Asian Journal of Peacebuilding Vol. 2 No. 2 (2014): 217-239 **Research Article**

Nationalism and Militarization in Nepal: Reactive Response or Long-Term Phenomenon?

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During the current decade Nepal has experienced a complex political change process accompanied by disharmony, communal tension, and social mistrust. However, to date there has been no critical analysis of ethnicism and societal militarism and their effects on the political transformation process. Hence, this article examines the process of the emergence of exclusive ethnicism and societal militarism and their effects on Nepali society. The strategy of the Communist Party of Nepal Maoist to garner support of ethnic communities, and their tactics to mobilize the youth for electoral and political gain, were the main reasons for advancement of exclusive ethnicism and societal militarism in Nepal. If the current approach does not change it is highly likely that communal and ethnic violence will continue.

Keywords conflict, ethnicity, Maoist, militarism, radicalism, youth

Introduction

Nepal is undergoing a process of political transformation, emerging from a centuries-old centralized, hierarchical and exclusionary state. The transformation process started with the overthrow of the autocratic political system in 1990 by a popular people's movement and the establishment of liberal multiparty democracy. With the adoption of the new 1990 constitution, a debate on nationalism emerged. Nepali citizens began to exercise their constitutional rights and assert their political views and identities. Ethnic groups[1] became empowered by taking advantage of the openness brought about by multiparty democracy. This 1990 movement also raised unrealistically high expectations for ethnic groups, as political parties made untenable commitments to these groups in order to win their support for the scheduled elections. At the same time, the state failed to address ethnic group concerns and to meet their expectations. Multiparty democracy gave ethnic groups ample opportunity to raise their voices against

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ISSN 2288-2693 Print, ISSN 2288-2707 Online

injustice, poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion. A strong NGO sector emerged and several new identity-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) formed. Huge numbers of international NGOs also came to Nepal and provided support for rights-based and identity-based advocacy within the framework of ethnic movements and with reference to International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 that recognizes the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples. These developments were all part of a larger nation-building debate around how to promote inclusion for a multi-ethnic population. As this debate has evolved, these various movements have experienced internal politicization and organizational complications (P. Sharma 1997; Uprety 1992).

Before the political change of 1990 the centralized, feudalistic, monarchical-autocratic governing system, as well as political control of the state by certain groups, had systematically excluded poor, marginalized, and powerless people. Regrettably, the democratic forces ruling the country after 1990 not only failed to address the issues of caste, class, gender, geographical exclusion, marginalization and discrimination, but also failed to govern the country in terms of formulating and promoting forward-looking legislation. Using this lack of effectiveness as a foundation for their grievances, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M)[2] waged armed conflict against the state with the aim of establishing a communist system. The CPN-M skillfully used this situation to win the favor of ethnic groups and marginalized communities (Upreti 2006b; 2009). As a result two parallel social characteristics have developed in Nepali society: ethnicism and militarization. This article examines the causal sources of these two societal characteristics from the conflict management perspective. Ethnicism and militarization are discussed as dependent variables, while the sources of these phenomena are presented as the independent variables.

This article is based on research on the relationship between ethnicity and politics conducted in the context of the decade-long insurrection waged by the CPN-M in Nepal and its impacts on the society. The methods used in collecting data were key informant interviews, focus group discussions, observations, as well as meetings and general discussion with political leaders from the CPN-M, representatives of ethnic organizations, government security officials, and community members residing together in ethnic and caste groups in Kathmandu, Kaski, Sindhupalchowk, Jhapa, Ropla, Bardiya and Ilam districts of Nepal. The article uses descriptive (Onwuegbuzie and Collins 2007; Geertz 1973) and interpretative (Thorne, Kirkham, and O'Flynn-Magee 2004) methods of analysis. The interpretive method engages both the "hows" and the "whats" of social reality, as it is important to investigate how people construct their experiences and world views, how they configure meaning, and how they inform and shape their reality-constituting activity (Holstein and Gubrium 2005, 484). The descriptive method describes, explains, and interprets a phenomenon occurring at a specific place and time. It is concerned with conditions, practices, structures, differences

or relationships existing in the study sites (Geertz 1973; Thorne, Kirkham, and O'Flynn-Magee 2004). This research collected thick data and therefore descriptive analysis provides strong frameworks for analyzing ethnic relations and youth militarism in the current political context of Nepal. Further, the interpretative method is used to examine the interpretation of ethnic dynamics and the militarization process.

Diverse Perspectives on Ethnicity and Nationalism

The writings about ethnicity and nationalism in Nepal, especially after 1990, fall into several different categories. The first category focuses on more anthropological analysis (Bista 1991; de Sales 2003; Fisher 1993; Gellner 1997; 2001; 2003; Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka, and Whelpton 1997). This category is comprised primarily of specific observations in a specific context and time, particularly on the effects of religion and social structures. This body of analysis is weak in examining a holistic perspective and the complex and interconnected social relations between different groups within Nepali society. Most of the writing about ethnicity in Nepal falls under this category.

Another category of ethnic and nationalism analysis is based on a certain ethno-political ideology, and is guided by certain personal/communal interests. These analyses are often one-sided, assigning blame to the past and to certain social groups with an aim to create a radical reversal of past trends (Lawoti and Hangen 2012; Lawoti 2010; Bhattachan 1999; 2000; 2003). This category of analysis often interprets the past with certain biases. For example, they label the rule of King Prithivi Narayan Shah (250 years ago) as exclusionary because he did not include ethnic groups in the governing system. At that time there was no notion of inclusion, and it is not justifiable to use recently developed indicators like inclusion to analyze the past. This analysis is therefore conflict insensitive and can contribute to the promotion of ethnic tensions and communal hatred. This category of analysis does not see the value of communal harmony, co-existence, and mutual respect in a pluralistic Nepali society. The analysts of this category often label people of the Brahmin and Chhetri castes as enemies of ethnic culture and identity, and frame these groups as not ready to accept the contributions of spontaneous social and technological changes in society resulting from globalisation. For example, use of the English language predominates in Nepal over local languages, but researchers in this category blame Brahmin and Chhetri caste groups for the domination of English language over the local ethnic languages. Nepali radical ethnic analysts, however, occupy paradoxical positions, as they are mainly upper class based on social, economic, and educational measures. They do not enroll their own children in schools that teach the local languages. They are highly paid and often closely connected with

the international community, and yet ask other ethnic people to practice what they preach. By implication, this category of analysis is directly and/or indirectly promoting communal hatred, revenge, retaliation, and violence. This analysis often sees the reversal of past problematic patterns as the solution to present problems.

Another category of analysis focuses on ethnicity and identity from the political perspective (Baral 1991; 1993; 1998; Chauhan 1989; P. Sharma 1987). These texts bring together various political dimensions of ethnic relations. This category attempts a pragmatic approach to addressing ethnic, caste, and class exploitation, and tries to find the midway political solution to Nepal's highly complex ethnic-caste-class problems.

The final category of analysis of Nepal's ethnicity and identity issues comes from the conflict perspective (Deraniyagala 2005; Upreti 2004; 2006a; 2009). This analysis mainly focuses on the root causes of conflict and addresses them through a cooperative, holistic, and collaborative approach instead of denying one group while promoting another. In dealing with political, ethnic, or any other violent conflict the most common approaches proposed by these analysts are conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation (Burton and Dukes 1990; Salla 2000; Vayrynen 1991). Conflict management conceptually focuses on power and values (Vayrynen 1991). In the power dimension, the dominant conflict behavior is to contain conflict and maintain peace by constraining aggression and violence using different deterrence mechanisms such as alliances, balance of power, coercive conflict behavior, collective security, border sealing, and most importantly power sharing. Further it encourages and promotes execution of ethical and legal norms and provisions such as the Geneva Conventions and other international human rights laws and treaties, economic and social justice, and principled or moral conflict prevention/resolution behavior. It emphasizes managing relationships in order to manage conflict. Similarly, conflict resolution emphasizes respecting other party's needs, seeking to identify and acknowledge the legitimacy and relevance of other's needs, exploring alternatives, and disconnecting interests from positions in order to solve problems by addressing the structural causes of conflict (Salla 2000; Scimecca 1993). Furthermore, conflict transformation focuses in particular on transforming relationships of the conflicting parties by changing stereotypes and perceptions about self and other, and developing empathetic and transformative conflict management behavior. It argues for changing the nature of the relationships among the people involved in conflict, and consequently changing their response to the conflict situation over time. Vayrynen (1991) emphasized the transformation of actors, rules, contexts, issues, and statutes to transform the conflict into peace.

A sociological perspective (Dahal 1995; 2000; Pradhan 2003) complements the conflict management perspective as it focuses on understanding the social

relations that frame relationships among parties in conflict.

However, these different approaches for dealing with conflict are little acknowledged in Nepal because political decision makers are more strongly influenced by the analysis of ethno-political ideology, tend to be guided by certain personal/communal interests, and/or they are lacking comprehensive understanding of the complex social composition and plurality of Nepali society.

Ethnic Identity Debate

Ethnicization of politics (Pfaff-Czarnecka 1999) emerged in Nepal in the wake of the 1990 political change. Control of political and social processes by certain groups (e.g., close allies and supporters of the power centers, including the royal palace and political parties irrespective of specific caste and ethnicity) promoted a sharp feeling of injustice and an attitude of revenge among exploited people. The Maoists tactically and successfully utilized this sentiment to expand their insurrection (S. Sharma 2003). In parallel, through sponsorship from international actors, a neo-elite group[3] emerged and advanced in the name of ethnic identity by exploiting these feelings of injustice on the part of the marginalized sectors. This group, which wanted to obtain broad recognition and social status, as well as wider financial opportunities and external exposure, succeeded in securing substantial funding from bilateral development agencies and international nongovernmental organizations. With this backing, the neo-elite group vehemently raised the issue of ethnic rights and aligned itself politically with the CPN-M. Hence, three forces—the international community promoting ethnic radicalism, the neo-elite group radicalizing ethnic sentiments for their own vested interests, and the CPN-M wholeheartedly using ethnic sentiments to capture state power and resources—came together to promote ethnic nationalism (Lawoti and Hangen 2012). Although the term "ethnic nationalism" is widely used in the literature, I prefer the more precise term "ideology of exclusive ethnicity."

While examining the different analyses of these three groups,[4] it is important to note that the causes of Nepal's social and political problems are largely agreed upon by all who want to promote an inclusive and democratic Nepal. However, the solutions that they propose for the problems are problematic, as each of them proposes to exclude particular groups from ruling the country. Consequently, the state restructuring agenda did not move ahead in the Constituent Assembly (CA) during the period of May 2008 to May 2012. Instead, the CA fumbled largely due to the contestation of ethnic issues, such as single-identity versus multi-identity criteria when designating the provinces. The ethnic debate in post-peace-agreement Nepal not only became contested, but it was also politicized at the time of the federalization of the unitary state during the first CA (2008-2012) (Mishra and Gurung 2012).

Since the people were suffering under the predatory nature of the state

(centralized, regionally imbalanced, a skewed distribution of state resources and power, elite control of natural and other productive resources) it was easy to manipulate their ethnic sentiments. The hegemonic influence of traditional Hindu values and culture that has promoted discrimination against women and Dalits also became an important cause of exclusion and discrimination. Even after the restoration of multi-party democracy, rulers failed to address these issues, and neo-elites and radicals found space for manipulation.

The different governments formed under the multi-party political system after 1990 were not able to fully demonstrate commitments to reduce poverty, corruption and irregularities and to prevent exploitation of disadvantaged communities, and thus the space for radicalization of nationalism and militarism widened. Sentiments of the semi-educated and frustrated youths from ethnic and marginalized groups became tools for radicalization in Nepal (Upreti 2004).

From the conflict perspective, the ideology of exclusive ethnicity and identity-based movements are contextually relevant only if they do not introduce communal conflict and ethnic tension and contribute to the disintegration of society (Upreti 2009; Burton and Dukes 1990; Salla 2000; Vayrynen 1991). Hence, the logic, arguments, and analysis in this article are guided from this perspective.

Contested Understanding of Nationalism and the Ideology of Exclusive Ethnicity

The relationship between state and society has become more contested (Gurung 1997) and the focus has concentrated largely on the nationalism debate (Gurung 2001). However, the nationalism debate in Nepal is largely misleading, beleaguered with vested interests, politically manipulative, and socially confusing. When a multicultural, multilingual, and multireligious country attempts to create a single identity framework around a single ethnicity based on historical legacies and sentimental idealism, the nation suffers from what Nepal is currently facing.

There is a confusing and contested relationship between the concepts of ethnicity and nationality. Confusion is also created by the words "nation" and "nationalism." The term nation usually suggests a homogenous group of people within a specific geographical territory with a common language, a common faith, a shared culture, and common ethnic ancestors. Many of these aspects can also be interpreted as ethnicity. From this perspective, exclusive ethnicity is defined as an ethnic group having common language, common culture, common values/faith, and common ancestors. Therefore, the basis of membership in a nation is heredity and by nature it is restrictive, narrow, and exclusionary.

While analyzing the Nepali nationalism debate, this article uses the concept of civic or territorial nationalism (Eriksen 2002) because the ideology of exclusive ethnicity perspective cannot capture the nature of a highly complex, massively plural Nepali society where there exists more than 125 caste and ethnic groups, more than 122 languages, and 10 religious groups. When the nation is defined from the ethnicity perspective, civic nationalism shatters if there are not proper

protection mechanisms in place. The work of some authors (e.g., Bhattachan 1999; 2000; 2003; Lawoti and Hangen 2012; Lawoti and Guneratne 2010) directly or indirectly contribute to weakening the existing social relations and communal harmony because of radicalized notions of promoting exclusive ethnicity and even arguing for mobilization and violent activities to address political and economic inequality.

From the perspective of civic or territorial nationalism, a nation is defined as an association of people with equal and shared political rights and an allegiance to similar political procedures, and therefore the nation is an inclusive and liberal political entity (Eriksen 2002). Civic nationalism is the relationship between people and the state, going beyond cultural boundaries. In civic or territorial nationalism the government does not operate based on shared history, ethnicity, language and genealogy but rather on equal rights and laws that treat all citizens equally. As the ideology of exclusive ethnicity advocates only for a particular race or group based on ethnicity, language, and genealogy, other citizens feel excluded, and it becomes ultimately a source of conflict and social tension. At present Nepal is acutely faced with this situation.

The main pillars of Nepali society are ethnicity, caste, language, religion, and class (see Figure 1). However, the debate on nationalism has been reduced to the ideology of exclusive ethnicity while other pillars of Nepali society receive scant attention in political and social discourse. Hence, the pluralism that existed in Nepal has been severely undermined, particularly since the peace agreement of November 2006. As the country moves towards redefining nation and nationality, identity, the role of the state, and the political system, the persistence of debate and discourse regarding exclusive ethnicity not only undermines plural social co-existence, but also exacerbates existing social tensions and weakens the state's attempts to restructure itself through an inclusive, peaceful, and democratic process. Application of the different approaches of handling conflict (Burton and Dukes 1990; Salla 2000; Vayrynen 1991) is essential in such a situation of ethnic tensions.

The activities of the identity movement in Nepal are limited to the identity of ethnic groups but ignore other aspects of identity such as religion, caste, and geography, and consequently exclude many people who are a blend of these aspects. The political decision makers and the government, since signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in November 2006, have been under severe pressure from ethnic leaders. One example of such pressure is the decision to erase the identity of Brahmin and Chhetri caste groups by labeling them as "others" when promulgating the Interim Constitution (IC). In this way the ethnic leaders of political parties and neo-elites from different ethnic groups severely undermined the identity of Brahmin and Chhetri caste groups. As a result, there were strong reactive responses from the Brahmin and Chhetri castes; they formed Chhetri Samaj (Chhetri social group), and Brahmin Samaaj to counter their

Figure 1. The Interrelated and Complementary Components of Nepali Society

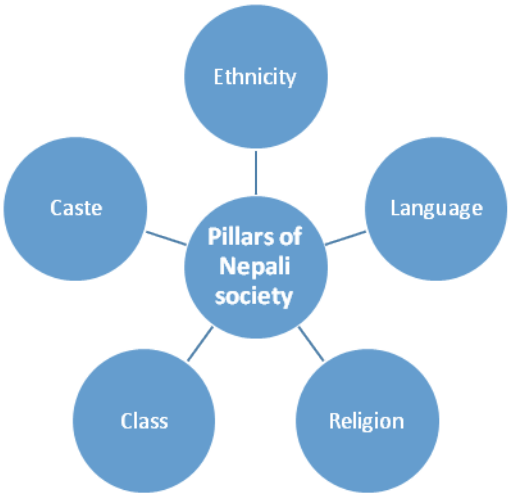

Figure 2. The CPN-M Proposal for a Federalist System Based on Ethnicity

own marginalization. Hence, the whole country became divided along ethnic and caste lines. Such divisions undermined the plural character of Nepali society and became the main reason for the failure of the Constituent Assembly (CA) to produce a new constitution. The neo-elite ethnic leaders and members of the CA

exerted huge pressure on political parties to support the establishment of single-identity, ethnic-based federal states. They asked for each new state to be named for a single ethnic group such as Tamsaling Province in the name of the Tamang ethnic group, Limbuwan Province in the name of the Limbu ethnic group, Magrat Province in the name of the Magar ethnic group, and so on. Spontaneous opposition emerged to this proposal from those ethnic groups not included in naming the provinces and also from groups representing people from other geographic areas such as Akhanda Sudur-Paschim (Undivided Far West) who clamored for their own recognition. The Akhanda Sudur-Paschim movement was supported by non-ethnic leaders of all political parties. Hence, conflict mounted and it became evident that there should be recognition of plurality and multiple identities in order to create an inclusive political process for building democracy in Nepal. Any form of exclusion—either the pre-1990's exclusion of poor, marginalized and disadvantaged groups, especially Dalit, women, and some ethnic groups, or the post-2006 exclusion of Brahmin and Chhetri groups—would not solve the social stratification issues of Nepal. Rather, a more collaborative approach is needed where co-existence of all caste-ethnic groups in mutual respect and harmonious social relations is promoted.

Use of Ethnic Sentiments for Advancing Armed Conflict

Ethnic tensions and issues were very strong in the decade-long (1996-2006) armed conflict waged by the CPN-M (Upreti 2004; S. Sharma 2003) and this dimension of the conflict has been amply analyzed (Mishra 2004; Onesto 2005; Karki and Seddon 2003; Upreti 2006a; 2009; Hutt 2004; Kumar 2000; 2005; K. Sharma 2006). The main synthesis of these analyses recounts the exploitation of ethnic sentiments by the CPN-M for their military advancement and for gaining greater access to power and resources. The CPN-M, with the aim of advancing their insurgency, brought the ethnic identity issue within the framework of the "right to self determination." The movement for ethnic rights predated the insurgency, and its initial goals were political change to ensure social change. However, once the CPN-M started armed insurrection, it divided the ethnic movement along pro-Maoist and non-Maoist lines (S. Sharma 2003).

The pro-Maoist ethnic movement focused on the right to self-determination, whereas the non-Maoist ethnic movement focused on establishing rights and ethnic autonomy at the local level. However, this distinction between movements gradually faded and the focus shifted to radical[5] ethnic identity. The CPN-M began calling for ethnic federalism with the right to self-determination, and the anti-caste radicalism associated with this call became a powerful tool to win the hearts and minds of ethnic populations that comprise approximately 37% of the total population. The CPN-M joined hands philosophically with neo-elite ethnic leaders and made ethnic identity a central issue in all political negotiations with other parties. However, over time, ethnic interests began to clash with loftier

CPN-M goals (i.e., establishment of a communist republic)—a development the Maoist leadership did not anticipate—and before long CPN-M had to just follow ethnic radicalism to the detriment of its other interests.

During the period of armed insurrection, especially after the failure of 2001 peace talks, the CPN-M developed and implemented a policy of ethnic states. At that time they divided the country into Limbuwan State (based on Limbu ethnic group), Kirat (Rai ethnic group),Tamsaling (Tamang ethnic group), Newa (Newar ethnic group), Tamuwan (Gurung ethnic group), Magrat (Magar ethnic group), Tharuwan (Tharu ethnic group), and three other states (Madhesh, Seti-Mahakali and Bheri-Karnali autonomous regions) established on a geographical basis (see Figure 2). The CPN-M promoted the same model at the time of writing the constitution during the first constituent assembly.

Interpretation of Ethnicity for Vested Interests

In Nepal, social harmony and coexistence have been fractured by conflict between the traditional elites from traditional conservative groups who are not interested in meaningful change, and the neo-ethnic elites—new actors, mainly from ethnic backgrounds, educated, who have emerged by taking advantage of ethnic sentiments and grasping power and resources in the name of marginalized and excluded ethnic groups. Neo-elites argue that all people who belong to an ethnic group are excluded and marginalized and that all people who belong to Chhetri and Brahmin caste groups have exploited ethnic people for personal gain. Neo-elites do not acknowledge, or even recognize, the role of class as a possible determinant of power, preferring to voice their objections solely along ethnic lines.

Implications of the Development of Exclusive Ethnicism

As a result of the work of neo-elites and the CPN-M, Nepali people began forming exclusive identity groups because it seemed that would be strategically necessary for future political negotiations. For example, when ethnic groups such as Limbuwan Ratrya Mukti Morcha, an ethnic-based political forum, advocated for exclusive states based on ethnicity, Chhetris (Khas Chhetri Samaj) and Brahmins (Brahmin Samaj), and even Far-Western people (Akhanda Sudhur Pashim) followed suit. Whereas the CPN-M had initially protested against a Nepal split between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, Nepal was now confronted with new divisions between ethnic and non-ethnic groups.

One of the causes of ethnic radicalism was the role of development donors. Some of the ethnic groups were marginalized and excluded from state power and resources. Development donors (including the Swiss, Danish, British, German, U.S., Dutch, and Norwegian donors) wanted to address this concern, and therefore they reoriented their funding priorities to massively support ethnic groups and ethnic networks, such as the National Federation of Indigenous

Nationalities Nepal (NEFIN), and this funding was heavily used to organize different ethnic groups against the state and in opposition to other castes groups. They also used this funding for coercive activities, like initiating a general strike and blockades. Ultimately, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) had to withdraw its multi-million-dollar support provided to NEFIN. In view of this some donors became a bit more cautious about funding the radical ethnic networks active in undermining social harmony and promoting ethnic tensions.

Societal Militarization in Nepal and Its Implications

Here the term "militarization" is defined as a social process of engagement in militant activities, creating fear through the use of violence or by carrying out illegal activities that inhibit citizens from exercising their basic rights. Violators engaging in militarism aim to fulfill their interests regardless of how political power may be abused in the process (Luitel, Upreti, and Rai 2010). In this way, the term militarization is used with a view to a societal perspective rather than from a military perspective.

Militarization from a social, state-led perspective describes a step-by-step process through which government and nongovernmental institutions gradually come under the control of the military, and, as a result, the political views of the people are shaped within this narrow scope. In this way, militarization is a discursive process, involving a shift in general societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing armies with their leaders, and the higher taxes or tribute used to pay for them (Lutz 2007). However, in the case of Nepal, although these aspects are present, militarization was led not by the state, but by civil society, intellectuals, and radicalized political groups (e.g., CPN-M). This form of militarization in Nepal has been a major impediment to the post-insurgency processes of achieving security, restoring justice, and empowering the state.

Although much has been written on state militarism, the process of social militarization has received much less attention. For example, Geyer (1989, 79) defines militarization as "the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence." Scholars like Kumar (2006) have defined militarism as a situation in which the propensity to use military power, or the threat of it, for political settlement is prevalent. These definitions are more focused on state militarization (use of official armed forces).

When the debate on establishing the rights of individual groups began during the post-1990 *andolan* (movement or agitation) protestors relied on trade unions and sister organizations of political forces to pressure the government to fulfill their demands. Hence, mobilization of civil society groups for agitation and

protests became common practice in Nepal. Over time, these groups from various political shades became very successful in using strikes and other threats to disrupt daily life. Objection to these strikes was limited by the threat of retaliatory violence. Neither citizens nor the government made serious attempts to challenge the strength of these strikers. In fact, if particular groups organized a protest on some personal issue, the state would provide money for them as compensation. Hence, calling strikes and staging protests became lucrative business for the unemployed youth and militant groups. In this way the militancy approach came to dominate political discourse in Nepal with little opposition from society or the state (Upreti 2010; Upreti et al. 2010).

The militarization of society that began post-1990 with strikes and protests soon devolved into more serious illegal behavior such as kidnapping, abduction, extortion, coercion, occupation of private property, and physical assault. Such activities were later explicitly prohibited by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2006. However, these activities continued in other forms after the CPA as there was little enforcement of the agreement's tenets.

Militarization of Youth

This article defines the term "militarization of youth" in the Nepali context as the process of radicalizing young people and employing them to undertake illegitimate actions in order to gain power and resources. The use (or threat of the use) of coercion or violence under political protection has been a commonly used tool on behalf of political parties or organizations affiliated with them.

On the one side, large numbers of youth are unemployed or underemployed making them vulnerable to recruitment for militant activities. On the other side, the state is weak and insufficiently equipped to implement the rule of law, and thus youth who might be dissuaded from illegal political behavior through threat of arrest or punishment face no such deterrent. In fact, not only are youth not dissuaded from such behavior, their encounters with other political youth groups and state-based law enforcement groups, including the police force, have only strengthened their commitment to such behavior. Consequently, the youth groups are divided along the lines of "coercion camps" created by political forces, organized on the basis of ethnicity, geography, and political ideology.

After the CPA was signed in 2006, different youth groups began to grow in size and strength. The Young Communist League (YCL) became especially active in coercive activities. As a result, to balance this offensive other political parties created their own militarized youth wings. The major motive behind the establishment of such outfits was to strengthen their role and influence at the grassroots level and also to counterattack other youth groups. Similarly, militarized youth groups were also employed by ethnic, caste and religiously affiliated political forces. Chronic unemployment in Nepal along with sugarcoated slogans and incentives all contributed to helping recruit unprecedented numbers

Table 1. Militant Groups Formed by Nepali Political Parties

	YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS	MOTHER ORGANIZATIONS	GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCE
1.	Young Communist League (YCL)	Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)	Nationwide
2.	Youth Force (YF)	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)	Nationwide
3.	Madhesi Youth Force	Madhesi Janaadhikar Forum	Eastern, Central and Mid-Western Terai regions
4.	Chure Bhawar Shanti Sena	Chure Bhawar Ekta Samaj Party	Central and Mid-Western regions
5.	Security Brigade (Rakshya Bahini)	Nepal Sadbhawana Party (Rajendra Mahato)	Central and Mid-Western regions
6.	Madhesi Commando	Nepal Sadbhawana Party	Central and Mid-Western regions
7.	Terai Madhes Sewa Surakshya Sangh	Terai Madhes Loktantrik Party	Mid-Western and Western regions
8.	All Nepal Democratic Youth Organization	Rastriya Janamorcha Party	Mid-Western and Western regions
9.	Tharu Sena	Tharuhat Swayatta Parishad	Certain Districts of Mid-Western and Western regions (e.g., Dang, Kapilbastu, Bardiya)
10.	OBC Regiment	Pichhada Varga Mahasangh	Central Terai region
11.	Limbuwan Volunteers and Limbuwan Liberation Army	Sanghiya Loktantrik Rastriya Manch/Limbuwan Rajya Parishad	Eastern region
12.	Kirat Limbuwan Volunteers	Pallo Kirat Limbuwan Rastriya Manch	Eastern region
13.	Janasurakshya Bal	(Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)	Some districts
14.	Madhesi Raksha Bahini	Sadbhawana Party	Some of the Terai districts
15.	Khas society group	Khas-Chhetri Unity Society	

Source: Luitel, Upreti, and Rai 2010.

of youths to these groups. Under public condemnation through the media, militant youth groups have offered different reasons for their existence and necessity. First, they claim to be organizing youth movements, awareness, and initiatives to ensure the rights of young Nepali people and to equip them to solve the country's ideological, social, political, and cultural problems. Second, they are coordinating political and legal actions against corruption, hooliganism,

deformity and distortion with people's consent. Third, they are conducting awareness campaigns to keep youth away from the luring temptation of narcotics, as well as to stop the purveyance of these substances. Finally, they say they are assisting and supporting the national liberation movement that was initiated by the toiling masses and oppressed people of the world and to develop fraternal relations with all international revolutionary forces (Onesto 2005).

However innocuous these objectives may sound, in practice they were implemented in illegal ways that led to clashes among different militarized youth groups. Threats of violence, abduction and coercion have been a regular practice. Moreover, many of these illegal activities were politically protected and immune from prosecution, which only fuelled insecurity in the everyday life of Nepali people.

As mentioned above, following the lead of the CPN-M, many political parties throughout Nepal launched their own youth groups. Table 1 provides an incomplete list of those known to exist.

Most often militarized youth in Nepal were deployed to commit political crimes. According to Hagan (1997), a political crime is a crime committed for an ideological purpose rather than being motivated by private greed or passion. The offenders believe they are following a higher conscience or morality that supersedes present society and law. This is the justification often given by the militarized youths when they commit political crimes. The act of criminalization of politics in Nepal to some extent contradicts Hagan's definition because the private greed and passions of politicians and political cadres supersede their ideological purpose. Supporting youth political cadres by ignoring their unlawful activities has also encouraged more criminalization of politics.

The Khas Kshetri Unity Society has also established its militarized youth wing with a claimed 1,200 active membership. Akin to this, the YCL claims that their group has 500,000 members, of which 450,000 are general members, 50,000 are assumed to be active, and 6 to 7 thousand are working fulltime. Youth Force claims to have 600,000 members and its regional expansion is accelerating.[6]

A few statistics will illustrate the impact of the work of these political youth groups. According to the *Nepal Human Rights Yearbook 2010* (INSEC 2010), the security situation in the Terai region has actually deteriorated owing to the activities of the armed groups. According to the publication, 240 people were killed in 15 Terai districts in 2009 alone. Among them, 27 persons were killed by state forces, 22 by armed groups, 89 by unidentified groups (many of which are suspected to be political youth groups), and one person each killed by the YCL and YF (Youth Force) groups. Thus the many militant youth wings of political parties and other mushrooming underground armed groups have been undermining the already fragile peace in Nepal.

The situation with militarized political youth groups is exacerbated by the open border with India, as small arms are easily available to the armed groups.

The illicit trade and carrying of small arms across the Indian border has severely hindered the implementation of the provisions of the peace agreement.

As I have noted elsewhere (Upreti 2006a) a militarized society is one in which the military has taken ascendancy over civilian institutions. It is predominantly and visibly relied upon to police and regulate civilian movement, solve political problems, and defend or expand boundaries in the name of national security. Clearly this is the situation of Nepal today.

Reasons behind Militarization

Youth in Nepal have been misused and mishandled time and again by political parties and other interests groups. They are mobilized for protests and obstruction and this has given youth a negative connotation in society. But what drives the young people's desire to join these groups and maintain their allegiance?

Psychological Reasons: Ideally, youth is the stage of life where a person becomes productive and responsible, and thus evolves to a more conscientious state. Much of this process begins when a person starts to identify with different ideologies and beliefs that form the basis of his or her personal and political values. However, during this period young people are also quite vulnerable and impressionable. Recognition becomes a key factor in their lives. They tend to challenge the traditional values of society and to affiliate with those who have the courage to defy such values. They are less analytical regarding implications and more action-oriented (Upreti et al. 2010).

In societies with a large percentage of youth, there are imbalances between the education and employment systems. This results in a larger number of unemployed youth and/or educated youth with insufficient employment. With this idle time young people engage with different groups that can be either constructive or destructive. During this stage they tend to listen more to their peer groups, and because of peer pressure they become involved in activities they would not choose on their own (Tippelt 2004). One youth respondent active in the radical Young Communist League said, with condition of anonymity:

> I am not Maoist and do not understand Marxism or Maoism like some senior YCL leaders do. So many of my friends joined YCL in 2009 and they demonstrated their supremacy. They were around the Maoist senior leaders like Prachanda and Babu Ram Bhattarai in public functions, travelling in vehicles and enjoying drink and meat. So I was tempted to join the group with the help of my friend who was already influential. It became easy for me to work in YCL since he was already active. After some time he became passive and ultimately left the camp. But I continued. Now I am regretting it, but it is difficult to leave the YCL, as I do not have a job and cannot earn a living.[7]

Socio-economic Reasons: In the situation of insurgencies and civil wars, there is a close relationship between the youth population and the conflict itself

(Upreti 2009). Excessive unemployment among youth is regarded as a dangerous precondition for the rise of conflict. In other words, unfulfilled desires often prompt young people to join paramilitary or military groups to acquire some power or prestige which is not available in regular society nor within the family. Staveteig (2005) argues that the relationship between large youth cohorts and civil war can be found throughout history. Similarly, Moller (1968) suggests that wars in premodern and present day Europe, including the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, corresponded with surges in the proportion of young men in the population (Staveteig 2005).

A number of studies have made the link between high levels of unemployment and the militarization of youth (Upreti et al. 2010). Thapa (2006) argues that the majority of the youth population in Nepal, which comprises nearly half of the nation's total, has been left behind economically. Further, the role of youth is not properly appreciated by political parties, and if they are not mobilized properly they are likely to emerge as a severe threat. Tippelt (2004) also argues that the post-adolescent phase, where a person begins to find his/her political and intellectual orientation, while still continuing to develop, has strong repercussions with respect to the ways in which young people map out their lives. The continued neglect of youth in Nepal could be counterproductive for state building in the post-conflict phase with its twin challenges of violence prevention/accord maintenance, and social reconciliation and reconstruction.

Political Reasons: Disadvantaged and ideologically guided youth form different militarized groups to achieve their aims through the use of coercion. The zero tolerance position adopted by each group has precluded the possibility of cooperation between groups and often leads to clashes that might otherwise be negotiated without violence. Ironically, these groups gain more notoriety for illegal activities than they do for the legal and proper services they are supposed to provide. Thus violence often begets power and recognition.

It is often observed that the exclusion of a large section of the population from the decision-making process denies members of the excluded group the opportunity to play an active political role, to learn the rules of the game, and to accept the responsibilities of civic participation (Upreti 2010).

In Nepal entering politics or becoming affiliated with a militarized group is not difficult as neither specific qualifications nor experience is required. Similarly, association with any group gives a person power, and militarized groups have an interest in manipulating youth groups to fulfil their political aims. The recent extreme politicization of issues related to socio-economic marginalization has also created ample space for young people to group themselves in militarized formations.

The process of political and economic development in Nepal has excluded the majority of the population and the vast majority of the youth have suffered from such exclusion (Aditya 2007) and become susceptible to persuasion

by radical groups. The emergence of youth organizations in military and paramilitary forms has further attracted large numbers of youths into the conflict zones. Further, the affiliation to these organizations has given youth the sense of being powerful, hence binding them to these groups and their ideologies.

The militarized youths have diverse perspectives on their role. Some of them are ideologically indoctrinated and believe that their coercive activities are needed to neutralize the coercive activities of the youth wings of other political parties and to protect people and their cadres. According to one of the militarized youth leaders from Youth Force: "We are not engaged in any hooliganism. We are compelled to organize ourselves to neutralize the coercive activities of the cadres of the Young Communist League. They were terrorizing society and attacking our supporters. Once we became organized their arrogant coercive activities were drastically reduced. We are helping the police."[8]

Implications of Youth Militarization for Peace and State-Building

In Nepal, one of the most malicious results of the armed conflict and post-peace agreement period has been the militarization of youths, which has had serious negative implications for restoring peace, state-building, and democratic stability. Regarding Nepal and its political process, three challenges remain unaddressed: (1) use of youth in militant action rather than in constructive work, (2) failure of the state to address the aspirations of young people, and (3) politicization and criminalization of the youths.

Regardless of why political parties and interest groups form youth wings to support their objectives, there always remains the possibility that violence and conflict can emerge and thus weaken the country's democratic and state-building aspirations. The presence of youth militarization has different short- and long-term impacts on youth, the state, and society itself. The impact on youth due to militarization appears in their lack of holistic understanding of political processes, missed educational opportunities, and waste of energy and intelligence.

At the societal level, militarization of youths has had several impacts. First, it has increased impunity, fear, and insecurity. Second, it has increased the incidence of threats, coercion, and criminal activities such as rape and abduction. Third, it has generated negative social images and mistrust. Fourth, it has caused the waste of human resources leading to retardation of development and economic growth. Fifth, it has increased the dependent population. And, finally, it has given rise to a dysfunctional law and order situation.

Growing youth militancy can deteriorate into a dangerous situation if not handled properly. In nations with high percentages of youth and unemployment the dynamics can be even more unpredictable. Youth can be more easily motivated or de-motivated, so devising appropriate policies to address their needs is more difficult. Furthermore, segregating youth groups on the basis of region, caste, culture, or ethnicity also constitutes a great threat to the country and its

overall development. Political party leaders, on the other hand, seem content with the activities carried out by their youth wings and they do not take responsibility for their actions.

Finally, it should be noted that those youths who do not fall prey to radical militarized activities often migrate in search of employment (and frequently must accept 3D-type jobs: dirty, difficult and dangerous). Thus, these young people, who might otherwise work to stabilize the situation and counter the trend toward militarization, are abroad and unable to contribute to the national political discourse.

While reflecting on their past activities and their implications for the peace process one young women working in one of the coercive youth groups observed: "I engaged in coercive activities as a member of the Young Communist League for some time. We were asked to confront the police if they tried to prevent our attack on other youth groups. So, I quickly realized that our activities were weakening the police, a state force responsible for security. Hence, I left the YCL and engaged in peace related activities and I am happy with what I am doing in the peace movement."[9]

Conclusion

Exclusive ethnicism and societal militarism in Nepal are inherently interlinked and they can deepen ethnic tensions and have lasting effects in shaping social relationships and communal harmony in Nepali society. If the CPN-M, a major political actor, does not change its approach of using ethnic groups and youth for political gain the situation will only worsen.

Decades-long social exclusion, acute inequalities, absolute poverty, lack of access to resources, deep-rooted social cleavages, and failure of political structures to address these issues have made Nepali people highly frustrated. At the same time, Nepali society has largely accepted the violence imposed by CPN-M and its youth groups, which have not only divided the society but have also provided a perennial source of conflict, social tension and ethnic division. However, as we observe more recent activities of the CPN-M, it has become clear that it has used ethnic sentiments more for tactical reasons than humanitarian ones.

The ideology of exclusive ethnicity is not suitable for Nepal as it advocates only for a particular race or group based on ethnicity, and, in doing so, advocates against a heterogeneous society. Consequently, other citizens of this highly pluralistic country feel excluded, which raises tensions leading to conflict. Instead, civic or territorial nationalism is the most suitable concept for Nepal, as it focuses on equal or shared political rights of all people regardless of heritage.

The problems faced by Nepal at present are complex, highly politicized, and dominated by ethnic radicalization. Hence, addressing the existing situation of

ethnic tensions and potential ethnic conflict requires acknowledging this reality and applying different approaches for dealing with conflict.

Notes

I express my gratitude to the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments. I extend my gratitude to Professor Edward Reed for his valuable comments, suggestions and correction of language. I appreciate the support of my assistant Ms. Sharmila Shivakoti and Research Officer Mr. Suman Babu Paudel for their continuous help.

1. There are 59 officially recognized ethnic minority groups in Nepal which together constitute 37% of the total population.
2. In January 2009, the Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (CPN-M) and the Unity Centre (also a communist party) united to form the Unified Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (UCPN-M). The name CPN-M was prevalent during period of armed conflict and all the documents referenced at that time use CPN-M instead of UCPN-M. Hence CPN-M is used in this article to indicate the Unified Communist Party of Nepal Maoist.
3. Based on my research work over the past 6-7 years, I have noted a phenomenon that I call the "neo-elites." Neo-elites are those who emerge from within a particular ethnic group and engage in advocating for radical but relevant issues (e.g., caste-based discrimination, ethnic marginalization, and gender-based discrimination) in a way that the excluded, marginalized and discriminated groups feel that they (neo-elites) are liberators. However, they have not actually experienced exclusion, marginalization and discrimination themselves, as they are highly educated, from medium to high economic class, and always moving in the power centers. They radically advocate these issues for their personal benefit while presenting themselves as liberators, radicalizing the excluded, marginalized and discriminated groups and threatening violent action if their issues are not addressed. On the surface they seem committed to the issues and their intentions seem fair, but going a bit deeper they are either staying aboard, working with or for donors in very high paying positions, or revolving around the political power centers and bargaining for high ranking political appointments. However, these characters are dominant in Nepali politics, civil society movements, and media and therefore neo-elites are becoming a regular and socially accepted phenomenon.
4. In fact, international community interests are disguised/merged mainly within the neo-elite groups and therefore there are actually only two distinct groups.
5. The term "radical" in this article indicates the ideology, interests, and behavior of people preferring abrupt revolutionary change in the existing social relations and political process, and it is not limited to the behavior and actions of militant people.
6. Data retrieved from: http://www.nagariknews.com/opinions/98-opinion/12533-2010-04-20-05-30-55.html (accessed April 20, 2010).
7. Author's interview, Koteshwor, Kathmandu, November 9, 2009.
8. Author's interview, Kathmandu, September 21, 2011.
9. Author's interview, Kathmandu, September 21, 2011.

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