What’s in a Name?

*How migrants are changing social codes in a Nepali municipality*

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Abstract

Everyday 1500 Nepalis of all different castes migrate overseas in pursuit of a better life, sending money home to family and returning when they can, often laden with foreign gifts. As a result, the economic capital of families and individuals in Nepal is growing, allowing many to escape from poverty, invest in the education of their children and generally enjoy more leisure time. With more money circulating among communities across Nepal, it appears that social codes are changing, moving from traditional ideas of caste to more economically rooted ideas of class.

This thesis explores how out-migration from Nepal is impacting the social structure of an area called Waling. Inspired by Bourdieu’s theories of Capital and Habitus, I use a mixed methods approach to understand how an increasing ability to accumulate capital in its various forms is influencing how social position is determined. I consider the historical events that have helped shape Nepali society today, including the formation of the caste system and the rise of migration. I then detail how migration has changed perceptions of the caste system in Waling, and discuss how class appears to be growing in relevance. With this in mind, I question whether changing class also means changing caste.
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List of abbreviations and acronyms

ASEAN - The Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Includes: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Cambodia

CPN – Communist Party of Nepal

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council. GCC countries include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

UPF/UPFN – United People’s Front Nepal
Bags of gold are like the dirt of your hands
What can be done with wealth?
Better to eat only nettles and greens
With happiness in your heart,
Beloved, with a heart that is rich!

Laxmi Prasad Devkota

(Devkota and Hutt 1996)
1 Introduction

Devkota, considered to be Nepal’s greatest poet, wrote these words as part of his short epic, *Muna Madan*. In this epic, Madan emigrates from Nepal to Tibet to bring his newly-wed wife, Muna, wealth. Muna fears for her husband; the road to Lhasa is perilous and she insists she does not want for gold. During his return journey to Nepal, Madan falls sick and is abandoned by his friends, left for dead on a roadside. Muna is told he has passed-away and, grief stricken, she dies. However, Madan is saved by a man deemed low caste – untouchable – and when he arrives in Kathmandu and learns of his wife’s passing, he realises that money, after all, has no value. This epic, and this quotation in particular, is the inspiration behind my research.

In this thesis I will explore how out-migration is impacting the social structure of a Nepali municipality. Using Bourdieu’s theory of Capital, I will explore how an increasing ability to accumulate capital in its various forms is changing social relations in an area called Waling. I will address how ideas of caste and class interact and will consider whether changing class also means changing caste.

1.1 My Journey to Nepal

**Becoming Nepali**

Nestled within the magnitude of the Himalayas a humble Nepal bustles with mayhem, magic and mystery. Travelers seek refuge in peaceful Buddhist monasteries, locals longingly look for a life in ‘developed’ foreign shores, but there in-between these lives chaotically converge. I first stepped-foot in this enchanting country in 2011; fresh out of university, I was zealous to see the world and eager to experience new and completely different cultures to my own. Nepal seemed a natural choice to begin my adventures; situated in the centre of Asia, the paths into India, China and beyond appeared easily within reach and the mountains beckoned exploration. I went as an English as a second language (ESL) teacher, and planned to move-on after a year. Little did I know five years later, I would be calling Nepal home.
I spent my first three months with a wealthy middle class family, who lived in a luxurious, three storey house close to central Kathmandu. This home was perhaps an unfair introduction to a traditional Nepali life; aside from handwashing my clothes, it had all the comforts of home. The family wholeheartedly welcomed me into their lives and I came to see them as my guardians, gently easing me into the quirks of Kathmandu. They arranged a job for me in a Nepali college, where I spent nearly three years teaching A-Level English to students eager to escape the country. At the start of every year, the new batches of students would ask, “Ma’am, why did you move to Nepal? We can’t wait to leave!” and at the end of each year, I said farewell to many as they accepted offers from universities overseas. It wasn’t long before I found myself at the airport saying goodbye to my guardian family as they too set-off for a new life abroad; it seemed that, while Nepal remained magical for many foreigners, for Nepalis it was their nemesis.

In 2013, my life took a surprising twist. Not only had I fallen in love with the country, but I had also fallen for a Nepali man. That year we were married, a modest ceremony in the family’s local temple, in which I was drenched in a fine dupatta sari and an array of gold ornaments. The wedding was considered small in Nepal; at the time we had little money to spend on all the usual matrimonial extravagances. My husband’s two brothers had only just moved abroad, and my husband, although in a good job in Kathmandu, earned only enough to support our daily life with little to spare. Since then the family has seen a great many changes, without a doubt the result of having (now all) their sons overseas. They are not alone in this, as half of all households in Nepal have at least one family member overseas (World Bank 2011, i).

1.2 Research Questions

Knowing the struggle my husband’s family has previously faced, I was curious as to how their new economic power had impacted their social position in the community. Had their increased wealth led to an increased respect from neighbours and friends? Did their new class outweigh the traditional caste hierarchies? And if so, what does this mean for other members of society – particularly those deemed ‘untouchable’ – in terms of their lifestyles and social position? As I began my fieldwork, I found that
many considered migration to be a root cause of their improved lives, both in terms of their everyday lifestyles, but also their social relations. Accordingly, my main research question became:

- How is out-migration influencing understandings of social position in Nepal?

Stemming from this, I needed to understand the main factors behind social position in Nepal. Caste has historically played a central role in governing Nepali society, but migration, open to anyone regardless of caste, appears to be blurring this hierarchy. Today it seems that economics has more of a governing role over social position, leading to class based ranks. I therefore ask:

- How are notions of caste and class being influenced by out-migration?

By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this thesis aims to contribute to the increasing research on migration and its impact on Nepali society. I explore factors that have led to the increase in out-migration, as well as how notions of caste and class are understood.

1.3 Notes on the Text

**Buhari or Daughter-in-Law?**

In some of my interviews and even in my own narrative I have chosen to use Nepali terminology instead of an English translation. I have Romanised and italicized these words and have provided the original Devanagari and definition in a Glossary at the back of this thesis (see pages 95-96). The decision to do this is concerned with nuances in language. Sometimes, a word simply does not translate into English, for example *doko*. A *doko* is a traditional Nepali basket that is carried on the back, with a strap put over the forehead for extra support. As this is something, to my knowledge, only found in Nepal, it seems obtuse to attempt an English translation. Other words have more loaded meanings in Nepali than English. By way of example, *buhari* literally translates as daughter-in-law. However, a native English speakers’ understanding of daughter-in-law differs vastly from the Nepali notion of *buhari*. While a daughter-in-law is simply understood as the wife of one’s child,
buhari is a much more loaded term. Traditionally, a buhari moves into the family home and takes-on the entirety of the housework; she is duty-bound by family expectations, submissive and obedient to her mother-in-law, and required to birth a male heir. Liechty acknowledges the importance of language in his study of Kathmandu. He states speech is “a vehicle for the performance of meaning and the circulation of cultural narratives” (Liechty 2003, xv); the weight of meaning in some Nepali words far exceeds that of their English counterpart. Cultural significance is lost in translation, and as this thesis is concerned with factors deeply engrained into Nepali society and culture, maintaining this depth of meaning was important.

1.4 A Himalayan Mountain Trail: Overview of this Thesis

In this introduction, I have presented the focus of my research and my personal connection to the field and topic at hand. As this thesis unfolds, I will continue to use anecdotes and thick description to detail how the twelve members of the community in Waling I spoke with have been impacted by migration. I will consider their social position since having a connection to foreign lands, and will address how this interacts with ideas of both caste and class.

The second and third chapters will lay the foundation for my analysis. In the second chapter, I will consider the major events in Nepal’s history that have helped shape the social sphere and have brought the country closer to the international world. In the third chapter, I will detail the theory that inspired my research, as well as the methodological approach I adopted during my fieldwork and on into data analysis.

The fourth chapter will delve into the terms caste and ethnicity and will consider how they have formed the core of Nepal’s social relations for many years. Through Bourdieu’s Capital and the use of interview and survey data, I will discuss how migration has shifted perceptions of caste in practice, particularly in relation to perceptions of manual labour at home and abroad. I will consider how this plays into the social position of my informants, and will address whether caste continues to be the ultimate determiner of the social hierarchy. Furthermore, I will consider the internal conflict my informants seem to be battling between their heads and their
habitus; a battle between knowing what is wrong with caste based discrimination, and deep-rooted traditions planted during childhood.

The fifth chapter will introduce ideas surrounding class, and will consider a more economic perspective on the social sphere in Nepal. I will discuss the rise of the remittance economy in Nepal and the impact this had on investment decisions made by my informants, from traditional ideas of gold and land to newer ideas surrounding consumer goods. I will address how this ties in to emerging ideas of class and therefore social position, and whether these ideas outweigh the traditional caste hierarchy.

Finally, I will conclude this thesis and summarise the main arguments made throughout.
2 Breaking Borders: Nepal’s Relationship with the World, 1800s-Today

Nepal; where the Earth’s plates have carved the landscape into endless hills and mountains that encase a cosmopolitan array of cultures and ethnicities. To the South lies the birth place of Lord Buddha, Lumbini, drenched in history and spiritual importance; to the North the Himalayas, the highest mountain range in the world, fundamental to Hindu religious beliefs and the country’s tourism economy; and in the centre of it all lies the bustling capital, the city of Kathmandu, where old and new awkwardly merge and 4,416 people are crammed into every square kilometre (National Planning Commission Secretariat 2012, 3). Influenced greatly by its two neighbouring civilisations, Liechty states that Nepal often acts as a geographic, cultural and political buffer zone (Liechty 2003, 13). Its topography is part of the reason for its sustained independence, even during a time of British rule in India, but today the mountains present a monumental hindrance to daily life in terms of agriculture and infrastructure, with one-third of the country at elevations of over 4,500 metres (Liechty 2003, 39).

Since the 1800s, but particularly in the last sixty years, Nepal has seen a great many developments; from the opening of its borders to the international world to the civil war of the 1990s, this period has brought about rapid, dramatic change for the country. The heavy influx of foreign aid organisations, the abolishment of the monarchy, and the establishment of a democratic system have been major events, which have heavily influenced the everyday lives of Nepalis all over the country. As such, I will consider the major events that have occurred since the 1800s and how they have helped to shape the country, before discussing specifically the context of Waling.
1800s - Ethnicity and Caste Amidst the Rana Autocracy

The modern state of Nepal recognised today was formed by the Shah kings of the mid-sixteenth to late-eighteenth centuries (Hutt 2004, 2). Prior to their rule, Nepal was limited to Kathmandu valley, and its surrounding territories were composed of separate kingdoms. The Shah rulers sought to conquer these kingdoms and unify Nepal, finally achieved by Prithivi Narayan Shah in the late-eighteenth century. The Shahs were succeeded by the Ranas, in power from 1846 to 1951. While the Shahs had succeeded in unifying the country of Nepal, the Ranas attempted to unify Nepali society. As Hutt notes, the Ranas “pursued a programme of Hinduisation which systematised the incorporation of Nepal’s many disparate ethno-linguistic groups into a national hierarchy of castes and ethnic groups” (Hutt 2004, 2).

The population of Nepal is comprised of 125 ethnic groups and 123 spoken languages (National Planning Commission Secretariat 2012, 4). Fürer-Haimendorf notes that ethnicity is tied to language and racial features (Fürer-Haimendorf 1957, 244), and Gellner understands an ethnic group to be when a population shares a common language, culture and attachment to a particular territory (Gellner 2012, 16). Within Nepal, Fürer-Haimendorf states,

Through Nepal runs the dividing line between Europoid and Mongoloid racial types...Similarly there is the fundamental distinction between Indo-European and Tibeto-Burman languages, and the line separating the speakers of these languages coincides largely with the dividing line between the two main racial groups, and to some extent with the dividing line between Hindus and Buddhists (Fürer-Haimendorf 1957, 244).

Furthermore, Levine notes that ethnic groups in Nepal are typically associated with the country’s major geographical zones: the hills, the mountains and the plains (Levine 1987, 75).

In 1854 the Ranas formulated The Legal Code of Nepal which, as Clarke notes, imposed a social hierarchy incorporating Hindu notions of caste onto ready established ethnic groups (Clarke 1998, 227). Béteille defines caste as,

A small and named group of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary membership, and a specific style of life which sometimes includes the pursuit by tradition of a particular occupation and usually
associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system (Béteille 1965, 46).

This system differed from that of neighbouring India because it incorporated the various ethnic groups into its hierarchy, making it a multi-ethnic caste system, much less strict than the pure caste system of India. Although The Legal Code of Nepal was formulated in an attempt to create a unifying national identity, Gellner notes that the caste system was ultimately exclusionary to minority ethnic and religious groups, as well as low-castes and Dalits¹ (Gellner 2012, 12). These terms - ethnicity and caste, along with The National Legal Code - are discussed in more detail in Chapter four.

Alongside establishing a national legal code, the Rana autocracy, under Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana, brought about the first encounters with the foreign world. In 1857, Jung Bahadur sent Nepali troops to India to help British forces there, arguing that by serving British power, Nepal could retain its independence (Liechty 2003, 44). From then onwards, Rana rulers indulged in imported goods from Europe, adopting new forms of dress and home décor. Furthermore, Liechty notes that these elites did not just consume foreign goods, but were beginning to make significant concessions to foreign cultural practices (Liechty 2003, 43). Nevertheless, they ensured Nepal remained closed to foreign passenger traffic, and its citizens were kept largely distant from the new luxury goods carried in over treacherous mountain trails.

The first political party in Nepal was established in 1936, but was sternly suppressed (Hutt 2004, 3). Its successors, the Nepali Congress Party and the Communist Party of Nepal, were formed in India alongside a surging anti-British nationalist movement (Liechty 2003, 46). In 1951, a coalition including the Shah King, the political parties and disgruntled members of the Rana elite overthrew the Rana regime. The Rana autocracy had ended and Nepal entered a new era.

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¹ Dalit is the South Asian term to describe a member of the lower caste, an ‘untouchable’. The word Dalit comes from the Hindi Sanskrit dalita (दलित) meaning ‘oppressed’.
1960s – Nepal Opens to the Foreign

In 1960, Nepal hosted its first general election in which the Nepali Congress Party gained majority (Hutt 2004, 3). Unsettled by this, King Mahendra dismissed the Congress government and established a Panchayat democracy, giving him ultimate power under the pretence of democratic participation (ibid.). The king banned all political activity, but political parties continued to operate underground (ibid.).

Along with the shifting political climate, the state opened Nepal’s borders to commodity imports, interstate relations, and the arrival of foreign diplomatic missions (Liechty 2003, 47). Many of the country’s encounters with the foreign were carried in by international development organisations. Nepal currently hosts 254 INGOs (Social Welfare Council 2016), who promote the country globally as being “a poor, land-locked and underdeveloped nation”. The World Bank ranked Nepal 104 out of 195 countries according to its GDP per capita in 2015 (World Bank 2017, 2), while Global Finance magazine ranked it the 28th poorest country in the world (Gregson 2017). In 2011, the Central Bureau of Statistics in Nepal noted that an estimated 25% of the population live below the poverty line (Central Bureau of Statistics 2011b, 16), with the country’s Dalits largely the poorest of the poor. With this global view of a struggling Nepal, foreign aid floods into the country every year. In 1960, Nepal received $8 million in aid, but in 2014 this number increased to nearly $900 million (World Bank 2016b).

While the 1960s was overtly the beginning of Nepal’s relationship with the rest of the world, Shrestha argues that the Ranas planted the first seeds of foreign cultural practices into the country. He states, “this small acorn of Western cultural emulation, planted by the Ranas more than a century ago, has today grown into a huge oak tree, moulding the elite mind set and taking over Nepal’s national culture as well as its development process” (Shrestha 1993, 7). The Ranas had teased Nepali citizens with luxurious foreign goods and interesting new cultures, but had kept them well out of reach; as the country’s borders opened, the foreign was no longer reserved just for the elite.

While interest in the international world was growing, so too was opposition to the Panchayat system. Hutt notes that this was rooted in its increasing exclusivity, its
failure to deliver the ideas of development brought in by foreign organisations, and its suppression of anyone who expressed opposition (Hutt 2004, 3). Furthermore, the legacy of *The National Legal Code* remained at large, and while the foreign was overtly accessible to all, caste and ethnic-based discrimination remained. By the 1990s, following the promulgation of a new Constitution that, according to Hachhethu, failed to recognise the existence of discrimination (Hachhethu 2003, 232), tensions exploded and Communist ideology took hold.

**1990s to early 2000s – The Maoist People’s War**

In April 1990, the Panchayat system was dismantled and a democracy, led by the Nepali Congress and a United Left Front consisting of seven communist parties, was formed (Hutt 2004, 3). In November that year, a bicameral government was formally established, alongside the promulgation of a new democratic constitution that reduced the palace to a constitutional role (ibid.).

Communism had originally crept into Nepal from India in 1949 and, during the Panchayat democracy, had begun to grow (Lawoti 2009, 5). By the 1990s, the movement had gained increasing popularity with the young and marginalised, by promoting a move away from ethnic struggle through agrarian reform, land distribution and economic empowerment (Shneiderman and Turin 2004, 103). However, the movement was and is consistently prone to factionalism and splits, and at any one time there has been nearly a dozen different communist political parties in activity (Lawoti 2009, 6). Within these factions there have been some extremist-communist parties, who have often resorted to extra-parliamentary tactics to press their demands (Hutt 2004, 4). In the 1990s, the two most significant factions were those led by Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai, both of whom boycotted the 1994 mid-term elections because their front was not recognised by the Election Commission (Lawoti 2009, 6).

Following this, Prachanda’s party renamed itself the CPN-Maoists and throughout the year 1995 began formulating plans for an armed insurgency (Lawoti 2009, 7). On 4th February 1996, the Baburam Bhattarai-led UPFN party submitted a list of 40 demands to the government concerned with nationalism, democracy and livelihood; failure to meet these demands would be met with the planned insurgency (ibid.).
These demands further resonated with exploited minorities and, as Shneiderman and Turin note, along with a drive to gain respect and have purpose beyond village life, led many to join the movement (Shneiderman and Turin 2004, 92). Those who joined tended to be from low caste backgrounds, who were finally given recognition in Bhattarai’s demands; point 20 states, “all kinds of exploitation and prejudice based on caste should be ended” (Bhattarai 1996), followed by point 21 “discrimination against downtrodden and backward people should be stopped. The system of untouchability should be eliminated” (ibid.). On 13th February 1996, after the failure to meet these demands, the insurgency began with an attack on police posts in three rural districts (Lawoti 2009, 7).

Hutt notes that the violence escalated rapidly and by 2001, nearly 2000 people had died as a result of the insurgency (Hutt 2004, 6). In that same year, the country faced another shocking upheaval when, on 1st June 2001, ten members of the Royal family, under King Birendra, were killed. While many conspiracies circulated, the royal massacre was reported to be at the hands of Crown Prince Dipendra, who was said to have killed himself after shooting his family (Hutt 2004, 7). This incident sparked a major turning point for the Maoists, who in November that year attacked the Royal Nepalese Army for the first time, killing fourteen soldiers, twenty-three policemen and looting Rs.225 million ($2 million)² from banks (Hutt 2004, 11). On 26th November 2001, with the Maoists in control of 73 out of 75 districts, the king declared a National State of Emergency and suspended clauses of the constitution that allowed for freedom of thought and expression, leading to the censorship of newspapers (Hutt 2004, 11). The violence that resulted was brutal, although data released on the death toll was considered unreliable as a result of the imposed censorship (ibid.).

In May 2002, following an extension of the state of emergency, the king dissolved the House of Representatives, and later that year handpicked a small cabinet of ministers to form the government (Hutt 2004, 13-14). The years that followed were filled with violence and, in 2005, the king dismissed the elected parliament and took executive power into his own hands, an unpopular decision that spurred the government into negotiations with the Maoists (Upreti 2008, 152). By 2006, Maoists

² $1 is equal to Rs.111.29 according to Google Exchange Rate, accessed 16.08.2018.
had control of 80 percent of the country (Bhattachan 2012, 49) and on 21st April 2006, what is described as the most furious and widespread uprising occurred, forcing the king to step down (Upreti 2008, 159). Finally, by the end of 2006, the Maoist party and the Government of Nepal signed a twelve point peace agreement in which, among many stipulations, both parties agreed that “nobody should be discriminated against based on colour, gender, language, religion, age, race, national or social origin, wealth, disability, birth or other standing, ideology or faith” (The Government of Nepal and CPN 2006).

The Maoist insurgency resulted in many deaths and kidnappings, which continue to be under investigation by The Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in 2015. While many of my informants recalled the fear and pain caused by the insurgency, many also noted the changes it brought about in the country. Hutt notes,

Maoists promised full participation in a multi-ethnic republic to those who were previously disenfranchised, with the expectation that those who joined would eventually put aside their ethnic claims in the interest of the overarching class struggle (Hutt 2004, 103).

This is an ideal that seems to have penetrated and be impacting society today.

2007 onwards - The Great Escape

In 2007, the ruling coalition of Nepal, including the Maoists, abolished the monarchy and made Nepal a federal republic with the Prime Minister as head of state (Hangen 2009, 2). Furthermore, the country was changed from a Hindu state to a secular polity, and a new constitution was discussed that would offer greater rights to marginalised groups (ibid.). Years of instability followed. Politically, Maoists left the government in 2009; the Constituent Assembly was dissolved for failing to produce a draft constitution; and when the constitution was finally promulgated in 2015, the Madheshi community3, backed by India, held a border blockade and protests for six months, leaving Nepal with shortages of fuel, medicines and food. Alongside this, the country was hit by two massive earthquakes in 2015 killing over 8000 people, causing mass destruction and crippling the economy.

3 The Madheshi community originate from India but reside in the Terai, or plains, of Nepal, close to the Indian border. The protests and blockade, backed by India, were a response to the marginalisation of the Madheshi community in the constitution. For further details see: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asta-india-34313280
This decade of insecurity following the Maoist insurgency led to a dramatic increase in out-migration. Lacking opportunities at home, 71% of Nepal’s absent population are estimated to be working overseas (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2016, 1). In 2001, the Population Census of Nepal revealed that there was an absent population of 762,181, 3% of the country’s total population (Central Bureau of Statistics 2001, 108). By 2011, the World Bank estimated that there were around 4 million Nepalis overseas, (World Bank 2011, i), comprising 14% of the total population (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2016). This means that half of all households in Nepal have at least one family member abroad (World Bank 2011, i). By 2013, Nepal was one of the top five emigration countries in the world (World Bank 2016a, 33), with 519,638 labour permits issued for international migration (excluding India) in 2013-14, double the number of permits issued in 2009/10 (See Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Labour permit trends 2008/09-2014/15](image)

The 2011 census in Nepal revealed that 45% of the absent population were aged between 15-24 years (Central Bureau of Statistics 2001, 2), although the 2014/5 labour migration report indicates that 48% of all labour permits were issued to those aged between 26-35 years (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2016, 22). As shown in Figure 1, the majority of these migrants are male, leading to a large absence of the working male population in the country. This has had implications for family dynamics; one of my informants was uncomfortable when trying to explain the rise of extramarital affairs,
The wives here have too much leisure time in the day when their kids go to school; they seem to keep bad company and misuse the money their husbands send, so when their husbands return, there is nothing left and the wives leave their husbands because they cannot face them (Hari).

Furthermore, from my own experience teaching in colleges in Kathmandu, many of my students lived in college accommodation because one or both of their parents were overseas. They felt abandoned by their families, as one of my informants observed, “the head of the family is abroad, which has made the house unmanaged and bonds between family members aren’t maintained” (Indra).

Part of the reason behind the disparity between male and female migration is rooted in the heavy restrictions on female migration by the Government of Nepal. Since 2008, on-and-off bans have been issued for female migration to GCC countries, initially imposed following the death of a female domestic worker in Kuwait (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2016, 58). The sharp increase of labour permits issued for female migrants in 2011/10 was a result of the lifting of the ban in 2010. However, this ban was reintroduced in 2012, leading to a reduction in the number of labour permits issued for women (ibid.).

Although there was an overall drop in the number of labour permits issued following the 2015 earthquakes and subsequent aftershocks, migration is continuing to play a huge part in shaping the country. In 2015, Nepal was the highest remittance receiving country in the world, gaining $6.6 billion (World Bank 2016a, 33). This contributed to 29% of the country’s total GDP (ibid, 12) and has contributed to a decline in poverty from 42% in 1996 to 21% in 2010 (World Bank 2011, v). Domestic un- and under- employment rates have been reduced and families are now able to invest more in their children’s education and the health of the entire family, and focus more on leisure time over work (ibid). In 2009, 40% of all remittance-receiving households were entirely dependent on inflows for their basic needs and 22% were able to pay off debts (World Bank 2011, 26). Many were able to invest in real estate and land and it has been noted that households with migrants “escape from poverty” twice as fast as those without (ibid).

From my own discussions in the field, the reasons for leaving Nepal were pretty consistent. For Samrat the decision to move abroad was straightforward, “because of
money; I felt like I had to earn more”. Others expressed concern for their children’s futures, “we had to send the kids to a better school, right? So, we both went abroad” (Samiksysya), and some talked about making investments back home, “I planned to earn then buy gold for my parents and buy land and build a house” (Indra).

Interestingly many blamed the government, corruption and nepotism, for a lack of opportunities at home,

It’s been a trend for a while to go abroad. What to do after studies? There are no factories or industries in Nepal, and in offices and other sectors you have to have a connection; relatives or a political power to support you, or you have to bribe your way in; it’s difficult to get a job here and you need money to survive (Hari).

Even the eldest of my informants at 94 years of age acknowledged, “Nepal has improved a lot since people have moved abroad. Otherwise, what do we have here in Nepal? We have nothing. It’s a nice place to live. We have nice weather, but nothing else” (Gaurav).

Many noted that saving money was a lot easier with the isolation of living abroad, without friends, family or the opportunity to spend on leisure activities,

Here, in your home country, you are not hard working, but overseas you have responsibilities, you have to be disciplined. Here, when you have a house, you are not compelled to work hard, you can do as you like, there you don’t have a choice (Mohit).

Disconcertingly, many of my informants were negative about their futures in Nepal. Two days after talking with Samrat, he bid farewell to his family to re-migrate overseas for unskilled employment. A number of my informants correlated money with happiness, and spoke of the disappointment at not being able to earn more in Nepal, “not just for me but for all money is essential. If I could earn lots of money, we could have fun. I wish I could earn more” (Indra). Hari talked about choosing between a life abroad and a life in Nepal and said, “you think about gain and loss, you look into the future of Nepal and all you see is loss”; and Darpan noted “if the government can guarantee employment, no one needs to go abroad, but the government cannot do it. There are many educated people in Nepal, but all educated people are elsewhere overseas”. Among all of my informants there was an air of negativity regarding the future of the country; the choice to move overseas was a
given. Many talked about plans for their children to go overseas, “I am pushing [my son] to join the Indian army…I was thinking of Australia as well” (Darpan); it seems that unless there is a drastic change in Nepal, the number of people choosing to migrate will only continue to increase. At current rates it is predicted that Nepal will face a labour shortage of around 3.6 million by 2030 (Alberto Lemma et al. 2017, 7); this will of course impact the country in numerous ways. Some of these impacts are already being observed, with the most stark the changes to social dynamics and cultural norms.

Since conducting my fieldwork, Nepal held its first parliamentary election since 1999 and the 2015 constitution. In December 2017, the CPN-UML, closely followed by Prachanda-led Maoist Center (Nepal Republic Pvt. Ltd. 2017), won the election. The new Prime Minister, K.P Sharma Oli, is said to be the most powerful in Nepal’s recent history, with the Left Alliance controlling both the House of Representatives and the National Assembly (Bhattarai 2018). As 1500 youth emigrate from Nepal on a daily basis, Oli is expected to create jobs, build new industries and improve the infrastructure of the country (ibid.). Whether this will be achieved and how this will impact the country is yet to be seen.

2.1 The Waling Context

My husband’s family home seemed like a natural starting-point for my research, not only for its obvious convenience, but also because of its interesting demographic. Nepal is divided into 7 provinces, 75 districts and 130 municipalities (National Planning Commission Secretariat 2012). I focused my research in Waling municipality, where my husband’s family is based. Waling is located along the Siddhartha Highway, connecting Pokhara to the South of Nepal and beyond into India. It is part of Syangja district, which has a total population of 289,148, and an absent population (staying abroad) of 50,476 or 17.1% (National Planning Commission Secretariat 2014, 227). This is the second highest proportion of absent population in the country, after Gulmi at 20.9% (ibid). Of the total 68,856 households in Syangja district, 34,207 or 49.7% are recorded as having migrants, the fourth highest in the country (ibid). Within this, Waling comprises a total population of 24,199. It is 12495.4 hectares, 449.9 hectares of this used for settlement (Waling
Municipality 2018). It is described as a multicultural and multiracial area, with a population belonging to many different castes and ethnic groups (ibid.). Figure 2 shows Waling’s location within Syangja district, as well as the location of the district in Nepal. Figure 3 shows the area of Waling where my research was focused; much of the settlement is concentrated close to the highway and the Aadhi Khola River.

As the number of out-migrants is significant in this area, as well as it being multicultural and multiracial, Waling municipality forms an interesting field research area.

![Syangja District, Waling Municipality (Nagarpalika) and surrounding rural municipalities (Guanpalika). Source: (Bhattarai 2017)](image1)

**Figure 2**: Syangja District, Waling Municipality (Nagarpalika) and surrounding rural municipalities (Guanpalika). Source: (Bhattarai 2017)

![Fieldwork area. Source: (Google Maps 2018)](image2)

**Figure 3**: Fieldwork area. Source: (Google Maps 2018)
3 Analytical Framework and Methodological Approach

“Selves are viewed as grounded in history, mediated by cultural discourses and practices, and yet makers of history, of culture, of selves. (Skinner, Pach, and Holland 1998, 6)

Skinner et al. consider how an individual is fashioned and fashions their identity in Nepal. Further, they consider how a researcher is able to interpret and understand how personhood is formed across different times and spaces (Skinner, Pach, and Holland 1998, 6). The works they present draw from a variety of theoretical perspectives, but are unified in their acknowledgement that individuals are not merely constructed subjects, but agents involved in creating worlds and selves alternative to those seen as dominant (ibid.). It is within this context I position my research; to consider how Nepali migrants are being shaped by and are shaping their societies.

With this in mind, I have framed my analysis using Bourdieu’s theory of Capital. Similar to Skinner et al., Bourdieu believes the social world is formulated totally by agents, as noted in Harker et al.’s analysis of Bourdieu’s theories, “it is the agents who construct their social world and act to maintain or enhance their position in it” (Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes 2016, 203). While my research will be centrally grounded in Capital, it is important to note that Bourdieu’s theories tend to interweave, with Capital incorporating Distinction and Habitus; thus, by extension, my analysis also connects with these theories, though I will not delve into them in great detail. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s theories are densely complex; what I offer is a simplified summary of how I have interpreted Capital for the purposes of my research.

As I seek to understand how social position is determined in Waling, and Bourdieu’s theories are largely concerned with the formation of social position, I will first consider this term in more detail before addressing Bourdieu’s Capital specifically.
will do this by considering the theories that influenced Bourdieu’s writing, as well as the social situation he himself was in.

3.1 Understanding Social Position

Anderson et al. believe social status involves three key elements. They state,

First, it involves respect and admiration, in that individuals afforded high status are held in high regard and esteem by others…Second, status involves voluntary deference…People afford higher status to another individual by voluntarily complying with that individual’s wishes, desires, and suggestions—a compliance unaccompanied by threat or coercion…Third, people afford higher status to an individual when that individual appears to possess…perceived instrumental social value—that is, when the individual seems to possess personal characteristics that will facilitate their own goal accomplishment (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015, 575)

They continue to note that social status is tied to social exchanges, and emphasize that an individual may be perceived as having instrumental social value and therefore a high status, when in fact their actual social value may differ; meaning that a person who projects confidence or skill may be perceived as having a high social value, when in actual fact they have little or no skills (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015, 575). While a helpful definition of social position, understanding in greater depth what it is rooted in and how it has been understood over the centuries may perhaps give greater insight into Bourdieu’s Capital.

One of the first theorists of social position is Karl Marx. Writing during the Industrial Revolution, his focus is the exploitation of workers by capitalists, connecting social position to economic status. Marx believes the social, political and intellectual life is ultimately determined by the mode of production, rooting human relationships in economic conditions (Marx 1970, 20-21). Crossley argues this purely economic understanding of social relationships could not be extended into the twentieth century; not only had discrepancies in economic wealth become more complex, but the prevalence of education and academic qualifications had also expanded (Crossley 2008, 89). Weber was one of the first to move away from the

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4 I use social status and social position interchangeably, although when referring to other resources remain true to their use of terminology.
narrow lens of economics, and attempted to incorporate these emerging factors into his understanding of social position.

Weber considers how ideas shape human action, and he juxtaposes traditional and modern society (Grenfell 2008, 21). For Weber, social status is tied into social honour and is expressed through a specific style of life (Weber 1992, 39). He suggests social status is further tied into an individual’s class situation, with classes being groups of people from the same economic situation (ibid.). While closely connected to Marx, Weber sees social status as being connected not just to the mode of production, but the market situation, or the production and acquisition of goods.

As well as considering his own social setting, Weber explored the Indian caste system. He notes that the religious and ritual orientation of the caste system makes the notion of rank relations complex, and that caste “intensifies ‘status’ principles in an extreme manner” (Weber 1992, 42-44). He considers how the industrial capitalist society became incorporated into the Indian caste system, concluding that caste sustains tradition no matter how often capitalistic development tries to override it (Weber 1992, 104). In the context of India therefore, status is understood through the country’s specific caste system. Caste relations play a bigger part in determining social position than the economically determined class situation of Weber’s society.

Stemming from this, Bourdieu attempts a definition of social position applicable across different societies, by offering a more holistic view of how it is determined. For Bourdieu, the social world is accumulated history (Bourdieu 1986, 241). A society is not based on instantaneous incidences, but years of exchanges and accumulation, in particular the accumulation of capital. He includes social and cultural capital, as well as economic capital, in the formation of social position. These he defines as,

Economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility (Bourdieu 1986, 242).
While he differentiates between the different capitals, Bourdieu notes that economic capital is at the root of all other forms of capital; “these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital…produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal…the fact that economic capital is at their root” (Bourdieu 1986, 250). As a result, Gartman notes that those with little capital are constantly exposed to the economic necessity of making a living, while those with greater capital are distanced from the same urgency (Gartman 1991, 424). Ultimately, this determines different cultural tastes according to class position (ibid.).

Similar to Veblen’s theory of conspicuous consumption, Bourdieu seems to suggest that an outward display of privilege, or capital ownership, helps an individual to claim their place in the social order. Where Bourdieu differs from Veblen is his belief that this display is not rational or conscious, but determined by socially conditioned characteristics, which he calls habitus (Gartman 1991, 425). Habitus is “society written into the body” (Bourdieu 1990, 63); meaning it is both a social and cultural structure, so deeply rooted into individuals it appears to be natural (ibid.). His use of habitus offers his theory further flexibility across different contexts; habitus differs across different societies, and what may be central to the formation of social position in one place may not be so in another.

To summarise, social position is tied to social honour and determines an individual’s place in the social hierarchy. According to Weber, it is expressed through a particular style of life, which he limits to the consumption of goods. However, Bourdieu believes it is connected to the accumulation of cultural and social capital as well as economic capital. Furthermore, Bourdieu states that social codes are engrained into habitus, which differs across different contexts. The social world across these contexts is influenced by their accumulated history of exchanges and accumulation. In this sense, while social position in Bourdieu’s Parisian society is connected to the class system, in India, according to Weber, it is largely determined through the Hindu caste system.
3.2 Bourdieu’s Theory of Capital

As noted above, Bourdieu believes social position is determined through the accumulation of economic, cultural and social capital. In this section, I will discuss these terms in more detail and will discuss how they are represented in the context of Nepal. Furthermore, I will consider how Bourdieu’s theory, based on the Parisian class society, can be applied to the multi-ethnic caste society found in Nepal.

3.2.1 Economic Capital

Economic capital, as noted above, can be interpreted as money and property rights. It is at the core of all other forms of capital, and as Bourdieu states, a great effort is required to transform economic capital to another type of capital (Bourdieu 1986, 250). He continues to discuss how economic capital can give immediate access to certain types of goods and services (ibid.) and, as Crossley notes, confers both spending power and status (Crossley 2008, 88). By simply having economic capital, an individual gains a higher place in the social hierarchy than someone without. With reference to Nepal, migration is giving many families higher economic capital in the form of remittance. It has been an important source of income for families, particularly from lower castes, and is typically used for daily consumption, the repayment of loans, and educating children (World Bank 2011, v).

Nevertheless, economic capital can depreciate over time if it is not added to or converted into another form of capital. Bourdieu notes that there is an economy of time involved in accumulating capital, and that economic capital alone cannot guarantee access to other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986, 250). The investment of economic capital is therefore strategic and must be carefully considered if it is to influence social position. Transforming economic capital into cultural capital, while laborious, is perhaps easier to build than social capital. Bourdieu notes that social capital is connected to relationships and networks, but cultural capital is associated more with the expenditure of time, with the more time available and the longer this time is used effectively, the greater the accumulation (ibid., 251).
3.2.2 Cultural Capital

Embodied

Cultural capital can exist as objectified, embodied or institutionalised. In its embodied form, cultural capital becomes part of an individual’s habitus. Habitus, or “the social game embodied and turned into a second nature” (Bourdieu 1990, 63), is hereditary and determined by the society and social class an individual or family is situated in (Bourdieu 1986, 243-244). It is limited by the appropriating abilities of the individual, and dies with them. Therefore, embodied cultural capital, while initially shaped by a wider sphere, is a personal investment and involves time, hardship and sacrifice (ibid., 244). Interestingly, Bourdieu notes that differences in the cultural capital within families are associated with age; the length of an individual’s acquisition is dependent on the amount of time the family is free from economic necessity (ibid, 245). Considering the current situation in Nepal, this seems highly relevant. Previously economically challenged families are now in a much more secure economic position, which suggests that the younger generation are able to give more time to cultural capital accumulation, or capital accumulation in general, than previous generations.

Objectified

Closely connected to embodied cultural capital is cultural capital in its objectified state. In this state, cultural capital is linked to the ownership of material objects and media, and presupposes economic capital as well as embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 246). Bourdieu uses the example of a machine; an individual may possess the economic capital to own a machine, but he must have the internalised knowledge, the embodied cultural capital tied to habitus, in order to use said machine (ibid.). In Nepal, objectified capital can be seen in the increasing consumption of foreign goods, particularly household appliances. These appliances seem to possess a status of their own, with a perception that goods from Nepal, or elsewhere in Asia, are ‘duplicate’ and goods from bidsesh are ‘original’. Migrants therefore are almost obligated to buy goods from overseas on their return to Nepal, as Pun notes,

Most buy television sets and blankets—the two items on an airport trolley that immediately distinguish a migrant worker from other
passengers. Not only are these items cheaper abroad; they are considered to be of “original” quality compared to the ones sold in Nepal (Pun 2015).

In giving these items to family, migrants help build their objectified capital and fulfil the perception of their success abroad. In entering other lands, migrants access the world seen on TV by Nepali people, a world of luxury and affluence. The gifts not only materially demonstrate their participation in this world, but give their recipients a small piece of it. These material objects are a physical embodiment of their assumed affluence and new bideshi status; I will elaborate on this in chapter 4.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 4: Migrants return to Nepal with 'original' quality electronics and blankets. Source: (Ojha 2015)

Institutionalised

Lastly, cultural capital can be institutionalised in the form of academic qualifications, which are a physical certification of an individual’s cultural competence (Bourdieu 1986, 246). As Bourdieu states, an academic qualification has a legal guaranteed value with respect to culture, and has significant material and symbolic profits (ibid., 247). A qualification allows an individual to compete in the labour market the more advanced the qualification, the greater the opportunity to establish economic capital.
The ability to attain academic qualifications as with other forms of objectified capital presupposes economic, cultural and, to some extent, social capital. In Nepal, social capital is a strong determining factor. Access to education has historically been caste dependent, with Dalits continuing to form the majority of the illiterate population (Central Bureau of Statistics 2003, 102).

3.2.3 Social Capital

According to Bourdieu, social capital concerns membership in a particular social group, in which individuals are backed by the collectively owned credentials of said group (Bourdieu 1986, 247). These credentials are enacted, reinforced and maintained by a whole set of social institutions, such as the sharing of a common name and by exchanges (ibid). For each individual within a social group there is a network of connections, which is initially formed by the act of institution, but is maintained by individual effort, consciously or unconsciously, to secure material or symbolic profits. A social group is put at risk with each new member, who challenges the limits of legitimate exchange; matters such as marriage, trade or commensality are limited within each social group to maintain their identities and boundaries (ibid., 248).

In Nepal, I argue that social capital is seen as caste and ethnicity. As mentioned in my background chapter, there are 125 ethnic groups in Nepal and these are incorporated into the Hindu caste system. Historically, Höfer notes that caste has governed every aspect of life in Nepal, from day-to-day practices to marriage and occupation, and it therefore determines an individual’s social networks, groups and ultimately their place in the social order (Höfer 1979, 196).

3.3 Bourdieu in the Context of Nepal

Criticisms of Bourdieu’s Social Capital

For the context of my research, Bourdieu’s theory is limited by its focus on the Parisian sociological field, a neoliberal capitalist nation, where class and economics have a central role. As Harvey states, neoliberalisation means the financialisation of everything, from the economy, to the state, to daily life (Harvey 2007, 33). This
contrasts with the situation in Nepal, where society is governed by a long-established caste hierarchy rooted in Hindu religious beliefs. As a result, social capital appears to have a greater role in governing the social hierarchy in Nepal, with access to cultural and economic capital governed by the caste group in which an individual belongs. Narayan and Cassidy also found this in their research in Ghana and Uganda, where social capital impacted every element of life, including access to economic capital (Narayan and Cassidy 2001, 91). They state, “optimism, satisfaction with life, perceptions of government institutions and political involvement all stem in large degree from the fundamental dimensions of social capital” (ibid.). While Bourdieu argues that economics is at the root of all forms of capital, I argue in Nepal it is social capital in the form of caste.

Anthias believes social capital should be more centrally located in debates regarding social hierarchy and divisions (Anthias 2007, 801). She states,

> The emphasis on social capital being translatable to the economic…ignores the role of non-economic factors in hierarchical relations. Life chances or position in a hierarchically ordered world, is not only a product of economic position but of a whole set of symbolic and cultural resources which in and of themselves provide access to forms of life which are valued and which enable opportunities and access in social and economic life (Anthias 2007, 792-793).

Additionally, Field believes social capital needs to be considered more broadly and criticises Bourdieu’s one-sided focus on the merits of social capital for those who possess it (Field 2003, 142). In order to expand the spectrum of social capital, Anthias suggests that it should be considered from a position of both advantage and disadvantage (Anthias 2007, 801). Stemming from this, Field continues to note that unequal access to social capital is often associated with other inequalities, such as wealth, gender or ethnicity, something lacking in Bourdieu’s definition (Field 2003, 142). This ties into the situation in Nepal, where low social capital in the form of low caste becomes a handicap for an individual or family and impedes their access to other forms of capital. In analysing the situation in Waling, being aware of the centrality social capital has traditionally played has therefore been important.

Although reconsidering the importance of social capital is helpful, it is perhaps insufficient for the situation in Nepal. It is not just the significance of social capital
that is seen through the lens of Bourdieu’s society, but its very definition too. In order to understand social capital in the context of Nepal, perhaps it is the term itself that requires further consideration. Woolcock and Narayan argue that theories of social capital have typically been limited to wealthy countries, and thus focus on the means of production, and the antipathy between capital and labour (Woolcock and Narayan 2000, 227). Hero similarly believes that the connection between social capital and economics is associated with the white population and/or around social-class (Hero 2003, 120). As a result, it is no surprise social capital is seen to be rooted in economic capital, where an individual can expand their social network the more economic power they possess. However, in Nepal this is more the reverse; social capital determines access to economic and cultural capital, with Dalits forming most of Nepal’s poor and illiterate.

Furthermore, Bourdieu believes social capital involves a continuous effort of sociability and exchange (Bourdieu 1986, 248), but Goulbourne and Solomos assert that social capital is not a commodity that can be exchanged with other forms of commodities (Goulbourne and Solomos 2003, 332). In Nepal, caste is fixed, tied to a person throughout their life; as Kalaiyarasan and Vijayabaskar note, unlike theories of social capital, “caste clearly lacks both linking and bridging capital” (Kalaiyarasan and Vijayabaskar 2014, 34). Caste as social capital cannot be exchanged or built upon; it is static and remains constant, as Subedi states, “caste status is determined, and therefore the systems are perpetuated, by birth. Membership in them is ascribed and unalterable” (Subedi 2011, 140).

Faced with a similar problem, Hero questions whether a single view of, in his example racial-group equality, is sufficient to be used across states, where notions of equality differ (Hero 2003, 120); the same could be said of social capital in general. With caste clearly of central importance to Nepali society, a narrow view of social capital, rooted in a class system, presents a challenge.

**Considerations for Application**

Although aware of the limitation in using a theory based on a class society in the context of Nepal where social capital is of central importance, I argue, as with Bourdieu, that habitus helps form a mediating construct across societies and different
forms of capital. As Mahar et al. note, capital differs across societies, but in all these particular societies, the particular capital is incorporated into the habitus (Harker, Mahar, and Wilkes 2016, 13). Habitus therefore gives Bourdieu’s theory some fluidity, with the role of different capitals understood alongside the habitus of a particular social group; the economically governed class system feeds into the habitus of Bourdieu’s society, but social capital is at the core of the caste system incorporated into the habitus of Nepal. Furthermore, as Bourdieu notes, habitus is not only different across societies, but also through generations, meaning that the social environment for one generation may be different than that for another (Bourdieu and Nice 1977, 78). Hilgers and Mangez build on this and suggest that an individual or group has the power to completely change the social understandings of their particular society, thus shifting how the different capitals are perceived; “sometimes, the individual or group…activates a series of schemes that make it possible to conceive another representation of the world, other logics of interests, other games and other stakes” (Hilgers and Mangez 2015, 18). As more and more Nepalis are encountering the wider world and different social settings, it is interesting to consider how they are impacting the habitus, and by extension the hierarchy, at home.

3.4 A Mixed Methodological Approach

In order to gain a picture of Nepali society and the factors that determine social position, I needed to understand the everyday lives of the community in Waling; their relationships with their neighbours, their connections to the wider world, and how their life today differs from their childhood. Coming from a humanities background with a Bachelor’s in English Literature and Creative Writing, my strengths lie in storytelling and interpreting how other people’s stories connect with their world. White notes, “we may not be able fully to comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another culture, however exotic that culture may appear to us” (White 1980, 5). With this in mind, adopting an ethnographic approach became a natural choice. Stewart states that ethnography is, “the up-close involvement of the researcher in some form of participative role, in the natural, “every day” setting to be studied” (1998, 6). Although my time in the field as a researcher lasted only a
month, I have previously lived in Nepal for five years; this gave me an advantage, as I already had an in-depth understanding of Nepali culture, as well as the situation in Waling.

Of course, this also meant that I was entering the field with my own assumptions and ideas; I could not return to Nepal totally unbiased. This line of thought connects with constructivist thinking in which, Moses and Knutsen note, my understanding of the world is unique to myself as an individual, sustained and maintained by my social relationships and shaped by the community around me (Moses and Knutsen 2012, 169, 184). This was important to recognise not only in myself as a researcher, but also in the people I encountered.

With this in mind, multiple methods of data collection became of central importance to my research, as Stewart emphasizes “multiple modes of data collection…is an important tactic in the service of veracity” (1998, 28). I combined my work in the field – interviews, observations and field notes – with desk research, academic literature and also a survey to ensure the reliability of my research. Much of my data was collected using qualitative methods, with data collected during my ethnography based on what Geertz defines as thick description (Geertz 1973), and Connelly and Clandinin deem narrative;

Data can be in the form of field notes of the shared experience, journal records, interview transcripts, others’ observations, storytelling, letter writing, autobiographical writing, documents such as class plans and newsletters, and writing such as rules, principles, pictures, metaphors, and personal philosophies…The sense of the whole is built from a rich data source with a focus on the concrete particularities of life that create powerful narrative tellings (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 5).

However, I combined this with some quantitative methods and drew from different disciplines in my readings in order to ensure the rigour and reliability of my research.

A bigger hurdle for me to overcome was my personal connection to the field of research. Before detailing how I collected my data, I will attempt to address this challenge.
3.5 Conducting Research as a Nepali Buhari

“We contrast the “other” to “ourselves”; use insights gained “abroad” for a project of cultural critique at “home”...but for many the boundaries between home and the field, between us and them, are more blurred.” (Enslin 1994, 548).

The Challenge of Familiarity

We sat on Dixcya’s bed; my mother-in-law examined the curling posters peeling away from the damp walls while my husband and I set-up our recording device. Dixcya was timid, quite obviously awkward to suddenly be hosting her landlady, her landlady’s son and his kuirey wife in her single, rented room. She almost whispered when she spoke, as if to hide her words from prying ears in the courtyard outside; she never locked eyes with us but instead followed the flight path of an unwelcome insect. Her modest demeanour veiled the depths of what she revealed; her life had been a constant struggle, and yet her pain seemed to be an everyday matter, part of her daily routine. From a troubled past to a challenging present, Dixcya sought no sympathy or reassurance, and brushed-off her struggles as a dutiful buhari should.

The interview was our first; it lasted just thirty minutes and throughout I was acutely aware of Dixcya’s visible discomfort. While she was quite open with what she shared, particularly about her past, she was not at ease in talking with us. Of course, this may have been the result of a culmination of factors, but I wondered whether the most prominent of these was the close relationship she shared with our family. In revealing personal details about herself, she made herself vulnerable to her landlords – us - with whom her shelter and that of her children depends. What if we disapproved of her past? What if we increased the rent based on her bi-monthly remittance? What if we told the neighbours her personal information? These questions must have been circulating through her mind.

How then did this affect the answers she gave? It seemed that Dixcya had been open in her responses to our questions, offering quite intimate details about herself, but she was concise with her words and entered into little detail. It was possible that she was holding-back some of what she really thought. When the topic of remittance and money was raised, she was willing to tell us how much her husband sent,
“30/35,000NRP - “What can I say?! How much did he send?” She seemed dissatisfied when she spoke, disappointed that he sent such a small amount, but it is possible she hid the true amount from us to protect herself and her family from a possible increase in rent. Following this interview, I had to consider my role as buhari and researcher more carefully before continuing the data collection process.

**Researcher and Buhari**

Elizabeth Enslin’s work became of central importance to my methodological approach; a cultural anthropologist from the US, Enslin married into a Brahmin family and found herself, somewhat serendipitously, conducting research in her husband’s home village in Chitwan District, West Nepal, while pregnant with her first child. In an essay concerning the limitations of ethnography, she details the challenges of conducting interviews with local women who would steer questions away from her area of research - women and landlessness - to that of her pregnancy and the pain of giving birth (Enslin 1994, 547). Furthermore, her intimate connection with a politically active Brahmin family often lead to questions regarding her role as a researcher and her involvement in local affairs (ibid, 548). Unlike Enslin, I was not actively involved in local political issues, but I was asking sensitive questions to close friends and acquaintances of my in-laws. Although I was not well-acquainted with many of my informants, my husband’s immediate neighbours and many of the community in Waling recognised me as the Shrestha’s buhari. As for all Nepali women who marry, my in-laws house and village became my home. I was not an anonymous researcher, an outsider, asking questions to strangers in the community, I was a member of the community. I was all at once a kuirey in my appearance but a Nepali by marriage. As Enslin writes,

“Where is ‘home’ and where is ‘abroad’? Like others who are caught between boundaries, I do not conceive of myself as an anthropological ‘bridge’ facilitating a cultural encounter ‘elsewhere’ (Nepal) to build critiques of ‘home’ (United States). People in Nepal have incorporated me into their lives and into their social and political activities” (Enslin 1994, 549).
My familiarity to the field of course impacted my own response to the data collection process. Having spent many years in Nepal, three of which as a Nepali buhari, I entered the field with some assumptions. Furthermore, while I may not have been intimately connected with a lot of my informants, my knowledge of them and response to them has likely been largely shaped by my in-laws relationships with them, as Moses and Knutsen note, “people do not obtain knowledge by observing the world; they obtain it by interacting with other people” (Moses and Knutsen 2012, 184). This may also have translated into my perceptions of migration and the social hierarchy in Waling. However, Moses and Knutsen continue, “our knowledge is framed by history, society, ideas and language” (Moses and Knutsen 2012, 202); Waling may have been my community for a time, but much of my life has been spent in the UK. My understandings may have been partially shaped by my life as a Nepali buhari, but they are also rooted in my upbringing as a western woman. So, I entered the field both as an insider and an outsider; with my knowledge shaped by years spent in Nepal, but also out in the world.

It is this that further created a challenge. As Enslin discusses, the differences between myself as a western woman and a Nepali buhari are stark (1994, 550-551). I was able to come and go from the family home as I pleased; I could instantly abandon a household chore if an opportunity for an interview arose. While I was sure to dress in a traditional kurta suruwal or occasionally a sari for interviews, I was normally without the traditional signs of marriage: sindoor powder or tikka on the forehead, bangles on each wrist and a pothe or beaded necklace. Furthermore, my time in Nepal was bounded by flights back to a comfortable Norwegian lifestyle, a life many have assumptions about. My fieldwork therefore became a game of balance between my role as buhari and that of western woman. Considering my focus on migration and the impact on household lifestyles, this became of particular relevance. I sought to understand the drive behind migration, and further still the desire for monetary wealth and possessions, all the while being acutely aware that my brothers-in-law and even myself and husband had left Nepal for much the same reasons as those we interviewed.

In taking a mixed-methods approach to my research, I hoped to ensure that I remained aware of this dualism and potential bias, and stayed open to the many
possibilities I faced. I will now detail the data collection process, all the while discussing how my relation to the field impacted each approach.

## 3.6 Data Collection

_Dashain_ in Nepal: the biggest Hindu festival of the year and the main trekking season for tourists. I had never seen Kathmandu International Airport so chaotic before; locals intermingled with outsiders and those in between, as people clawed for their possessions, like an intensive chicken farm at feeding time. None of this was helped by the intermittent power cuts shutting down the luggage conveyor belts and stilling the desperately needed fans. Televisions, suitcases, blankets, pots and pans – the place was awash with goods from all over the world, with many Nepali migrants returning gift-laden for the festival. The air was hot and still, familiar smells of the city carried in on the clothes of porters trying to fleece foreigners for a few rupees to carry their bags. The sun was shining outside, barely visible through the day’s smog, and the late afternoon chorus swirled around us as we piled into a rickety minivan. At long last, Nepal.

As we weaved through familiar streets I was overcome with nostalgia; I had so longed to be back in this beautiful chaos and had missed our life here after a year in Norway. My husband sat beside me, but frowned in utter dismay as we passed houses still dangerously derelict from the earthquakes two years beforehand; the overcrowded streets littered with salesmen, afternoon shoppers and debris; the impatient driver whose stubbornness had caused an hour’s worth of gridlock; “it’s the same” he sighed, “nothing’s changed”. While to me this was part of Kathmandu’s appeal, to my husband it caused great frustration. Having lived in Norway and visited the UK several times, he knew another world, and it disappointed him that Nepal would seemingly never reach the standards of that world.

We travelled to Waling two days later; the journey was as long as our flights from the UK, but much less comfortable and adorned with the jovial chimes of Nepali folk songs. My in-laws were sat at the front of their newly extended house, chatting to the neighbours and watching the highway in anticipation. As we unloaded our
things, my mother-in-law complained about the amount of luggage we had come with, “kati dherai!” she remarked “so much!” However, when she clapped eyes on the new micro-oven we had bought for her, she was excited to unwrap it and place it in her new kitchen.

We were not alone in travelling to our home village for the festival; our bus from Kathmandu was bursting with other Nepalis returned from overseas, and when we had reached the only highway out of Kathmandu – Kalanki – there was a sea of people pouring into buses with their luggage heaped onto the rooves. I had purposely planned our visit at festival time, knowing this would be the case; I believed it would present me with many opportunities to talk with migrants, as well as their families. Nepalis, in my experience, are quite open to chatting freely with strangers, particularly a Nepali-speaking-foreigner, so I was able to have many informal chats with people throughout our time in the country; from our taxi drivers, to shopkeepers, the opportunities were abundant.

We began our interviews the day after our arrival in Waling, after my morning chores were complete. My husband thought it best to start with the immediate neighbours, who were familiar with all of us and not just my parents-in-law. However, as addressed above in my discussion about our interview with Dixcya, I realised that talking to people so physically, as well as personally, close to my family presented some challenges. While we continued to interview immediate neighbours, my father-in-law became instrumental in introducing us to acquaintances who, through the snowball effect, introduced us to others willing to be interviewed. These people, although loosely connected to my parents-in-law, were less intimately acquainted. Of course, total confidentiality in such a small, tight-knit village is perhaps near-impossible. With such a close community, I have kept names and specific locations anonymous in an attempt to protect the identities of my participants.

**Interviews**

Interviews allowed me to better understand the reasons behind migration from Nepal, and how social position ties into them. In total I conducted fourteen semi-structured interviews over a period of four weeks in September-October 2017. I have detailed
those interviewed according to their caste/ethnicity, rank and connection to migration in Appendix A. All interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone, and throughout each I wrote detailed notes. I had hoped to contact not only migrants and migrant families, but also families who had no relative overseas; this was immediately laughed off by my father-in-law, “everyone is overseas!” I interviewed one family with no connections abroad, but learnt soon after we returned to Norway that two members of said family are now overseas.

Seven of the total interviews I conducted were with immediate neighbours, who were situated a few steps away from my in-law’s home, and other interviews were further into Waling. Considering the size of the municipality, we were never very far from my in-law’s house. I conducted two interviews with family members, one with my husband’s grandfather and one with my mother-in-law; these were more to gain insight into how things have changed in Nepal since their childhood, and gave useful background information. All interviews were conducted in the homes of the interviewees; this meant privacy was often limited. Nepali households, especially in villages, are always filled with people coming and going. We spoke with shop owners who would frequently be interrupted by curious customers, and more often than not family members would want to sit in and listen. I tried to use this to our advantage and involve family in the discussion, while many were reluctant, some were more than eager to participate. Of the fourteen interviews, two were with a couple and one an entire family; the interactions between the parties, particularly their correction of one another, often added insight to the topic at hand.

I am able to speak and understand Nepali language, although my speaking is much less proficient than my overall understanding. I decided it best for my husband to lead interviews based on an interview guide I had prepared and discussed with him, and I would step-in with additional questions when I felt more information was necessary. Dixcyaa was our first interviewee, and as detailed previously, our thirty minutes with her provided great insight into how to improve our interview style. From that first interview, I had understood my husband changed the wording of some of my questions. For example, rather than “how has your life changed since your husband went abroad?” he asked more leading questions, “did you buy this TV after your husband went abroad? Has your living standard increased?” As I had been able
to follow the interview and pick-up on issues like this, I was able to guide him in
how to better lead interviews, encouraging him to keep questions open-ended
following a semi-structured interview style, to allow conversation to flow more
naturally and be less like an interrogation. Berry notes that excellent interviews are
defined by this conversational style, “they [interviewers] make interviews seem like
a good talk among old friends…He gave his subjects a lot of license to roam but
would occasionally corral them back if the discussion went too far astray” (Berry
2002, 679). With this in mind, our following interviews became much more relaxed,
especially with those we had contacted through the snowball method. This was
particularly evident in one of our last interviews when we asked our interviewee to
tell us about her childhood and she talked, uninterrupted, for forty-five minutes!

A forty-five minute answer to a single question demonstrates the challenge of semi-
structured interviews; they are time-consuming. This made it difficult to interview
many people, as both we and our interviewees had busy schedules, especially as it
was festival time. Furthermore, as my husband was leading the interviews, he
sometimes probed interviewees on matters that had little relevance for my research,
as Berry notes, “different interviewers might not probe at the same points in the
session even if they hear the same answers to their initial question” (Berry 2002,
681). I had to be sure to intervene where an interview was going off track, and ask
the questions I wanted answered, sometimes with my husband’s help in translating
them properly. Of course, this further added to the amount of time we spent on each
interview.

As interviews were conducted in Nepali, the transcribing process was challenging.
Berry states, “it is the statistical manipulation of the coded interview transcripts that
is considered to be the rigorous part of the research” (Berry 2002, 679); considering
this, I had hoped to transcribe the interviews with my husband to raise questions
about the use of certain words or expressions as they came up, but this was far too
time consuming. My husband transcribed most of the interviews, but I sent four of
the longest ones to a translator in Nepal, known to an expat friend of mine in
Kathmandu. While my husband had worked closely with me and knew the
importance of nuances in language, I was concerned I may lose this with an
anonymous translator. However, when she sent me the transcripts, she had written in
both Nepali and English, so I was able to follow her translation and confirm details with my husband where necessary.

**Participant Observation**

Syse defines participant observation as,

A way of using oneself as an instrument for research. By seeing, hearing and using one’s intellectual capabilities, and combining this with one’s own memories, experiences and personality, it is possible to seek another person’s confidence (Syse 2001, 228).

She discusses the importance of participant observation in building an in-depth relationship with those in the field, particularly interviewees, allowing a researcher to learn as much about them and their reality as possible. For me, Nepal had been my daily reality for several years, and I spent our times in Waling as a Nepali *buhari*. This both broke and created barriers between my participants and myself, as previously addressed. However, the informal conversations I had over our month in Nepal often proved more fruitful than my interviews or literature review, particularly conversations with women. Sat on the back porch of my in-law’s house, my son sleeping in his pushchair and husband off with friends, local village women would join my mother-in-law and I and chat about their daily struggles, gossip about a local girl being married off to a boy with a foreign visa, or comment on a new item of jewellery someone was wearing. My mother-in-law was particularly interesting to interact with; with three sons overseas, two of whom were visiting for the festival, her life has dramatically changed in the last few years.

**Survey Questionnaire**

In planning my fieldwork, I had read through a lot of statistical data from different ministries in Nepal. This had given me some idea of the situation in the country, particularly with regards to household income, rates of migration and caste-ethnicity relations. However, as McNeill discusses in a paper concerning statistics, I was acutely aware of the possible inaccuracies of this information (McNeill 2000). Before entering the field, I wanted to have a general understanding of migration; the reasons behind it, the income earned and the consumer goods brought into Nepal in the suitcases of Nepali migrants, and so I decided to conduct my own survey.
questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-four questions with mostly fixed-alternative answers, focusing on factual information concerning the migrant, their family and their home environment as well as the goods they were bringing back to Nepal with them (see Appendix B). My husband translated the questionnaire into Nepali, a translation we closely discussed to ensure accuracy.

During our four hour layover in Delhi airport on our way to Nepal, we handed the survey out at two departure gates with flights heading to Kathmandu. Many were happy to fill-out the questionnaire, and we gained a total of thirty responses. One of the main unforeseen challenges was that some of the Nepalis we approached were illiterate; they were employed overseas as ‘unskilled’ workers as they had little or no formal education. This meant that my husband had to sit and go through the questionnaire with them, which raised a number of ethical issues. Wilhite emphasizes that in a questionnaire, respondents tend to “conceal perceived faults and to exaggerate perceived qualities” (Wilhite 2008, 12); much like an interview, this issue was emphasized by my husband’s involvement in filling-out some of the questionnaires. While I had to remain aware of this flaw, Stewart notes that, generally speaking, this type of data collection is perceived as being objective because it is independent of the peculiarities of the researcher, and so it is a useful tool to gain a picture of the field independent of research circumstances (Stewart 1998, 29). However, with such a small number of responses, I could not use the survey to draw definite conclusions, but it did provide an interesting and helpful overview, and was useful to compare with interview responses and participant observations.

**Academic Literature and Official Document Analysis**

reading from different disciplines, I built-up a picture of Nepal from various angles, but was careful not to make any conclusions based on what I read. I entered the field with part of a story, combined it with my own findings, and added to it with my own perceptions.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Waling is a small area, and the community I contacted even smaller. As such, it is important to respect the privacy of the individuals I interviewed. I have therefore referred to my informants under pseudonyms and have not detailed their specific location, or that of their relative overseas. Where a quotation includes sensitive information, such as a family name or city, I have either omitted it or replaced it with a neutral term. This is indicated with the use of square brackets ‘[]’. During my fieldwork, I assured all informants they would remain anonymous in my research, and I believe this allowed them to feel more comfortable to talk freely in my interviews. However, my in-laws were happy to be referred to directly. While I do not disclose their names, I often refer to my mother or father-in-law; this has been done so with their oral consent.
“मनिस कुलो दिले हुन्छ, जातले हुँदैन।”
“A man must be judged by the size of his heart, not from his name or his caste.”
(Devkota and Hutt 1996, 38)

Returning to Devkota’s epic, here Madan falls sick on his journey home to Nepal, and is left abandoned on the roadside by men he calls his brothers, men of his caste. When Madan is rescued from the roadside, near dead from his sickness, he is overcome with gratitude for his rescuer, a man considered untouchable. As this man carries Madan to his home, clothes and feeds him back to health, Madan realises that a name, an indicator of caste, is worthless, and that actions speak the truth of a man’s worth.

As the second chapter detailed, Nepal has often been divided; divided into separate kingdoms, into rulers and laymen, into high caste and low caste. In this chapter I will discuss how the 1990s Maoist Revolution brought about rapid, dramatic changes to the country, particularly in relation to caste and ethnic disparities. I will first consider changes made by the government, examining the laws surrounding caste based discrimination. I will then address caste discrimination in practice, with a particular focus on migration and its impact on the social sphere. Building on this, I will consider perceptions of manual labour at home and abroad since the migration boom, and will discuss whether manual labourers hold the same stigma as in the past. Lastly, by using Bourdieu’s Habitus, I will discuss the conflict faced by my informants between knowing what is wrong with caste based discrimination and deep-rooted teachings from their childhoods.

4.1 What’s in a Name? The History of Caste and Ethnicity in Nepal

As mentioned in my background chapter, the social structure of Nepal has historically been tied to the Hindu caste system, similar to that found in India.
However, Nepal is unique in that the caste system incorporates ethnicity, making it much more flexible. While there is much research examining caste and ethnicity in great detail (Fürer-Haimendorf 1957, Gellner 2007, Höfer 1979, Levine 1987, Parish 1996, Weber 1992), I will offer a somewhat simplified explanation of both in order to understand long-standing social codes in the country, before considering how these codes have been changed in recent years.

**The Establishment of a Multi-Ethnic Caste Hierarchy**

Caste divisions are tied to Hindu religious beliefs concerning purity and impurity. Subedi defines the Hindu caste system as,

A hierarchy of endogamous division in which membership is hereditary and permanent. Here, hierarchy includes inequality both in status and in access to goods and services. There are rigid rules of avoidance between castes, and certain types of contacts are denied as contaminating, while other non-contaminating….Individually low castes are considered inherently inferior and are related to a disadvantaged position, regardless of their behaviour (Subedi 2011, 140).

Höfer considers how caste has impacted the social sphere in Nepal in his extensive study of the 1854 Muluki Ain. The Muluki Ain, rooted in orthodox Hindu values, was the predominant national legal code of Nepal during the Rana autocratic regime. This code divided society based on the Rana rulers’ own notions of caste, and stipulated a place in the social order for the various ethnic groups in Nepal (Levine 1987, 72). It resulted in a hierarchy of castes, with higher castes elite tagadhari or ‘sacred thread wearers’, and lower castes enslaveable Dalits (Höfer 1979, 69). One of my informants, Sania, recalled this from her childhood,

They [low castes] didn’t used to have money and were poor. If we high castes provided them with some work, they had work to do. They would have something to eat and could celebrate festivals only if we gave them a salary.

Gellner notes that upper castes tended to be powerful landowners and lower castes untouchable labourers, leading to a relationship of exploitation and dependence (Gellner 2007, 1823). Subedi similarly discusses the restrictions imposed by the caste system and notes that while a high caste person may be friends or have
workmates from a lower caste, they must never enter one another’s house or eat food together (Subedi 2011, 137). Caste therefore became the overarching determiner of social status, as Höfer states,

> Caste status is, indeed, the chief factor determining an individual's juridical status….Caste "interferes" in marriage, inheritance, occupation; in the relationship between servant and master, between patient and healer, between the individual and the State. (Höfer 1979, 196).

Tied into this are notions of ethnicity. Fürer-Haimendorf notes that ethnicity differs from caste as it distinguishes between language and racial features, not just occupation and habits (Fürer-Haimendorf 1957, 252). Furthermore, Barth states that an ethnic group forms a common sphere of culture, communication and identity and has its own set of boundaries (Barth 1998, 15). While ethnic groups were recognised long before the caste hierarchy, the Muluki Ain granted different groups different rights and incorporated them into the Hindu caste system (Levine 1987, 72). Typically, there are no fixed hierarchies within the different ethnic groups, except for the Newars, the aboriginals of Nepal, who follow the Vedic Varna caste system, the same as the Indian caste system and the inspiration behind the Muluki Ain.

The ethnic groups are typically associated with the country’s three major geographical zones, namely the Himal -mountains, the Pahad – the middle hills and the Terai - plains. Levine offers a simplified breakdown of these geographical zones in terms of their ethnic groupings: the Himal is associated with Tibetan language speakers and culture, tightly linked to Buddhism; the Pahad inhabits a mixture of Tibetan-Buddhist and Indian-Hindu cultures with aboriginal Newars dominant; and the Terai occupies Hindu, Muslim and Tharu populations (Levine 1987, 75). However, both Levine and Fürer-Haimendorf emphasize these boundaries are not strict.

Fürer-Haimendorf discusses the interesting relationship between caste and ethnicity in Nepal, particularly in comparison to the stricter caste-based hierarchy of India. While Höfer implies changing caste is near impossible (Höfer 1979, 165), Fürer-Haimendorf suggests that the caste-ethnicity relationship allows mobility within the rank order and the possibility to climb the ladder (Fürer-Haimendorf 1957, 251). He notes that a number of principles in the Indian caste system are lacking in Nepal, the
main being endogamy (Fürer-Haimendorf 1957, 251). Nepali men maintain their high-status in Nepal even if they marry a woman from a lower caste, and may even improve their status by marrying a woman from a higher-caste (ibid.). He does not discuss if the same is true for women, but from experience, I believe it is not. While the difference in status between men and women in Nepal is interesting, it is beyond the scope of my research, but is certainly a relevant factor worthy of further research.

In addition, Fürer-Haimendorf discusses how the major ethnic groups are subdivided into status groups, which create ‘tribal blocks’ within the stratified national society (ibid, 252). These ethnic groups are typically non-Hindus who cannot be incorporated into the Hindu caste hierarchy. He notes that this tribal principle connects each individual to all the members of their own ethnic group whatever their rank position, while the hierarchic caste system determines an individual's position in relation to the members of other groups (ibid., 253). Within the Hindu caste hierarchy, those belonging to non-Hindu ethnic groups are known as janajati. Gellner notes that this term was adopted in 1990, and that janajatis were originally known as ‘hill tribes’ (Gellner 2007, 1825). The term janajati corresponds with the Indian concept of a tribe (ibid.).

Figures 5 and 6 show the different caste and ethnic groups found in Nepal. Figure 5 details the caste hierarchical groups, with Brahmins the highest and Dalits the lowest, along with the different ethnic groups incorporated under each caste. Gellner notes that an individual’s caste and ethnicity is indicated by their surname (Gellner 2007, 1823). This can also be seen in figure 5; for example, my own family name Shrestha is from the ethnic group, Newar, with the caste Kshatriya or Vaishya depending on whether they are tagadhari – wearers of the sacred thread or not. Figure 5 also shows the janajatis, the non-Hindus who cannot be placed into the hierarchy. While this is the official hierarchy in Nepal, Nepalis themselves often refer to their caste and ethnicity as being one and the same. When discussing the hierarchy with my husband, he was adamant that his caste was Newar and that his ethnic group was also Newar. However, he agreed figure 5 was indeed correct.
Figure 6: Ethnic groups in Nepal and their typical geographical location. Source: (Mapsland 2018)
Caste and Ethnic Discrimination in Nepal

Although there appears to be some flexibility within Nepal’s social codes in comparison to India, there has been much discrimination based on caste and ethnicity. Dalits continue to form most of Nepal’s poor population, with much research on caste concerned with the lack of rights Dalits receive in society (Gellner 2007, Jodhka and Shah 2010, Pd Pyakurel 2011, Vishwakarma 2002). Furthermore, gender divisions stipulated in the Muluki Ain still dominate and patriarchy remains at large. These divisions are rooted in concerns about maintaining spiritual purity, with physical contact between castes considered jhuto. Acts such as sharing water or food, sexual relations and general physical contact are strictly bound by this. Many of my informants recalled such type of discrimination, but our conversation with Sania and Sarala, high caste Brahmin sisters, was one of the most informative. Sania recalled her attitude towards low castes in her childhood,

In the past, whenever low caste people came to our house they used to squat at the end of our garden. They weren’t given a mat to sit on…They used to come to our house during festivals with fruits and my father used to offer them tikka using leaves so he didn’t have to touch them; they had to put the tikka on themselves. We wouldn’t touch them… Those low caste people were so dirty and nasty. I hated touching them and we hated eating food touched by them.

Similarly, Sarala also felt this way,

In my childhood, when Dalits came to our house, they weren’t allowed inside and had to sit in the corner on the ground; they had to wash and dry the utensils they had eaten with themselves. During winter, we used to make a fire for them and later sprinkle water over it to make it clean. If they touched us, we used to sprinkle holy water on ourselves because [a Dalit] touched us.

In her adult life, Sarala’s work has involved much contact with lower castes. She recalled once visiting a Dalit family and how difficult it was for her,

They took me inside for tea in the kitchen, above the cooking place they were drying the meat of one whole buffalo and its juices were dripping everywhere. How could I drink tea there?...That discrimination was because they were dirty. They didn’t bath; they ate dead animals, dried skins inside etc. And later all this was deemed religious sin.
Although my informants recognised the prevalence of caste discrimination in their childhoods, many acknowledged a difference today. Hari and Sarala were similar in their belief that caste discrimination was still prevalent, but much less so than when they were growing-up. Hari, a Dalit himself, stated, “we cannot say that discrimination has completely gone, it’s still here, lower caste discrimination is still here, but compared to back then we have more respect” and Sarala similarly noted,

Now there is no discrimination. Still Brahmins don’t allow Dalits to enter their homes, but it’s ok to be together in public vehicles, walking together and eating in the same restaurants. They won’t sprinkle water. There is a change, but Dalits are still not allowed inside temples or to touch objects associated with worship.

Some of my informants were much more optimistic. Mohit believed that caste was no longer relevant in society,

Compared to a long time ago there have been a lot of changes. Yesterday (meaning a long time ago), so called high class people discriminated against low caste people; they called them ‘Dalits’ and did not allow them to enter their houses. They didn’t eat or drink anything touched by them. They were not allowed to go to school. But now things are different. If you compare now to 20-25 years back there have been a lot of changes.

He continued to discuss how his children were oblivious to caste, and played with all children in the neighbourhood regardless of their lineage. Mohan and his daughter Manjushree were similarly dismissive of caste. Manjushree, a young university student, was almost embarrassed that she had ever discriminated against anyone based on caste. She stated,

Nowadays people accept Dalits as human beings, just as we [higher castes] are; they also bleed if they are cut. I am changed. I was like that then, but now I don’t think or believe that way. Now I have friends of all castes and we sit and eat together. People are changing with time.

It is interesting to note this shift in perceptions of caste; my informants were mostly aged between 30-65 years, with just one a young university student and one an 80+ year old. Therefore, this shift has happened recently and relatively quickly; the laws of the Muluki Ain seem to have been prevalent during my informants’ childhoods, but within just a few decades appear to have been relaxed. Furthermore, Mohit stated, “in my own house my family and my kids don’t discriminate at all, while my
mother still believes in caste, which is rare now”. It seems that the practice of castes is generational, changing with each new age. The older generation in Waling, those who are the parents of most of my informants, seem to have a stronger relationship with caste than the youngest generation, or the children of my informants. In just three generations, the prevalence of caste in determining social codes has been substantially diluted. What has brought about this rapid change? I will now consider the factors that have been influencing Nepali social codes in recent years.

4.2 The Caste Revolution - 1990s and Beyond

4.2.1 Caste in State Policies

Although Nepal opened its borders to the world in the 1960s, it was not until the 1990s that the *Muluki Ain* was overtly scrapped. This was in conjunction with the establishment of a bicameral parliament, a democratic constitution and the demotion of the palace to a constitutional role (Hutt 2004, 4). Ethnic and caste affiliations were discouraged in the name of patriotism and nation building, but this had little effect, as high caste elites with ready established connections were able to access development initiatives, such as education, much more easily than lower castes, widening caste-based social divides (Gellner 2007, 1824). Frustrated by the lack of developments in Nepal and the continual discrimination against ethnic and caste minorities, the Maoist movement took hold and, as detailed in my background chapter, brought dramatic changes to the country. The forty point demands made to the government in 1996 by the leader of the UPF party, Baburam Bhattari, were largely concerned with the abolishment of discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, gender and regional location.

In November 2006, after years of fighting and thousands of killings and abductions, the Prime Minister of Nepal, Girija Prasad Koirala, and the President of the Communist Party of Nepal, Prachanda, signed *The Comprehensive Peace Accord*. In signing this accord, both parties agreed to a number of stipulations, many concerned with human rights. Point 7.1.1 states, “nobody should be discriminated on the basis of colour, gender, language, religion, age, race, national or social origin, wealth, disability, birth or other standing, ideology or faith” (The Government of Nepal and
CPN 2006), further challenging caste and ethnic discrimination as raised by the Maoist movement. Many of my informants attributed changing attitudes to caste with the Maoist revolution. Mohan strongly believed in the Maoist cause,

Maoists have done much to stop untouchability. When they were in state, they brought big changes to untouchability. They made laws that deemed all people as equals; they tried to make all equal. That is one reason for the big changes.

Gaurav, the oldest of my informants, believed the initial change was rooted in the Maoist insurgency, but for him personally was furthered by his spiritual group,

There were so many castes then, but now things are changing. It’s more liberal now. After Maoists came, there’s more liberty. But there is still untouchability even though the law enforces equality among all the religions and castes. There was a time when we didn’t drink water touched by Muslims and low caste people. After I found my spiritual group, I learnt that there is nothing in the caste system and I think equality is better than what we used to have.

Following the peace accord, Nepal has faced increasing international pressure to dissolve caste-based discrimination. In 2011, The Caste-based Discrimination and Untouchability Crime Elimination and Punishment Act was established. This Act made any form of discrimination based on custom, tradition, religion, culture, rituals, caste, race, descent, community or occupation punishable by law, and specifies how complaints of discrimination can be made and the potential punishments (Law Commission Nepal 2011). Furthermore, the constitution of Nepal, promulgated in 2015, emphasizes equal rights for the Dalit population and even provisions free education for all Dalits from primary to high school levels (Ministry of Law 2015, 23). It seems that the Maoist revolution planted the seeds of change that led the Nepali state to disengage from the traditional caste hierarchy. Subedi questions whether this has been enough to bring about change in practice, suggesting that the legacy of caste remains at large in society (Subedi 2011, 154). I will now explore how society has evolved since the 1960s, and how this has impacted the mind-sets of the general populous.
4.2.2 Caste in Practice

Nepal and the Wider World

Since the 1960s, Nepali society has become much more engaged with the wider world. There has been an increasing presence of international organisations in the country, as detailed in my background chapter, which bring a discourse that divides Nepal from the Western, developed world. Pigg notes that this difference is largely seen as being between traditional and modern, with ideas of progress tied into economic gain (Pigg 1996, 163-165). Shrestha connects this with the word bikas, meaning development, which he believes has created a social divide between bikasi and abikasi – developed and undeveloped. He addresses how development has become not just a concept, but a social ideology. Through this discourse, more Nepalis aspire to attain a bikasi life, one that is often tied to the western world. He states,

Bikas was generally associated with objects such as roads, airplanes, dams, hospitals, fancy buildings etc. Also viewed as a key component of bikas was education, for it was proclaimed to be essential to building human capital…But education had to be modern emphasizing science, technology, and English, the language of bikas. (Shrestha 1997, 46)

For individuals in Nepal this has been instrumental in challenging their very way of life; bombarded with images of western luxury, the ‘traditional’ life of Nepal no longer appeals and there is an increasing desire for imported consumer goods to meet renewed ideas of comfort. It is interesting to note the change in the country’s import patterns; not only has Nepal increased its rate of imports, the items that are being imported have changed. In 2015, Nepal imported $6.61 billion worth of foreign goods, with the highest imports petroleum, gold, vehicles, electronic equipment and rice; this is compared to the $619 million worth of imported goods in 1995, spent mostly on woollen clothing and rubber footwear (The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) 2017). Even within these twenty years, Nepal’s ability to import, along with the goods that are being imported, demonstrates a change in the country’s economic strength and also renewed consumer demands. Liechty notes that, more and more, identity is being tied into these modern goods (Liechty 1994, vi), and the clash between traditional Nepal and the globalising modern world is impacting
cultural norms. Subedi similarly recognizes this, and suggests that the impact of modernization and economic prosperity has led to an increase in the secularization of life (Subedi 2011, 155). This, he suggests, has led to a move away from the caste system and has given rise to new antagonisms and social norms (ibid.).

**Becoming Cosmopolitan – The Impact of Migration**

As a result of, or even contributing to this, is the radical change in migration patterns. It is not just the numbers of Nepalis overseas that has increased, but the countries of destination have become more varied and much further afield. In 1952/54, the absent population was recorded as 198,120, 2.3% of the total population, with the most common destination countries being India, Malaysia, Burma, China, Tibet and Pakistan (National Planning Commission Secretariat 2014, 223). However, in 2011 the World Bank estimated that there were around 4 million Nepalis overseas, 14% of the total population (World Bank 2011, i), with 58.3% migrating to ASEAN Member State Countries and the Middle East (National Planning Commission Secretariat 2014, 223). As more Nepalis migrate to a wide variety of countries, they are encountering the wider world, one very different from their homeland. On their return to their homeland, migrants may fuel the bikas discourse and further the divide between bikasi and abikasi, modern and traditional, Nepal and the West. Many of my informants who had migrated overseas described the countries they had migrated to as being bikasi. When asked to elaborate on what they meant by this, many talked about “systems”, which they defined as being good infrastructures, job opportunities and strong governments. They also discussed the self-sufficiency of these countries, many mentioned factories and industries abroad, and others talked about the high standard of education overseas. Hari described the UK, “it’s so developed, all the transport facilities, everything is on a timetable, systematic” a sentiment shared by many.

Interestingly, Samrat stated,

> I think development starts from human minds. Development should start with human attitude, with an individual’s attitude, then community, then society. When our society is developed, I think others will develop as time goes on.
For Samrat, development was not tied to physical objects, but mentalities, beginning with the individual and expanding through all of society. Migration therefore has a dual role in not only allowing an individual to encounter the bikasi world, but to become bikasi themselves. Pigg addresses this, and likens becoming bikasi to becoming cosmopolitan: “to understand the ways of other places, to make a living away from the village, to be mobile” (ibid). She argues that cosmopolitanism has changed how prosperity is measured in Nepal, with traditional measures rooted in labour, land and livestock being transformed into connections to a wider economic sphere (Pigg 1996, 173). By having an experience overseas, a migrant acquires a cosmopolitan or bikasi status and perhaps therefore improves their social position. Erel furthers this and states, “first, migrants do not only unpack cultural capital from their rucksacks, instead they create new forms of cultural capital in the countries of residence” (Erel 2010, 649). She suggests that these new forms of migrant specific cultural capital help determine a migrant’s social position at home. Migrants are therefore not only cosmopolitan individuals building on an already circulating notion of bikas, but they are adding new ideas that help construct social codes at home. Levitt deems this social remittances, “the ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving- to sending- communities” (Levitt 1998, 926). From my research, Hari recognised the significance of migrants and their potential to bring about social change,

A Nepali who goes abroad and travels will gain some knowledge and of course will change and have bigger ideas. One who gets a good job in a good company will bring some good changes to living standards back here in Nepal, and attitudes and thinking will also develop in the same way…Most people experience positive changes because they gain knowledge and bring positive attitudes back to Nepal and seem to help development.

How does all this tie into caste system? Parish suggests that as time goes by, the moral codes by which society is governed shift and change how social position is perceived,

Moral constructs…wear out, and lose their grip on consciousness as the conditions of life change, or people generate new images of world, society, self. As people withdraw commitment, disengage, change their deeply cultural minds by drawing on culture in different ways, existing moral visions may dissolve – and others arise to take their place (Parish 1996, 220)
This ties into Bourdieu, who recognises that the accumulation and transmission of capital is tied into the quantity of time spent on both, with the more time spent, the more rewards reaped in the long run (Bourdieu 1986, 551). As more and more Nepalis venture overseas, they have the potential to bring about change not just to their own social position, but to how social position is determined as a whole. As time passes, perhaps even the caste system, formerly so central to social position in Nepal, will become irrelevant. In the words of my informant, Mohit,

Culture….. culture. Culture will change as well. If there is only one culture it remains same, but when we bring new cultures they modify what we have.

4.3 Perceptions of Manual Labour and Caste at Home and Abroad

As discussed in my background chapter, the drive for many migrants to go overseas is rooted in economic capital. Among all my informants, there was the assumption that more money equates a better life, “after going abroad they earn lots of money. They bring lots of money and after having lots of money one will have a good and happy life” (Darpan). Furthermore, many of my informants were frustrated by the lack of opportunities available in Nepal, aggravated by the low incomes generally offered in the country. Indra noted,

People are educated and have the sense that they should earn. By sitting in the house or by working in agriculture, there is not a good income. Even the Government has been unable to provide proper employment or manage salaries….People won’t be able to provide their families with their needs just by working in their fields, so they go abroad where they can earn at least Rs.30-35,000. They can send that home and educate their children.

As of 2016, the legal monthly minimum wage for employees in Nepal (excluding those employed in tea plantations) is Rs.6205 ($55). However, in 2011 the nominal average per capita income was recorded as Rs.41,659 ($380), with 20% of the poorest population earning up to Rs.15,888 ($145) and the richest 20% earning up to Rs.94,149 ($855) (Central Bureau of Statistics 2011a, 43). According to the Annual Household Survey 2014/15, annual consumption for the average Nepali household amounts to Rs.292,312 ($2650), (UNDP 2016, vii); this totals an average monthly
expenditure of nearly Rs.25,000 ($225), far higher than the national minimum wage or that of the poorest in the population. While there are disparities between urban and rural, rich and poor, on average 56.9% of this expenditure goes towards food, 12% on rent and 3.9% on education (UNDP 2016, 6). Interestingly, 18% is spent on non-food others; a large portion of this being medical expenses, as well as cultural services such as cinema tickets and holiday expenses (ibid, 90). Shrestha comments on the increased consumption on cultural services and consumer goods, “the North-Atlantic consumer culture invades every nook and corner of Nepal, generating previously non-existent wants and hence scarcity which ultimately thickens the sediments of poverty” (Shrestha 1993, 13). As a result of these renewed wants, juxtaposed with low salaries in Nepal, it is perhaps understandable that many choose to move abroad.

From the survey questionnaire I conducted at Delhi airport, responses regarding occupation, monthly salary and remittance varied greatly. Figure 7 shows the average monthly salary of questionnaire participants based on their occupation. I have excluded those employed as housewives or students, as they do not receive a salary. Figure 7 demonstrates that participants engaged in unskilled labour, such as construction workers, domestic helpers etc., receive a lower salary than those in skilled work, such as medical professionals. Furthermore, Figure 7 shows that the salaries unskilled labourers receive range from Rs.7500 to Rs.30,000 ($70-$275) per month. By contrast, a non-agricultural wage worker in Nepal can expect to earn only Rs.263 ($2) per day (Central Bureau of Statistics 2011a, 61). While the difference between salaries in Nepal and abroad is significant, it is important to note that many employed overseas incur huge expenses during the labour migration process and on average use 25% of remittances to pay off debts (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2013/14, 37, 42).
Figure 7: Average Monthly Salary by Occupation, based on questionnaire data.

*Original question regarding salary was based on a range (See Appendix B), so for the purposes of this graph I have used the average of each range.

**Numbers in brackets indicate the number of questionnaire participants engaged in each occupation.

Furthermore, salaries are very much dependent on the country of employment. A World Bank report on migration in Nepal indicates that those who migrate to developed countries typically earn more than those who go elsewhere; the highest salary was recorded in Korea and the lowest in the GCC countries (World Bank 2011, 39). Considering this, Figure 8 shows the average salaries of my questionnaire participants based on their country of employment. From this it is clear that those employed in developed countries, such as Australia and the UK, earn significantly more than those employed in Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The average monthly salary of questionnaire participants in Australia was Rs.120,000 ($1090), while for those in the UAE was Rs.7500 ($70).
Figure 8: Average monthly Salary by Country, based on questionnaire data.

*Original question regarding salary was based on a range (See Appendix B), so for the purposes of this graph I have used the average of each range.

**Numbers in brackets indicate the number of questionnaire participants located in each country.

4.3.1 Occupation and Social Position

These figures show that, in the case of my participants, a migrant’s experience abroad depends greatly on the country they move to and the occupation they are engaged in. While there are numerous reports on the hardships many Nepalis face overseas, and data estimating that 4322 Nepali migrant workers have died since 2009 (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2016, 27), there seemed be an assumption among my informants that those overseas have a better life. While most of this was based on the assumption migrants earn a high economic capital, many believed abroad was simply better; Indra stated, “we used to see people who had been to Delhi and Bombay. We didn’t know if they earnt well or not, but watching them we used to wish we could go to India or even better the Indian Army”. Pigg argues that the assumption a life abroad is better is rooted in ideas of bikas, as mentioned earlier in the chapter. Pigg discusses how bikas is often associated with the Western world and goes hand-in-hand with wealth, making Nepali village life seem traditional, backwards and poor (Pigg 1993, 49). She argues that this has changed how prosperity is measured in Nepal, with traditional measures rooted in labour, land and
livestock being transformed into connections to a wider economic sphere, something she calls becoming ‘cosmopolitan’ (Pigg 1996, 173). One of my informants, Nabin, considered a Dalit, recognised this as he talked about his return from overseas, “I was in India for a while and when I returned to Nepal I was able to afford a bit more than before and people saw me a bit differently. I’d had a bidesh experience”. Nabin’s social position had changed just by him travelling abroad; he had become a cosmopolitan bikasi, a developed man with an experience beyond the borders of village life.

Further to this, Shrestha discusses the impact of bikas on the perception of manual labour. He notes that as Nepalis have witnessed the lifestyles of Westerners in Nepal, viewed as educated, sophisticated and civilised, attitudes towards manual labour have hardened (Shrestha 1993, 10). He suggests that the high rate of unemployment among the educated in Nepal is directly related to their growing refusal to take manual jobs, now perceived as demeaning and a sign of abikasi (ibid). Bourdieu echoes this understanding in his analysis of class structures, where class is rooted in occupation and therefore the capital associated with that occupation. He states,

> The negotiations between antagonistic interest groups…concern, inseparably, the tasks entailed by a given job, the properties required of its occupants (e.g., diplomas) and the corresponding advantages, both material and symbolic (the name) (Bourdieu 1984, 481).

In Bourdieu’s study, a manual labourer or farm worker is deemed working class, directly opposed to the occupations of the dominant classes employed as private sector executives or college professors (ibid, 128-129). These categories are defined based on capital, namely economic and cultural. While Bourdieu emphasizes economic capital is at the route of all other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986, 250), his occupational-based class divisions demonstrate the importance of cultural capital. A manual labourer may have high economic capital, but low cultural capital maintains his position as working class. With reference to Nepal, this is highly relevant; for a country whose economy has historically depended on agriculture, and therefore manual labourers, today there is a significant devaluation of labour. My informant Darpan, although proud to be a mechanic himself, has ensured his children have all received a formal school education. His eldest son is enrolled in the army, and
during our discussion he told us his plans to send his other son abroad, “I am pushing [my son] to join the Indian army…I was thinking of Australia as well”. Many of the parents I spoke with in Waling face this dualism; they work as labourers from a family of labourers, but they are ensuring their children will not have the same fate. Although Bourdieu’s analysis suggests this is associated with improving class status, and the increase in economic and cultural capital, I argue that in Nepal occupation is heavily tied to the caste hierarchy and social capital.

Typically, manual labour is associated with Dalits; Höfer discusses how occupation is tied into caste formation and therefore status allocation (Höfer 1979, 74). Dalits were often associated with work that absorbed the impurity of others, such as prostitution, begging or work involving dead animals and animal skin, such as cobblers (ibid). From my own research, some of my informants were familiar with this from their childhood,

In the past when cows or buffalos - any animal - died out of disease, we used to call Sarkis [low caste], and they would carry them in a doko and eat that meat. They were considered to be the people who ate dead animals….They used to dry the skin around their house….It was so smelly around their house because of that. That is why we disliked them. How can anyone eat food touched by them? (Sania)

Some even recalled purifying themselves after contact with a Dalit, “we used to sprinkle holy water on ourselves because a Sarki or Damai [low caste] touched us” (Sushmina). While the government has taken steps to ensure Dalits have access to the same opportunities as higher castes, there still seems to be a stigma around them and the labour positions they are usually employed in. While my informant Hari - a Dalit who works as a goldsmith, a typical occupation for his caste - has spent many years overseas, has a child studying abroad and is arguably one of the wealthiest men in Waling, he stated,

Here the attitude towards workers is different and there is a stigma. An example is with my business, I will tell you; when my workers are busy and I have to work in my workshop, customers and relatives who normally greet me with namaste from a distance while I am in the showroom, do not do so while I’m inside my workshop. Maybe they feel I am inferior or they don’t value my work? If I am in the shop they say namaste from far away.
Hari’s economic and cultural capital have overtly given him respect in society, but when reminded of his rank as a goldsmith, Hari’s social position is significantly reduced. His low social capital outweighs his other forms of capital. He may be a *bikasi*, but for many in his society he is an untouchable *bikasi*.

Interestingly, this attitude towards manual labour does not seem to translate into a life overseas. As shown in Figure 7, many people who move abroad, regardless of caste, migrate for unskilled work; reportedly 32% of migrants are employed in the manufacturing industry and 16% in construction (Sharma et al. 2014, 56). Perhaps it is the ability to build cultural capital while abroad which allows migrants to transcend this occupational hierarchy. They may be working as manual labourers, but they are doing so in a foreign location with a whole new set of social understandings, one in which notions of caste are irrelevant. Sunam recognises this in his analysis of Dalit migrants, he states, “for…migrants caste experience in their own village starts receding when they board an international flight where they are greeted with *namaste* with other fellow travellers” (Sunam 2014, 2041). He notes that migration has distanced Dalits from traditional labour relations with upper castes and the associated discrimination (ibid, 2042). Migrants seem to be in a caste of their own; their social capital is exceeded by their increasing cultural capital, and their engagement in manual labour abroad is overlooked as a result. Interestingly, Sharma notes that on returning to Nepal, 90% of individuals previously employed in agriculture do not return to this work, but instead seek employment in the manufacturing sector (Sharma et al. 2014, 59). Similarly, Sunam observes that Dalits abandon their original occupations and cease performing their traditional music on returning to Nepal; this furthers the idea that the perception of labour at home is dependent on caste. In order to maintain their position on, and potentially climb up the social ladder, returnee migrants must abandon activities typically associated with their caste by embracing new habits and attitudes to improve their social capital. This suggests that if Hari had changed his occupation from a goldsmith, he may have further improved his social position. By engaging in work typically tied to his caste, he is automatically recognisable as Dalit, creating a barrier between him and other castes and preventing him from increasing his social capital.
Although work migration has the potential to improve Dalits’, and other castes’, social position in Nepal, Seddon et al. note that access to work abroad is heavily dependent on an individual’s class, caste and ethnicity. They state, “in general terms, it appears that the wealthier and higher status families and households are able to obtain access to better paying and more secure employment” (Seddon et al. 2001, 138). They discuss how labour abroad is often acquired through social connections, therefore allowing those with higher social capital access to better opportunities (ibid, 66). Employment in the Gulf countries is relatively accessible to all, but employment in the East and West is heavily constrained by class, ethnicity and caste (ibid, 72). From my own research, Indra’s story is a perfect example of this. As a young Dalit, the opportunities open to him were limited; labour migration to the Gulf and other countries was an emerging trend at that time, but becoming a lahure in the British and Indian armies was considered a great honour. Seddon et al. note a position in the army offers security, welfare payments and a guaranteed pension at the end of service (Seddon et al. 2001, 39), making it an attractive option for many in Nepal. For these reasons, Indra’s family encouraged him to apply, but he noted, “there was a tacit understanding that only Gurung and Magars were admitted into the army. So, I had to make a police certificate stating I was Magar in order to join. Otherwise, we […] wouldn’t get to go there” (Indra). Gaining a police certificate was not easy, nor was the application process and travel expenses. Indra spoke of the sacrifices made by his family and friends to help him secure a place in the army, which he was lucky enough to get. He was enrolled in the army for 20 years, and is now known in Waling as “the man with the big, fancy house”. His son is also in the army.

This example demonstrates the importance of caste in acquiring a position abroad in the first place. As previously discussed, caste in Nepal is often tied to social capital, with Dalits possessing the lowest social capital. Low social capital restricts the type of occupation an individual can be employed in and thus hinders access to economic capital, which in turn limits access to work overseas. A World Bank Report notes the probability to migrate for employment is highest among Muslims/others, who typically go to the Gulf countries, whilst the lowest probability is among Hill Dalits.

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5 I have added ‘…’ here in place of my informant’s specific surname in order to protect his identity. He is considered to be a Dalit.
whose major destination is India (World Bank 2011, ii). The report confirms that this is associated with the wealth status of migrants; on average securing employment in the Gulf can amount to a Nrs.109,700 ($995), while to India Rs.5,250 ($50) (ibid, iii). Sharma et al. describe this an ‘ethnicised’ migration phenomenon, and although overtly anyone regardless of their social group can migrate, these patterns indicate factors such as socio-economic conditions or social networks ultimately determine the benefits and impacts each group experiences as migrants (Sharma et al. 2014, 55). Returning to my findings, if Indra had not legally changed his named, his family may not have been in the comfortable situation they are in today. By changing his caste, Indra was able to not just build economic capital, but all forms of capital. For Indra and his family, they have been able to build a new social network, a ‘fancy’ house and a future in which their son has also been able to join the army.

Economic capital is certainly an important factor motivating many to seek work overseas and also to obtain said work, but it does not seem to be the central element determining their social position. From my findings, it seems that a migrant’s social position improves by the action of them being abroad and experiencing a new, developed country. They become bikasi, cosmopolitan, able to understand things beyond the life of their village and experience things those at home may never witness, thus building their cultural capital. However, on returning home it seems necessary to play into this new position and seek employment outside of caste stipulations. By changing their way of life at home, migrants, particularly Dalits, are able change perceptions of their social capital and further help build their social position.

4.4 Casting out Caste?

From the data presented in this chapter, it seems that those I spoke with in Waling appear to be at a crossroads regarding their attitudes towards caste. As previously stated, my informants were mostly from the same generation, and while they acknowledged that caste was no longer important to them, they stated they often struggled with exercising such behaviour. The International Dalit Solidarity Network recognises this, and believe the continued exploitation and discrimination of
minority groups is as a result of how deeply ingrained the caste system is in society; they state, “exclusion of Dalits is so deeply rooted in Nepal that victims of caste discrimination are unable to speak up for their rights” (International Dalit Solidarity Network 2017, 24). Bourdieu deems this deep rooting of social norms as habitus, “the habitus…is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature” (Bourdieu 1990, 63). Habitus thus determines an individual’s place in the social order, but also makes them aware of the social place of others (Bourdieu 1989, 19). It is only in recent years in Nepal that legislation has attempted to dissolve the caste hierarchy and create equality, so many of those I spoke with have grown-up under the laws imposed by the *Muluki Ain*. Caste has been built into their habitus, but as the state attempts to move away from a caste hierarchy, they are struggling to make sense of changing social codes. Many talked about a change in outward actions for fear of punishment from the state, but recognised the internal struggle to overcome ideas of caste, particularly concerning untouchability. Sania stated,

In my opinion, the impact made within us by our previous teachings is so deep it can’t be changed quickly. It will take a long time to bring out a complete change. The Government has made laws against discrimination. However, behaviours have changed only from the outside, as people are forced to behave in a certain way. They fear that Dalits or lower castes will create uncomfortable situations by complaining to the police. In their heart, they wish not to be touched by them. Even we feel similar. I don’t mind eating together with them [Dalits] outside, but I don’t like eating at their house, not even now, because we have this concept from our childhood; it takes time to clear that. There have been improvements, but it takes time to clear completely.

Similarly, Sarala talked about her experiences,

All castes sit and eat together in programs, but not inside the house. Even we are uncomfortable to go inside their [Dalits] house and eat, though we are ok eating outside together. Though educated, our heart doesn’t support going inside their house and asking water from them. It is our belief and custom, and although we understand those things are bad, we can’t stop.

And Indra, a Dalit himself, stated,

There isn’t a change in people’s mind-sets. Sometimes their behaviour does not show this, but in the mind it can be seen. You can sense that
they are trying to push you away. We can see glimpses somewhere in their behaviour.

What was particularly interesting to observe was the internalisation by Dalits themselves. While my other informants were aware of their internal battle between their child and adult understandings of caste, it seemed that the Dalits I spoke with had truly internalised their caste position. Hari was a good example of this. In Nepal, it is custom to offer guests visiting your home some form of refreshment – usually tea and some snacks. This would be prepared by a female member of the household and served on the household’s own crockery. When we visited Hari, it was early evening, just before dinner. It was still warm outside, and we had walked to his home, so were rather hot when we arrived. He offered us some cold juice, which he made a point of buying brand new from the shop across the street. He put the juice, along with some plastic cups, on the table and asked us to serve ourselves. He did not take any juice himself, and never touched the juice carton once it was opened. Whether consciously or not, Hari had exercised some of the central rules from the Muluki Ain associated with jhuto and the contamination of food and drink. If he had served us the juice, offered it to us in his own cups, or had any contact with it once open, he would have, according to the Muluki Ain, polluted it, and by extension, us. Of all the people we interviewed, those deemed Dalit were the only ones who did not offer us any refreshments, or if they did, served us in much the same way as Hari.

Sarala had also had a similar encounter with her renters, a Dalit family, whose specific surname I have omitted to protect their identity,

We rent our lower storey to a […] family. Though we call them inside, they won’t come. They feel uncomfortable, concerned about what we might think. They fear that they might be sinners by coming inside. Even if there are old people from a low caste who we bow to for a blessing, they deny touching us [high castes] saying, “Brahmins are high caste and by touching us they might sin.” We don’t feel that way and have let them sit inside our room. I have even brought their children in and let them sit, but they feel uncomfortable about it. Only 10 to 15% among them say they go everywhere comfortably, others don’t.

As a high caste herself, Sarala has tried to move beyond the caste system, but has witnessed Dalits reinforcing the caste hierarchy upon themselves. Parish states that
this is because the shared culture of caste is reinterpreted through actual lived experience, thus leading to different responses to the same social codes (Parish 1996, 202). While Parish suggests Dalits sometimes enforce their place at the bottom of the hierarchy simply to shape a life for themselves within the long-established caste system (Parish 1996, 242), I suggest that Dalits historically have been affected by this system the most. While high castes have not lived a life of oppression, Dalits have, and it is this differing engagement with the caste system that is perhaps leading to the differing responses today. The abolishment of caste discrimination may be the most liberating for those in the Dalit community, but the fear of suppression, or even the fear of God, engrained into their habitus, is hard to overcome.

4.5 Summary

Since the 1800s, Nepali society has functioned under the laws stipulated in the Muluki Ain. Caste and ethnicity have been the determining factors of an individual’s social position and have traditionally restricted mobility within the social hierarchy through the limited ability to accumulate other forms of capital. Furthermore, occupation and caste have been strongly connected, with labourers often low castes. These positions are typically poorly paid, further restricting access to economic capital and thus with it the opportunity to build cultural capital. However, since the 1960s and the opening of Nepal to the rest of the world, the country has seen a great many changes. As ideas of bikas entered the country through foreign aid organisations and the increasing presence of educated Westerners, a divide began to form between traditional and modern, bikasi and abikasi. As this divide grew, the desire to live a bikasi lifestyle took hold, and more and more Nepalis have turned to a life overseas to meet new desires. Simultaneously, political tensions escalated; the scrapping of the Muluki Ain in 1990 followed by the Maoist’s People’s War, brought new ideas to traditional social codes, and aspirations towards equality began to take hold. The numerous democratic governments in power over the years have taken steps to abolish caste based discrimination by introducing legislation that enforces punishment on those who openly discriminate based on caste or ethnicity.

The combination of these factors – an increasing relationship with the international world and legislation attempting to bring about caste and ethnic equality – seem to
have had an effect on the social codes apparent in Waling. Migrants overseas are hailed as *bikasi* regardless of their caste or occupation they are engaged in. They have encountered a world outside of Nepal, outside of traditional social codes, and seem to enter a caste of their own that is respected by those at home regardless of their traditional caste position. Furthermore, new legislation regarding caste has also sparked change; many of my informants stated that they no longer followed caste based codes and spoke of an awareness that discrimination based on caste was wrong. However, many of my informants grew-up under the laws of the *Muluki Ain* and it is only in the last decade, their adult years, that attempts have been made to abolish caste based discrimination. While their heads see the fault in caste, their habitus is in conflict. Furthermore, as Dalits are often in conflict with the caste system the most, the ability to overcome their habitual practices surrounding caste rules is much more of a challenge. It seems that Waling is in the process of change, but how will social position be determined beyond the caste system?
5 “What can be done with wealth?”

Increasing Economic Capital and the Rise of Class

As her husband prepares to leave for Tibet, Muna asks Madan, “What can be done with wealth?” to which Madan replies,

Wealth sustains life…
Mother’s throat I will soothe with sips of milk,
Her wish I shall grant for a resthouse and spout,
I will adorn your arms with solid gold
And shore up this house which now totters in debt  (Devkota and Hutt 1996, 25-26).

While Muna assures her husband that his worth is priceless and she has no desire for gold, he leaves for Lhasa blinded by a desire to bring monetary prosperity to his family.

In the previous chapter I considered how migration is impacting the caste system, and concluded that, in Waling, social position no longer seems to be fully determined by caste. Building on this, this chapter will consider how an increasing economic capital, brought about through the remittance economy, is influencing emerging ideas of class as a determiner of social position. First, I will discuss understandings of the notion of class before considering consumption habits as an indicator of class position. I will continue to detail the impact of the remittance economy on Nepal, and will discuss how increasing economic capital in Waling is impacting the lives of my informants. I will do this by considering their investment decisions, from traditional ideas of land and gold to newer ideas of consumer commodities. I will reflect on how these investment choices feed into social position and whether emerging ideas of class outweigh longstanding ideas of caste.
5.1 Class

Class is a highly debated term, and as Liechty notes, “an exceedingly difficult concept to pin down” (Liechty 2003, 11). In order to analyse whether class is relevant to Nepali society, I will briefly consider some of the most prominent discussions on the term, namely that of Marx, Weber and Bourdieu, before formulating my own understanding of class.

In his Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx divides society into two classes, the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. He deems this an outcome of the growth of capitalism and states,

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, callous 'cash payment' (Marx et al. 1998, 37).

Marx reduces class to an economic phenomenon. His focus is the exploitation of workers by capitalists, connecting economic status to class ideology. Writing during the industrial revolution when struggles between labour and capital in the West was rife, Liechty argues that Marx fails to consider the role of culture in shaping social status (Liechty 2003, 13).

Considering this, Weber, writing during the emergence of a consumer society, has a more holistic view of class. He differentiates between class and status situation and introduces the term ‘honour’ to the stratification of the classes. This honour, he suggests, “may be connected with any quality shared by plurality, and, of course, it can be knit to a class situation” (Weber et al. 1991, 187). In so doing, Liechty notes, Weber remains closely connected to Marx by rooting power in economic privilege, but differs in believing this is exercised and reproduced culturally with culture heavily tied to class practice (Liechty 2003, 14). Weber was the stepping stone to a larger debate on class that introduced the importance of factors such as education and lifestyle to the mix.
Following this first step away from a purely economic approach to class Bourdieu’s theory of capital builds on Weber’s introduction of culture to consider the interplay between economic, social and cultural capital. Bourdieu states, “a class or class fraction is defined not only by its position in the relations of production…but also by…a certain distribution in geographical space (which is never socially neutral) and by a whole set of subsidiary characteristics” (Bourdieu 1984, 102). In this definition, Bourdieu introduces the importance of location in shaping class relations, indicating that various factors may have differing degrees of relevance to class formation across different social spaces. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 3, Bourdieu introduces the idea of habitus into these social spaces; habitus is the internalisation of practices and behaviours that contribute to perceptions of class. Through habitus, Bourdieu suggests that class is not necessarily something that can be consciously achieved, but is embodied within. However, habitus evolves through spaces and generations, continually changing how class is perceived.

Although all these understandings of class differ, they each acknowledge that, to some degree, economics is involved in class formation. While Marx states that class is purely a product of economic relations, Weber and Bourdieu incorporate economics into a wider set of factors. Weber differentiates between class and social status, but Bourdieu believes the two are interconnected. Furthermore, Bourdieu approaches class with even greater fluidity, suggesting that it is subject to change across spaces and time through habitus.

It is with Bourdieu I align my understanding of class, as something embodied, something changeable, and something incorporated into culture. It is rooted in economics, but connected with the specific culture and specific social codes it is embedded in. As Liechty eloquently states,

Class is a constantly renegotiated cultural space – a space of ideas, values, goods, practices and embodied behaviours – in which the terms of inclusion and exclusion are endlessly tested, negotiated, and affirmed (Liechty 2003, 15-16)

**Analysing Class**

While an individual’s caste is easy to recognise, their class position is much more challenging to pin down. Liechty observes this in his study of middle class culture in
Kathmandu. However, he notes that one of the main identifiers of class is disposable income, manifested in the display of consumer goods; “specific commodities often effectively distinguished class groups, especially the lower from the middle class” (ibid., 66). This is similar to Wilhite’s findings in Kerala, where families and individuals work to maintain their identities through cultural projects including consumption (Wilhite 2008, 10). For Wilhite, the social performance of consumption allows individuals and families to appear modern and up-to-date (Wilhite 2008, 173), echoing the ideas of bikasi discussed in the previous chapter. All this contributes to new ideas of social position. While both Wilhite and Liechty note that numerous other complexities are also entwined in constructing class culture, I chose to focus on consumption for the purposes of my own analysis.

Although Liechty and Wilhite focus on the consumption of consumer goods as identifiers of class position, I was interested to understand how families and individuals in Waling are choosing to invest their income. Unlike Kathmandu, Waling does not experience such a blatant consumer culture; there are not the array of shops, banners and consumer buying schemes available. While this may be so, the number of people able to invest their economic capital and the caste of those investing is changing. This has been achieved through the growing remittance economy, enabling previously poor families to take a step up on the social ladder. In order to understand the emerging class position of my informants, I focused on the remittance they received and how, if at all, they chose to invest it.

### 5.2 The Remittance Economy

In 2011, 56% of households in Nepal received remittance (Central Bureau of Statistics 2011a, 3). The nominal average amount of remittance received by each household in 2010/11 was Rs.80,436 ($730), five times higher than that received in 1995/96. Remittance is largely used for daily consumption, the repayment of loans, and educating children (World Bank 2011, v). It has allowed poor households to increase their consumption and build their savings, which they generally invest in land and consumer durables (ibid, 13).

From the survey I conducted at Delhi airport, 68% of those who participated were primarily abroad for work, 29% were Non Resident Nepalis with citizenship
elsewhere, and 3% were studying. Of these, 26 out of 30 sent remittance home. Those who did not send remittance were either students who used any money earned for their daily lives, or those whose entire family were overseas, with them or elsewhere. Figure 9 shows the amount sent back to Nepal in relation to monthly income based on questionnaire responses. Interestingly this indicates that a higher average monthly salary does not necessarily equate to a higher average monthly remittance, with those earning an average Rs.30,000 ($270) a month sending the highest amount of remittance. A World Bank report also notes this, observing that remittance reception rates are lowest among the wealthiest (World Bank 2011, iii). Nevertheless, the results I obtained from my questionnaire require further scrutiny; according to Figure 9, of the monthly Rs.30,000 ($270) salary, nearly all - Rs.27,500 ($250) - is sent back as remittance. Based on data from the Ministry of Labour and Employment and from some of my interviews, many migrants receive accommodation, food and other facilities in addition to their monthly salary, which could explain why some migrants are able to send such a high portion of their monthly earnings as remittance. However, this result may have also occurred due to a limited number of questionnaire participants, as previously addressed.

![Figure 9 Average monthly Remittance by Salary, based on questionnaire data.](image)

* Original question regarding remittance was based on a range (See Appendix B), so for the purposes of this graph I have used the average of each range.
From my questionnaire and interviews, it is clear that remittance has a central role in supporting families in Nepal, with nearly all of my informants either senders or receivers of remittance. As we talked with people, it was interesting to observe the nonchalance with which remittance was discussed; it was a given, expected of anyone overseas. Samrat, who was preparing to re-migrate when we talked, stated he would “of course” send money home, “for day to day expenses, apart from that it depends on what my family want to do with the money” (Samrat). There seemed to be an expectation about how much would be sent dependent on which country the migrant was employed and the work they were involved in. Some seemed disappointed when she told us how much they receive, Dixcya, for example, was seemed unsatisfied, “what can I say?! How much does he send?! Rs.30-35,000 ($270-$320)”. She was frustrated because his earnings had been similar in Nepal, but she continued, “here, he can be careless with his spending – going out drinking, snacks with friends etc.” (Dixcya). Furthermore, Hari discussed students enrolled in foreign universities,

Those who went to study in the UK had to be supported financially from here, but we didn’t have to do that for our son. His friends found him a job quite quickly. We used to receive some money monthly from him; I didn’t have to send him any. He did not send a big amount; normally people send more when they are in financially strong countries like the UK (Hari).

Even sending minimal amounts seems to have some significance.

**Changing Consumption and Investment Decisions**

Many of my informants noted how the increasing wealth from remittance is impacting daily lives. In interviews we asked informants to talk about their childhood homes; nearly all noted how much their situations had improved since then. Many described how their entire family used to live in one or two rooms, most with thatched rooves. Mohit stated, “at that time houses didn’t have rooms like today” and Samrat recalled, “the houses used to be small then. We had two rooms. One was a kitchen and we all used to sleep in the other one. We rented the house. We were four in total”. Some talked about the lack of facilities in their childhood homes; Hari discussed his childhood village and his first few years in Waling.
Back then in my home village, we used to go to a spring to bathe and fetch water. After moving to Waling, we used to go to the river to defecate, bath and wash clothes, but now it’s the opposite. When we are somewhere in the bazar, if we need the toilet, we come back home. Now we have 2-3 attached bathrooms in our home. This is one of the biggest differences I have seen. Otherwise, there was a time when we had limited access to food, now we can eat whatever we want to eat.

Some of my informants had been unable to attend school as children because they had to help in the family home or work and contribute to household income. Sania noted,

Me and my siblings had a hard time doing all the house work. Because my father had no job, we had no income. We consumed all the agricultural foodstuffs we produced (grains, milk, ghee, fruits etc.) as we didn’t have the culture of markets to sell local products. Though we had enough food for our household, we had financial problems. We had no money for lunch at school.

All of those we spoke to now live in concrete houses with indoor bathrooms and running water. While some families still rent one or two rooms, they were unanimous in describing their life today as an improvement on their past. Some of those we spoke with grew-up in Waling, but others have migrated there after returning from overseas or have moved there since having a relative overseas. The decision to internally migrate was based on Waling’s proximity to other major cities in Nepal and also the opportunities available there; Indra stated, “I wanted my children to study at boarding school as there were only government schools in my home village”, and Mohit noted he moved to Waling, “to run a business. Waling is bigger than my village”. Darpan had been able to use his skill as a mechanic to start his own business; he stated, “this skill and the increasing number of motorbikes in Nepal have provided me with the opportunity to be self-employed”. Darpan had lived in India for a long time, but witnessing the changes in his home country he was able to set-up and run his own mechanic shop along the main highway running through Waling. During our interview he was interrupted several times by numerous customers; he certainly was not short of business.
5.3 Investment Decisions and the Status Quo

Bourdieu discusses how the transmission of the different forms of capital is important for their conversion and reproduction (Bourdieu 1986, 251). In relation to economic capital, he discusses the significance of commercial capital in giving immediate economic power, but its vulnerability in comparison to land and real estate in its inability to establish long lasting dynasties (ibid, 252). Within the context of Nepal, remittance could be seen as this commercial capital; it gives previously poor households an immediate economic boost and the freedom to consume, temporarily improving their situation and potentially their social position. However, according to Bourdieu, the failure to tactically invest this remittance could lead to a loss of capital, thus returning a household to their original state.

Liechty observes that land and gold have been traditional investments in Nepal. They are considered to be objects of permanence, stabilising and nurturing, and something that can be accumulated to propel future generations into more desirable social circumstances (Liechty 2003, 97). He continues to address how modern day investments lean more towards education and the pursuit of comfort and pleasure, significantly depleting these fixed assets and, according to Bourdieu’s understanding, jeopardising social position. While Liechty focused on the middle-class in Kathmandu, my research in Waling found that traditional investments in land and gold remain at large. Wasti also found this in her survey of migrants from the mountains of Nepal, where 75% of her participants had invested in land, and 12% in gold (Wasti 2017, 129). Using my data, I will consider how the decision to invest in land and gold, contrasted with general consumption habits, helps shape social position in Waling.

Land

From my own research many of my informants were proud to own their own plot of land, on which most plan to, if not already, build their own house. Dixcya was living in a single rented room with basic amenities. Her husband had been working abroad for nearly a decade, sending remittance on a bi-monthly basis. While much of this money had been spent on educating their children, they had saved enough to buy a plot of land on which they are hoping to build a house, in her own words, “life is ok;
we have bought some land close by. Nothing else really” (Dixcya). Similarly, Indra talked about going abroad to send money home for land and gold,

I went to the Indian army when I finished grade 8, around the age of 16/17 years...Working in the army gives good earnings and I resigned after 20 years. After I returned, we built this house, and then I went abroad again to earn more money to add more storeys to the house.

Nabin also spoke about going abroad to build a house for his family and his concerns for the future,

I worked long hours every day…I was able to pay for this house and my daughter’s wedding, but what happens when my sons get married? Then they will need rooms for their families and this house will be too small.

Both Indra and Nabin had re-migrated several times to meet new demands from family, but now these demands are met by their sons who are employed overseas. This has been the case for my in-laws, who have also focused on investing in the family home. Since having sons abroad, their house has been extended from seven rooms, to fourteen, and the family has even been able to buy another plot of land elsewhere. While in Waling, my mother-in-law was encouraging me to consider buying land in Kathmandu; “I want to tell the neighbours that we also have a house in the city” she said.

Land is a secure investment; it is a physical demonstration of economic capital, but one that endures through the generations. Gellner notes that historically in Nepal wealth was primarily measured in land, with those who owned much being typically powerful high castes, leading those without land – typically Dalits – to be dependent on others (Gellner 2007, 1823). Land therefore is tied into more than just economics; remittance has brought about significant changes to land ownership patterns and is, as Adhikari and Hobley note, shifting the social geography of the country (Adhikari and Hobley 2011, 5). Firstly, they address the renewed relationship between Dalit and non-Dalit wealthier households (Adhikari and Hobley 2011, 55). In the past, landowners were from higher-castes, and employed Dalits as tenants and agricultural labourers on their land. As part of their rent, Dalits had to give 50% of the produce from the land to their landlord, as well as offerings and gifts when the landlord visited them (ibid). However, migration has meant that many of
these landowners now reside overseas or elsewhere in Nepal, and in order to maintain their land and ensure its fertility, rent it to Dalits without these restrictions.

Secondly, migration has given Dalits, among other lower-caste households, independence from higher castes; remittance provides an income that they are able to invest, with many choosing to buy land. Adhikari and Hobley observe that lower castes, typically those with fewer assets, buy land in villages, while wealthier, mainly high caste households invest in areas of Nepal with better services, such as schools, hospitals and employment opportunities (ibid, 5). They state that this is partly associated with land prices; migration has led to a boom in the demand for housing plots driving prices up, particularly in more developed urban areas (ibid, 22). As stated earlier, lower castes tend to migrate for unskilled labour and their salaries tend to be lower than higher caste migrants in more skilled positions, meaning they are only able to purchase land in villages.

In addition to land prices, the drive to migrate to urban areas, Adhikari and Hobley argue, is to move away from agricultural-based livelihoods and invest in better education for children (Adhikari and Hobley 2011, 57). This relates back to my previous chapter where I discussed manual labour; by moving away from the village, a migrant can escape occupations associated with their caste and simultaneously build their cultural capital. Urban areas offer greater opportunity for employment, to engage in cultural services and acquire a private education, all contributing to cultural capital. At the same time, by moving away from the village, migrants build on their bikasi status. From my own research, my in-laws offer an interesting case study of land and the importance of its location. They possess high economic capital within the context of Waling; they own a large, relatively luxurious house and have land in the nearby city of Pokhara and elsewhere in Nepal, as well as having three sons overseas who regularly send remittance. However, they are now hoping to acquire property in Kathmandu. While they do not intend to live in this property, the ownership of it has the potential to further boost their social position in Waling, by adding not only to their economic capital, but cultural also. Land in Kathmandu would give them access to a new social space, one that is seen as bikasi in the eyes of those in Waling. Furthermore, my mother-in-law often asks when we will buy property in Norway; it is not a question of if, but when. By extending their network
outside of Nepal, this could further extend the family’s capital and therefore social position.

**Gold**

For people in Waling, gold is another important form of investment. Hari has directly benefitted from this, and believes migration has allowed his family business as a goldsmith to flourish. He recalls,

Comparing now and then is so different. Then our situation was very pitiable. Our dad was a goldsmith with a low income. We used to farm as well. I still remember going to cut grass carrying a doko strapped to my head. We had a buffalo for milk and I used to cut the grass for this buffalo. We had quite a pitiful life…Later our business did well. Actually, the reason it got better was because people started emigrating abroad. Nepali peoples’ income sources increased, which helped the gold business flourish. It seemed to improve the lifestyle of the people and it directly improved our lifestyle.

Furthermore, being in Nepal during Dashain, I witnessed the desire for gold first hand. When we arrived at Hari’s place of business in the early evening for our interview, it was awash with eager customers wanting to buy gold for the festival a few days later. On the day of the festival, my mother-in-law and I were drenched in different gold ornaments, and we spent the day greeting female relatives similarly adorned.

In his study of Kerala, Wilhite notes “gold is popular because it has not only a cosmetic and visual usage when worn as jewellery, but it is liquid, in that it can be easily converted into cash” (Wilhite 2008, 85). He compares gold to consumer goods and notes that the liquidity of gold makes it an attractive investment decision over goods that quickly depreciate and lose value. Furthermore, Wasti states that gold can be used as collateral for loans being easy to sell (Wasti 2017, 135); from this perspective, gold is therefore a solid investment decision that can secure a family’s economic capital when cash from remittance runs short.

In addition, Wasti continues, for women in Nepal gold is a symbol of a high social status (ibid); it is an important part of Nepali culture, and is tied to Hindu religious beliefs. One of the Hindu Vedas, or holy books, the *Atharvaveda*, states “O men I tie this gold upon your body to make you live for 100 years. Gold was first created
among the deities. Those who carry gold never fall ill, nor ghosts ever trouble him” (Pandey 2005, 18). Gold is linked to the Gods and the protection offered by them; this implies that the more gold an individual possess, the more connected to the Gods they are. Furthermore, this interacts with the Hindu caste hierarchy; Dalits are seen to be impure, at a distance from the deities, but by owning gold perhaps they are able to bridge this gap. In his discussion of caste hierarchy, Parish notes that caste understandings are today often based on surface behaviours rather than underlying models (Parish 1996, 150). He continues to suggest that these surface features may help charge the underlying model with meaning or emotional significance, leading to their rejection or neutralisation (ibid). This suggests that the ownership of gold, a symbol of wealth and a relationship with the Gods, could act as a purifying agent in the caste hierarchy. As many low castes are able to migrate and acquire higher economic capital, the choice to invest in gold may have the dual advantage of forming an outward symbol of wealth, but also of change. For a low caste migrant, the new ability to invest in gold may signify a step away from traditional caste hegemony and a step on the ladder towards a new social order.

**Education**

Literacy rates in Nepal have increased more than ten times since the 1960s. A report published by UNESCO reveals that in 1952/54 only 5.3% of the total population aged 5+ were literate, but this number increased to 65.9% in 2011, of course with rural-urban, ethnic-caste and gender disparities (Literacy Mapping Study Team 2013, 1). Some of my informants talked about being unable to attend school as children as they had to help with work at home. Gaurav stated,

> There was no school in my village. There was a school in a nearby town. My two elder brothers went to that school but they could not study. They just went to school for 2-3 years…we were not allowed to study. We had to work on the farm.

Similarly, Hari noted,

> We went to a government school. I went to one of the smallest, oldest schools in the district…We didn’t get enough to eat; we ate a poor man’s food. During vacations and holidays I used to help my father with his work. With a strong desire to study I went to [a city] for further studies, but because of my poor economic situation I had to work. I
acquired this skill as a goldsmith, but had to drop out of studying; we just didn’t have enough money for me to study.

However, today many see education as a priority for their children, even choosing to move to Waling because of the reputable boarding school there. Indra noted, “I wanted my children to study at boarding school, as there were only government schools in my village”. Similarly, in a discussion with Samrat and his family, they were anxious that their child attend the new Montessori School with a foreign teacher. When asked more about the school, they expressed concern over the challenging entrance exam and the expense, but were certain it was the right choice for their family.

The increase in literacy is largely associated with educational policy reforms, and also the increase in economic capital of the general population. However, the drive for parents to enrol their children into school, particularly expensive private schools, is rooted beyond their economic ability into the status of these schools and thus the students who attend. Hari believed the high status of private schools was associated with the difference in exam results between them and their government counterparts, but also to do with being perceived as ‘higher’,

When a person goes somewhere abroad to earn, the culture here in our villages is to send kids to boarding school (private English medium school) because of the perception that those who go to boarding school are higher. The situation seems to justify that because more than 90% of students, even 100% of the students pass the exams in boarding schools, but in government schools only 15-16% of students pass the exams. Because of that practice, boarding schools have more value, but villages don’t have boarding schools. In the name of sending his kids to boarding school, a man has to move his family to a town. He then has to go abroad to earn so that he can pay the bills and give his kids a better future (Hari).

For Hari, private schools have a higher status. The institutionalized cultural capital attainable at a private school appears to be stronger than that of a government school; this is associated with the standard of teaching and better results. Furthermore, the sheer expense of the school enables a family to demonstrate their economic power. Hari continued to discuss the impact this has had on villages, where once fertile land is now left fallow as families increasingly move to towns with private schools. He also noted that this new desire for private education is leading to many fathers having
to migrate overseas to afford private education. Adhikari and Hobley also found this in their extensive study of a hill village in Nepal. They state,

Education is one of the primary concerns of all households and is a major driver for overseas migration either to provide money to pay for private education or internal migration to enable the family to move completely to other areas of Nepal where there is access to better education (Adhikari and Hobley 2011).

Adhikari and Hobley continue to note that although the benefits of providing children with better education are not immediate, in the long-term there will be gains for both families and the general population of having a better educated population (ibid., 39). At the family level, this may be related to a child’s chances of acquiring a better employment position, thus increasing the family’s economic capital and perhaps with it, their social position.

In addition to building economic and cultural capital, the case of Samrat’s family presents an interesting shift in mindsets. Samrat and his family believed that a foreign teacher was a sign of a reputable school, and were determined their child attend. As Shrestha discusses, Nepal’s increasingly close relationship with the West has led to ‘whites’ transcending the national caste system, elevating their status from monkey or polluted, to top of the hierarchy (Shrestha 1993, 12). He states, “caste relations had been transformed into power relations in our dealings with Whites, the latter occupying the position of power and prestige” (ibid., 13). He believes this is associated with notions of bikas, and by having some kind of connection to a White person, an individual can become bikasi. By sending their child to a school with a foreigner, Samrat’s family can build their bikasi status; they demonstrate the extent of their economic capital, build their cultural capital and expand their social capital to incorporate a bikasi White person.

**Consumer Goods and Dashain Festival Treats**

As we were conducting interviews in the week building up to Dashain, we also asked informants about their childhood memories around the festival and the differences they observed today. Many were nostalgic for the simplicity of their childhood days, and all were unanimous regarding the changes they had witnessed. Mohit summarizes these sentiments well, “now people have money. People have gone
abroad and send remittance into the country, and that has changed all of it. There’s no need to wait for festivals to get good food and new clothes, every day is like Dashain”. For Mohit among my other informants, the general increase in economic capital has enabled people to spend more on a daily basis. Meat is eaten regularly and families are able to spend on new clothes much more than before. Samrat observed,

Dashain doesn’t feel like a festival. There is no excitement to wear new clothes, we eat delicacies every day. There was a time when people used to kill goats only for Dashain, but now goats are killed every day. Now Dashain is only a festival to take tikka.

Furthermore, my informants recalled that in the past people used to exchange homemade goods and produce at Dashain time, but today there seems to be a culture of spending on consumer items. Sania noted,

In the past when we had to go for tikka at an elder’s house, we used to cook roti by ourselves and pack them in tapari and give that. In exchange, the elders would feed us roti or seasonal fruits, guavas and bananas – whatever they had grown, or milk or ghee they had produced at home. Now people find it easier to carry fruits and buy sweets and clothes from the shop, rather than making rotis. Also, in the past dachhina was given only to virgin girls, married daughters, sons-in-law and nieces. Now, people even give money to fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law, so that has again increased the financial burden of the people.
Not only has this impacted how Dashain festival is celebrated, but also other previously small or even unobserved occasions. Sarala recognised this, “people spend more and receive more gifts on other occasions like birthdays, weaning ceremonies, and for births and marriages”. This has led to an increasing economic pressure on individuals, as Sania stated, “the one who gets to receive enjoys, but the one who needs to gift feels burdened” an opinion shared by most of the people we talked with. Additionally, the increased pressure to give gifts, and the nature of these gifts, is deepening social divides between rich and poor. Sania noted the burden created on poorer households to compete with their neighbours,

For poor people, it is like a burden. All their neighbours are busy showing off, so they have the pressure to do so too even though they don’t have the money for that. Not only this, but nowadays people are more focused on fashionable clothes, which creates even more difference.

It seems that while remittance has allowed people to improve their lifestyles, it has also impacted cultural norms concerning gift giving around festival time, and has created pressures for poorer households to match the living standards of others in their society. Shrestha recalls this pressure at Dashain during his childhood,

It is not just a religious celebration; it is also equated with status. There is tremendous pressure on every family, rich and poor, to celebrate it with as much pomp and show as possible. Parents are expected to buy brand new clothes and other material items for their children. As a result, each year countless families plunge deep into debt. Many mortgage, if not sell outright, whatever little land or other assets (e.g., gold) they have to raise money to celebrate this so-called auspicious occasion…My father used to call Dashain dasha (misery) or ‘Festival of Sorrow’ (Shrestha 1997, 44)

Since writing in 1997, migration has exploded, and with more money entering the country the pressure felt at festival time, as demonstrated in my findings, has only increased. Furthermore, while traditional, homemade gifts still seem to be prevalent, they are now being combined with consumer goods, as noted by my informant Sania. This pattern has been extended across exchanges in general; Wilhite recognises home appliances now form part of the dowry, alongside the traditional gift of gold (Wilhite 2008, 85).
Liechty states that this transformation is tied not just to the enormous increase in the quantity of commodities entering Nepal, but also their “sudden ubiquity in daily life” (Liechty 2003, 99). It could be argued that this necessity is a result of migrants and their changing comfort needs. Wilhite discusses this in his study of Kerala, where material items once deemed luxuries become the norm for a migrant, “life with a refrigerator, a stereo system, a television or an air conditioner, initially thought of as luxuries for the migrant, get normalised as means to achieve comfort, convenience, and entertainment” (Wilhite 2008, 103). He continues to address how these items, once installed in the family home, reconfigure habitual practices and become essential in fulfilling ideas of comfort.

From my own research, I have seen this occur within my family. When I first met my in-laws, they owned a handful of electrical appliances; one radio, one TV and a mobile phone each. During our stay in September, we bought my mother-in-law an electrical oven as a gift for Dashain; during Skype conversations she had seen me bake bread and cakes in Norway and wanted to do this herself. We fitted the oven in her new kitchen alongside a washing machine, a water purifier, a roti maker (similar to a waffle iron), an electric mixer and a large refrigerator, most acquired that same year. While we were in Waling, my in-laws upgraded the TV they had bought a few weeks before to a ‘smart’ model that could be connected to the internet; this was in addition to a TV and laptop my brother-in-law had bought them the previous year. The justification for all these appliances, according to my husband, is to make life easier for his aging mother. However, these gadgets may go beyond simple convenience.

Liechty notes that the increased availability of goods in the local economy is increasing the opportunities for consumption aimed at producing or claiming distinction (Liechty 2003, 114). Veblen describes this phenomenon as conspicuous consumption, or the outward display of wealth that affirms an individual’s place in the social hierarchy. According to this theory, a migrant’s social position is thus determined by their consumption; they must match or exceed the consumption of others in their society in order to claim their place in the hierarchy. Furthermore, Liechty argues that consumption is less about attaining a high social position, but more a way of preserving one’s place in the social order (Liechty 2003, 116).
sense of ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ connects well to my findings, as many have talked about the pressure of matching-up to their neighbours or extended family members during festival time by wearing new clothes or giving expensive gifts. However, Bourdieu adds to this notion of consumption and states that it is not merely the consumption of goods, but the consumption of specific goods, that helps formulate social position; he states, “nothing more rigorously distinguishes the different classes than the disposition objectively demanded by the legitimate consumption of legitimate works” (Bourdieu 1984, 40).

Remittance has given individuals and families in Waling economic independence; lower castes are increasingly becoming less dependent on higher castes for their livelihoods, and previously financially challenged families are able to make investment decisions formerly unattainable to them. This appears to be changing perceptions of social position, as more and more people are able to build their capital based on their increasing economic power. While investing in land and gold remains to be important in Waling, many are choosing to spend on education, particularly private education, adding to the cultural capital of the family. Furthermore, consumption of consumer goods is becoming increasingly common and there is now a growing sense of competition between households. In consuming more, it seems a household is able to improve their social position by claiming distinction, particularly by consuming specific goods. By tactically investing their remittance, it seems that people in Waling are able to change how they are perceived in society, potentially improving their social position.

5.4 A New Social Order?

With class appearing to be of increasing importance, how relevant is the caste system? Liechty discusses old and new materialism converging and coexisting to form an uneasy combination of logics (Liechty 2003, 98). This seems to represent the situation I found in Waling, where traditional ideas of caste are now meeting new ideas of class. As discussed in chapter three, the older generation has a closer connection with the caste system, but is now being confronted with new ideas brought about through migration. These new ideas are helping to change mind-sets and the habitus, particularly of the younger generation, is being influenced. This,
juxtaposed with the growing importance of economic capital, I suggest may ultimately outweigh the relevance of caste. As Liechty observes,

As more and more of everyday life revolves around the social imperatives of the money/market economy, the moral (and economic) logic of caste is subordinated to the economic (and moral) logic of class (Liechty 2003, 8).

While class is certainly an emerging determiner of social position, as demonstrated in both chapters three and four, the social order in Waling is still very much governed by caste. However, as the years pass and more people choose a life overseas, I question whether this will remain to be so.

5.5 Summary

Migration has brought a great many changes to Waling, most notably the increase in economic capital. With the rise in wealth, brought about through the remittance economy, previously poor or financially challenged families are able to enjoy a much more comfortable life and make investments they would otherwise have been unable to make. Many of my informants talked about challenging childhoods in which they had to work in order to contribute to household income, as well as the simplicity of their childhood homes and of celebrations at festival time. Most noted that their lives today were economically more secure and that their lives were comparatively better than before, and many believed this was directly associated with migration.

The economic growth of individuals in Waling is seen in their consumption practices. While Liechty argues that consumer culture is becoming more prevalent in Kathmandu, I argue that traditional consumption practices in land and gold are still important in Waling. However, the difference brought by migration is that access to these types of consumption practices is more widespread, with Dalits as well as high castes able to invest in a wider variety of things. While these investment choices overtly appear to be a physical demonstration of economic capital, they also contribute to building other forms of capital. By owning land in Kathmandu, or sending their child to a private school with a foreign teacher, families are able to build their cultural capital and with it their bikasi status, thus potentially improving their social position.
Furthermore, a growing number of people in Waling recognise a sense of competition among family, friends and neighbours in being able to consume, expressed in their discussions concerning Dashain festival. All of my informants recognised that the festival had shifted from a simple family celebration, to an elaborate and expensive burden. From my own observations, Dashain was a time to show-off, by wearing fine clothes and jewellery, exchanging expensive gifts and eating rich food. In so doing, individuals and families claim their place on the social ladder. They must keep-up-with or exceed the consumption levels of their neighbours and relatives in order to maintain or improve their place in the social order.

With the increasing relevance of economic capital, juxtaposed with the changing mind-sets brought about through migration, I argue that the habitus of those in Waling is changing. As these patterns continue through the generations, I suggest that the caste system, currently the ultimate determiner of social position in Waling, will lose importance. As the younger generation in Waling today becomes the older, I believe that social position will be determined not by family lineage, but by an economically governed class system.
6 Summary and Conclusion

The social structure in Nepal is extremely complex, and has seen a great many changes throughout the country’s history. This thesis set-out to explore how increasing levels of out-migration have been impacting the social codes in an area called Waling, with my main research question:

- How is out-migration influencing understandings of social position in Nepal?

In order to answer this question, I needed to delve further into the social codes of Nepal and understand how social position is determined. While caste has historically governed Nepali society, the Maoist revolution fought for an equal society, in which family lineage had no impact on an individual’s social standing. Although this period brought great instability to the country, it also arguably brought the first wisps of change to longstanding social codes. Today, new legislation enforces punishment on those who discriminate based on caste, and has attempted to create an even playing field for all Nepalis regardless of their heritage. Furthermore, the revolution was followed by a massive increase in out-migration, with Nepalis of all castes seeking a seemingly better life abroad. In 2011 it was reported that more than 4 million Nepalis reside overseas (World Bank 2011, i), sending money in the form of remittance home to family across Nepal. This has given many previously financially challenged families economic power, which appears to be creating an economically governed class system as a determiner of social position. As a result, I further asked:

- How are notions of caste and class being influenced by out-migration?

In order to answer these questions, I first had to understand Nepali society throughout history. From the Shah Kings and Rana rulers of the 1800s, to the Maoist Revolution and the abolishment of the monarchy between 1990 and early 2000s, I detailed the establishment of Nepal’s unique multi-ethnic caste system found in the *Muluki Ain*, along with the state’s recent attempts to create an equal, casteless society. I also considered the increase in out-migration alongside some of these major events, and used anecdotes from my informants to explain some of the reasons...
behind moving abroad. I then introduced my area of research, Waling, and discussed why this small part of Nepal provided an interesting focal point.

I adopted Bourdieu’s theory of Capital, and to some extent also Habitus to analyse my findings. Through these theories I was able to consider how social position is understood, as well as the many elements involved in shaping it. With such a unique social structure in Nepal, I had to address the challenge of using a theory formulated based on Bourdieu’s Parisian society. One of the central issues I found was Bourdieu’s emphasis on economic capital at the root of all other forms of capital. Although applicable to the capitalist society of France, I argued that the social situation in Nepal is governed by social capital in the form of caste. I therefore reconsidered Bourdieu’s definition of social capital, as well as its centrality in certain societies. In so doing, I was better able to consider Nepal’s social situation throughout history, before considering in-depth how migration has impacted social codes in recent years.

Interpreting how social position is understood is no easy task and I believed could only be achieved through a mixed methods approach. I therefore adopted an ethnographic style in Waling and combined qualitative data collection, including in-depth interviews and participant observation, along with quantitative methods, in the form of a survey and an analysis of academic literature and official documents. In drawing from different disciplines using a variety of methods, I hoped to ensure the veracity of my research and to build a narrative around how social position was understood by my informants. As Connelly and Clandinin state, “the sense of the whole is built from a rich data source with a focus on the concrete particularities of life that create powerful narrative tellings” (Connelly and Clandinin 1990, 5). However, I also wanted to ensure that my role as buhari and researcher did not lead to bias in my interpretation of the data, something I remained acutely aware of throughout my analysis.

In Waling I found that the traditional social hierarchy, based on caste and ethnicity, was still a strong determining factor of social position. However, I understood that Nepal’s encounters with the wider world since the 1960s were having an impact on the attitudes and mind-sets of my informants. I introduced the terms bikasi and
*abikasi* – developed and undeveloped – to describe the increasing divide between modern and traditional. In the pursuit of a *bikasi* life, many have turned to migration to meet new demands. Interestingly, I found that migrants seem to automatically be hailed as *bikasi* regardless of their caste or occupation, as they have encountered a world beyond the parameters of their home country. Furthermore, I discovered that new legislation is leading to changing ideas regarding the caste system, with many of my informants claiming to no longer discriminate based on caste or ethnicity. However, I also witnessed an internal struggle with those of my informants who have grown-up under the laws of the *Muluki Ain*; their heads tell them that the caste system is wrong but their habitus still triggers feelings of unease. These feelings appeared the hardest to overcome for the Dalits among my informants; while they may be the most adversely affected by the caste system, it seemed that for them it is the hardest to overcome engrained practices. I questioned how this would change with the younger generations.

While I felt that the caste system was still prevalent in Waling, I believed the social codes there were in the process of change. This, I argued, was a change towards a more economically rooted class system, much like that analysed by Bourdieu. I found this through examining the changing consumption habits of my informants, arguing as with Liechty that disposable income, displayed through consumption practices, was a partial indicator of class position (Liechty 2003, 66). I discovered that my informants in Waling were still investing in what Liechty considered traditional items, such as land and gold (Liechty 2003, 97), but that the number of people able to invest, particularly those of lower castes, was growing. As a result, families of all castes are able to build their economic capital and this, I argued, was helping improve their social position. Furthermore, many shared the growing sense of competition between neighbours to consume more on a daily basis or at festival times, particularly by spending on consumer commodities. This drive to match-up to or exceed neighbours I argued was associated with claiming distinction.

Overall, I concluded that the growing importance of economic capital in Waling appears to be leading to a class governed society. While class is certainly growing in relevance, today caste is still the determining factor of social position. However, the importance of caste appears to be weakening, with many of my younger informants
disregarding caste completely. Caste and class function alongside one another, as Subedi states, “caste is not today what it was before 1950; and it has not become completely class or replica of it. It is also true that a dominant caste has not necessarily a part of the dominant class” (Subedi 2011, 156). However, I argue that as migration numbers continue to rise, and the economic power of individuals grows, class will become more and more relevant. Juxtaposed with the changing habitus of the younger generation, caste-based social position, I believe, will cease to exist.


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**Glossary**

**Abikasi** – अविकसि: Undeveloped. In Nepal this term is typically associated with something deemed traditional or backwards, and can be used to describe a person who is seen as out-of-touch.

**Bidesh** – बिदेश: Abroad or foreign.

**Bikasi** – बिकसि: Developed. Typically used to describe the Western world, seen as modern, organised, and with advanced facilities. Can be used to describe a person, typically someone who has been abroad or appears to be more modern.

**Buhari** - बुहारी: Daughter-in-law. Once married, in-law family members will generally address a buhari by this familial term instead of her given name.

**Dakshina** – दक्षिना: A monetary offering, either voluntary or compulsory, given to a spiritual leader, cause, temple or ritual.

**Dashain** – दशैं: The biggest Hindu festival of the year, lasting for a period of two weeks. It symbolises good over evil, when the goddess Durga defeated the demon Mahishasura. Families come together and celebrate with different meals and ceremonies.

**Doko** – डोको: A traditional basket carried on the back with a strap put over the forehead for extra support.

**Dupata Sari** - दुपट्टा सारी: A traditional and elaborate Newari red and gold bridal sari, typical in Hindu Vedic ceremonies.

**Ghee** – घी: Clarified butter, typically made from buffalo milk.

**Jhuto** – झुटो: Filth or pollution. For example, if an individual drinks from a glass, the glass and its contents are considered jhuto, and only the original individual can drink from said class until it is washed.

**Kuirey** – कुइरे: Blue eyed, white skinned person, usually a foreigner.

**Kurta Suruwal** - कुर्ता सुरुवाल: A loose, long fitting, collarless shirt worn with loose fitting style trousers underneath and, for women, a shawl. Worn on a daily basis as a practical alternative to a sari.

**Lahure** – लाहुरे: A Nepali enrolled as a Gorkha soldier. The word derives from when soldiers from Nepal were sent to Lahore to train. Today, lahure is often used to describe anything foreign or any Nepali migrant. For more information see: http://archive.nepalitimes.com/news.php?id=15294#.WtChHi7FJaQM
Namaste – नमस्ते: A respectful greeting or salutation, said with hands together as if in prayer. From Sanskrit namaste can be understood to mean I bow to you.

Prashad – प्रसाद: A type of food given as a religious offering in Hinduism.

Pothe – पोथे: A traditional, beaded necklace worn by women as a sign of marriage.

Roti – रोटी: Also known as chapatti, roti is a flatbread made from wholemeal flour and water. The term roti can also be extended to other types of bread, particularly those common at festival time – Sel Roti, for example, is a round, doughnut shaped bread made from rice flour and ghee/butter and is very common at Dashain time.

Sari – सारी: A garment consisting of a long length of material, usually 5-8 metres of cotton or silk, draped around the waist and over the shoulder, baring the midriff.

Sindoor Powder – सिंदूर: A traditional vermillion red-orange cosmetic powder worn by married women on the top of their forehead into their hair.

Tagadhari – तागाधारी: A sacred thread wearer, someone who is religiously pure and is restricted from drinking alcohol, or eating certain types of meat and even sometimes onion or garlic.

Tapari – टपरी: A plate made from green leaves, usually from a Sal tree. It is very common to use these plates during religious ceremonies or celebrations.

Tikka – टिक्का: A mark on the head, usually a red thumb print, worn daily or tied to a special religious occasion. A sign of blessing, respect and honour.
## Appendix A

A list of my informants according to their caste/ethnic group, caste rank, occupation and connection to migration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informants</th>
<th>Caste/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Area they or family member has worked/are working</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darpan and his wife</td>
<td>Brahmin/Khas</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Mechanic/housewife</td>
<td>Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dixcya</td>
<td>Dalit/Khas</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>The Gulf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhupendra, his wife and two daughters</td>
<td>Vaishya/Newar</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Shopkeeper</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaurav</td>
<td>Vaishya/Newar</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Retired from agricultural work</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hari</td>
<td>Dalit/Khas</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Goldsmith</td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indra</td>
<td>Dalit/Khas</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Retired from army</td>
<td>Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lata</td>
<td>Vaishya/Newar</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Australia, Europe and The Gulf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohan and Manjushree (father and daughter)</td>
<td>Brahmin/Khas</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Politician/student</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohit</td>
<td>Brahmin/Khas</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nabin and his family</td>
<td>Dalit/Maithil</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Retired from many different unskilled labour positions</td>
<td>Asia and the Gulf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sania*</td>
<td>Brahmin/Khas</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarala*</td>
<td>Brahmin/Khas</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informants</td>
<td>Caste/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Area they or family member has worked/are working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samiksyा</td>
<td>Dalit/Maithil</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samrat</td>
<td>Vaishya/Newar</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Security Guard</td>
<td>The Gulf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Sania and Sarala are sisters. They were interviewed separately, but were each present for part of one-another’s interview.
Appendix B

Survey Questionnaire in English and Nepali

General Information
1) Gender
   1. Female
   2. Male
   3. Other
2) Age
   1. 0-20
   2. 21-30
   3. 31-40
   4. 41-60
   5. 61+
3) Occupation

4) Monthly Salary
   1. Less than 15,000NRP
   2. 15,000-45,000NRP
   3. 45,000-75,000NRP
   4. 75,000-105,000NRP
   5. 105,000NRP+

Travel Details
5) Where are you travelling from today?
   Country

                                   City

6) Why were you overseas?
   1. Holiday/tourism
   2. Work – please state what type of work

                                   NNR – Non-resident Nepali – resident Overseas
   3. NNR – Non-resident Nepali – resident Overseas
   4. Other, please state

7) How long have you been abroad?
   1. Less than 1 month
   2. 1-6 months
   3. 6 months-1 year
   4. 1-5 years
   5. 5+ years
8) How often do you return to Nepal?
1. This is the first time
2. Every year
3. 1-2 years
4. 2-5 years
5. 5+ years

9) **Who do you stay with in Nepal?**
   1. Spouse/partner
   2. Parents/guardians
   3. Daughter/son
   4. Other family members
   5. Other, please state

**Remittance and Gifts**

10) **Do you send money (remittance) to family or friends in Nepal?**
   1. Yes
   2. No

11) **How often do you send money?**
   1. Once a month
   2. Every other month
   3. Every six months
   4. Once a year
   5. Other, please state

12) **How much do you send each time?**
   1. Less than 15,000NRP
   2. 15,000-25,000NRP
   3. 25,000-45,000NRP
   4. 45,000-65,000NRP
   5. 65,000NRP+

13) **Did your family or friends ask for anything from abroad?**
   1. Yes
   2. No

14) **If yes, what?**
   1. Electronic Items (TV, mobile, I-pad, refrigerator etc.)
   2. Textiles (Clothes, blankets, material etc.)
   3. Household items (Cooking pots and pans, furniture, pictures etc.)
   4. Other, please state

15) **Did you buy anything from abroad for family or friends?**
   1. Yes
   2. No

16) **If yes, what did you buy?**
   1. Electronic Items (TV, mobile, I-pad etc.)
   2. Textiles (Clothes, blankets, material etc.)
3. Household items (Cooking pots and pans, furniture, pictures etc.)
4. Other, please state

........................................................................................................................

17) How much did you spend?
   1. 0-5,000NRP
   2. 5,000-15,000NRP
   3. 15,000-25,000NRP
   4. 25,000-35,000NRP
   5. 35,000NRP+

18) Will you buy anything from Nepal for family or friends?
   1. Yes
   2. No

19) If yes, what will you buy?
   1. Electronic Items (TV, mobile, I-pad, refrigerator etc.)
   2. Textiles (Clothes, blankets, material etc.)
   3. Household items (Cooking pots and pans, furniture, pictures etc.)
   4. Other, please state

........................................................................................................................

Household Facilities
20) How many storeys does your family house in Nepal have?
   1. 1
   2. 2
   3. 3
   4. 4
   5. 5+

21) How many rooms does your family house in Nepal have (excluding bathrooms)?
   1. Less than 3
   2. 3-5
   3. 6-8
   4. 9-12
   5. 13+

22) How many bathrooms (excluding shared toilet/water tap) does your family house in Nepal have?
   1. 0-1
   2. 2-3
   3. 4-5
   4. 6+

23) What of the below appliances do you have in your home in Nepal?
   1. Radio
   2. Mobile Phone
   3. IPad/tablet
   4. Computer/laptop
   5. Television
   6. Refrigerator
   7. Washing machine
8. Bicycle
9. Motorbike
10. Other vehicle

24) Which of the above appliances were purchased after you emigrated overseas?
   1. Radio
   2. Mobile Phone
   3. iPad/tablet
   4. Computer/laptop
   5. Television
   6. Refrigerator
   7. Washing machine
   8. Bicycle
   9. Motorbike
   10. Other vehicle

Additional comments:

Thank you for completing this survey!