

'Inclusive citizenship' for the chronically
poor: exploring the inclusion-exclusion
nexus in collective struggles

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Abstract

The promotion of 'inclusive citizenship', through which the disadvantaged engage in collective struggles for justice and recognition, has been attracting growing attention as a solution to chronic poverty. This paper problematises this formulation by drawing on a case of landless squatters (*sukumbasis*) in Western Nepal. Underlying the notion of 'inclusive citizenship' is a teleological view assuming that it is attained when social exclusion is countervailed through the extension of full citizenship to marginal groups. This orderly world-view is flawed, however, in that it disregards the intermingling between exclusion and inclusion. The case study shows that the *sukumbasis*' collective actions were bound to draw a line between 'us' and 'them' thereby privileging some squatters over 'immanent others' who are not entirely outside the realm of association, but are positioned as those lacking the properties required of fully-fledged citizens. Moreover, while claiming rights as citizens, the *sukumbasis* were ironically compelled to conform to the dominant social norms which had placed them at a disadvantage. However, these 'unintended' outcomes arising from the double-edged nature of the *sukumbasis*' struggles did not subjugate them outright to constrained positions, but also played into their hands. The arbitrary nature of group formation, demarcating the outside from the inside, allowed 'immanent others' to question this and to put forward claims for inclusion. Moreover, the disciplinary power contained within the notion of citizenship itself not only imposed particular norms of civility on the *sukumbasis*, but also served as leverage for them to gain due recognition as citizens. It is therefore crucial for proponents of 'inclusive citizenship' to heed the contingent and unpredictable nature of collective actions. Contrary to a view commonly held by advocates of 'inclusive citizenship', assetlessness and the denial of voices do not necessarily go hand in hand. To avoid imposing outsiders' presumptions on the uncertainty and complexity surrounding the lives of the deprived, an 'ascending' approach is called for to delve into the micro-level inconspicuous practices of the chronically poor. Outside agencies should seek to devise strategies that capitalise on and make up for the opportunities and the limitations arising from their day-to-day struggles.

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Glossary

Abbreviations

CPN-UML	Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist
NC	Nepali Congress Party
RPP	Rashtriya Prajantra (National Democratic) Party

Nepali Terms

<i>dalit</i>	Hindu low caste group
<i>Dheshi</i>	Hindu caste groups originating from the Indo-Gangetic Plain
<i>kamaiya</i>	bonded labourer
<i>Pahadi</i>	hill people
<i>Panchayat</i>	party-less monarchy (preceding the multi-party system in the 1990s)
<i>sukumbasi</i>	landless settler
<i>Sukumbasi Ayog</i>	Landless Settlers' Problem Resolution Commission
<i>Tarai</i>	narrow lowland strip stretching along the border with India
<i>Tharu</i>	ethnic group from Western <i>Tarai</i>

1. Introduction

The notion of 'inclusive citizenship' has emerged as a converging concern of several themes in development studies. First, in the field of studies on 'participation', the 'user group' approach in which people are reduced to 'consumers' of discrete projects is losing ground, in favour of broader forms of 'citizen participation' (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Cornwall and Coelho, 2006). Second, in parallel with this scaling-up from projects to policy-making and institutional changes is the agenda of 'participatory governance' (Fung and Wright, 2003; Gaventa, 2006). The growing attention to the direct state-society interface reflects a realisation that marginal groups cannot be fully-fledged citizens by merely expressing preferences through electoral democracy, and should take part more directly in decision-making which affects their well-being. Third, the rise of new forms of citizen-state engagement also coincides with the emergence of a 'rights-based approach to development (RBA)' that intends to mark a departure from its predecessors, with its focus on moving away from charity to claim (Uvin, 2004; Gready and Ensor, 2005). The RBA seeks to regard people as 'claimants' rather than as 'beneficiaries'.

The notion of 'inclusive citizenship' is also playing an increasingly central role in debates within leading development agencies, especially the World Bank and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Accordingly, while donors have tended to focus on the capacity-building of the state, there is now a growing realisation that effective state institutions need to be nurtured through a lengthy process of interactions between the state and its citizens (Eyben and Ladbury, 2006). In tandem with the increasing popularity of the discourse within development agencies is their burgeoning involvement in initiatives intended to promote the citizen-state interface.¹ To draw on the classifications of Hickey and Mohan (2004b), aid agencies are increasingly supporting a) efforts to scale up participation within development bureaucracies, including the World Bank's Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) and Poverty Strategy Reduction Papers (PRSPs), b) participatory governance and democratic decentralisation, and c) NGO-initiated community-based actions, as well as advocacy activities and social movements.

Does this mushrooming growth of 'inclusive citizenship' offer prospects for pro-poor outcomes? The chronically poor, who experience absolute poverty for an extended period of time, normally suffer from a compound of economic class subordination and inequitable status order that deprives them of broader systems of social support. Merely assisting the destitute to claim their entitlements to better social status and economic opportunities does not necessarily address wider normative orderings that cause intractable poverty (Green, 2006). However, as pointed out by Hickey and du Toit (2007), the analytical proponents of 'inclusive citizenship' are liable to uncritically endorse the notion that '... exclusion is combated through citizenship, and the extension of equal membership and full participation in the community to outsiders' (Silver, 1994: 543, cited in Hickey and du Toit, 2007: 12). In this way, social exclusion and 'inclusive citizenship' tend to be counterposed teleologically in existing literature. This tendency to dichotomise exclusion and citizen participation is

¹ It is to be noted that donors, while engaging in the citizen-state interface, need not only address 'vertical' relations between the state and the people, but also take 'horizontal' views of citizenship. As pointed out by Kabeer (2005: 23–25), 'horizontal' relations among citizens, both within and across national boundaries, are crucial for the promotion of 'inclusive citizenship', especially in places where the state has proved to be unresponsive and unaccountable to its people. This point is pertinent because, until recently, there was a tendency among aid agencies, to adhere to a conventional state-centred view, equating citizenship with formal membership of a nation state, and relegating citizens to a position as beneficiaries of services (Eyben and Ladbury, 2006: 5). Donors thus tended inadvertently to assist the state in legitimising its grip on the control of development planning, rather than unleashing citizens' self-organising potential for societal change, or rectifying oppression and discrimination against minorities within society. For a case study that elucidates how the World Bank's PRSPs were liable to be immersed in enlisting beneficiaries' acceptance of state policies and programmes, see Brown (2004).

problematic in that advocates of 'inclusive citizenship' tend not to consider adequately its double-edged problematic characteristics (Hickey and du Toit, 2007: 11–12).

First, while seeking equal citizenship, the poor are ironically compelled to conform to the dominant norms of civility which place them at a disadvantage. The citizens that their collective actions foster are concurrently the 'citizen-subjects' who are subjects in their own right, but are also subjected to the power dynamics that underlie the inequitable social order (Cruikshank, 1999). Some analysts point out that spaces of participation are often imbued with exclusionary elements that hinder the meaningful inclusion of the least organised and vocal groups (Cornwall and Coelho, 2006; Gaventa, 2006). At the same time, it is also crucial to examine out this point, in view of the mutually constitutive relations between exclusion and inclusion, and to explicitly regard social exclusion as internal to the state of being a citizen. As exemplified by a case study of a village of western Nepal (Masaki, 2005),² incorporation into mainstream participatory arenas allows the disadvantaged to make legitimate claims of development activities, but simultaneously compels them to assert wider political processes of representation and competition that relegate them to inferior positions. As pointed out by Hickey and du Toit (2007: 11), it is difficult to make sense of such an intricate nexus between inclusion and exclusion, in terms of such normative and abstract notions as 'good governance' and 'democracy'.

Second, collective struggles do not emerge out of a mere convergence of interests. A political community is constructed while eliminating plurality and difference among its members, and is therefore composed of adversaries, or 'friendly enemies ... who share a common symbolic space but ... want to organise this common symbolic space in different ways' (Mouffe, 2000: 13). 'Agonism' among adversaries who share a collective form of political identification, is an essential feature of group struggles for 'inclusive citizenship', as opposed to 'antagonism' among enemies who do not maintain a single collective identity (*ibid.*). Some researchers note that a political coalition is not necessarily a monolithic platform of actors belonging to a single organisation with a shared agenda, but involves a range of networks and alliances with divergent goals and commitments (Gaventa, 2006; Leach and Scoones, 2006). At the same time, this argument on the heterogeneity of group struggles needs to be extended further to make explicit another dimension of the inclusion-exclusion nexus, namely that the promotion of 'inclusive citizenship' entails 'demarcating the outside from the inside' (Benhabib, 2001: 41). A collective struggle for citizenship requires the constitution of 'immanent others' who are not entirely outside the realm of socialisation or association, but are positioned as those lacking the properties required of fully-fledged citizens, in order that the claimants present themselves as 'righteous citizens'.

How then should we tackle the double effects of 'inclusive citizenship' for chronically poor people? If collective struggles entail the above types of double-edged problematic characteristics as the fundamental conditions of existence, what measures can we take in assisting the poor to assert their rights as citizens, such as better access to productive assets, or due recognition as equal personhoods? Is there a strategy that can resolve the

² In this case study, a group of indigenous people were given opportunities, through the allocation of reserved seats and quotas, to participate in a flood mitigation project on a par with dominant villagers. This meant that they also had to assimilate themselves to dominant modes of project implementation (under which they had to use the Nepalese language in public), and more broadly, to 'governmental rationality' regarding their emancipation as being amenable to planners' blueprints (which, in this case, manifested itself in the reserved seats and quotas). The disadvantaged were subject to, but also had plenty of room to challenge the regulations imposed on them. This was because development projects had not historically succeeded in ameliorating their predicament, which gave the underprivileged the grounds to resist the bureaucratic control entailed in the flood mitigation project. Accordingly, this resulted in some modifications of the project modality. The case study corroborates the notion of 'citizen-subject', with which Cruikshank asserts that citizens are 'both subjected to power and subjects in their own rights' (1999: 23–24). This double-edged nature of 'inclusive citizenship' is dwelt on in the following section on the analytical framework.

paradoxes of the agonistic and ambivalent nature entailed in 'inclusive citizenship', or should we resign ourselves to the 'pessimistic' verdicts mentioned above? According to Jacques Derrida (1992:15), 'justice is the experience of the impossible', namely its possibility is opened up by continually seeking to push against its irresolvable limits. If so, should the promotion of 'inclusive citizenship' be regarded as the relentless pursuit of the impossible, while its possibility is sustained by the impossibility of its final realisation?

This paper intends to address these questions, by taking up the case of landless squatters called sukumbasis in a village of Western Nepal where research was undertaken in 2000–01. The sukumbasis were chronically poor in that they were suffering from the combination of assetlessness and despised social status, which trapped them persistently in absolute poverty. At the same time, in the village, land-based feudal exploitation did not merely serve to suppress the sukumbasis, but provided them with grounds for petitioning and protesting to local leaders and functionaries for the fulfilment of their 'citizenship'. However, because the sukumbasis in the village were composed of various groups of adversaries with varying socio-cultural backgrounds and political affiliations, their struggles took place in a context of diversity and conflict. Moreover, the sukumbasis were ironically compelled to conform to the dominant social norms which had relegated them to lesser citizens. This paper starts by describing the analytical framework that elucidates the agonistic and ambivalent nature of 'inclusive citizenship'. It then provides the overview of the sukumbasis in the village, followed by the analysis of their collective struggles over land rights, *corvée* obligations, and community forestry. The complexity of links between the sukumbasis' assetlessness and their social relations is also elucidated in the case study. This paper concludes by drawing lessons for those promoting 'inclusive citizenship' for the chronically poor, while bringing to attention the need to embrace a 'radical democratic notion of citizenship'.

2. Analytical framework: the double-edged nature of 'inclusive citizenship'

As explained above, existing studies on the promotion of 'inclusive citizenship' tend to consider teleologically that it is attained when social exclusion is countervailed through the extension of full citizenship to marginal actors. This section provides the analytical framework to overcome such an idealised view, in order to delve into the double-edged problematic characteristics of 'inclusive citizenship', in which inclusion and exclusion are intermingled in a complex manner. For this purpose, the 'logics of alterity' and the 'dialectics of universality', both of which bring to light the agonism and ambivalence inadvertently caused when the poor articulate communal demands, are discussed. As described below, the 'logics of alterity' and the 'dialectics of universality' are bound to seep into the foundation of a collective form of identification, and to forge what Homi Bhabha terms a 'interstitial community' (1996: 231). At the same time, the 'unintended' outcomes do not entirely subjugate the poor to constrained positions, but can also play into their hands.

2.1 The logics of alterity

'Inclusive citizenship' is promoted through collective actions by subordinate people, who coalesce around a common form of identification, such as the poor, the landless, or women. However, their organised struggles entail 'demarcating the outside from the inside' (Benhabib, 2001: 41). A political community is bound to draw a frontier between 'us' and 'them', thereby opening up civic space for members, while closing it down for non-members. A paradox of 'inclusive citizenship' is, therefore, that it is plagued by the constitutive dilemma between the principle of self-determination and that of universal human rights (*ibid.*: 39), or the irreconcilability of individual sovereignty and democratic equality (Mouffe, 2000).

At the same time, this binary friend-enemy distinction misses the overlapping, fluid, contingent nature of group formation, as indicated by Isin, who points out the need to take into account the 'logics of alterity' rather than the 'logics of exclusion' (2002). The term 'alterity' means to constitute the relationship between oneself and others, without the intent of

effacement, unlike 'exclusion' that posts others as opposites to be eliminated (*ibid.*: 30–32).³ The 'logics of exclusion' consider a sovereign body to form its identity by establishing a restricted or exclusive space, while constituting 'others' who do not belong to that sphere. On the other hand, according to the 'logics of alterity', a civic group constitutes not only 'opposite others', but also 'immanent others' who are not entirely outside the realm of socialisation and association. When a group of people seek to claim rights as virtuous citizens, they posit 'immanent others', or to use the term cited in the introductory section, 'adversaries' (Mouffe, 2000: 13) who occupy a common symbolic domain but seek to organise it in different manners. It is therefore important to analyse citizenship from the viewpoint of the mixedness or impurity of a group identity, rather than inside/outside dichotomies.⁴

The 'logics of alterity' lead us to another point made by Isin, namely that struggles for citizenship are not limited to 'revolutionary' actions seeking universal restructuring, but entail 'polyvalent, multiple, minor, tactical engagements' (2002: 282). A collective form of identification is fissiparous with the presence of differing desires and identifications among its members. Accordingly, different subsets of a group continually stake their claims and wage struggles with one another for hegemony. At the same time, even supposing a certain segment seemingly succeeds in attaining hegemony, it undergoes successive revisions and transvaluations by various members because the arbitrariness of dominant citizenship claims is ceaselessly called into question by 'immanent others'. This resonates with what Butler terms the 'promising ambivalence of the norm' (1997: 91), that is, an ironic hopefulness that hegemony, in order to remain pervasive, needs to be continually re-established.

What is at stake in the promotion of 'inclusive citizenship' is therefore the 'performative nature of group identifications: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference' (Bhabha, 1996: 219). It is also useful to turn to the notion of 'performative agency' put forth by Butler, who argues that '(a)gency exceeds the power by which it is enabled' (1997b: 15). A universalising claim is made by a certain segment of people, who exercise their political agency to present themselves as righteous citizens, while inadvertently constituting 'immanent others'. Ironically, at the same time, their agency turns against itself since their claims are bound to be contested by other competing views. From this self-refuting potential for domination, those relegated to 'immanent others' unwittingly derive their agency to challenge dominant sections of their 'compatriots'.

2.2 The 'dialectics of universality'

Agency's potential to outmanoeuvre power, pointed out by Butler (1997b: 15), is evidenced, not only in relation to the 'logics of alterity', but also in the 'dialectics of universality', which is

³ According to Emmanuel Lévinas, who has furthered the notion of 'alterity', in the history of Western culture, such 'others' as the immigrant, the homosexual, and the feminine have largely been relegated to a position outside of 'normalcy'. The Western self has required the constitution of those types of 'others', in order to assert its 'superiority'. Lévinas also pointed out that those 'others' did not precede Western culture, but have been constituted in the process of fabricating its 'civility'. Accordingly, it is crucial 'to distinguish between the logics of alterity that constitute strangers and outsiders as immanent identities and the logics of exclusion ... that constitute aliens and barbarians as transitive or exterior identities (Isin, 2002: 30).

⁴ The conception of 'immanent others' resonates with what Lister (2003) terms 'differentiated universalism', which feminist scholarship has long pointed to. Feminism has problematised, not only the gender-neutral views of citizenship, but also the essentialist idea of women, among whom there exists no natural convergence of interests. A citizenship project, so the story goes, is liable to bring about exclusion 'from within'. However, 'differentiated universalism' aspires to a universalism that stands in positive tension with difference, thereby disregarding the irreconcilability between individual sovereignty and democratic equality. This paper draws on the conception of 'immanent others', since it elucidates the ineradicable tension between exclusion and inclusion, by bringing to light the 'alterity' inherent in collective struggles for 'inclusive citizenship'.

the topic of this subsection. One post-structuralist critique often levelled against the notion of 'inclusive citizenship' is that it is liable to impose certain norms of civility on the vulnerable populace, however well intentioned it may be. The citizenship that it fosters is affected by the disciplinary power which permeates in society in such a manner as to exert pressure on people to conform to social norms. Citizens are not necessarily the antithesis of passive subjects who are subjugated by power and authority. Instead of simplistically polarising autonomous citizens and powerless subjects ('citizen/subjects'), it is imperative to regard citizens as the hyphenated 'citizen-subjects' who are 'both subjected to power and subjects in their own rights' (Cruikshank, 1999: 23–24).⁵

In this regard, it is crucial to pay attention to the 'dialectics of universality' (Laclau, 1996: 56), namely the paradox that marginal groups, when claiming their citizenship, are liable to assert the 'particular' system of power in which they have been relegated to as non- or lesser citizens. The notion of universality is 'what pertains to every person, but it is not everything that pertains to every person' (Butler, 2000: 17) in that it is tainted by the parochial property of dominant culture. Therefore, there exists no uncontaminated dividing line between particularity and universality (Laclau, 1996: 22). Accordingly, the disadvantaged are prompted, while demanding their rights as citizens, to assimilate themselves with, and conform to the particularistic conceptions of civility underlying the seemingly objectivistic notion of 'inclusive citizenship'. In their attempts to reverse the contents of social injustice, therefore, underprivileged people inadvertently reiterate the context in which oppression takes place, to paraphrase Laclau's argumentation (1996: 31). '[O]pposition ... requires the identification with the very places from which opposition takes place' (*ibid.*: 30).

This does not mean, however, that the acts of marginal groups in challenging subordination merely presuppose their subjection. An enabling reversal simultaneously takes place because no context is immune from a contaminating trace of its 'foreign' content, as pointed out by Butler (2000: 39). The underprivileged, in their efforts to rectify their status as non- or lesser citizens, reinvoke prevailing norms of civility, which, however, do not merely constrain their thoughts and actions, but serve as a medium through which different actors re-negotiate their interpretations of reality. Dominant standards of civility therefore assume a split role of 'the father and the oppressor; just and unjust; moderate and rapacious; vigorous and despotic' (Bhabha, 1996: 96).

No 'citizen-subject' comes into being without power, but to paraphrase Butler (1997b: 15–16), 'that coming into being involves the dissimulation of power'. The disciplinary power contained within the notion of citizenship not only serves as a condition of agency, but is also turned into the citizen-subject's own agency. This ambivalence corresponds to another aspect of 'performative agency', referred to in the preceding section. Because subjection as a 'citizen-subject' also works against the power that brings about its very subordination, it is crucial to avoid arriving at a totalitarian conclusion that imminent intervention regulates citizens in such a manner as to inhibit people's autonomy and spontaneity in shaping their strategies. On the contrary, because it can both inhibit and facilitate popular agency, care

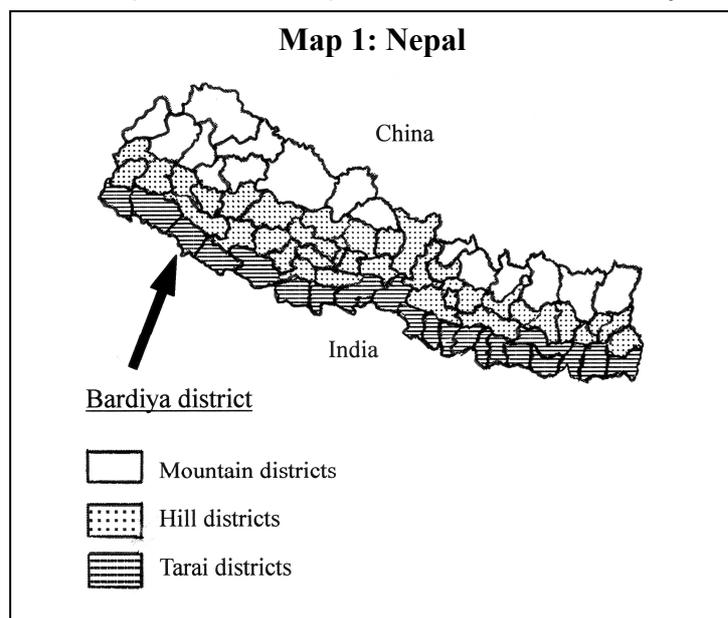
⁵ It is to be noted that Cruikshank does not merely presuppose the oppressive nature of being 'subjects'. On the contrary, she proposes to hold together two ostensibly divergent meanings of the word 'subject', namely the 'subject' who is subjugated by a sovereign power, and the 'subject' (as opposed to the 'object') of government (1999: 22–23). Accordingly, the 'subjects' of bureaucratic control, such as welfare recipients, are not merely the opposite of active 'citizens', but are also agents who resist regulations imposed on them (*ibid.*: 23). The notion of 'citizen-subject' therefore corroborates the assertion by Hickey and du Toit that 'clientelism may not be quite the negative political form that liberal democratic theory tends to suggest' (Hickey and du Toit, 2007: 16). It is crucial to do away with the widely held view dichotomizing 'inclusive citizenship' and patron-client forms of politics (*ibid.*: 12–17). The intermingling of the oppressive and productive nature of 'citizen-subjects' is highlighted in the last paragraph of this section in the main text, with reference to Judith Butler's notion of 'performative agency'.

should be taken to heed the double-edged problematic of 'inclusive citizenship' pointed out by Hickey and du Toit (2007: 11–12), and thus avoid prejudging its outcomes.

To summarise this section on the analytical framework, both the notion of 'immanent others' and that of 'citizen-subject' point to the need to avoid uncritically accepting the value of 'inclusive citizenship', and to heed the exclusionary dynamics inherent in the concept. At the same time, its Janus-faced nature does not entirely limit but also opens up possibilities of 'performative agency' to subvert the status as 'immanent others', or the subordination as 'citizen-subjects'. The two conceptions thus combine to illustrate the potential of drawing on such intricate intermingling of exclusion and inclusion, towards the achievement of 'inclusive citizenship'. It is neither desirable nor feasible to arbitrarily set a teleological objective of moving away from exclusion to inclusion, by straightforwardly demarcating the lines between dominant actors and 'immanent others', or between the state of being political subjects and that of being democratic citizens. To consider how best to address the inclusion-exclusion nexus, the following section looks into a case of a village in western Nepal, where struggles for 'inclusive citizenship' were predicated on double-edged power dynamics.

3. Setting the context: Sukumbasis in Pyauli

Drawing on the analytical framework delineated in the preceding sections, this paper analyses the case of the landless squatters called sukumbasis in Pyauli in western Nepal. The sukumbasis were trapped in chronic poverty with low levels of asset holding and despised social status as landless squatters, ethnic minorities or low-castes. The combination of social and economic subordination accorded them little opportunity to attain upward mobility out of intractable poverty. Before examining their struggles for 'inclusive citizenship', this section provides an overview of Pyauli, which is situated in Bardiya, the third



Tarai district from the western border with India (see Map 1). The Tarai, which is an extension of India's Gangetic plains, stretches along the southern frontier adjoining India. In Pyauli, as of November 2000, there were a total of 556 households. 309 households were those of *Pahadis* of hill origin. *Tharu* households (234),⁶ namely the original settlers in Pyauli and surrounding areas, made up the majority of the remaining village population, while the remaining, smallest portion of households (13) were those of *Dheshis*⁷, who were said to have originated from the southern Tarai plain.

The *sukumabasis* in Payuli can be categorised into groups along the lines of these three ethnic groups, namely the Pahadis, the Tharus, and the Dheshis. The second group corresponded to a group of landless Tharus who started squatting on unused public land in

⁶ There existed three households of mixed marriage, two between Tharu males and Pahadi females, and the other between a Dheshi male and a Tharu woman. All these couples lived in Tharu-only settlements, and are counted as Tharu households.

⁷ Dheshi is an abbreviation of Madheshi, which literally means people living in the southern plain. According to the original meaning of the word, Tharus should therefore be a sub-group of Dheshis. However, the two are distinguished in the case study village.

1993 after they had stopped working as live-in servants (*kamaiyas*) in their neighbourhood. As *kamaiyas*, they had been required to carry out both agricultural and domestic tasks as demanded by their landlords, in exchange for a minimal amount of grain – barely enough for their survival. The two camps became estranged from each other after the Tharu *sukumbasis* severed patron-client relations and settled elsewhere on unused public land beside a road. Their landed neighbours subsequently expelled the Tharu *sukumbasis* from the forest group of the neighbourhood. Moreover, the lack of landholdings compelled them to continue working as agricultural labourers for other landowners. Their predicament did not only emanate from assetlessness, but also from the Tharus' status as the indigenous populace whose sovereignty over territories and resources had historically been usurped by the Pahadi-dominated Nepalese state.⁸ Therefore, there existed little prospect in the short term for the Tharu *sukumbasis* to climb out of chronic poverty.

Bardiya was originally inhabited by Tharus and a limited number of Dheshis, until the state took over their land in the nineteenth century, and entrusted new Pahadi landlords of hill origin, to bring the newly acquired land under cultivation and to collect taxes. Although the Pahadis had since then continued to constitute a powerful force in both economic and political terms, the incident of landlessness in Payuli was also prevalent among the Pahadis. From the 1970s onwards, there was an influx of new Pahadi migrants from the hills. Many of them settled, as *sukumbasis*, on new land that had been made available after the change in the course of the river, or on other unregistered land on the forest fringes that existed in abundance in Pyauli.

The Pahadi *sukumbasis* were scattered in different corners of the village. One settlement was located at the northern end of Pyauli where a group of impoverished Pahadis migrated in the late 1970s, with the help of the chair of the village council (then called the village *panchayat*), who had also come from the same locality in the hills. The new migrant *sukumbasis* settled on the old course of a river that had started flowing in another direction. Another Pahadi *sukumbasi* area was inhabited by a group of dalits or low-castes from a hill district, who settled near a forest in the early 1980s. At the same time, not all the Pahadi *sukumbasi* settlements were as cohesive and homogenous, as exemplified by another locality stretching along a major road leading to the village centre. The residents came from different areas, settled at varying times, and sought protection from different village leaders. It is to be noted that non-dalit Pahadi *sukumbasis*, who ostensibly belonged to upper castes, were also discriminated against as 'non-permanent' residents.⁹ The Pahadi landless, regardless of their caste status, can be characterised as chronically poor, given the combination of their low levels of asset holdings and the social barriers that they had to overcome to gain recognition as citizens.

The last category of the *sukumbasis* in Payuli corresponded to a group of Dheshis who had been squatting in the village since they had migrated across the border between Nepal and India in the 1960s. The Dheshis, with the help of the then chair of the village Panchayat, settled on public land beside a road in one Pahadi-dominant settlement. None of the Dheshi squatters had Nepali citizenship, given the government's practice of granting citizenship by

⁸ Bardiya had been thinly populated mostly by Tharus, until it was annexed to Nepal in 1861. Since then, Pahadis manipulated governmental programmes, drawing on their caste and kinship affiliations with government leaders and local functionaries. As a result, despite several attempts at land reform in the past, the ownership of land remained skewed in favour of Pahadis, even at the time of this fieldwork in 2000–01.

⁹ The *sukumbasis*, including even high-caste Pahadis, were often harassed by their landed neighbours, who imposed forced labour for village public works, by taking advantage of the squatters' anxiety about potential eviction from their 'illegal' settlements. Moreover, other villagers not only exacted *corvée* from the *sukumbasis*, but also resorted to making false accusations against them. For example, according to some non-dalit informants, landlords would order their underlings to cut down trees, and complain to the Forest Department that it had been done by the landless living on the forest fringes.

'descent' only, in defiance of the legal provisions for 'naturalised' citizens or citizen by 'birth'. Because of the absence of formal citizenship, neither government officials nor the wider public considered them to be 'Nepalese', in contrast to their Tharu and Pahadi counterparts, most of whom had legal citizenship.

To conclude this section, the sukumbasis in Payuli were generally unlikely to escape poverty in the foreseeable future, not only because of their lack of access to productive assets, but also given the inequitable social relations in which they were trapped. At the same time, this did not deter the sukumbasis from demanding the fulfilment of their rights as residents of the village. The following section examines their struggles for justice and recognition as citizens. At stake in their crusades were the agonistic confrontations among the sukumbasis themselves, rather than their relations with landed neighbours who did not necessarily seek to suppress them all the time.

4. Agonistic struggles for 'inclusive citizenship' in Pyauli

This section analyses the sukumbasis' struggles over land rights, corvée obligations, and community forests. These were the spheres in which the squatters were most actively claiming their rights as 'fully-fledged citizens' at the time of the fieldwork. As described below, given the 'logics of alterity' and the 'dialectics of universality', their endeavours for 'inclusive citizenship' ironically entailed the exclusion of their 'compatriots', while also subjugating themselves to the dominant norms of civility. The double-edged nature of 'inclusive citizenship', at the same time was not entirely 'unfavourable' as it was also 'beneficial' to the sukumbasis, owing to the 'performative' nature of power dynamics that both suppress and liberate 'citizen-subjects'. This section concludes by examining the interfaces between assetlessness and inequitable status, the combination of which is inflicted on the chronically poor, such as the sukumbasis in Pyauli.

4.1 'Collective' struggles for land rights

The sukumbasis in Pyauli were landless squatters with no legal title to their plots of land. Underlying this seemingly straightforward definition was the adversarial nature of the collective identity which, to paraphrase Mouffe's model of democracy (2000), entailed agonistic confrontations as the fundamental condition of possibility. As stated in the preceding section, the sukumbasis were divided along the lines of ethnicity (Pahadis and Tharus), caste (dalits and non-dalits), and legal status (Dheshis and other sukumbasis). What added to the tension among them was the advent of party politics in 1990 which increased favouritism through the provision of land permits.¹⁰ In the 1990s different political parties utilised the government's Sukumbasi Ayog (the Landless Settlers' Problem Resolution Commission) to allocate land in ways that dispensed patronage to their respective support bases. Land distribution programmes were conducted in ways 'demarcating the outside from the inside' (Benhabib, 2001: 41) because some sukumbasis had ties with dominant political parties that were in a better position to influence the Sukumbasi Ayog, while others did not have connections with them. The former managed to obtain official endorsement, albeit without land ownership, to register and stay on the land which they had encroached on, or on alternative land provided by the government. The latter were relegated to a position of 'immanent others' who had to continue squatting on the self-occupied

¹⁰ The Panchayat system, in which the king assumed sovereignty as a symbol of national unity, ended in 1990 when various political parties joined hands in organising mass anti-Panchayat movements. However, the multi-party system in the 1990s degenerated into a 'naked power struggle' (Hachhethu, 2000: 91), causing frequent changes of the central government. This prompted party leaders at the centre to exert pressure on their local cadres to strengthen support bases by fair means or foul. Accordingly, the political party in power often intervened in the operations of line agencies, including the Sukumbasi Ayog, in such a manner as to distribute patronage to its supporters. For detailed village-level case studies, see Masaki (2007).

holdings without the government's permits. The agonistic confrontations among the sukumbasis in Pyauli prevented them from forming a single, inclusive platform for seeking land rights.

In Pyauli, those 'immanent others' who failed to receive preferential treatment included the *Pahadi* sukumbasis living at the north of the village, as well as the Dheshi squatters. Both of the groups had migrated into the village with the help of the chair of the village council (then called the village Panchayat). The two settlements had been excluded from land distribution programmes, since they were regarded by villagers as the clients of the *Rashtriya Prahantra* Party (RPP) formed by former Panchayat leaders after the end of the Panchayat era in 1990. These areas were thus ignored by the two major parties in Pyauli, that is the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML) and the Nepali Congress (NC). The two parties had larger political authority than the RPP. Throughout the 1990s, one or other of the two parties led one-party or coalition governments, while the RPP served only occasionally as a partner either to the NC-led or the CPN-UML-led governments. Moreover, the two parties had greater support bases in the Bardiya district. Activists of the NC and the CPN-UML in Pyauli, through their party organs at the district level and in the centre, actively worked on the Sukumbasi Ayog to allocate land permits to their supporters. The Tharu sukumbasis, for example, turned to the CPN-UML and were subsequently provided with alternative land away from the neighbourhood from which they had been ostracised.

At the same time, we should refrain from attributing the inclusion/exclusion division merely to the sukumbasis' party affiliations, because it is also possible to make sense of it in relation to their ethnicity or their legal status. The Tharu sukumbasis, who were former kamaiyas, also managed to receive land permits because the issue of kamaiyas prevalent among Tharus had been attracting nationwide attention, owing to pressure mounted by a group of NGOs on political leaders. Accordingly, in Pyauli, at the time of the fieldwork, just as in other villages in Bardiya, *Pahadi* sukumbasis were less of a priority of the Sukumbasi Ayog, in comparison with Tharus. Moreover, the exclusion of the Dheshi sukumbasis emanated not only from their party affiliation, but also from their legal status as 'non-Nepalis' that denied them the basic rights to register land ownership. Local politicians and bureaucrats were generally loath to help the Dheshis with their access to land, in defiance of legality.

A dichotomised view such as that provided in the preceding paragraphs misses the 'polyvalent, multiple, minor, tactical engagements' (Isin, 2002: 282) that the sukumbasis resorted to, to render the exclusion/inclusion division unstable and contingent. Those squatters left out of land distribution programmes were not entirely reconciled to their fate. On the contrary, in line with the 'promising ambivalence of the norm' (Butler, 1997: 91), their disadvantaged position led them to call into question the arbitrariness of the *Sukumabasi Ayog's* operations, and to stake their claims. Moreover, the excluded continued their struggles in other aspects of their livelihoods, as described in the ensuing sections on their corvée obligations, and their involvement in community forestry.

This attests to the importance of abandoning the 'logics of exclusion' that posit an inside/outside division, in favour of the 'logics of alterity' that take note of 'immanent others' who are not entirely outside the realm of association, but are positioned on its periphery, as proposed by Isin (2002). The sukumbasis in Pyauli were far from being a monolithic entity, but included 'immanent others' who were discriminated against, with regard to other more 'privileged' squatters, who enjoyed preferential treatment by local politicians in relation to the land they had been squatting on. At the same time, the supremacy gained by certain segments of the sukumbasis was precarious and did not affect universal reach, given that different sub-groups of the sukumbasis were waging their struggles in other domains, as described in the following two sections.

4.2 'Emancipative' *corvée* obligations

With the rise of decentralisation and participation (D&P) in the 1990s, the government came to channel a larger portion of its budget to villages. This had bred party rivalries over the distribution of patronage in the form of public work projects throughout the country. In Pyauli, in deciding on the use of the budget, public meetings were held with the participation of all the major political parties to prevent the opposition camp from standing in the way. This ensured that the budget was spent equitably in the village, instead of being diverted to areas favoured by the village's elected representatives. Moreover, a committee was usually formed, drawing members from all the major parties, and it was given responsibility to oversee the project implementation. This brought about rivalries among different political parties which strove to outperform one another by seeking to derive maximum benefits from the limited resources. In this regard, local leaders drew on the tradition of community labour contributions, which historically fell inequitably on marginal groups, including the sukumbasis. The D&P rhetoric was appropriated as a euphemism for the *corvée* practice which would be instrumental in putting the budget to maximum use. Unpaid labour contributions, so the story goes, would be indispensable for the advancement of Pyauli.

As exemplified by the sukumbasis' struggles for land, described in the preceding section, in which they sought land permits with recourse to party politics, the advent of the multi-party system in 1990 provided a fertile ground for the betterment of their livelihoods.¹¹ This meant, at the same time, that the sukumbasis were compelled to embrace the historical *corvée* tradition as righteous 'citizen-subjects'. It was crucial for the landless to display their allegiance to their patrons, through 'voluntary' labour contributions, and thus help their benefactors outdo other political parties. In this way, the subordinated, while claiming their rights as 'citizens', were simultaneously required to assimilate themselves to the system of oppression that had reduced them to lesser citizens. Underlying this 'uncanny double' (Bhabha, 1996: 96) was the sukumbasis' dependence on other landed villagers for protection against potential evictions, and also, in many cases, for their subsistence. It is these multiple binds that coerced or coaxed the sukumbasis into providing labour for public work projects.

This does not mean, however, that their subjection as 'citizen-subjects' necessarily fell into disfavour with the sukumbasis, in line with Cruikshank's assertion that citizens are 'both subjected to power and subjects in their own rights' (1999: 23–24). As described in the section on the analytical framework, disciplinary power not only constrains the thoughts and actions of the sukumbasis, but is turned also into their own agency. Accordingly, this 'uncanny double' often played into the hands of the landless. For example, when the dalit settlement was told to build a trail passing through their settlement, some residents resented having to bear solely the burden for the path that would also benefit other landed villagers. At the same time, it also represented an opportunity for them to counter the widespread view that they were just moving from one place to another as sukumbasis and could leave the village at any time. The dalits sensed that it would give them grounds to assert their rights as 'permanent residents', and they subsequently formed their own user committee and completed the trail by contributing their unpaid labour.

A similar sense of ambivalence drove the residents of the *Pahadi* sukumbasi area, located at the northern end of Pyauli, to make labour contributions to a flood control project in 1999. As

¹¹ The multi-party system served to compel local political leaders to cater to the plight of the sukumbasis for votes, and also to distribute patronage to their favoured squatters. To draw on the terms used by Hickey and Bracking (2005: 857), at the same time, this does not mean that all the major political parties had a 'clientelistic' focus only. On the contrary, they had differing 'programmatic' focuses, depending on their ideological leanings. In this respect, the CPN-UML, which regarded 'working class people' and 'peasants' as the vanguard of socio-economic progress, was associated more clearly with pro-poor reforms, than the NC and the RPP. In Pyauli, accordingly, owing to the prevalence of poverty, the CPN-UML (and its breakaway faction) assumed all the village's elected posts in the 1990s. This prompted the NC and the RPP, with more 'clientelistic' stances, also to seek to attend to the predicament of the chronically poor.

stated already, this locality was regarded as a protectorate of the RPP and was excluded from land distribution programmes. In the case of this locality, the denial of citizenship had manifested itself as exclusion even from the *corvée* practice since the area had been considered largely outside the service area of the village administration. The residents had never been involved in village public works. Through their voluntary contributions for the 1999 project, the landless managed to enhance their social positions in the eyes of other villagers, which is attested to by the fact that village leaders thereafter started making it a rule to involve this settlement in public works.

These acts by the two groups were not an entirely intentional move from exclusion. The sukumbasis had a practical understanding of the difficulty of uprooting the inequitable social order, but tacitly knew that it would be possible to resist it, albeit within limits, in a subtle and incremental manner. In line with Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' (1977), they acted dispositionally, without full intentionality, in response to both the limitations and the opportunities arising from the flow of their daily lives. They were not fully conscious of the motives of their actions, which instead stemmed from their 'practical consciousness' about what would work and how. At the same time, 'habitus' is 'the system of structured, structuring dispositions' (Bourdieu, 1990: 52) which not only generates, but also sets structural limits on social actions. Accordingly, the sukumbasis' moves were confined within the boundaries of possible actions and thus served to reinforce both the *corvée* practice and, more broadly, the domination over the landless.

While claiming rights as citizens, the sukumbasis were ironically liable to embrace the historical *corvée* practice that had placed them at a disadvantage. The 'unexpected' outcome, arising from the double-edged nature of their citizenship claims, at the same time did not entirely inhibit them from gaining recognition as 'fully-fledged citizens'. On the contrary, the disciplinary power contained within the notion of citizenship itself not only imposed the particular norm of civility on the sukumbasis, but also served as leverage for them to seek 'inclusive citizenship'. It is therefore crucial for proponents of 'inclusive citizenship' to abstain from uncritically endorsing an orderly world-view, such as 'exclusion is combated through citizenship, and the extension of equal membership and full participation in the community to outsiders' (Silver, 1994: 543, cited in Hickey and du Toit 2007: 11).¹² One should abstain from assuming that the promotion of 'inclusive citizenship' is unilinear and cumulative.

4.3 The contest over 'community' forestry

The politics concerning land rights and *corvée* obligations, described thus far, were dominated by men. In Pyauli, just as many other areas in Nepal, the public/private division served as a powerful principle of exclusion of women from the public realm. In this sense, the conception of citizenship, when it uncritically postulates a homogenous, unified 'public', is liable to lapse into a patriarchal concept. At the same time, female members of the sukumbasi households were differently positioned, depending on their socio-economic status, their proximity to political influence, and their involvement in organised activities. As pointed out by Mouffe (2005: 74–88), it is therefore useful to eschew the essentialist view that simplistically assigns a collective identity to women, and to heed the multiple forms of struggles against the exclusion that is inflicted not only on women, but also on other groups

¹² As stated at the beginning of this paper, there are increasing calls from researchers on participation to replace the conventional 'user group' approach with of 'citizen participation'. However, given the double-edged nature of citizenship, an alternative approach to participation is called for, which accords people autonomy and spontaneity in shaping their strategies. Pushing through a series of activities to promote 'citizen participation' is liable to relegate people to the position of passive beneficiaries of pre-packaged support (the 'user group' approach) with its unfounded assumption that people would not become citizens without outside assistance. This point is dwelt on in the concluding chapter of Masaki (2007).

along the lines of class, caste, ethnicity, and other combinations.¹³ This is attested to by the government's initiative for women's community forestry, from which another impetus for 'inclusive citizenship' came in Pyauli. Its results illustrate that landless women had multiple positions in the composite society, which prevented them from articulating their demands without agonistic confrontations. Their endeavours thus brought about 'immanent others' who did not benefit from the programme as much as other more privileged sukumbasi women.

The programme, which had started in 1992, was caught up in the inequitable social order at its initial stage. Some landed female villagers established their groups to the exclusion of their sukumbasi neighbours, thus depriving the latter of the forests that they depended on. Some of the sukumbasi households were even evicted from their occupied land to make way for community forests. However, in line with the 'promising ambivalence of the norm' (Butler, 1997: 91), this provided the affected squatters with a case with which to compel local politicians to broker a deal with the forest authority to provide them with alternative woodlands. The community forestry programme was run by the District Forest Office (DFO) in Bardiya, which is the deconcentrated office of the Department of Forest. The DFO at the same time relied on local political leaders to identify groups of women and assist them in lodging applications. In Pyauli, as of November 2001, three of the eleven community forests were managed by sukumbasi-exclusive groups, including one formed by the dalits and another initiated by the RPP-associated landless Pahadis residing in the north of the village.

On the other hand, just as in the case of the struggles for land rights, the 'logics of alterity' were evidenced in the case of community forestry which required of the landless the capacity to identify with their fellows and to act in unity. Those who were not able to mobilise themselves as a unified group were often left behind in the programme. A case in point was the sukumbasi settlement which spread along a major road leading to the village centre, referred to earlier. As stated above, the settlement lacked solidarity because its residents had migrated from different areas at various times and sought protection from different political leaders affiliated with different political parties. Local politicians found it difficult to form groups in this non-cohesive settlement. Some of them thus had to join forest groups led by their landed neighbours, while others remained outside the community forestry programme.

The boundaries between the participants in the programme and their 'immanent others', however, were far from static and were continually being redrawn. Those sukumbasi households that were not able to establish their own groups continued to struggle to gain access to the forests. Those sukumbasi women who belonged to groups led by their landed neighbours usually had to undertake physically demanding tasks such as digging pits, driving piles into the ground for fences, or cutting down branches of tall trees, in exchange for firewood and fodder. Such unjust treatment led the female squatters to resent being dictated to by other dominant women in their groups and eventually drove them to form a group of their own. It is to be noted that this move was supported by a male activist of the NC who resided nearby and intended to help the party expand its support base in the squatter settlement.

Thus, while manoeuvring themselves into negotiating their inclusion in the forestry programme, the female sukumbasis in Pyauli were prone to rely on male party activists who had ties with government functionaries. The landless women, in their efforts to rectify their

¹³ This does not mean that feminist goals should be discarded. On the contrary, they should be located within a broader context in which various forms of oppression are challenged by different oppressed groups. Feminist politics with a strict focus on 'women' are prone to constrain them within the foundational frame, while disregarding the activism already existing among 'women', whom the feminist supposedly represents and liberates. The need for feminist politics to aim at a wider articulation of demands is theoretically dwelt on in Chapter 5 of Mouffe (2005), and is empirically attested to by the case of Pyauli, where village politics were played out at complex intersections of differences based on gender, ethnicity, class, and other coordinates.

status as lesser citizens lacking access to forests, were required to conform to the prevailing norms of male-dominant party politics. Moreover, political leaders arranged for all three sukumbasi forest groups to appoint male advisors who were active in party politics and were also landed neighbours of the group members. The advisors not only made contact with the DFO on behalf of the landless women, but also meddled in group meetings especially when discussing 'big' issues such as the use of group funds, the shares of forest products, and the settlement of annual accounts. The appointment of the male advisors had a symbolic function, not only to give an impression of the political parties' commitment to public welfare, but more broadly, to assert the patriarchal, inequitable social order founded on asymmetrical relations between women and men, and between sukumbasis and their landed neighbours.

At the same time, the female squatters did not necessarily resent the interventions by the advisors. The sukumbasis' subjection as 'citizen-subjects' ironically worked against the very subordination, which was re-appropriated as their agency to rectify the unjust social order. The involvement of the party activists prevented the female squatters from running their forests as they wished. At the same time, because they were doubly handicapped, both as women and as squatters, the combination of which had accorded them little opportunity to manage government-sanctioned groups, they generally felt relieved to receive help from the male advisors who were conversant with the rules and regulations of the government. This allowed them time gradually to gain knowledge and experience in managing their community forest groups, thereby enabling them to take increasing control over activities. In all of the sukumbasi-exclusive groups, the male advisors came to interfere in their activities to a lesser degree by the end of the 1990s, as compared with earlier days.

To summarise this and the preceding two sections, the sukumbasis' struggles over their access to land, their *corvée* obligations, and their involvement in community forestry point to the centrality of agonism and ambivalence in their endeavours. This is in contrast to existing studies on 'inclusive citizenship', which as described at the beginning of this paper, tend to posit a teleological view proposing to move from exclusion to inclusion. An alternative approach to 'inclusive citizenship' is called for which as a point of departure recognises that it is impossible for the deprived to articulate communal demands without exclusion. Before considering such a new modus, the following section seeks to draw lessons from the case study on the connections between asset holdings and social relations, the combination of which was inflicted on the sukumbasis in Pyauli.

4.4 The complexity of the assetlessness-status nexus

Proponents of 'inclusive citizenship' generally fail to elucidate the relationship between social and economic ordering, and are prone to assume implicitly that the advancement of socio-cultural status and redistributive justice go hand in hand.¹⁴ To paraphrase Fraser who stresses, while promoting politics of recognition, the need to delve into the status-class interface, or what she terms the 'bivalent' forms of exclusion, existing studies tend to 'paint a night in which all cows are grey' (2003: 60). Green (2006) similarly argues for distinguishing, and for heeding the intermingling between, economic deprivation as a consequence of the absence of assets and/or incomes, and destitution arising from networks of social relations.

The sukumbasis in Pyauli were suffering from the combination of low levels of material asset holdings and their despised status as squatters, ethnic minorities or low-castes. The empirical examinations made in this paper indicate the intricate nexus between the two

¹⁴ One noted exception is Kabeer (2000) who draws on Fraser's notion of the 'bivalent' forms of exclusion (2003) to highlight the antinomy between the similar treatment required to address economic injustice, and the differentiated treatment called for to combat cultural injustice. At the same time, Kabeer proposes to redress this dilemma by adopting 'transformative approaches to economic and cultural injustice since both move away from the politics of special group treatment, and towards a more consistent notion of universality' (2000: 95). As such, Kabeer ends up assuming that the two can ultimately go hand-in-hand, disregarding the complexity and contingency, as described in this section, of the nexus between economic deprivation and socio-cultural subordination.

aspects of their predicament. First, assetlessness did not necessarily subjugate the sukumbasis to constrained positions, but opened up political opportunities for them to fulfil their citizenship. This double-edged nature of material subordination is attested to by their struggles over land rights and community forests, in which their status as the landless allowed them to put forward their claims. In line with Giddens' notion of the 'duality of structure' (1984), the structural disparity in landholdings served as 'structural properties' that allowed the sukumbasis to ally with local elites who often sought to derive the legitimacy of their leadership from patronage distribution.

Second, even when successfully negotiating the redistribution of assets, namely land and forests, the sukumbasis were prone, ironically, to embrace social standards such as the *corvée* practice, which had historically formed the foundations of the inequitable status order. The case study corroborates Laclau's conception of the 'dialectics of universality' (1996), that is the paradox that collective struggles for citizenship compel its claimants to assert the dominant norms of civility that fall inequitably on them. At the same time, as illustrated in the case study, the disciplinary power contained within the notion of citizenship also serves as leverage for them to gain recognition as citizens. Some of the sukumbasis in Pyauli, through conforming to the *corvée* tradition, obtained wider recognition as 'proper citizens' who embodied the norm of 'civility'.

While seeking to advance 'inclusive citizenship', therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to the complex and contingent nature of status-class interfaces. Its proponents should eschew a 'stable pyramid picture of subordination' (Fraser, 2003: 59), and thus avoid uncritically assuming the synergism between the lack of assets and the denial of voices. In this regard, it is also recommended that assetlessness is not equated simplistically with the absence of formal landholdings and other private properties but reconceptualised to encompass the institutional settings in which social relations are organised, as pointed out by Green (2006). The poor with similar levels of asset holdings do not necessarily engage in struggles for citizenship on equal terms, as attested to by the case of the sukumbasi 'community' composed of adversarial sub-groups. It is imperative, while promoting 'inclusive citizenship', to consider the dynamic regime of struggles among those with parity-impeding social backgrounds.

5. A way forward: Towards a non-teleological model of 'inclusive citizenship'

As described at the outset of this paper, existing studies tend to conjure up a teleological world-view polarising social exclusion and 'inclusive citizenship', and are liable to suggest moving from the former to the latter. The case study of the sukumbasis in Pyauli illustrates that social exclusion is not external but integral to citizenship. Their struggles for 'inclusive citizenship' entailed 'demarcating the outside from the inside' (Benhabib, 2001: 41) because they were composed of sub-groups of 'adversaries' with divergent socio-cultural backgrounds and political affiliations. The sukumbasis constituted a group with agonistic confrontations in that they held diverse, conflicting interests, and contested with one another for the attainment of their 'citizenship', though they shared the common form of identification as landless squatters. Could an external agent have facilitated different factions of the landless squatters to coalesce around a common feeling of predicament? What strategy could it have adopted to assist in redressing the agonistic nature of the sukumbasis' struggles?

A major question that must be posed in this regard is how feasible it would have been to counteract the overarching context in which different political parties were seeking to distribute patronage to their respective support bases, thus exacerbating tension and divide among the sukumbasis with different party affiliations.¹⁵ The squatters' agonistic

¹⁵ This does not mean that the advent of the multi-party system had only negative impacts on the lives

confrontations also manifested themselves along the lines of ethnicity (Pahadis and Tharus), caste (dalits and non-dalits), and legal status (Dheshis and other sukumbasis). What added to their adversarial relations was the 1990 transition to the multi-party system, which had opened up more space for marginal groups to contest power, as a result of the relaxation of political restrictions such as those hindering freedom of speech and association. How could an outside agency possibly contribute to reversing this larger historical process of the intensification of village politics?

Existing studies warn that the promotion of 'inclusive citizenship' does not always take place in favourable socio-political circumstances. For example, Gaventa stresses the 'importance of countervailing forms of power which help to open the public spaces and insure they do not become captured by existing power holders' (2006: 19), while Cornwall and Coelho argue for 'supporting processes of social mobilization ... ; instituting measures to address exclusionary elements ... ; and articulating participatory sphere institutions more effectively with other governance institutions' (2006b: 24–25). These assertions fail to provide a well-defined way forward in that they ignore the 'performative' nature of power, namely that '(a)gency exceeds the power by which it is enabled' (Butler, 1997b: 15), or that power not only serves as a condition of people's agency but is also turned into their own agency. Instead, those proponents of 'inclusive citizenship' uncritically uphold what Lukes (2005) terms the 'power-as-domination' perception that attributes power to dominant actors who exercise control over others, and thereby dichotomises domination and emancipation.

Power does not always subjugate the underprivileged into subordinate positions, but can also be turned into an advantage. This paper attests to the need to take into consideration this 'performativity' of power dynamics when seeking to address the agonistic nature of 'inclusive citizenship'. Although collective struggles by the sukumbasis are bound to draw a line between 'us' and 'them', thereby privileging some squatters over 'immanent others', the frontier between them was neither fixed nor uni-dimensional. The arbitrary nature of group formation alienated certain groups, but also allowed them to call it into question and to stake their claims for inclusion. Accordingly, different sub-groups of the sukumbasis, even the most disadvantaged of the sukumbasis such as the Dheshis, were ceaselessly waging their struggles in various spheres. This double-edged nature of 'the logics of alterity' brought about a complex constellation of unstable and multitudinous lines between inclusion and exclusion.

Moreover, the 'performativity' of power is also evidenced in the ambivalence inherent in the sukumbasis' subjugation as 'citizen-subjects'. As illustrated in the case study, ironically, the sukumbasis were compelled, while claiming their rights as citizens, to conform to dominant social norms such as the ongoing party politics and the corvée tradition which had relegated them to disadvantaged positions. At the same time, their subjection as 'citizen-subjects' often played into the hands of the landless for whom it also served as leverage to gain recognition as 'fully-fledged citizens'. The *sukumabasis* felt that their labour contributions to public works and their engagements with local politicians represented an opportunity to allay the ill feeling held by their neighbours, who generally did not regard them as 'permanent residents'. In line with the Janus-faced nature of 'citizen-subjects' (Cruikshank 1999), their subjection to social standards was also instrumental in securing help from local political leaders in their struggles for their rights as villagers.

No sukumbasis in Payuli 'came into being without power, but that coming into being involved the dissimulation of power', to paraphrase Butler (1997b: 15–16). It would therefore not have been sensible for an outside agency to have attempted to regulate the power dynamics, on the pretext that they needed be ameliorated to allow the sukumbasis to coalesce around a

of the sukumbasis. On the contrary, as stated in Section 4.2, the multi-party system compelled local politicians to cater to the plight of the landless while canvassing the village for support. This offered more room for the sukumbasis to claim their entitlements, as attested to by their struggles over land rights (see Section 4.2, especially Footnote 11).

common cause, contrary to the assertions by Gaventa (2006) or Cornwall and Coelho (2006b), referred to above. The sukumbasis' collective struggles were bound to subjugate them to dominant societal norms, and also to entail the exclusion of some of their 'compatriots'. These 'unintended' outcomes of their actions were at the same time turned into a blessing for the sukumbasis. Rather than preconceiving what constitutes 'unfavourable' circumstances, a more down-to-earth strategy would be to assess both the opportunities and the limitations arising from the sukumbasis' daily endeavours, and seek to build on and complement the double-edged nature of their ongoing struggles. To avoid imposing analysts' presumptions on the contingent and unpredictable nature of citizenship claims, an 'ascending' approach¹⁶ is called for to delve into the micro-level – the inconspicuous practices of different actors. The concluding section draws further implications for the promotion of 'inclusive citizenship'.

6. Conclusions: Rethinking 'inclusive citizenship' as a never-ending process

A collective form of identification, such as that of the poor, landless squatters or women, is bound to encompass diverse forms of individuality, and concomitantly entails agonistic confrontations as the fundamental condition of existence. This was the case even with the *sukumabasis* in Payuli, who experienced similar magnitudes of chronic poverty and ostensibly should have been able to find a common ground for collective action. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, while some analysts point out that a political coalition is not necessarily a monolithic arena, their argument needs to be extended further, to heed the existence of 'immanent others' who are not entirely outside the realm but are marginalised in collective struggles for citizenship. However, existing studies tend to hold a teleological view that social exclusion is combated through the promotion of 'inclusive citizenship'. Underlying such a purposive perception is the uncritical assumption that the two dominant views of 'citizenship', namely one based on liberalism and the other on civic republicanism,¹⁷ are compatible with each other, though the two positions have long been in contention in the academic literature. The expression of the common good is considered to be reconcilable with individual liberty, as exemplified by Kabeer's assertion that 'while the capacity to exercise agency at the individual level may be an important precondition, it is the collective struggles of excluded groups which have historically driven processes of social transformation' (2005: 22).¹⁸

However, in light of the agonistic confrontations inherent in struggles for 'inclusive citizenship', it is evident that, as pointed out by Mouffe (2000:44), individual liberty and

¹⁶ This term is drawn from Foucault (1980: 98–99). Foucault argues that power does not fall into the hands of particular agents, but permeates and circulates in society in such a manner as to subject both the 'powerful' and the 'underprivileged' to incessant power struggles. One should therefore conduct an 'ascending' analysis that starts by examining the micro-power experienced by different individuals or groups, instead of a conventional 'descending' approach that investigates which actors possess power and what strategies they pursue. For an 'ascending' examination of Nepal's development policy, see Masaki (2007).

¹⁷ The former view defines citizenship as the capacity of each person, as a free and equal individual, to form and pursue his/her own interpretation of the good. Civic republicanism, on the other hand, places emphasis on an ethico-political bond among participants in a political community prior to and independent of individual desires and interests.

¹⁸ This does not mean that Kabeer fails to ignore the tension between individual liberty and collective rights. On the contrary, Kabeer warns that the dominant segments of minority groups potentially reap benefits from collective struggles (2005: 11-15). At the same time, Kabeer's assertion does not go as far as pointing to the fundamental impossibility of articulating communal demands without exclusion. As implied in her argument quoted in the main text, Kabeer instead envisages the ideal of 'inclusive citizenship' as the realisation of a 'rational consensus', thereby lapsing into what Mouffe terms the 'consensus model' (2000).

communitarianism are in permanent tension and cannot be fully reconciled. An alternative conception of citizenship is called for if we are to take into account the impossibility of realising a fully constituted political community. In this regard, it is helpful to draw on Mouffe's 'radical democratic conception of citizenship' (2005: 82–86) that elucidates the antinomy between liberalism and communitarianism. According to this alternative view, every collective endeavour to demand rights requires the designation of a 'constitutive outside' that enables the delimitation of its frontier and thus makes its existence possible.¹⁹ This assertion resonates with the 'logics of alterity' repeatedly taken up in this paper. Once we concede that any group formation entails the constitution of 'immanent others', our concern would no longer be the final attainment of a political community. We should instead see the common good as a 'vanishing point' (*ibid.*: 85), something which we are required to ceaselessly refer to, but cannot reach. The agenda of 'inclusive citizenship' would then become a 'social imagery' (*ibid.*) which we continue to seek, while knowing it is a never-ending process.

This alternative notion of citizenship resonates with the statement by Jacques Derrida that 'justice is the experience of the impossible', quoted at the beginning of this paper. Indeed, during the fieldwork for this paper, I realised that it was impossible, not only to identify a common good in the interest of the entire sukumbasi community, but also to set a clear-cut boundary of the 'membership' of that community. In Pyauli, villagers often said that there existed 'professional' sukumbasis. Some possessed land outside the village, but encroached on public land in Pyauli to further expand their asset holdings, while others speculatively occupied vacant plots, with the intention of reselling them after securing official permits to stay. It was not easy to deduce who actually had hidden agendas, nor was it considered imperative to demarcate 'bogus' sukumbasis from other 'genuine' squatters. Even the former type of 'pseudo-squatters' would not have become 'professionals', if they had had an alternative source of livelihood. Given the sheer magnitude of chronic poverty in the locality, I felt hesitant to put blame squarely on 'professional' sukumbasis.

What is more important is to come to terms with the 'performative' nature of collective action. To use the phrase by Bhabha, quoted in the section on analytical framework, a group identity is 'continually, contingently, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference' (1996: 219). Accordingly, proponents of 'inclusive citizenship' must abstain from projecting their own classificatory schemas onto the uncertainty and complexity surrounding the lives of the disadvantaged. The case study of the sukumbasis in Pyauli illustrates the double-edged problematic of group struggles for 'inclusive citizenship' in which both inclusion and exclusion are interwoven in a complex manner. It is not necessarily feasible to determine clearly whether a particular course of action is 'beneficial' or 'unfavourable' to a group of deprived people. What is seemingly exclusionary for a certain group is turned into its advantage, as illustrated by the *corvée* tradition that fell inequitably on the sukumbasis, or a claim for land and forests that proceeded at the expense of some segments of the sukumbasis.

If 'justice is the experience of the impossible', which we ceaselessly refer to, but cannot identify its final definition, it becomes all the more crucial that an outside agent plays a facilitative role, in such a manner as to allow marginal actors to explore their own course of action. This does not mean that we should bow to 'voluntarism', championing human agency, nor dismiss 'determinism' regarding social actors' structural locations to determine their subject positions. On the contrary, it is imperative to pursue our commitment to combat oppression and discrimination, especially when dealing with the chronically poor who suffer from intractable poverty, such as the sukumbasis in Pyauli. Outsiders should instead balance the need to redress the predicaments of the deprived, with the contingent and unpredictable nature of struggles for 'inclusive citizenship'. To avoid imposing unfounded assumptions onto informal flows of social interactions, it is important for an external agency to seek to build upon the opportunities arising from marginal groups' ongoing struggles, while making up for

¹⁹ For a case study of such discussion, in relation to pastoralists in Africa, see Hickey (2007).

the limitations of their daily endeavours to overcome entrenched inequalities. An 'ascending' approach is therefore called for, as referred to at the end of the preceding section,²⁰ to delve into the micro-power experienced by different actors, and then to conceive an overarching strategy.

It is to be noted that this paper does not intend to downplay unreservedly the mass social movements, in which minorities collectively seek to rectify their status as non-citizens, drawing on an essentialist category of human identity. As pointed out by Spivak who proposes the notion of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak, 1987), it is crucial for a minority group, especially at the initial stages of struggles when its 'inferior' status is kept off the political agenda, to define its collective identity as a 'natural fact', and to challenge the pre-emptive and violent circumscriptions of who counts and who does not count as 'human'.²¹ At the same time, for citizenship movements to lead to a long-term, enduring solution, it is also imperative that group identity does not get fixed as an 'essential' category, as this could lead to agonistic confrontations being ignored.

Similarly, this paper is not intended to invalidate the types of initiatives referred to at the onset of this paper, such as the Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs), bottom-up planning exercises at local government levels, and NGO-assisted advocacy campaigns and social movements. These programmes, aimed at broader institutional and policy changes, can give rise to a favourable background, as illustrated by the case of Pyauli where the country-wide governance reform in 1990 had provided a fertile ground for the sukumbasis' struggles. What is required of proponents of 'inclusive citizenship' is to engage with the 'experience of the impossible', and to cease expecting to attain desired ends through particular measures. This requires paying attention, beyond institutional and policy initiatives, to citizens' actual 'polyvalent, multiple, minor, tactical engagements', not because they must be regulated for the final achievement of 'inclusive citizenship', but because they represent both opportunities and constraints for people themselves to build on and tackle, to relentlessly pursue the ultimate and impossible goals of justice and solidarity.

²⁰ See Footnote 16.

²¹ In the case of Nepal, the government's policy on landless squatters had historically been geared to controlling illegal encroachment on government land, and thus to discouraging the landless from establishing permanent settlements. In the early 1990s, however, owing to the mushrooming growth of peasant movements throughout the country, the government was compelled to start adopting a conciliatory approach of allowing sukumbasis to squat on their land. The agonistic struggles over land rights in Pyauli, described in Section 4.1, were made possible by this overarching change of the thrust of the government's stance towards landless squatters.

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