explore the ways in which Dalits, who belong to the former 'untouchable' category, are shifting their boundary in contemporary Nepal by applying Wimmer's multilevel process theory in addition to the concepts of identity politics and discourse. Since Dalits can be regarded as a subordinate group and their boundary shifting strategy as counterdiscourse, the thesis has first addressed the dominant discourse that Dalits are attempting to counter.

While analysing the historical context in which the 'untouchable' category was invented, it became evident that Nepal forms a textbook example to demonstrate how ethnicity is produced by the interaction of social structures and social practices: The *Muluki Ain* of 1854 legalized the hierarchization of all caste and ethnic groups that placed the ruling *Parbatiya* elite on the top, the indigenous groups in the middle and certain *Parbatiya* occupational caste groups as 'untouchables' at the bottom of society. The Newars were the only ethnic group that was internally divided by sub-castes, allocated besides the *Parbatiya* caste groups as either 'high' or 'low'. This imposed social structure was reproduced by actors engaging in the practice of untouchability, which confirms Jabri's (1996:94-5) claim that 'social texts do not merely reflect or mirror objects [...] *they do things*". However, as Wimmer (2008:995) points out: "While powerful actors can make their vision of the social world publicly known and consequential for the lives of all, subordinates may develop counterdiscourses and other modes of dividing the social world into groups than those propagated by the dominant actors."

Prior to analysing the counterstrategy of Dalits, the next chapter addressed the structural transformations that enabled the Dalit movement to pursue their counterdiscourse. In Wimmer's theory, exogenous shifts such as major political events can provide incentives for actors to opt for new strategies of boundary making. In Nepal, the second democratization process that began in 1990 transformed the institutional structures,

opening up the space for subordinate groups to pursue counterstrategies. The number of Dalit and ethnic organisations grew exponentially, since the new constitution formally recognized the existence of untouchability and the cultural, linguistics and religious diversity of the country. Identity politics became the new means for marginalized groups to transform their previously stigmatized accounts of group membership.

The democratic environment also introduced new powerful actors to the political landscape of Nepal: international organisations. This provided the opportunity for the Dalit movement to form alliances with these organisations by using the general human rights discourse, which serves as a powerful frame to justify their claim of being wrongfully marginalized by the practice of 'untouchability'. The use of frames, such as 'equality' and 'social harmony', leads to the assumption that the Dalit movement is attempting to redefine their boundaries, which contrasts with Wimmer's (2008:1007) claim that they adopted the strategy of inversion. Although, Dalit activists are targeting the hierarchy of society, Wimmer's proposed strategy seems to be an inadequate fit. Rather, it is argued that they aspire to replace the hierarchy with an 'equal society'. Therefore, the incorporation of a sixth strategy 'Shifting Boundaries through Redefinition' into Wimmer's model is recommended.

The UN discourse of 'racial discrimination' had been identified as another frame used by the Dalit movement. It is suggested that the appropriateness of frames is secondary, as long as they serve the interests of the movement. Furthermore, Wimmer's claim that Dalits have adopted the discourse of 'indigenousness' had also been dismissed based on the findings of this research. While the *janajati* movement is using the 'indigenousness' discourse to differentiate themselves from the caste groups of Nepal, the Dalit movement claims that the society had been divided between 'pure' and 'impure' castes. At this point, the *madhesi* movement was mentioned that bases their discourse of marginalisation on the divide between the Tarai and Hill region.

While it became evident that the discourses of these three movements produce overlapping classifications and identify one common oppressor, the Hill Brahmin, the likelihood that they will expand their category to demand their rights collectively is argued to be minor. Dalit activists state that they also face untouchability from indigenous nationalities due to the legacy of the imposed caste hierarchy of 1854. As a consequence, the collaboration

between the two movements is limited while they could form a powerful alliance to oppose the oppressive structures jointly.

Further, it became evident that the practice of untouchability is an important aspect to define the term Dalit and Folmar's (2013:93-4) proposed distinction between the imposed and generated identity was used to demonstrate this. While the imposed identity refers to the status of untouchability, the generated identity focusses on the wrongful oppression that derives from the imposed one. It is argued, however, that the continued association of the term Dalit with 'untouchability' is an obstacle for the boundary to exceed the categorical character and become a social or behavioural one, a distinction that is made by Wimmer (2008:975).

The above findings have presented the two characteristics of the social setting, the institutional order and power relations that determine the incentives of actors to choose a boundary shifting strategy and the specific strategy type. Yet, the third characteristic had not been addressed. According to Wimmer, the reach of political networks determines the exact location of the boundary. The findings of this research are not supporting this claim. Rather it is a government institution, the National Dalit Commission that has the authority to certify the membership of sub-castes in the Dalit category, which currently includes 26 caste groups.

At this point, it became evident that the politics of identity entail the granting of public priority to one of the overlapping identities which had been demonstrated with the so-called 'low' caste Newars. From the five Newar caste groups that had originally been scheduled as Dalits, three have been granted their requested removal from the Dalit category by the NDC. It was argued that the discourse of 'indigenousness' was an incentive for certain 'high' caste Newars to aim at an expanded Newar category that includes all sub-castes, which was accepted by leaders of these three removed caste groups. These developments have also affected the Pode/Deula sub-caste that is still included in the Dalit list, but faces internal disagreement on the matter.

Earlier, the assumption had been made that the importance of power is most evident at the margins of Dalitness where inclusion and exclusion is contested. This was demonstrated by the Deula case. While negotiations within the Deula community on lower levels of society appear to have resulted in the consensus that the Deulas opt for being categorized as

marginalized *janajatis*, the negotiations on the political level between the NDC and leaders of the Deula community resulted in keeping this sub-caste in the list. Therefore, it was argued that a differentiation between category and ethnic group should be made in order to identify to what an extent the categorization of an individual is in correspondence with his or her self-identification. Returning to Wimmer's third field characteristics, it appears that the NDC has the authority to define the location of the Dalit category, while actors can define their 'ethnic group' with the affiliation of networks. Nevertheless, actors or sub-castes should also have the right to self-determination, regarding their categorisation.

## Recommendations for Further Research

The first recommendation for further research concerns the above mentioned findings on the Deula community. It should be noted that they are based on a very limited number of interviewees from the concerned sub-caste and the verification of these assumptions is required. Ethnographic research and unrestricted access to the research subjects could reveal much more about these negotiation processes within the Deula community.

Moreover, due to the limited scope of this thesis, further research is recommended to analyse the boundary shifting strategy of Dalits in Nepal. While the aforementioned findings have mainly addressed the exogenous shift that enabled the Dalit movement to shift the consensus over the location and meaning of the boundary in their direction, additional research should address the endogenous mechanism that can assess to what extent the boundary shifting strategy of Dalits is able to destabilize and denaturalize existing hierarchies of power, institutional structures and political alliances (Wimmer 2008:1006). This mechanism could be assessed after the Constituent Assembly announces the form of federalist restructuring, especially during its implementation period.

Furthermore, research on the *madhesi* movement through the lens of Wimmer's multilevel process theory in comparison to this research could offer valuable insights in the ways that *madhesi* actors are attempting to overcome the caste hierarchy within their constituency, since *madhesi* people include *madhesi* Dalits, indigenous nationalities and so-called 'high' caste *madhesis*.

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# Scheduled Dalit Sub-Castes[69]

A) Hill Dalit

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Gandharba (Gaine) | 2. Pariyar (Damai, Dargee, Suchikar, Nagarchee, Dholee, Hudke) |
| 3. Badi | 4. Bishwokarma (Kami, Lohar, Sunar, Od, Chunanra, Parki, Tamata) |
| 5. Mijar (Sarki, Charmakar, Bhool) | 6. Pode (Deula,Pujari,Jalari) |
| 7. Chyame (Kuchikar,Chyamkhal) | |

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B) Tarai Dalit

| | |
|---|---|
| 8. Kalar | 9. Kakaihiya |
| 10. Kori | 11. Khatik |
| 12. Khatwe (Mandal, Khang) | 13. Chamar (Ram, Mochi, Harijan, Ravidas) |
| 14. Chidimar | 15. Dom (Marik) |
| 16. Tatma (Tanti, Das) | 17. Dushadh (Paswan, Hajara) |
| 18. Dhobi (Rajak Hindu) | 19. Pasi |
| 20. Bantar | 21. Mushar |
| 22. Mestar (Halkhor) | 23. Sarbhang (Sarbariya) |
| 24. Natuwa | 25. Dhandi |
| 26. Dharikar/ Dhankar | |

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[69] National Dalit Commission, available at: http://www.ndc.gov.np/caste-schedul-12-en.html [accessed 22 July 2014]. It should be noted that this list does not reflect internal hierarchy within the Dalit community.

# Glossary of Nepali Words

| | |
|---|---|
| *Acchut*…………………...…………………….. | Untouchable |
| *Adivasi janajati*……………...…………….…. | Indigenous Nationalities |
| *Bahun*……………………………….……… | Member of the Brahmin caste group |
| *Garip*.................................................................... | Poor |
| *Janajati*……………...…………………….… | Non-Hindu ethnic group |
| *Jat*……………………...…………………….. | Sub-caste |
| *Khas Bahun*………………………………. | Hill Brahmin |
| *Madhesi*………...………………….……… | Inhabitant of the Tarai region |
| *Matwali*………………….……………….… | Liquor-drinking |
| *Namasinya*………………………...……… | non-enslavable |
| *Masinya*…………………….........…..... | enslavable |
| *Muluki Ain*……………………........……… | Civil Code |
| *Tallo Jat*.............................................................. | Low caste |
| *Pahadi*.................................................................. | Inhabitant of the Hill region |
| *Pani nachalne choi chito halnu naparne*…..……...…. | "Impure but "touchable" Caste |
| *Pani nachalne choi chito halnu parne*………....…….. | "Impure" and "untouchable" Caste |
| *Parbatiya*……………...…………….............. | Nepali speaking Hindu |
| *Paune*.................................................................... | Three-quarter Man |
| *Tagadhari*……………...……………….......... | Wearers of the Holy Thread |
| *Uppechhit*.............................................................. | Ignored |
| *Utpidit*.................................................................. | Oppressed |
| *Varna*……………………………...……… | Caste Category |