

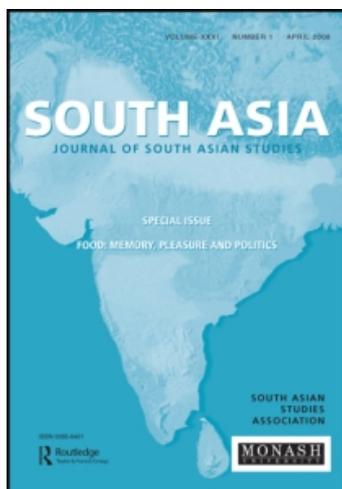
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Many Names for Mother: The Ethno-Linguistic Politics of Deafness in Nepal

Erika Hoffmann-Dilloway

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Introduction

In Nepal d/Deafness¹ has commonly been interpreted as the result of the affected person's bad karma. As a result, families have often worked to render d/Deafness invisible, by preventing non-hearing members from displaying their condition in public. Despite the prevalence of this perspective, during the last twenty years d/Deafness has become increasingly visible in Nepal, particularly in urban centres such as Kathmandu. Sign language interpreters now appear weekly on the televised news, Deaf servers are prominently featured in a popular chain of restaurants, and members of Deaf social organisations march in the streets to promote Nepali Sign Language as the 'mother tongue' of Deaf Nepalis.

This emerging change in the social significance of d/Deafness in Nepal can be linked to a broad international shift in the ways in which sign languages are perceived. Previously considered crude gestural systems, the last forty years has seen a global increase in the academic, social, and governmental recognition of sign languages as full and distinct languages, independent of the spoken languages surrounding them.² This new understanding of the nature of sign

¹ In this article I follow the widespread convention of writing the word deaf (lower case) to indicate the inability to hear and Deaf (with a capital D) to indicate identification as a member of a signing community. In cases in which I refer to a group or situation in which both models of d/Deafness are prominent, I use mixed case (d/Deaf). While this convention for writing the terms is not common in Nepal, the social distinctions it indexes are important in this context.

² See for instance W. Stokoe, *Sign Language Structure* (Silver Spring: Linstok, 1978); R. Senghas and L. Monaghan, 'Signs of Their Times: Deaf Communities and the Culture of Language', in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol.31 (2003), pp.69–97; and L. Monaghan, 'A World's Eye View: Deaf Cultures in Global Perspective', in L. Monaghan, C. Schmaling, K. Nakamura and G.H. Turner (eds), *Many Ways to be Deaf: International Variation in Deaf Communities* (Washington DC: Gaulladet University Press, 2003), pp.1–24.

languages has in turn affected the ways in which Deafness itself has been framed. In particular, Deaf organisations worldwide have increasingly come to promote a view of the Deaf not as a disabled population but as an ethno-linguistic minority group.

As Deaf Nepalis have adopted this model of Deafness they have become increasingly aligned with other marginalised ethno-linguistic groups in Nepal; efforts to gain political and social recognition as an ethnic group in Nepal are often grounded in claims of a distinct ‘mother tongue’. This way of framing ethnicity is derived from the widespread notion that social and linguistic boundaries naturally coincide. However, connections between such social categories and the symbols (including language) that reflect and produce them are not inherent but emerge through historically situated semiotic processes. Nevertheless, essentialism remains a powerful trope by which both social groups claim or are ascribed ethnic status. As a result, scholars must attend to the ways in which contingent linkages between linguistic form and social structure come to be seen as natural—and thereby accrue social and political power.

This paper explores these processes by detailing the emergence of Deafness as an ethno-linguistic category in Nepal. Although this shift in the framing of Deafness coincided with, and was influenced by, the rise of other identity movements in Nepal, Deaf Nepalis are not often included in discussions of ethnic politics in Nepal. Against this, I argue that an analysis of ethno-linguistic Deafness in Nepal highlights processes that are fundamental to, but less visible in, the construction of ethnicity more generally: because d/Deaf Nepalis are typically born to hearing parents, the processes of social (re)production in Deaf networks are more easily seen as one of a number of possibilities and can be less taken for granted, or naturalised, than many other ethnic categories in Nepal. However, as the prevailing view remains that ethnicity should map onto a shared language and culture, I show that the discursive practices that work to construct the symbols of Nepali Deafness also work to naturalise them.

In addition, this case highlights the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism in Nepal. Deaf Nepalis typically only acquire Nepali Sign Language and form social relations on the basis of Deafness once they enter a school for the Deaf. Institutions such as schools are not only the primary sites of Deaf social (re)production in Nepal, but have also been important sites through which the Nepali state has promoted the symbols and practices of Nepali nationalism. As a result, both Nepali Sign Language and Deafness as an ethno-linguistic social category have been significantly influenced by the state’s

framing of nationalism. While this is particularly visible in the case of Deaf Nepalis, other ethnic, Dalit, or indigenous nationalities (*adivasi janajati*) movements in Nepal are also relationally shaped by the symbols of the Nepali state.

Another consequence of the fact that Deaf Nepalis are born into hearing families from all social classes, castes, and ethnic backgrounds, is that Deaf Nepalis are socially and linguistically diverse. This, too, is not unique to Deaf Nepali social networks, as internal diversity characterises all ethnic groupings³ (though it is more extreme among the Deaf). This paper's analysis of variation in the form and interpretation of the sign for MOTHER⁴ in Nepali Sign Language highlights the tension between identification with birth social networks and Deaf affiliation. The issues surrounding such kinship terms demonstrate both the ways in which a given symbol can have different significance for differently-positioned people and the processes by which social institutions attempt to regiment those forms and interpretations. The primary argument of this paper, then, is that the framing of Deaf Nepalis as an ethno-linguistic minority group is mediated both by the notion of a shared mother tongue, Nepali Sign Language and, crucially, by attempts to create shared semiotic interpretations of its lexical items.

The data analysed in this article are drawn from a corpus of approximately forty videotaped hours of natural signing within Nepali d/Deaf schools, associations, and homes recorded between October 2004 and May 2005. My acquisition and interpretation of these data was grounded in long-term participant observation in Nepali d/Deaf social networks during a series of visits in 1997, 1999, 2002, 2004–05, and 2006.

Ethnicity and Nationalism in Nepal

Ethnic groups are often popularly defined as social groups marked by internally-homogeneous and discretely-bounded cultures, a framework that treats ethnicity as essential or primordial. However as there are no external criteria concerning descent or cultural practice that neatly circumscribe discrete ethnic boundaries, many anthropologists see ethnicity rather as involving 'subjective belief in ... common descent because of (subjectively perceived)

³ See for instance W. Fisher, *Fluid Boundaries: Forming and Transforming Identity in Nepal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); and A. Guneratne, *Many Tongues, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁴ English glosses of NSL signs appear throughout the article in capital letters.

similarities of physical type or of customs or both'.⁵ While this move to reframe ethnicity as an emic phenomenological category has been theoretically significant, it is equally important to attend to the ways in which the fluidity implied by this model is limited by the structural conditions that obtain in a particular historical and social context.⁶ Anthropology's epistemological shift from a focus on structure to a focus on process⁷ has been important in this regard, directing scholarly attention away from the hoary question of what ethnicity 'is' (and who 'has' it) to the ways in which the social utility of the concept is deeply implicated with processes previously assigned to other analytical domains, such as state development and economic relationships. This focus highlights the power struggles involved in the relational processes of ethnic affiliation and ascription.

Nationalism in particular is often an important force in structuring the idioms by which ethnicity is ascribed and ethnic boundaries are contested and ranked within a given social context. Like ideologies surrounding ethnicity, nationalist ideologies often frame nation-states as the natural expression of primordial racial, ethnic, and linguistic unity. The notion of shared language played a particularly important role in the emergence of this conception of the nation-state. Languages, often understood (incorrectly) to be 'natural entities, out there to be discovered' and therefore 'prior to intentional human political activity', can be used to 'justify and legitimate political actions such as the formation of nation-states'.⁸ However, nations, far from primordial, are often shaped through state intervention; nationalist projects work to 'produce an imagined sense of political community that conflates peoplehood, territory, and

⁵ M. Weber, *Economy and Society* (trans. E. Fishcoff, G. Roth and C. Wittich) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p.385, comments in parentheses inserted by A. Alonso, 'The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism and Ethnicity', in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol.23 (1994), p.391. For other works highlighting this perspective see F. Barth, 'Introduction', in F. Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Boston: Little Brown, 1969), pp.9–38; and J. Fishman, 'Language and Ethnicity', in H. Giles (ed.), *Language, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Relations* (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp.15–57.

⁶ The following works have been important in directing anthropologists' attention to these structural constraints: P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); A. Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks* (trans. Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith) (New York: International Press, 1971); and R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁷ S. Ortner, 'Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.26, no.1 (1984), pp.126–66.

⁸ S. Gal and K. Woolard, 'Constructing Languages and Publics: Authority and Representation' in S. Gal and K. Woolard (eds), *Languages and Publics: The Making of Authority*, (Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 2001), pp.4; T. Taylor, 'Which is to Be Master? Institutionalization of Authority in the Science of Language', in J. Joseph and T. Taylor (eds.), *Ideologies of Language* (New York: Routledge, 1990) pp.9–26; and R. Bauman and C. Briggs, *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000).

state' while generating hierarchical 'categories of Self or Other within a polity'.⁹ In this respect, struggles between the state and its 'ethnic' subjects are mutually formative.

These processes are well illustrated by the ways in which the Nepali state on the one hand has worked explicitly to legislate caste and ethnic identities¹⁰ and, on the other hand, those social groups in Nepal who define themselves as marginalised ethnic groups or nations and have worked to frame their group identities in ways that either align with, or against, the processes of Sanskritisation¹¹ that have characterised Nepal's nationalist project. While Nepalis are extremely diverse in religious, social, and linguistic terms, nationalist sentiment in Nepal has always been grounded in hegemonic hill Hinduism and the linguistic and social practices of Bahun and Chhetri groups from the central hills region.

A particularly stark example of the ways in which 'official nationalism and state routines simultaneously homogenize community while creating heterogeneity',¹² can be found in Nepal's Muluki Ain, or Chief Law, of 1854. Enumerating and ranking Nepal's social groups in terms of their relative purity by Hindu standards, this legislation was an attempt by Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana to both codify and reify the various, relatively fluid, practices concerning caste and ethnic group relationships then extant in Nepal.¹³ By legislating rules concerning cross-category physical and social contact, and associating different groups with different kinds of land tenure and trading rights, the Muluki Ain not only laid out a set of categories but also imbued them with a practical significance that may have been previously

⁹ Alonso, 'The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism and Ethnicity', p.391; and B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991).

¹⁰ N. Levine, 'Caste, State, and Ethnic Boundaries in Nepal', in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.16, no.1 (1987), pp.71–88.

¹¹ M.N. Srinivas defined the term Sanskritisation as 'The process by which a "low" Hindu caste or tribal or other group changes its customs, rituals, and ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently "twiceborn" caste'. See M. N. Srinivas, 'Cohesive Role of Sanskritization', in P. Mason (ed.), *Unity and Diversity: India and Ceylon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp.67–82.

¹² Alonso, 'The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism and Ethnicity', p.391.

¹³ C.von Furer-Haimendorf, 'The Inter-Relations of Castes and Ethnic Groups in Nepal', in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol.20, no.1/3 (1957), pp.243–53; L. Caplan, 'Inter-Caste Marriages in a Nepalese Town', in C.von Furer-Haimendorf (ed.), *Contributions to the Anthropology of Nepal* (Westminster: Aris and Philips, 1974), pp.40–61; J.T. Hitchcock, 'An Additional Perspective on the Nepali Caste System', in J.F. Fisher (ed.), *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface* (The Hague: Mouton Publishing Company, 1978), pp.111–20; A. Hofer, *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A Study of the Muluki Ain of 1854* (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 1979); Levine, 'Caste, State, and Ethnic Boundaries in Nepal', pp.71–88; Fisher, *Fluid Boundaries: Forming and Transforming Identity in Nepal*; and Guneratne, *Many Tongues, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal*.

lacking. As a result, claims to membership in particular named categories became ‘a matter of economic and political significance and engendered a process whereby groups began to define or redefine themselves with respect to the legal hierarchy’.¹⁴

Nepal’s legislation of ethnic identity through the Muluki Ain can be seen as Jang Bahadur Rana’s response to Nepal’s precarious geo-political position at that time (between Tibet/China to the north and British India to the south). While the Muluki Ain stressed differences between social groupings, it organised those differences hierarchically within a single, bounded system. By projecting the notion that the Nepali nation-state mapped onto a culturally-unified and discrete population, Jang Bahadur was able to frame Nepal’s right to sovereignty in the terms of European Romantic Nationalism.¹⁵

While the Panchayat government revised the Muluki Ain in 1963 to remove the use of caste as an officially-sanctioned method of structuring social relations, the state continued to draw on a hill Hindu cultural framework in defining its notions of nationalism. This involved attempts to unite its polity ideally by encouraging citizens to adopt upper-caste Hindu practices, or failing that to see such practices accepted as the unmarked norm (while associating ethnic or indigenous nationality groups with negative or marked qualities). The emerging educational system was a focal point for these efforts, as all educational materials were written in Nepali—the official language (spoken primarily in the Hindu middle-hill region of the country)—and promoted Hindu cultural perspectives.¹⁶ This effort also entailed the repression of the expression of other ethnic identities.

After the first People’s Movement of 1990—the mass uprising in Kathmandu that forced the government to institute constitutional reforms and allow the formation of a multiparty parliament—the Nepali constitution was reframed. The old document had described the nation as ‘an independent indivisible and sovereign monarchical Hindu kingdom’; the new one spoke of it as a ‘multiethnic, multilingual, democratic, independent, indivisible, sovereign, monarchical Hindu kingdom’.¹⁷ This rewording reflected the government’s

¹⁴ Fisher, *Fluid Boundaries: Forming and Transforming Identity in Nepal*, p.71.

¹⁵ R. Burghart, ‘The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal’, in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.44, no.1 (1984), pp.101–25.

¹⁶ D. Skinner and D. Holland, ‘Schools and the Cultural Production of the Educated Person in a Nepalese Hill Community’, in B. Levinson, D. Foley, and D. Holland (eds), *The Cultural Production of the Educated Person* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp.273–300.

¹⁷ M. Hutt, ‘Drafting the Nepali Constitution, 1990’, in *Asian Survey*, Vol.31, no.11 (1991), pp.1029 & 1035.

increased recognition of the political rights of marginalised ethnic groups, a shift that included designating languages other than Nepali as ‘national’ languages of Nepal,¹⁸ and permitting the establishment of ethnic associations. This environment allowed marginalised ethnic groups to formally resist the Sanskritisation imposed by the state; many of those groups in Nepal that have been discriminated against on the basis of Hindu principles (‘tribal’, Tibetan, other ethnic or indigenous groups given a low ranking in the Muluki Ain, for example) have urged their politically-active members to reject Hinduism and to boycott its major festivals, such as Dasain, and have sought to highlight the Tibeto-Burman components of their syncretic practices.¹⁹ In such ways, leaders of ethnic group associations attempt to frame their constituencies in terms that are oppositionally related to nationalism as defined by the state.

An Ethno-Linguistic Model of Deafness in Nepal

There is a very high incidence of deafness in Nepal—the percentage of profoundly deaf individuals in the population is estimated to be between 1.7 and 3 percent.²⁰ Despite this, Irene Taylor claims that while most Nepalis know at least one d/Deaf person, ‘what the people of Nepal find more difficult to accept than sheer numbers and statistics on deaf people is that deafness does not discriminate; in fact, it affects all ethnic groups, castes, and classes of people of each religion in Nepal’.²¹ The difficulty in accepting the social universality of deafness stems from the perception of d/Deafness as resulting from the affected person’s bad karma (the results of misdeeds in a previous life). Because of the shame and ritual pollution attached to the condition, ‘deafness is well hidden as it is quick to be disdained’.²² In fact, Taylor reports that d/Deaf children are often disguised as servants, their kin relationship with their families thereby obscured to the public eye.²³ Indeed, d/Deaf people can even lose their birth-caste status (particularly those born into high-caste families). For this reason, many Nepalis interpret d/Deafness as a low- or out-caste phenomenon, which further reinforces its association with pollution and punishment—though this

¹⁸ While this move has provided some recognition for languages other than Nepali, Nepali retains privileged status.

¹⁹ Fisher, *Fluid Boundaries: Forming and Transforming Identity in Nepal*; S. Hangen, ‘Boycotting Dasain: History, Memory, and Ethnic Politics in Nepal’, in *Studies in Nepali History and Society*, Vol.10, no.1 (2005), pp.105–33.

²⁰ I. Taylor, *Buddhas in Disguise* (San Diego: Dawn Sign Press, 1997), p.35.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p.65.

state of affairs does not manifest itself via birth patterns but must be actively produced.

However, since the 1960s, international aid organisations such as the Peace Corps have been effective in introducing a biomedical model for understanding deafness in some circles. This shift was marked in large part by the efforts of such organisations to communicate a message that deafness has a biomedical basis *not implicated* in the workings of karma. This model provided a platform from which d/Deaf Nepalis could resist the dominant religious paradigm that constructs hearing loss as a marker of moral lack. However within this model, deafness itself is still constructed as an undesirable condition, an illness to be cured. In cases in which biomedical intervention or the application of hearing aids is not successful in effecting a cure, educators who adhere to this model typically attempt to mitigate the resulting disability through oralist procedures—attempting to teach a deaf person to speak and read lips. This is an effort to allow deaf students to function analogously to, or ideally pass as, hearing persons in order to ‘cure’ their deafness socially if not physically.

In such contexts the use of sign language is often strictly discouraged, and the first Nepali schools for the d/Deaf were no exception. As Kiran Acharya, one of the first students of these schools notes, ‘the teachers working at the instruction center did not allow the d/Deaf students to communicate or study using sign language. In order to suppress their natural tendency to communicate in a manual manner, the teachers would scold them, hold their hands down, twist their ears, pull their hair, etc. This was done in an attempt to channel their efforts towards communicating with sounds, unnatural for Deaf people’.²⁴ Despite these measures, Nepali Sign Language (NSL) emerged from the communicative interactions of the d/Deaf children brought together in this, and other subsequently-established, d/Deaf schools.²⁵ NSL is not unique in this regard; scholars have noted that many sign languages have had their genesis from the intensive manual communication of d/Deaf children in schooling contexts (whether this practice is actively suppressed by oralist teachers and staff or not).²⁶

²⁴ K. Acharya, *A History of the Deaf in Nepal* (original in Nepali) (trans. E. Hoffmann and D. Chemjong) (Kathmandu: National Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, n.d.).

²⁵ There are roughly a dozen other schools for the d/Deaf in Nepal. While most are found in urban centers, they serve both urban and rural students. In addition a few, such as the school for the Deaf in Gorkha, are located in more rural areas.

²⁶ See for example D. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign against Sign Language* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996); L. Monaghan, *Signing, Oralism, and the Development of the New Zealand Deaf Community: An Ethnography and History of Language Ideologies* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1996); R. Senghas and J. Kegl, ‘Social Considerations in the Emergence of Idioma deSignos

As mentioned above, the last 40 years has seen widespread growth in the academic, social, and governmental recognition of sign languages as fully linguistic.²⁷ Deaf social networks worldwide have in turn drawn on the popular view of the relationship between language and ethnicity to promote a model of the Deaf as an ethno-linguistic minority group rather than as a disabled one.²⁸ From the anthropological approach to understanding ethnicity outlined above, the question to ask about this shift is not: 'Are Deaf signers ethnic?', but rather: 'By what processes do Deaf people frame themselves as ethnic and what is the relationship between this way of framing Deafness and the broader socio-political contexts in which these efforts are embedded?'

Because ethnicity is popularly understood as entailing shared and essential biological qualities, those working to promote a view of the Deaf as an ethno-linguistic minority group often do so in ways that respond to that perspective. For example, activists in the United States have claimed that paternity, or descent, plays a major role in the constitution of Deaf ethnicity. This is most obvious—for genetic reasons—in cases in which Deaf children are born to Deaf parents. Indeed in some visions, only Deaf (or hearing) children of Deaf parents, born into a 'Deaf World', can be considered ethnically Deaf.²⁹ However, over 90 percent of d/Deaf children are born to hearing parents and it has also been argued that in whatever way hearing loss is acquired, the condition constitutes a shared biological trait which, for those who enter Deaf social networks, becomes part of the basis for kinship, shared identification, and often intermarriage.³⁰

Nicaraguenese (Nicaraguan Sign Language)', in *Sign*, Vol.7, no.1 (Spring 1994), pp.40–6; A. Senghas and M. Coppola, 'Children Creating Language: How Nicaraguan Sign Language Acquired a Spatial Grammar', in *Psychological Science*, Vol.12, no.4 (2001), pp.323–8; and C. Reilly and N. Wannuwin, *The Rising of Lotus Flowers: Deaf Children's Self-Education in Thai Boarding Schools* (Washington DC: Gallaudet University Press, 2005).

²⁷ William Stokoe's seminal work on the structure of American Sign Language led to this shift. Subsequently, linguists world-wide have followed his lead in analysing the structure of sign languages. Nepali linguists, including Yogendra Prasad Yadav, Bhim Narayan Regmi, Shilu Sharma and Basanta Battachan, have published works in Nepali asserting that Nepali Sign Language is a real language, and Deaf Nepalis have drawn on these works for support.

²⁸ The notion of Deaf ethnicity has been critiqued by scholars within Deaf studies precisely because it relies on essentialising tropes. See for example L. Davis, 'Post Deafness', in H. Bauman (ed.), *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp.314–26.

²⁹ By the same token, Douglas Baynton argues that ethnicity is a misleading model for describing Deaf social identity because it obscures the fact that most deaf are born to hearing parents. See D. Baynton, 'Beyond Culture: Deaf Studies and the Deaf Body', in H. Bauman (ed.), *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), pp.293–313.

³⁰ Recent anthropological perspectives on kinship are well adapted to account for this way of framing Deaf relatedness; anthropologists have become aware of the 'cultural specificity of what were previously taken to be the natural facts on which all kinship systems were presumed to be built'. See L. Holy, *Anthropological*

In justifying their claims of Deaf ethnicity, Deaf activists draw on academic, as well as popular, ideas. For example they have argued that Deaf communities should be viewed as ethnic rather than disabled because they are characterised by a 'feeling of community, shared norms for behavior, shared values, culture-specific knowledge and customs, Deaf centered social structures, distinct languages, and artistic traditions'.³¹ Harlan Lane argues that drawing on these notions to position the 'Deaf-World' as ethnic has positive and practical consequences for the ways in which Deaf people perceive themselves and are seen by others and in particular, that it encourages Deaf people to 'learn their language, defend their heritage against more powerful groups, study their ethnic history; and so on'.³² He goes on to suggest that, in addition to these group-internal benefits, if viewed as an ethno-linguistic minority group the 'Deaf-World should enjoy the rights and protections accorded other ethnic groups under international law and treaties, such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities'.³³

While these arguments have been disseminated globally by Western Deaf organisations, local constitutions of Deafness as social identity vary across cultural contexts.³⁴ Thus while the linguistic minority model has increasingly shaped global understandings of Deafness, the ways in which this notion is employed by Nepali Deaf associations (institutions that serve as a venue for d/Deaf social interaction and activism) which receive funding and support from such international Deaf organisations (particularly those based in Scandinavia and Great Britain) is still, in part, shaped by the local socio-political context. While I have mentioned the relevance of occupation and commensality to this

Perspectives on Kinship (London: Pluto Press, 1996), p.165. See also R. Johnson and C. Erting, 'Ethnicity and Socialization in a Classroom for Deaf Children', in C. Lucas (ed.), *The Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community* (New York: Academic Press, 1989), pp.41–84.

³¹ H. Lane, 'Ethnicity, Ethics, and the Deaf-World', in *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, Vol.10, no.3 (2005), pp.291–310; C. Erting, 'Language Policy and Deaf Ethnicity in the United States', in *Sign Language Studies*, Vol.19 (1978), pp.139–52; Johnson and Erting, 'Ethnicity and Socialization in a Classroom for Deaf Children', pp.41–84; H. Markowicz and J. Woodward, 'Language and the Maintenance of Ethnic Boundaries in the Deaf Community', in *Communication and Cognition*, Vol.11 (1978), pp.29–37; and C. Padden and H. Markowicz, 'Cultural Conflicts between Hearing and Deaf Communities', in F. Crammatte and A. Crammatte (eds), *Seventh World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf* (Silver Spring, MD: National Association of the Deaf, 1976), pp.407–11.

³² Lane, 'Ethnicity, Ethics, and the Deaf-World', p.295.

³³ United Nations, 'Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities Resolution 47/135', in E. Osmanczyk and A. Mango (eds), *Encyclopedia of the United Nations and International Agreements* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Lane, 'Ethnicity, Ethics, and the Deaf-World', p.295.

³⁴ B. Lemaster and L. Monaghan, 'Variation in Sign Languages', in A. Duranti (ed.), *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp.141–66.

discussion elsewhere,³⁵ here I focus on issues pertaining to kinship and language.

Deaf Kinship in Nepal

The vast majority of Deaf Nepalis are born to hearing parents, deafened as a result of disease, iodine deficiency, or accident rather than genetics. However, it is increasingly common for Deaf Nepalis to create intra-Deaf affinal kinship ties through marriage. In part this is because the religious model that associates d/Deafness with ritual pollution can make it problematic for a Deaf person to marry within their birth group—but also because of the bonds that form in Deaf schools and associations. When Deaf Nepalis marry, the ideal is to find a suitable Deaf marriage partner from a compatible caste or ethnicity, and indeed this does characterise most Deaf intermarriages in Kathmandu.

For example, a young Deaf man of my acquaintance insisted to his family that he would only marry another d/Deaf person—however, not having any particular individual in mind he allowed them to scour their own caste network for a d/Deaf woman of the appropriate Newar caste. They were able to find several suitable d/Deaf girls from the correct social group, and he chose from among them. As a result, the couple remained within the joint family system, living in the Deaf husband's ancestral home. The couple now has a hearing son, who is fluent in NSL, Newari, and Nepali and who facilitates communication within the family group.

Deaf intermarriage also occurs across birth-caste and ethnicity lines. This is a highly significant (and often disruptive) practice in Nepal, where endogamy is one of the defining features of caste and ethnic relations and is one of the primary means of maintaining social distinctions.³⁶ Moreover since there is no formal provision for cross-caste marriage in Nepal, when such boundaries *are* transgressed, the offending parties have often been ejected from their families and communities and made to occupy low-status social categories constructed for such purposes.³⁷ In one such case encountered during my research, a cross-birth-caste Deaf couple was firmly ejected from both of their birth social groups in response to their marriage. Accordingly, the couple moved to an urban centre away from both families, and attached themselves to the local Deaf

³⁵ E. Hoffmann, 'Standardization beyond Form: Ideologies, Institutions, and the Semiotics of Nepali Sign Language', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2008.

³⁶ Levine, 'Caste, State, and Ethnic Boundaries in Nepal', pp.71–88.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

association. This social network gradually replaced the kin networks they had lost. Thus their hearing son, a native signer, grew up as part of a Deaf community. Indeed, because this family group no longer had attachments to their hearing families, there was no other social group into which the child could be socialised. This refiguring of birth kinship ties contributes to the emerging conception of the Deaf as an ethno-linguistic minority group in Nepal.

Language

Claims of Deaf ethnicity are also frequently grounded in terms of patrimony: shared and distinctive cultural practices that, most importantly, include the use of a natural sign language. For example, in much of the literature concerning Deaf communities (including, as the reader will have noticed, this article) a terminological distinction is made between ‘deaf’ and ‘Deaf’ (the un-capitalised spelling referring only to the fact of audiological impairment and the capitalised version indicating self-identification as a member of a signing community). Deaf Nepalis follow this model but distinguish instead between the two terms most broadly applied to the deaf in Nepal: *laato* (a pejorative term meaning dumb in the literal and figurative senses); and *bahiro* (d/Deaf).

As mentioned above, the practice of using language to define Deafness as a social category aligns Deaf Nepalis with other marginalised ethno-linguistic groups in Nepal. This construction of Deafness was initially not acceptable to the repressive Panchayat regime when it was introduced into Nepal by international Deaf organisations in the 1980s. For example, though the state was involved in the formation of the first deaf schools, it forbade the establishment of Deaf associations, just as it would not allow ethnic associations to form during that period. Despite having been declared illegitimate by the government, however, Nepali Deaf associations met throughout the 1980s to work for the betterment of Deaf Nepalis. After the People’s Movement of 1990, Deaf associations were declared legal and began to actively work to promote Nepali Sign Language as the ‘mother tongue of the Deaf,’ eventually succeeding in having it entered as a category in the 2001 national census—which duly recorded 5,743 ‘speakers’ of the language.³⁸ This was a highly significant move as, in both India and Nepal, the census is a major means by which languages acquire socio-linguistic recognition.³⁹

³⁸ R. Gordon (ed.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fifteenth Edition* (Dallas: SIL, 2005).

³⁹ The model for this particular method of linking and evaluating social and linguistic groups was developed in colonial India, and deployed most famously by Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India*. Indeed much of

As most Deaf Nepalis are born into hearing households, it might seem odd to apply the term ‘mother tongue’ to a language that most Deaf children do not have access to until their school years (and sometimes much later) and which they almost never see produced by their birth mothers. However, the concept of ‘mother tongue’ is often used in a more subjective than objective way among hearing Nepali ethnic groups as well—as, for example, Arjun Guneratne has demonstrated for the Tharu.⁴⁰ He reports that the Tharus of southern Nepal have based their struggle to obtain recognition as a politically-significant ethnic group around claims of a common language or ‘mother tongue’ as the political structure of Nepal demands. An actually manifest common language was not immediately necessary, as entering ‘Tharu Bhaasa’ (Tharu language) on the census form was sufficient in this regard.⁴¹ Indeed, at the time of Guneratne’s writing, in formal terms the Tharu had no common language.

Of course, all named languages are partly imagined, as languages are not discrete or internally homogeneous. Rather, ‘cultural categories of communication, such as named languages, dialects, standards, speech communities and genres, are constructed out of the messy variability of spoken interaction’.⁴² However, when it is acknowledged that the idea of a mother tongue and its formal manifestation do not map onto one another neatly, this discrepancy is generally treated as a transitional moment in a move towards formal unification. Ethnic leaders generally deem it necessary to ‘correct’ the state of affairs that has led to such linguistic diversity or to uncover a ‘lost’ but still ‘essential’ language that corresponds with their caste or ethnicity.⁴³

Likewise, leaders of Nepal’s Deaf organisations have worked to standardise Nepali Sign Language, claiming that uniformity in signing is necessary to unify the Deaf in Nepal. The process of language standardisation involves the selection of a particular language variety, its codification, the elaboration of its use across socio-linguistic domains, and public acceptance of its claim to ‘correctness’.⁴⁴ However, while the ultimate goal of this process is purportedly

the typology of Indian languages and information about their distribution currently in use throughout India has stemmed from Grierson’s methods for formatting and conducting his surveys. Language has been an important part of governmental regimentation of social groupings in both colonial British India and the Indian and Nepali polity since. See R. Burghart, ‘A Quarrel in the Language Family: Agency and Representations of Speech in Mithila’, in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.27, no.4 (1993), pp.761–804.

⁴⁰ Guneratne, *Many Tongues, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Gal and Woolard, ‘Constructing Languages and Publics: Authority and Representation’, p.1.

⁴³ Fisher, *Fluid Boundaries: Forming and Transforming Identity in Nepal*; Guneratne, *Many Tongues, One People: The Making of Tharu Identity in Nepal*.

⁴⁴ E. Haugen, ‘Dialect, Language, Nation’, in *American Anthropologist*, Vol.68 (1996), pp.105–33.

the reduction of variation in linguistic practice, the actual reduction of such variation (which may or may not be actually realised) is less important than the ideological positions that motivate the process and provide frameworks for the interpretation of its results.⁴⁵ The remainder of this paper examines the ways in which the project to standardise Nepali Sign Language has involved not only efforts to reduce variation in the ways people sign, but also in the social meanings they connect to those linguistic forms. In this respect, this project can also be seen as an effort to standardise Deafness as an emerging social category.

Regimenting the Semiotic Grounding of Nepali Sign Language and Deafness

Within the essentialising framework described above, the social qualities attached to a language are often taken to reflect the social characteristics of the group with which it is identified (and vice versa). A range of semiotic processes mediates such linkages between social categories and the symbols that reflect and produce them. In using the term 'semiotic' I refer to the study of systems of meaning, which seeks to account for the association(s) between forms (including but not limited to the linguistic) and 'the meanings they bear'.⁴⁶

These meanings extend beyond the referentiality of linguistic forms to the social indexicality of language, which Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall describe as 'the operations by which a given linguistic form is taken to "point to" a particular social identity or quality'.⁴⁷ They also include iconisation, 'the ideological representation of a given linguistic feature or variety as formally congruent with the group with which it is associated'.⁴⁸ Both of these processes are important in naturalising as well as reflecting and constituting links between the linguistic and the social; indexicality is often taken to suggest that particular linguistic and social features *must* co-occur, while iconicity 'allows particular linguistic and cultural patterns to be referred to each other, such that they become mutually interpreting'.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ J. Milroy and L. Milroy, *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁴⁶ M. Bucholtz and K. Hall, 'Language and Identity', in A. Duranti (ed.), *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p.377.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.380.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.380; and J. Irvine and S. Gal, 'Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation', in P. Kroskrity (ed.), *Regimes of Language* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2000), pp.35–84.

⁴⁹ B. Mannheim, 'Iconicity', in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol.9, no.1 (1999), p.107.

The project to standardise Nepali Sign Language has drawn on these processes in ways that work to link the language—and thereby Deafness, as a social category in Nepal—to the symbols of Nepali nationalism. There are three primary reasons that the standardisation project takes this particular shape. First, standardisation projects are generally mediated by institutions of social control, such as schools, that have the authority to set and exemplify linguistic norms. The role of such institutions is especially important in the standardisation of sign languages because schools are the primary sites of Deaf social (re)production. As mentioned above, schools were also important sites for the promotion of the symbols and practices of Nepali nationalism, which have accordingly influenced both the development and the standardisation of Nepali Sign Language.

Second, acknowledgement of the Deaf as an ethno-linguistic minority group both provides Deaf Nepalis access to services accorded to other such groups by national and international organisations and, by the same token, risks exposing them to the governmental discrimination and oppression faced by marginalised ethnic groups in Nepal. As a result, drawing on the symbols of Nepali nationalism in framing their ethnic identity through language can be seen (accurately or inaccurately) as increasing the likelihood of state support of Deaf Nepalis. Finally, though Deaf Nepalis are extremely demographically diverse, the leaders of the Deaf associations are often (though not exclusively) of high-caste backgrounds.

As a result, the signs that have been chosen as standard, and enshrined in the Nepali Sign Language dictionaries that are disseminated throughout the country in the interest of uniting Deaf Nepalis through shared language, are very often forms that can be linked to the symbols of caste Hinduism. For example, the standard sign MOTHER involves a crooked finger at the side of the nose. The sign form itself is meant to iconically resemble a nose-ring or nose-stud, which can index those social groups in which women wear this style of jewellery (which include caste Hindus but excludes, for example, Newars or Sherpas). As a result, in addition to denoting the concept ‘mother’, this sign can have Hindu connotations. The form can, in turn, be treated as iconic of Deaf Nepalis as a social group, suggesting that Deaf Nepalis are (or resemble) caste Hindus, a move that counters the association between d/Deafness and low-caste status mentioned above.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Hoffmann, ‘Standardization Beyond Form: Ideologies, Institutions, and the Semiotics of Nepali Sign Language’; and E. Hoffmann-Dilloway, ‘Metasemiotic Regimentation in the Standardization of Nepali Sign Language’, in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol.18, no.2 (2008), pp.192–213.

Indeterminacy of Semiotic Meaning

However, it cannot be assumed that either the social indexicality through which symbols are linked to particular groups or the manner in which such signs may be read as icons are inherent in the forms themselves. Rather, as Peircean semiotics makes clear, there is an unending chain of possible semiotic relationships between signs, their interpretations, and their referents.⁵¹ Therefore, as Judith Irvine suggests, it is important ‘not to assume that the “likeness” of iconicity’ or the contiguity of indexicality is inherently accessible or transparent. Rather, we ‘have to pick out the likenesses’ (and co-occurrences) ‘that we deem to be relevant, within some discursive practice and some historical moment’.⁵² How, then, are semiotic linkages between the linguistic and social formed? People’s particular histories and experiences come to bear on the way that they interpret such signs.⁵³ The relevance of these personal histories is readily apparent in the case of the Deaf associations’ and schools’ demographically-diverse membership.

For some d/Deaf signers the nose-ring or nose-stud is a highly salient symbol that distinguishes between social groups. For example, one afternoon I was walking through some rice fields, chatting with a young Deaf woman who lived on the outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley. As we crested a small hill she pointed to a nearby settlement and signed to me that its inhabitants were ‘dirty’ and ‘poor’. Herself an upper-caste Hindu, she then attempted to indicate that the settlement was inhabited by a social group other than her own. Not knowing the standard sign for Newari (for it was a Newari village), she repeatedly indicated that nose-rings were not worn there, while indicating her own nose-stud. Because she lived in near proximity to a Newari village, she was able to observe the social distinctions marked by symbols such as jewellery, spatial segregation (close but visibly-separate villages), and differing house types, and to imbibe local attitudes towards these differences.

However, many Deaf signers in Nepal come from social groups, such as the Newars or Sherpas, in which women are not permitted to pierce their noses. As a result, someone growing up in such a context may not automatically read that particular connection in the NSL sign ‘MOTHER’ or may firmly associate such

⁵¹ C.S. Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 8 Vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931–1958).

⁵² J. Irvine, ‘Knots and Tears in the Interdiscursive Fabric’, in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol.15, no.1 (2005), p.74.

⁵³ Linguistic anthropologists refer to this process as ‘interdiscursivity’. For a discussion of this term see A. Agha, ‘Semiosis across Encounters’, in *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, Vol.15, no.1 (2003), pp.1–15.

a symbol with ‘the Other’. Without direction, such Deaf persons who come from smaller, less multiethnic, or more isolated villages sometimes assume that the sign simply points to the nose, and furnish idiosyncratic or culturally-informed indexical explanations for this association. For example, Deaf children may interpret the sign form as indicating snot, and rationalise the sign as indicating that a mother might wipe one’s nose. In another, more fraught example, Irene Taylor reports that a Deaf Sherpa child from the Solu Khumbu region, who studied in a Deaf school, had not been aware that, in addition to referring to ‘MOTHER’, the standard sign form could be read as connoting ‘Hindu-ness’. He became aware of this link only after having returned home for a visit, when his attempts to use the sign in reference to his actual mother caused affront to the family, to whom the link was quite salient and who felt he was becoming Sanskritised and less Sherpa.⁵⁴ As these examples show, it is necessary to acknowledge that the same symbols can have different significance for differently-positioned people, and to attend to the forces that work to standardise such semiotic meanings within social groups. Attention to these processes can provide a window on the ways in which personal experiences affect (and are affected by) the grounding of ethnic (or national) identity in purportedly-shared symbols.

In the case at hand, to make such links more salient to members of the Deaf associations and students in the Deaf schools, Pratigya Shakya, a Deaf Nepali artist, has created a series of posters that visually encode the Deaf institutions’ preferred semiotic connotations of the standard sign forms. His illustration of the sign MOTHER (seen in Figure 1) depicts a Hindu mother both performing and embodying the sign. Her clothing highlights this social information: a bright red blouse and sari (rather than the maroon top and skirt associated with rural Buddhist groups), the red *tika* mark on her forehead, and her garland (*pote*) are all non-linguistic signs indicating Hindu identity that are likely to be widely accessible to the Deaf. This imagery narrows the connotation of the sign further, excluding ethnic groups such as the Rai, in which nose jewellery can be worn. The elaboration of the caste-Hindu association in the poster, through the depiction of the mother’s clothing, is one of the ways that schools and associations attempt to direct attention to a particular indexical link between the linguistic form and its institutionally-preferred social meaning.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Buddhas in Disguise*.

⁵⁵ Hoffmann-Dilloway, ‘Metasemiotic Regimentation in the Standardization of Nepali Sign Language’, pp.192–213.



Figure 1

The Word MOTHER from the Nepali Sign Language Primer Posters (artwork by Pratigya Shakya)

Source: Kathmandu Association of the Deaf, Kathmandu, 2002. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Deepak Shakya, The Kathmandu Association of the Deaf.

Regimenting Interpretations of Non-Standard Signs

However, it is not only the semiotic extensions of the standard signs that are at stake in such a standardisation project. As Judith Irvine notes, ‘a sign and its object are both “like” and not—the construal of likeness depending, fundamentally, on a construal of relevant oppositions and their scope’.⁵⁶ That is, semiotic forms have meaning because of their contrastive placement in a field of alternatives. For example, Deaf individuals often develop idiosyncratic kinship terms within their birth milieu. As a result, each person who enters into institutional Deaf social life brings in a range of signs or gestures that broaden the contrastive field for Nepali Sign Language.

Such individuals, understandably, may balk at the idea of adopting the standard term MOTHER. This can be especially contentious once they have been socialised in the Deaf schools and associations to read the standard form as indexically linked to an ethnic group to which their actual birth mother may not belong (or may define herself in opposition to). The Deaf institutions in

⁵⁶ Irvine, ‘Knots and Tears in the Interdiscursive Fabric’, p.76.

turn work to fix the semiotic extensions of both the non-standard signs and standard signs. For example, sign language teachers frequently identify the birth-home signs for MOTHER—which can suggest breasts (as in nursing) or hair—as sexual, vulgar, and inappropriate, and individuals who have been socialised by authoritative figures in the Deaf institutions to view such signs in this light often take it upon themselves to put an end to their use within the family. In one instance a Deaf Newari man, while introducing me to his Deaf wife’s hearing family, took me aside and proudly explained that he had stamped out the use of non-standard kinship signs within their household, signing:

She had a sign of her own that she understood. Her sign was different than the standard sign for mother. It was the same as women have ... I’m ashamed (to say). Maybe you’ll see me (making this sign) and be surprised. Here, in Nepali culture ... the sign was like, um, the same as milk. I’m scared (to say it). Do you understand? Breasts! It was like breasts! ... I saw this and (told her) OK, this is wrong. In the past she had no language. Now she has switched. (I told her the non-standard sign for) Mother was not good. (I told her the standard sign) Mother, mother, mother is better.

When this man learned that his wife’s family sign for MOTHER had been iconically linked to nursing and to mother’s milk, he had worked to convince the family that such a sign was highly inappropriate and that they should adopt the standard sign (despite its indicating a nose-ring, not worn by Newars) as the more respectable alternative. By working to convert an understanding of the semiotic associations of the sign from one linked with ‘nurturing’ to one that is shamefully sexual, this project has social consequences. It defines the two signs relative to one another—the NSL associated with a powerful social group and with propriety, the birth-home sign associated both with vulgarity and the signer’s personal background.

Consequently, this manner of framing non-standard signs for MOTHER has posed difficulties for those Deaf individuals whose mothers, belonging to social groups in which women must not wear nose-rings, object to being referred to by means of the standard Nepali Sign Language sign (such as the Sherpa family previously mentioned). Several such individuals have reported that they must consequently persist in using birth-home-based signs to address their mothers, which has discouraged them from inviting Deaf friends to their homes lest they be embarrassed by this practice. Alternatively, other Deaf signers insist on using the standard Nepali Sign Language sign at home, despite objections from hearing family members, which makes

the already-challenging work of interacting with their birth families even harder.

The creation of this particular contrast between Nepali Sign Language and birth-family kinship terms has meant that Deaf and birth-ethnic identities have often also come to be treated as opposed alternatives. This reflects and supports the dominant notion that a given person must ‘naturally’ belong to only one ethnic group, even within a social group like the Deaf. In addition, by working to discourage the use of signs that index the birth origins of (some) Deaf members, this aspect of the standardisation project contributes to the framing of Deaf Nepalis as ethnically homogeneous and as conforming to the ideals of Nepali nationalism.

Conclusion

Social identities are frequently contested, both from within and outside of social groups. One of the primary means by which one position in such debates can achieve (partial) hegemony is through its claim to be ‘natural, obvious, objective, or proper’.⁵⁷ Links between language and ethnicity are often used to make such a case. Because languages have frequently been ideologised as natural, homogeneous and discrete entities, they have often served as ‘objective’ criteria onto which ethnic boundaries could be mapped. In addition, qualities attributed to language are frequently taken as iconic of particular social groups (and vice versa).⁵⁸ These perspectives allow linguistic and cultural patterns to be read as mutually reinforcing,⁵⁹ such that the ‘dominant characterizations’ of a language and an ethnicity are ‘seen as emanating not from any particular social position but rather from the phenomenon itself’.⁶⁰

Despite these ideological claims, ethnic and linguistic boundaries, as well as semiotic interpretations of linguistic signs, are subjective and discursively constructed—though subject to socio-political constraints. As a result, ‘careful recuperation and contextualization’ of the discursive processes by which such linkages are constructed ‘allows us to dislodge later assumptions of naturalness’.⁶¹ In this article I have attempted such a project, with particular attention to the processes by which the standardisation of Nepali Sign

⁵⁷ Gal and Woolard, ‘Constructing Languages and Publics: Authority and Representation’, p.4.

⁵⁸ Irvine and Gal, ‘Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation’, pp.35–84.

⁵⁹ Mannheim, ‘Iconicity’, pp.107–10.

⁶⁰ Gal and Woolard, ‘Constructing Languages and Publics: Authority and Representation’, p.4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Language has worked to regiment semiotic interpretations of the linguistic signs in which an emerging Deaf ethno-linguistic social identity is grounded.

The processes I have outlined in this paper are not unique to Deaf social networks but are important in the production and reproduction of ethnicity more generally. For example, attempts to link the symbols of Nepali nationalism as defined by the state with positive social qualities (such as development), and those associated with indigenous nationalities (*adivasi janajati*) groups with more-circumscribed and less-desirable qualities,⁶² have pervaded the educational system that emerged in Nepal during and (perhaps less intensely) after the Panchayat period. These efforts have worked to relationally shape both Nepali nationalism and ethnic identities.

Indeed, while efforts to regiment the connotations of the symbols that ground social identity are perhaps more visible in Deaf social networks, the more general nature of these semiotic processes can be discerned more generally in times of political and social change. This is currently the case in Nepal, as the second People's Movement of 2006 dramatically reframed the political structure of Nepal and declared Nepal a secular state rather than a Hindu kingdom. Such moments provide an interesting opportunity to explore the processes by which semiotic connections can be (or fail to be) reframed to reflect and produce different kinds of social relationships. Should the emerging Nepali republic dramatically change its framing of Nepali nationalism, it will likely do so in part by working to ground nationalist sentiment in new symbols and through efforts to reshape the population's relationship with symbols of the previous state. This creates a moment when the 'naturalness' of these linkages may be further disrupted as they are discursively adjusted to fit the new structural conditions.

⁶² Skinner and Holland, 'Schools and the Cultural Production of the Educated Person in a Nepalese Hill Community', pp.273–300.