Windows into a revolution: ethnographies of Maoism in South Asia

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A red corridor stretching from Nepal in the North, to the state of Andhra Pradesh, India, in the South, grips the public imagination in South Asia. Despite the collapse of socialism and the demise of communist governments across the world, in South Asia, Maoist movements have (re)emerged as a significant force in the region. India and Nepal have had people across the country mobilised in protracted guerrilla war aimed at annihilating class enemies, creating liberated zones and seizing state power through the barrel of the gun.

In Nepal, a ‘People’s War’ was declared in February 1996. The objective was to overthrow the old order, which included monarchic and privileged rule by an establishment of landed families and to replace it with a New People’s Democracy. The following years saw the spread of the Maoists from their strongholds in Nepal’s mid-western districts, attacks on the Royal Nepalese Army,¹ the deployment of the army and the suspension of democratic powers. In 2003 and 2004, Nepal had the highest number of disappearances in the world (Human Rights Watch 2004), and more than 14,000 people have lost their lives since 1996. However, from November 2005, the Maoists were set to formally shape the country’s political future as they collaborated with seven mainstream political parties to agree on a programme intended to restore democracy. Following a successful People’s Movement in April 2006, King Gyanendra, who had staged a coup in February 2005, relinquished power. The government and the Maoists signed a peace accord in November 2006, declaring a formal end to the 10-year insurgency. And finally, in April 2008, the Maoists won a stunning victory gaining

¹ The Royal Nepalese Army is also referred to as the Royal Nepal Army.

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the highest number of seats in the election for the new constituent assembly. The Maoist supremo 'Prachanda' (Pushpa Kamal Dahal) led a coalition government between August 2005 and May 2009 before resigning in protest when the president overruled a cabinet decision to sack the army chief. The Maoists continued, however, to commit to the democratic process.

In India, where South Asian Maoists find their roots, the movement has had a tumultuous presence. Although there were earlier communist uprisings, the Naxalbari movement, which began in the 1960s in West Bengal, is heralded as the beginning of the Maoist revolution in India. However, the Indian Maoists have not yet played a comparable role to their Nepali counterparts in shaping their country's prevailing national political agenda. The Indian state has, by and large, pursued a neoliberal agenda since the mid-1990s, propped up by the globally seductive images of 'India Shining' (the 2003–2004 Bharatiya Janata Party government's political slogan). However, the Maoist movement had made sufficient progress by 2006 to be declared the 'single biggest security threat' the country has ever faced by India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. As this volume goes to press, a military offensive of an unprecedented scale against the Maoists has begun to wipe them out.

Over the years, the Maoist movements in South Asia have attracted much media and scholarly attention. Several excellent books on the history and politics of the movements have been written by activists, ex-Maoists, journalists, academics and state officials (these include Banerjee 1980; Bhatia 2000; Chakravarti 2007; Ghosh 1974; Gupta 2004; Hutt 2004; Ogura 2007a, b; Singh 1995; Sinha 1989; Thapa 2003; Thapa and with Sijapati 2004; Yami 2007). This volume aims to contribute to this existing scholarship in two primary domains: first, by considering the Nepali and Indian case in one frame, and second, by focusing on the everyday experiences of the movements through detailed case studies which draw on long-term extended fieldwork and analyses in areas affected by the spread of the Maoist revolutions.

The comparative project

This volume is one of the first to begin with the premise that the Nepali and Indian experience should be considered in a comparative perspective. Undoubtedly, there are marked differences between the Maoist movements in the two countries. Different histories of state formation have produced differing strategies. Even after the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990, it was possible for the Maoists to represent Nepal as still being dominated by the King and a 'feudal' elite. Since the beginning, their campaign was against the monarchy even though violent confrontation did not escalate until 2001, after the Royal Massacre in which King Birendra and all his family was killed (Lecomte-Tilouine 2004). In India, a parliamentary democracy, the initial focus of the Maoist movement was against the rural landed classes. Territorially, there are also important differences. Much of Nepal's inhabited landscape consists of terrain that is difficult to reach even by foot. The forests of the mid-hills are, therefore, ideal territory for establishing and defending guerilla base areas (Gellner 2003; Ramirez 2004). In India, by contrast,

such terrain is limited to small parts of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh (Banerjee 2006).

There are differences too in the organisation of the Maoists: The Nepali Maoists were for years considered to be more united than their Indian counterparts, whose most powerful groups—the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the People's War Group (CPI (ML) People's War)—only united in 2004. These differences have also been reflected in the extent of war in each country. Nepal has experienced a countrywide decade-long Maoist insurgency, whereas India has seen pockets of insurgency. This has meant that Nepal, especially between 2001 and 2006, was entirely militarised in ways not experienced by the Maoist areas of India. Moreover, as the turn of events since 2005 in Nepal has shown, the Maoists in the two countries have initiated differing degrees of integration into official national political processes. There were certainly divisions within the Maoist leadership over this issue in both countries. In India, for example, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation participates in democratic electoral politics, while retaining the aim of a revolution. Nevertheless, the decision of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to work within the multi-party democratic system and lay down their guns, commended by many as the 'Prachanda Path' to a democratic republic based upon the concrete analysis of the specific conditions that exist in Nepal, was also condemned by the most powerful of the Indian Maoist groups, the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

Despite these differences, there are significant reasons for treating the Indian and Nepali experiences together. First, the Nepali Maoists emerged out of intimate dialogue and debate with their Indian counterparts, and many Nepali Maoist leaders were educated in Indian universities where they engaged in radical politics. Second, the fragmentation and differences within the Maoist movements in both countries, but especially in India, mean that there may be greater similarities between particular factions operating in different countries than there are within the same country. For instance, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation is keenly observing the recent developments in Nepal, as a comparative lesson for its political vision of the future (Jha 2007). Third, both countries have followed policies of economic liberalisation at around the same time (from the late eighties in Nepal and from the early nineties in India), the same period in which the Maoists have gained influence in both countries.

Fourth, historically and culturally, the two countries have a shared history. It is, to a certain extent, an accident of history that Nepal ended up as a separate nation-state. Therefore, historically embedded cross-border sociological issues, such as caste, mean that it makes sense to ask comparative questions about that issue in both countries. Caste and ethnicity were important dynamics within the Maoist movements in both India and Nepal. Fifth, our collective project shows that there are often greater similarities in the experience of the spread of the Maoist movements between sociologically similar regions of Nepal and India than there are between different regions within the same country. For instance, it makes greater sociological sense to compare the predominantly Magar ethnic areas of Rolpa and Rukum in Nepal, where the Maoist movement began in the country, with the Indian *adivasi* areas of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra than it makes sense to

compare, for instance, *adivasi* areas of Jharkhand with the landlord-landless structures of Central Bihar. As we suggest later in this introduction, making this comparison does not cast ethnic groups or tribal peoples as natural vessels of a revolutionary consciousness, but rather acknowledges that in both Nepal and India, these marginalised populations live in terrain which is difficult to access by the state and is well suited to guerrilla warfare. In addition, there may be substantial sociological similarities between the Maoist-affected areas of each country in terms of ethnicity and caste hierarchies.

Sixth, in both the Indian and the Nepali cases, the movement was launched by highly educated middle class leaders who were often urban based (though nevertheless had important networks at the village level). As Philippe Ramirez (2004, 233) has put it, the political leadership that became the vanguard of the insurgency did not spring out of a peasant upheaval, but preceded it. While this leadership needs to mobilise and voice the concerns of the people for whom the struggle was intended, their sociological and class differences mean that there is a possible risk that the leadership will substitute itself for the base.

Considering the Nepali and Indian situations together reveals comparative issues which might also emerge in any context of radical political mobilisation, not necessarily just those specific to the South Asian context. For instance, one such set of issues that has emerged from our collaborative project is the importance of youth aspiration, modernity and gender roles in radical political movements. Another is the significance of ancestral conflicts and earlier histories of political mobilisation in the spread of Maoist movements. These, and others, are issues that we turn towards the end of this introduction.

An anthropology of revolution

Apart from its consideration of the Nepal and Indian experiences in one frame, our volume is one of the first to focus specifically on the everyday experiences of the Maoist movements in South Asia through detailed and intensive field studies. Our concern is not primarily with the Maoist viewpoint, but with the lives of ordinary people living in Maoist areas. In fact, many articles here (Shah; de Sales; Thapa et al.) reinforce the perspective that there are blurred boundaries between state, society and revolution—a lesson that anthropology has shown us in relation to the difficulty of drawing lines between state and society (Fuller and Harriss 2001; Gupta 1995). To say that our primary interest here is ordinary people living amidst the revolution is to specify that our main concern is not with Maoist writing and literature and/or the official histories of the movements. Nor is it with explaining the broad political and economic patterns that have given rise to Maoism in South Asia. We are producing a sociological analysis of the spread of Maoism in South Asia by tracing some of its effects on the lives of ordinary people living amidst its areas of proliferation. This may, of course, involve people who have joined the Maoists, are in the process of doing so, or have left them, but our project is much broader than just concern for these individuals. We are interested in the continuities and transformations of the social, economic and political lives of a range of people

living within the sphere of influence of the Maoist movements. We believe that this requires an approach that does not prioritise a study of the Maoists *qua* Maoists, but rather one that tries to understand them within a much wider context of everyday socio-politics, livelihood strategies and state-society relations. Essentially, we are offering an ethnographic insight into the experiences of the Maoist movement: an anthropology of a revolutionary situation.

The efforts to bring the ‘political’ back into anthropology in the seventies set the stage for a historically engaged anthropological approach that analytically addressed issues of domination, resistance, power and transformation from the perspective of marginalised communities (Comaroff 1985; Scott 1985; Taussig 1980 are key examples). As a result, in recent years, we have also seen an emergence of subjects traditionally at the margins of anthropology—an emerging ‘anthropology of the state’ (on South Asia, see for example Brass 1997; Corbridge et al. 2005; Fuller and Benei 2001; Gellner 2003) and an ‘anthropology of violence’ (Brass 1997, 2003; Das 1995, 2007; Hansen 2001 on South Asia).

Some of the key proponents of this politically engaged anthropology were in fact concerned with rebellion. However, in recent years, we have seen a move away from scholarly concern with such radical political transformation. This shift is partly a result of the development of scholarly interest in everyday forms of resistance (Scott 1985) and its critiques (Abu Lughod 1990; Mahmood 2001; Ortnor 1995), as well as in the field that lies between mass revolution and small scale resistance—social movements, ‘direct action’ or ‘dissent’. This shift has led some scholars to argue that the old dream of total transformation may have faded in recent years (for example, Fox and Starn 1997). Nevertheless, as we are witnessing around the globe, the argument for radical social transformation through revolutionary movements was very much a part of the twentieth century and has clearly not disappeared with the dawn of the new millennium.

If we take a revolutionary situation as one in which the proponents of revolution argue for radical social transformation and through mechanisms which are anti-state, and where people break off from previous networks of support in order to create new ones, then anthropologists who have researched amidst such contexts have much to contribute. These include situations as diverse as the Sierra Leone revolutionary united front (Jackson 2004; Richards 1996), the Palestinian liberation struggle (Bornstein 2001; Jean-Klein 2000; Kelly 2006), the liberation struggles of Zimbabwe (Kriger 1992; Lan 1985; Ranger 1985), the Maoist revolutions of Peru (Starn 1999; Stern 1998; Taylor 2006), the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua (Hale 1994; Lancaster 1992; Rodgers 2009) and the guerilla movement in Guatemala (Falla 1994; Stoll 1993), to Mao’s Chinese revolution (Bianco 2001; Hinton 1966; Perry 1980).

The literature on such revolutionary situations from political science, governance, crisis states and peace and conflict studies is vast. However, the existing literature is rarely interested in an analysis of the direct voices of people mobilised and affected by revolution, and such voices are generally absent in political science studies of revolution. In fact, some political scientists even argue that revolutionary processes and outcomes are determined by structures (rather than human agency) and that it is thus irrelevant to seek the experiences of the participants (see

especially Skocpol 1979). Others, who argue that human agency determines revolutionary outcome, generally infer ideas about experiences and action from secondary material.

Clearly, fieldwork in revolutionary and violent contexts is challenging (Hoffman 2003; Kovats-Bernat 2002; Peritore 1990; Pettigrew et al. 2004), and many of those limited number of anthropologists who have worked in revolutionary contexts have to rely on historical sources and oral histories. There is a serious lack of detailed field-level data and analysis not only of the Maoist movements in South Asia, but also of revolutionary movements in other parts of the world. Most anthropological work is done post-conflict, when the guns are silent. In contrast, most of the contributors to this volume have conducted research in revolutionary situations. This volume provides a rare opportunity to bring together scholars embarking on a collective project to understand different phases of the Maoist movements in different regions through an analysis of grounded field-level data based on detailed and ongoing fieldwork.

Maoism in South Asia

Our purpose is not, of course, to provide a history of Maoism in South Asia. Nevertheless, some historical context provides essential background information to the articles presented here. Triggered by the split between the Moscow and Peking factions in the Communist Movement internationally, and inspired by the ongoing Cultural Revolution in China, the South Asian history of the Maoist movements can be traced back to the mid-1960s when communist revolutionaries broke away from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) to form the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (CPI(ML)). Led by West Bengali intellectuals, Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal, the CPI(ML) proposed armed struggle and rejected the parliamentary route to power. Like Mao Tse-Tung, their revolutionary hero, they believed that the rural peasantry (as opposed to the urban proletariat) should be the major revolutionary force to overthrow the government and the ruling classes who were responsible for their plight. The Maoist route that they envisioned explicitly connected political ideology to military strategy. They sought to launch a ‘people’s war’ of the peasantry, through the barrel of the gun.

The Naxalbari uprising of 1967, from which the Indian Maoists get the name ‘Naxalites’, is often regarded as the start of the Indian Maoist movement. From Naxalbari village in West Bengal, Majumdar and Sanyal led a violent uprising in which peasants attacked local landlords, forcibly occupied land, burnt records and cancelled old debts. The overall goal, as stated in the CPI(ML) programme of 1970, and reiterated again in the CPI(Maoist) programme of 2004, was to form liberated areas in rural zones and then encircle and capture the cities. This campaign was also initiated in the forested and hilly tracts of Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh, Koraput in Orissa and in the plains of Bhojpur in Bihar and Birbhum in West Bengal. In these regions, the Naxalites tried to draw on histories of earlier peasant movements (for example, the 1940s communist movements of Tebhaga in West Bengal and the Telengana in Andhra Pradesh). Landlords were driven out of villages, people’s

courts were set up to redistribute land and deliver justice, and there were programmes to initiate the mass mobilisation of the rural poor. These achievements went hand in hand with a form of class struggle that entailed the tactical strategy of ‘annihilation of class enemies’: the dissolution of what the Naxalites called ‘the feudal classes’, such as landlords, rich peasants, government employees, rival party members, as well as anyone suspected of being a police informer or agent.

The history of the Maoists in Nepal is intimately tied to India. Against the backdrop of the Rana autocratic regime in Nepal, the Communist Party of Nepal was founded in Calcutta, India in 1949. Reflecting splits in the Communist Party of India (Thapa and with Sijapati 2004, 23), the 1960s and 1970s saw multiple factions emerging in the Communist Party of Nepal. Influenced by the developments in Naxalbari immediately across the border in India, one of the most important factions to emerge in the early 1970s was the ‘Jhapeli group’ from the district of Jhapa. Following the doctrines developed by Charu Mazumdar in Naxalbari, India, the Jhapelis were Maoists who eventually abandoned their adherence to Naxalism after the arrest and death of five members. The ‘Jhapelis’ formed the nucleus of the 1978 Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), which has today become the largest mainstream communist group, now known as the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (Hoftun et al. 1999, 84).

The party that eventually became the CPN (Maoist), hereafter denoted as CPN (M), had its roots in another communist faction, the CPN (Fourth Congress). But while the CPN (UML) emerged through the continuous amalgamation of the various groups and became the largest party in the post-1990 period, the Fourth Congress was riven by factional disputes; by the time of the 1990 democracy movement, it had split into three groups.

In India, massive state repression, which included the imprisonment of most of the Naxalite leaders, as well as factionalism within the Maoist ranks, meant that by 1973, Maoist activity in the base areas of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal had largely subsided. While different Maoist factions chose different methods, guerrilla warfare re-emerged in the late seventies in the forested areas of Burdwan in West Bengal, from which the movement spread in the eighties to the central plains of Bihar, and into sociologically similar areas of northern Jharkhand. In the 1980s, the Andhra Pradesh Maoist groups also retaliated against the police repression they faced. In the 1990s, the Maoists increased their spread over central and eastern India, in areas often represented as the dark underbelly of the tribal heartlands of the country. Some of these areas became guerrilla zones, regions where the Maoists made every attempt to prevent police and forest officials from entering and created their own ‘people’s rule’. Significantly, in 2004, while an attempted peace process in Andhra Pradesh broke down (Balagopal 2005; Kannabiran et al. 2005), the Maoist Communist Centre and the People’s War combined to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist), the largest Maoist rebel group in India.

Many commentators acknowledge the Maoists’ positive achievements: confiscating and redistributing surplus land, achieving higher agricultural wages, eliminating the stranglehold of landlords, moneylenders and contractors, increasing protection of locals from harassment by forest and police officials, heightening

political consciousness and empowering the poor (Balagopal 2006; Banerjee 1980, 2002, 2006; Bhatia 2000, 2005). But these accomplishments, often engineered by the mass organizations of the Maoists, came hand in hand with the high human costs of the increasingly militant activity of the red guerilla squads (to annihilate class enemies) and the ensuing severe police repression (Balagopal 2006; Bhatia 2006). There were heavy casualties on all sides. Most recently, since 2005, Dantewada district in Chhattisgarh has clandestinely sponsored a counter-insurgency through the production of a movement called the Salwa Judum or 'the purification hunt'. The Salwa Judum displaced at least 30,000 people, put them into refugee camps and killed many suspected Maoists (Independent Citizen's Initiative 2006; People's Union of Civil Liberties 2006, see also Jason Miklian's article in this volume). Now, the Maoist threat is seen by the Indian government to have overtaken all other internal concerns, allegedly having an underground military force of at least 25,000 people active in 223 districts across 20 States, including Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, West Bengal, Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh. In May 2009, The Indian government banned the Maoists as 'terrorists,' justifying rising state repression not accountable to any law. 100,000 troops in addition to the existing paramilitary and police forces are on the way to Eastern India, in particular Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, as this volume goes to press.

In Nepal, the Maoists faced a different fate. Against the backdrop of a strong monarchy, the seventies and eighties saw the various communist factions in Nepal fighting for a multi-party democracy to achieve a new people's democracy (Hachhethu 2002, 2003; Hoftun et al. 1999, 238). The more radical leftist parties, including two of the three factions of the erstwhile CPN (Fourth Congress), however, did not join the left alliance that had teamed up with the Nepali Congress in the 1990 movement for the restoration of democracy. The third faction led by Nirmal Lama joined the ULF. When democracy was restored in 1990, with the Nepali Congress and their left partners forming the interim government, these radicals rejected the November 1990 constitution, which they saw as democratically inadequate. Instead, they demanded a constituent assembly with a view to drawing up a new constitution. But despite their protestations, a constituent assembly was not deemed necessary by the ruling alliance. Thus, in November 1990, two of the factions merged to become the CPN (Unity Centre), while a splinter group under the leadership of Baburam Bhattarai joined them from the third faction. The underground Unity Centre floated their political front called the United People's Front, Nepal (UPFN) and contested the 1991 elections. They won just nine seats in a house of 205, but this still made them the third largest party. Following the election, some of the smaller communist parties also became increasingly sceptical about the potential achievements of the parliamentary route. A group from the Unity Centre broke away in 1994, and in 1996, it renamed itself as CPN (Maoist).

The 'People's War' was officially declared in February 1996, when the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) presented a 40-point list of demands to the Nepal government. The points dealt largely with rectifying economic and social injustices, abolishing monarchy and establishing a constituent assembly and were described by several non-partisan commentators in terms such as "reasonable and

not dissimilar in spirit to the election manifestos of mainstream parties” (Thapa and with Sijapati 2004, 53). When these demands were not addressed, the Maoists escalated their underground war.

From their original strongholds in the mid-Western districts of Rolpa and Rukum (where they had captured power through the ballot box in the 1991/1992 local elections and were therefore confident of their support), the Maoists slowly began to establish “base areas” elsewhere in Nepal (c.f. Ogura 2007a, b; Ogura 2008). The conflict escalated after major police operations in 1998, with frequent skirmishes between the Maoists and the police throughout the country. It reached a new height in November 2001, when the guerrillas withdrew from a several month-long ceasefire and initiated a series of attacks across the country including ones targeted at the Royal Nepalese Army. This confrontation marked a departure: for the first time, the Maoists had directly challenged the army (rather than just the police), and had demonstrated their now substantial strength outside of their known strongholds in the western part of the country. In response, the government imposed a state of emergency on 26 November 2001, which effectively suspended most civil rights and, for the first time, deployed the army to fight the Maoists. January 2003 saw a second ceasefire called between the parties, and a schedule for peace talks was established. The talks broke down in August 2003 when both sides refused to budge from their opposing positions on the issue of a constituent assembly. The period that followed saw a resurgence of violence. Advocacy groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have extensively documented the human rights violations committed by both the Maoists and state forces (Amnesty International 2002a, b, 2003). Government security forces were responsible for the most disappearances. The disappeared were often kept in informal places of detention such as government buildings and army training centres, which made it extremely difficult for family members or lawyers to locate them. Approximately, 1000 people remain unaccounted for. The Maoists also perpetrated serious abuses and executed suspected informants, political activists, government officials and people who refused extortion demands. King Gyanendra assumed direct power in February 2005, and strikes and protests against royal rule increased culminating in a People’s Movement (*Jan Andolan*) in April 2006 led by a wide range of civil society organisations and political parties. The Maoists participated in the *Jan Andolan* although there was no official collaboration between them and the Seven Party Alliance (SPA).

By April 2006, the King had relinquished all political power. A negotiated ceasefire in May 2006 was followed by a peace accord signed by the government and the Maoists in November 2006. The Maoists declared a formal end to the 10-year insurgency. In January 2007, the Maoists entered parliament under the terms of a temporary constitution, but elections to a constituent assembly were twice rescheduled. Insisting on the abolition of the monarchy, the Maoists withdrew from government in September 2007, until December 2007 when the parliament approved their proposal. Elections for the constituent assembly were finally held in April 2008, and the Maoists emerged as the largest party, although with 220 out of 601 seats, they did not secure a majority. The constituent assembly voted to end the monarchy at its first sitting and in May 2008 the country became

the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal with Ram Baran Yadav of the Nepali Congress as its first president. In August 2008, the Maoist leader Prachanda formed a government which the Nepali Congress refused to join and went into opposition. Eight months later, Prachanda resigned in protest against the President's rejection of a cabinet decision to sack the army chief. The mainstream communist party leader (of the CPN-UML) became the new Prime Minister. Nepal continues to face many challenges. Limited progress has been made in writing a new constitution, land seized during the conflict has generally not been returned, the future of the two armies is still unclear and the Maoists have not totally committed to non-violence.

The question of sides

What does it mean to write an anthropology of a revolutionary context? In a field so politically charged and in which there are huge personal and emotional investments, an important question that may be posed to anthropologists working on the Maoist movement is, 'whose side are you on?' This question became the basis of extensive discussion at the workshop where the chapters that formed this volume were discussed.

The articles in this volume show that when we get into the complex and ambiguous contexts of fieldwork, there are no straightforward answers to this question. While some of us might have embarked on our field research with some sympathy towards the Maoist cause, to contributing to a militant anthropology (Scheper-Hughes 1995), where our commitment is not just to be friends and patrons but also comrades, others may have begun with no clear ideological position, while still others may have started out with a clearly anti-activist stance. Yet, many of us found that we had to adjust and refine our positions over time. The complexities of the ground realities often threw clear-cut boundaries back in our face. From the families that we grew to care for, whose lives we were trying to understand, we might, for instance, find one son joining an extreme left-wing cadre, while the other is attracted to the extreme Hindu right wing. Later, down the line, we might find that the son who joined the Maoists was accused of being a police informer by his neighbours. What does a militant anthropology mean in this context? At the ground level, there are often no clear answers to who is a Maoist supporter, who is state-affiliated and who is neither. The articles in this volume show how it is not easy to homogenise 'the people' that are the targets of Maoist support. While some might be caught in the crossfire, others are inspired by revolutionary ideology or may be in search of certainty. Still others might be using the movements or accusations of police informer status as new means to settle old disputes, and others may be strongly against the Maoists. And many more may ignore the Maoists in certain spheres of life while supporting them in others. These complex realities cannot be translated into a simplistic ideal of a militant anthropology.

Nevertheless, our writing is clearly a political intervention. If we take sides at all, they are those of understanding and sharing the multiple and varied life experiences of the people we work with, live with and care for—our adopted families, friends,

colleagues and informants. Our commitment, then, is to an ethnographically grounded account of the complexities of the lives and the decisions that the people we live with face amidst a revolutionary context, understanding the continuities and transformations in their lives, and the contradictions and tensions which result. This is not just storytelling for the sake of storytelling, but a record of the lives of people whose stories and points of views are rarely heard, who get homogenised in most other accounts—from both Maoist and anti-Maoist perspectives—as ‘the people’.

Windows into a revolution

Our aim is to offer a series of windows into various areas in different stages of mobilisation and transformation into what are or may become revolutionary bases. For instance, Sumanta Banerjee’s article gives us a unique glimpse of his personal transformation into an activist in the seventies in West Bengal. This is one of the earliest moments of the South Asian Maoist movements, and like Henrike Donner’s contribution, Banerjee’s article sheds some light on the sociological characteristics and romantic ideals of the early activists in setting up the first revolutionary bases in India. George Kunnath’s article, on the other hand, looks at the effects of the transformations of Maoist methods since the eighties and into the new millennium in a village in Central Bihar, a Maoist stronghold. Here, he traces some of the shifting tensions that develop between strategies of mass mobilisation and armed action as they were experienced by *dalits*. Amit Desai’s article concentrates on a later phase of the movement in Maharashtra, where for many *adivasis*, the presence of the Maoists brought the police closer at some cost (c.f. Balagopal 2006). And Jason Miklian looks at the production of a counter-insurgency programme in areas of Chhattisgarh, where the Maoists have long had a stronghold. Comparatively, Alpa Shah’s article explores the early spread of the movement in Jharkhand, where in 2000, there was little sign of mass mobilisation, and the Maoist spread was transforming the political economy of violence, disrupting previously taken-for-granted social relations.

In Nepal, Sara Shneiderman’s article focuses on the emergence of political consciousness among Thangmi villagers that was foundational for the development of the Maoist movement in the area. While Anne de Sales article on research in Rukum district focuses both on the early stage of the movement when mobilisation was taking place through ancestral conflicts as well as a later period of research in the village (in 2005) when the Maoists were far more established in the area and were organising village life. Marie Lecomte-Tilouine’s article also focuses on a later stage of the Maoist insurgency in the country, when the village, she knew since the late 1980s, became a model Maoist village, and the Maoists were operating through the production of red terror. Judith Pettigrew and Kamal Adhikari discuss different phases of the insurgency in a village in Kaski District that Pettigrew has known since 1990. Lauren Leve’s article focuses on a later phase of the movement when in 2001, she found village women she had known since the early 1990s, even those whose husbands were in the army or police forces, supporting the Maoists. Meanwhile, Deepak Thapa, Kiyoko Ogura and Judith Pettigrew’s article traces the

history of the development of Maoism in the village of Jelbang in Rolpa in their attempt to explain the comparatively excessive violence experienced by this village, resulting in Jelbang having a higher death toll than any other village in the country during the 10 year-long insurgency.

It is important to bear in mind that we are producing glimpses into different stages of the movements in different areas, as this will come to bear upon the reader's analysis of the insights presented here. Take the example of the theme of fear in revolutionary movements. Our comparative sociological project shows that this is an issue whose importance can sometimes emerge more in areas and times where the movements were relying on armed violence (for instance in Shah's field area and that of Pettigrew and Adhikari) than it is in areas where the movements were based around issues of mass mobilisation (for example in Kunnath's field site). In other cases, the production of red terror is a specific strategy that the Maoists use in particular circumstances (for example, Lecomte-Tilouine's field area). Bearing this comparative and contextual dimension in mind while reading this volume will deter the reader from reaching simplistic conclusions—for instance that a particular author is engaging in a critique of the movement through an exposition of fear. In this case, our project is not one of the expositions, but of attempting to comprehend the ways in which fear manifests itself, its particular historical trajectory in specific circumstances, how it adds to the myth and the spread of the movement, and how it is used in state responses. In short, we treat fear as a sociological category.

How will our volume of articles be read in 50 years time? When working on regions and times that are shifting so rapidly, when there is so much more work to do in understanding the continuities and transformations that are taking shape as we write, this is a crucial question that we keep asking ourselves. This is, of course, a question that all anthropologists face, but perhaps it is more pressing when one is working on social transformation in a context of revolution explicitly conceptualised as such. An anthropological analysis of revolution in the making means that it is inevitable that while we may come to particular sociological analyses of what we are seeing now, further down the line, our field data may be interpreted in the light of what has since taken place and may lead to new kinds of analyses and actions.

Over time, our comparative anthropological project of the Maoist revolution in South Asia may come to be seen not only as a collection of historical and ethnographic accounts, but also as historical *artefacts*. So perhaps in 50 years time, our experiment here might be read to show that the scholarly importance of an anthropology of revolution is in the details of ethnographic data and analysis, whose most lasting impact will be as historical artefacts, as *windows into a revolution*. These are questions that remain to be answered, but it is with these issues in mind that we embark on this project now.

Everyday experiences of the revolution

One of the great strengths of ethnographic research is its ability to shed new light on received wisdoms, to question that which is taken for granted. Why have Maoist

insurgencies gained such huge support in many parts of South Asia? Against the simplistic treatment of the Maoists as a law and order problem, received wisdom about the main cause of support for Maoism in rural areas increasingly focuses on socio-economic problems: in particular, the unequal nature of development in South Asia, and the poverty and illiteracy of the affected masses. On the one hand, in media representations, ‘poor illiterate village folk’ of the ‘backward areas’ are constructed as passive recipients who are caught in the crossfire between the Maoists and the state, dragged into the cancerous spread of the movement, and often out of fear. On the other hand, the revolution is portrayed as garnering great success in poor tribal or ethnic areas of South Asia that are natural sites of rebel consciousness, emerging from the stereotype of ethnic or tribal communities as the original primitive rebels. These kinds of analyses of the spread of Maoist movements in South Asia emerge from both sympathetic commentators and critics of the Maoists, as well as from Maoist activists themselves. The former often marginalise the significance of ideology in favour of the argument that the affected masses are supporting the movements out of false consciousness (see Sara Shneiderman’s article in this volume). At the same time, as is evident in Sumanta Banerjee’s reflective piece, Maoist leaders have often romanticised a tribal peasantry whose primitive rebel consciousness could be mobilised in the service of class struggle. In these analyses, Maoism appears as one way out for the dispossessed rural (and usually tribal/ethnic) poor, and development is thus often proposed as the solution to curb Maoism.

Our work shows that the field realities of the Maoist movements’ spread were far more complex. A host of factors that vary across space and time have influenced the expansion of the movements. These range from the attraction of the Maoist theoretical ideology of historical materialism to the practical ideologies of social and economic reform, the importance of earlier political mobilisations, the role of ancestral conflicts and local political tensions, and the role of individuals. Finally, there is the promise of alternative modernities and futures offered by the Maoists through, not in spite of, development and education.

For instance, in the Bihar case, *dalits* supported the Maoists not because of an absence of education or health facilities but, as outlined in George Kunnath’s article, because of the dignity offered by the Maoists in the face of extreme caste violence. Kunnath’s informants reflect the views of Sumanta Banerjee’s informant who says that, as a result of Maoist activities, lower caste individuals are now able to hold their heads up high in front of higher caste landlords. However, in areas like Bihar where the movement has been influential since at least the early 1980s, things have changed over time. Kunnath importantly points out that in the 1990s, the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) People’s War in Bihar shifted their emphasis from mobilising landless *dalits* to uniting the middle peasants by addressing the latter’s demands for government subsidies and remission of rents, as well as protecting them from the demands of the classes below them. Unsurprisingly, the *dalits* in Jahanabad district of Bihar were suspicious of the Maoist alliance with the middle peasantry, and the basic contradiction between the landed *kurmis* (this middle peasantry) and the landless *dalits* was never resolved. Ultimately, the *dalits* were alienated from the movement in the 1990s, and in the

village where Kunnath conducted fieldwork, they ceased participating in the armed squads.

There is an ‘uneasy marriage’ between Maoist mass mobilisation and armed action. The 1980s mobilisation of the *dalits* in Bihar was accomplished through the Maoist mass fronts, in particular, the MKSS (Mazdoor Kisan Sangram Samiti), whereas the 1990s saw a shrinking of the space for mass mobilisation and an increasing reliance by the Maoists on armed actions. Such shifts in Maoist policy and practice are noted to have a lasting negative impact at the local level. In Andhra Pradesh, Balagopal (2006) notes that while the mass mobilisation of the seventies and early eighties resulted in a lot of respect for Naxalites, the youth of today only see the violence of the armed squads and the police. In fact, the Indian Maoists were increasingly seen as becoming exclusively armed movements, with little focus on political mobilisation. Jha (2007) argues that this decision is partly due to the fact that the repressive state leaves the rebels with little space for mass mobilisation. He also suggests that the Indian Maoists are instituting lessons learned from their Nepali counterparts whose success, they believe, is also a result of an aggressive military strategy. These authors conclude that while some youth are now likely to get mobilised through the attractive images of masculinity (and femininity) offered by joining a squad and holding a gun, many others are likely to become further alienated when mass mobilisation is replaced by armed squads that are often seen to bring the police closer (Balagopal 2006). In contrast, Kunnath argues that in fact armed action continues to be crucial to *dalits*, as arms are necessary for protection from the middle and upper caste peasants. The key issue for the *dalits* was not the shift from mass mobilisation to armed action but the fact that this shift resulted in a politics that replaced the needs of the *dalits* with the needs of the middle peasantry.

The transgression of caste and ethnic boundaries was also important to Maoist mobilisation in Nepal. Although in both countries, the upper echelons of the movements were dominated by the higher castes, within the movements, people of different castes ate from the same plates and fought side by side. *Dalits* within the movements entered higher caste households and sometimes led fighting units composed largely of members from higher caste groups, a remarkable transition in a highly divided caste society (Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004; Tamang 2006). Marie Lecomte-Tilouine’s article here argues that such transgressions included the encouragement of matrimonial alliances between pure and impure castes among those who joined the Maoists, but have also affected more general village life in Nepal in the sense that people are now more likely to transgress established caste norms. For instance, most of the artisan castes and Magar families began eating cow meat as a result of the Maoist presence, and Lecomte-Tilouine notes that her hostess served beer bought from a *dalit* to a high caste man. Despite these significant changes in attitudes towards caste hierarchy, the reader should be warned against reaching the simplistic conclusion that the spread of Maoism is accompanied by a disappearance of caste. In Bihar, for instance, the alienation of the *dalits* in the nineties has led to the *dalits* now turning to a valorisation and celebration of their caste heroes (c.f Kunnath 2008). In this case, a class-based movement has ironically led to the reinforcement of caste associations. As a result of the Maoist movement,

caste has become substantialised in the Dumontian sense. Indeed, things can work out in very complex ways, in some arenas of the Maoist movement, rights-based issues, such as caste discrimination, were often more important in the process of mobilisation than development issues, such as poverty relief, microenterprise or education and health.

Such mobilisation has often been dependent on the production of organic intellectuals, and anthropological analysis of such leaders enables questioning the widespread assumptions of false consciousness that are often held up as reasons why rural people join the movement, a point crucially made by Shneiderman's article here. In the case of the Thangmi village of Piskar, in Sindhupalchok district of north-central Nepal, Shneiderman focuses on the development of political consciousness as a result of a 1984 massacre by police forces after villagers allegedly protested against the state-sponsored exploitative policies of local landlords. Shneiderman argues that together with the growing frustration with the lack of delivery on the promise of democracy and the sense of exclusion from its benefits, earlier state repression and movements against it created the social conditions which led to the development of the specific political consciousness on which the Maoists later built their project of mobilisation. Maoist 'practical ideology', referring to concrete social and economic reforms such as driving out the exploitative police and landowners, land reform and claiming political power for the disenfranchised, was hence relevant and attractive to many villagers in Piskar. So, while it might be true that the theoretical ideology behind an abstract notion of class struggle and revolution has not played a crucial role in mobilising the ordinary villager in many parts of rural South Asia, Maoist practical ideology has complemented theoretical ideology, and its central role in mobilising support for the Maoists belies crude conclusions that people join only out of fear or false consciousness.

However, ideology, even of a practical sort, was not important everywhere. In *adivasi*/tribal areas of Jharkhand, the situation is significantly different, as shown by Alpa Shah's (2006) research on the branch of the Naxalite groups reputed to be the most extreme, the Maoist Communist Centre. In the area of Shah's fieldresearch, the initial spread of the movement was not among the poorest tribal populations, but rather within an educated (often upper caste) rural elite, who were intimately connected with the developmental state. In effect, their participation blurred the boundary between state and rebel. Educated youth, no longer satisfied with tilling their land, looked to contracts from the developmental state as an alternative means of sustaining their livelihoods and local dominance. The Maoists progressed in the area, not through their mass fronts, but by entering the pre-existing 'markets of protection' offered by locally powerful people to access the informal economy of state development schemes in the area. Development and education, which are often seen as the answer to the Maoists, in such contexts only strengthen the revolutionary movements.

Some of Shah's analysis of the Jharkhand scenario has significant parallels in both Nepal and Peru. More than 3 years before the People's War was officially launched in Nepal, Nickson (1992) pointed out that in fact the impact of education and development in the Nepal countryside were producing conditions that had parallels in Peru, circumstances that were ripe for the spread of a Maoist movement.

As is emerging in the case of the initial expansion of the Maoists in Jharkhand, it was the educated disenfranchised youth who joined the movement in Peru (Degregori 1998). Disenfranchised because the impact of education and development in the rural areas had promised new futures that were never met, and such youths saw in the Maoists alternative livelihoods, hopes and visions. Judith Pettigrew (2003) has suggested that participation in the Maoist movement enabled Nepali village youth to participate in a new type of modernity. Prior to the Maoist movement, young villagers saw themselves and were seen as marginal to the “good and proper life” (McHugh 1989, 114) offered by town living and enjoyed by those with the money to relocate. Through their participation in the movement, rural youth were able to realign themselves with a new discourse of modernity, which was previously located only in towns. The rhetoric of Maoism constructed an alternative version of modernity, one in which the consumerist version was rejected on ideological premises. Membership in the Maoist party, therefore, reconfigured perceptions of a consumerist world that excluded them. In her article here, Shneiderman argues that the symbol of the nation was an important part of this inclusion. Maoists empowered their cadres as national political actors by proposing a counter-hegemonic national vision where indigenous needs and sacrifice were honoured. Village youth rejected that which they were previously excluded from, and in doing so repositioned themselves at centre stage. Images of rural youth which were previously unseen or were presented as ‘backward’ in media terms are now literally ‘front-page’, as the covers of popular magazines during the insurgency were as likely to feature gun-toting young women as they were to feature the ubiquitous beauty queens. Undoubtedly, as is argued by Lecomte-Tilouine in this article, the new role of the youth created intergenerational conflicts, as the position and role of respected elders as village authorities now became undermined by a younger generation of Maoist cadres.

Alternative visions of the self and, in particular, masculinities were not only important for the Nepali village youth, but also for the Bengali Naxalites of the seventies, who are the focus of Henrike Donner’s article. Donner argues that rather than reproducing the Gandhian ideals of an activist who is deeply embedded in domestic relationships and hierarchies, the ruptured kin relations formed as a result of joining the movement created a space for rethinking relationships. In the new context, idioms of reciprocity, exchange, friendship and egalitarian values between males emerged to challenge hegemonic concepts of masculinity. While these former Naxalites interviewed by Donner were clearly involved in a very different stage of the movement to Pettigrew’s rural youth in Nepal, in both cases, alternative visions of gender roles offered by the movement were a great attraction to those who joined the movement. Moreover, in the Nepal case, as is true of Jharkhand, development and education, and perhaps economic liberalisation, created the alternative visions of modernity and expectations for the future that set the stage for the spread of the revolutionary movement. Perhaps the Maoist spread in both countries is also an unintended consequence of the extension of state neoliberal policies.

This is not to say that our informants, in supporting the movements, were adhering to any simplistic notions of agency implied in models of conscientisation,

progress and rebellion. Notions that, Lauren Leve in her article here argues, rely on an autonomous, socially disaggregated self that is simply not matched by supporters of the insurgency in Nepal. Leve's article focuses on women in Gorkha District, participants of an International Non Governmental Organisation-run rural women's literacy and empowerment programme, who were sympathisers of the Maoist uprising. These Gorkha women supported the rebels by feeding them, housing them, and not informing the government about their presence or activities. In contrast to those who have argued that education programmes increased women's conscientisation, made them into the empowered agents that were needed for the spread of the insurgency, Leve shows that these women were socially rooted and reflected a very different sort of self—a self that defined itself by commitments and social relationships. The Gorkha women neither represented the modernist ideal of the autonomous self nor the absolute quest of liberation from all kinds of social constraints as the essence of human subjectivity that is implied in ideological projects of development, empowerment and rebellion. Rebellions, as James Scott (1976) suggested, may be less matters of consciousness and more matters of morality. These rural Nepali women supported and participated in the insurgency by thinking of themselves as people who were constituted by their relations with others and who value reciprocity.

Indeed, the grassroots analysis of the multiple reasons for the spread of the movements reveal a picture that is quite different to the widespread assumptions that in South Asia's poor, underdeveloped, tribal or ethnic heartlands, primitive rebels heralding some form of original communism are the 'natural' supporters of the Maoists. Anne de Sales (2003) work was one of the first to question such widespread myths in Nepal. Through her research in Northern Rolpa and Eastern Rukum, the Kham-Magar areas that are often seen as the heart of Nepal's revolution, she points out that in fact ethnic sentiment was surprisingly absent in the political mobilisation of the population (see also Ramirez 2004).

In the first part of her article here, de Sales draws attention to other important factors in the spread of the Maoist movement in Nepal: the presence of charismatic local intermediaries and in particular the movement's continuities with ancestral conflicts. Reflecting Shneiderman's concern with earlier contexts of political mobilisation as a key factor in understanding the spread of more recent Maoist movements, de Sales traces the intricate kinship networks and factions in Nakhar village in Rukum District, through which the Maoist movement works. One faction is headed by Ram Kumar Gharti, the son of the last collector of taxes, who supported the United People's Front, and the other by Karka Bahadur Pun, the son of the last *mukhiya* (headman), a teacher who supported the UML in their opposition to the protracted Maoist war. These longstanding rivalries meant that when Ram Kumar was caught taking hashish to Nepalganj he also implicated Karka Bahadur as his supplier. Both were put in jail for 2 years. Upon release, Ram Kumar, the Maoist protracted war supporter, joined the royalist party (the Rashtriya Prajantra Party), whereas Karka Bahadur, who had originally not supported protracted war, ended up presiding over the first Maoist village government, was tortured by the army, and then died. In this case, the longstanding conflicts between Ram Kumar and Karka Bahadur were crucial to their shifting positions vis-a-vis the movement. It is

essential to trace these continuities with earlier forms of social conflict and political mobilisation, rather than casting the arrival of a revolutionary movement as solely one of rupture and difference.

Earlier contexts of social conflict and political mobilisation also emerge as crucial to the spread of the Maoist movement in the Jharkhand case. There, Shah (2006) pointed out that the Maoists worked through pre-existing networks and relationships established by earlier political parties, such as the Jharkhand Liberation Front. In her article here, Shah arrives in rural Jharkhand to find her friend Chotu Roy, previously a broker between the state and the Maoists, now considering joining the armed squads. Chotu's dilemma is precipitated by the murder of a shopkeeper—who has refused to pay the Maoist tax on shops—and in which Chotu becomes the central suspected murderer. On hearing these allegations, Chotu feels betrayed, and is fearful of the new context. This fear is not abstract, but results from the uncertainty of social relations around him—the possibility that longstanding tensions between kin, neighbours, and business and political rivals will now be materialised either by the police forces or the Maoists, in unpredictable ways. In following Chotu's dilemmas, Shah reveals the transformations of the normative order (also documented in the articles of Lecomte-Tilouine and Pettigrew and Adhikari in Nepal) that have accompanied the shifting political economy of violence produced by the Maoist spread and which is characterised by the uncertainty of social relations. This new context of uncertain social relations drives people like Chotu, who work between the state and the Maoists, to search for the certainty that might be derived from either escaping from the affected areas entirely, or joining the Maoist red squads. In following Chotu's dilemmas and reflecting on her earlier work, Shah hence makes three related points: first, the characteristics of revolutionary support can change over time. Second, the reasons why people join the revolutionaries can change over time. And finally, rather than assuming that revolutionary support arises out of fear or false consciousness, or out of some commitment to a practical ideology, we might find that ultimately the dialectics between certainty and uncertainty are a significant part of the process of becoming a revolutionary. These dialectics are not just the result of an ontological uncertainty of commitment to the movement but are crucially also about the search for epistemological certainty in social relations imagined to be less opaque and hence more trustworthy.

In Nepal, as was the case in Jharkhand, the transformations in social relations that resulted from the arrival of the Maoists and the security forces contribute crucially to the experience of fear. Drawing on fieldwork in villages in central and mid-western Nepal, the articles of Pettigrew and Adhikari and that of Lecomte-Tilouine, respectively, examine local interpretations and understandings of fear and explore how fear worked through these transformations. Like Shah, these authors illustrate how terror and fear are perpetuated by the principle of uncertainty: no one knows who is going to be abducted, when, where and for how long. In Nepal, the significant difference from the Jharkhand case was the deployment of the army. In the case presented by Pettigrew and Adhikari, villagers were often far more fearful of the army than of the Maoists because the army was responsible for frequent, unpredictable disappearances of people, whereas the more locally based Maoists were more knowable. While the previous administration exerted limited or minimal

influence, during the ‘People’s War’, villagers found themselves under a shadowy Maoist regime characterised by what they experienced as random and unclear policies enforced by violence or the threat of violence.

However, terror has different colours for the Maoists and at the village level, the ‘red terror’ of the Maoists can be as frightening, if not more so, in particular stages of revolutionary situations, than the ‘white terror’ of the army. This is the experience of the inhabitants of the Maoist model village of Derauli, analysed by Lecomte-Tilouine, who were subjected to the Maoist strategy of mobilising through the production of red terror. This terror, the Nepali term for which translates as intense fear, was used by the Maoists firstly to provoke white terror, in order to reveal to villagers the real nature of the prevailing state, and at a later stage, it was used as a political tool in and of itself for the capture of state power. Red terror was not only spread by narratives of violence, as well as particular terrifying actions (such as the abduction of children for Maoist cultural performances), but also by staging terrifying messages (for example, the defacing of buildings by red or black slogans). This regime of terror was explained by some Maoists as a transitional state, after which people would get used to new customs and would stop suffering.

The importance of the uncertainty and ambiguity that resulted from the Maoist movement leads both Shah and Lecomte-Tilouine to argue counter-intuitively that fear thrives on ambiguity, disorder, mystery and uncertainty, just as much as it does on the life or death threat of physical violence. Lecomte-Tilouine reveals that paralysing fright is just as extreme in areas where almost no actual physical violence has taken place than in localities where brutal killings occurred. These are important insights in a context where scholars who have otherwise sympathised with the Maoist cause have criticised the underground party’s use of arms. For instance, Bela Bhatia (2006) has argued that the use of arms in the end results in huge casualties for the poor and ironically leads to a situation where a movement that promises liberation can actually end up making people less free. Shah and Lecomte-Tilouine’s articles here in fact suggest that such immediate physical violence can be rationalised and is actually less frightening and less constraining than the spectral violence implied by the presence of the Maoists. In the latter scenario, despite the absence of actual armed violence, the mere presence of the Maoists, and in response the state security forces, generates fear of the abstract and the unknown. Pettigrew and Adhikari note that this fear generated in response to the Maoist movement has long-lasting impacts. After the conflict formally ended in Nepal, although there was relief from conflict-related fears, the social effects of mistrust, uncertain allegiances and suspicion produced through fear during the insurgency period were not so easily erased. While villagers quickly reinhabited the spaces of their village, Pettigrew and Adhikari note that the spatial arrangements were easier to mend than the ‘shrunken’ hearts and minds that are a consequence of fear.

Despite the obviously complicated nature of ground realities in Maoist areas, widespread assumptions that the movement is supported by a ‘backward’ peasantry have generated all sorts of unintended consequences. In the forested areas of Eastern Maharashtra bordering Chhattisgarh, Amit Desai’s insightful article shows how the

presence of the Maoists has led to increased police activity in an effort to crack down on *adivasi* 'backwardness' believed to engender support for the Maoists. In this instance, the police focused their efforts on the practices of witch-hunting, in particular by prohibiting the propitiation of the *Angadev*, a powerful deity which detects troublemakers and disturbed spirits. Ironically, one interesting repercussion in this area is that the inability to deal with witches through customary practices has made *adivasis* turn to devotional sects which were ultimately interlinked with the growing spread of Hindu nationalism in the area. In this instance, the presence of the Maoists has ironically resulted in a police response which aids the agenda of the extreme right.

Assumptions that a 'backward peasantry' forms the core of Maoist support are also held by many of the Maoist leadership themselves. It has long been noted that the Maoist leadership in both India and Nepal is overwhelmingly upper caste, and as was the case in Peru, predominantly middle class intellectual elites. In the Thangmi speaking area of Piskar in Nepal, Shneiderman ([forthcoming](#)) has noted the internalized class and caste prejudices that motivated many communist activists, who saw themselves as the architects of a radical social transformation, required the 'wild' Thangmi to be domesticated, to give up their 'primitive' identity. The wildness of this peasantry can of course be both a positive and a negative force. While Maoist cadres on the one hand stressed the need to civilise the peasantry, and on the other hand, the wildness was valorised in the making of the peasantry as 'natural' footsoldiers of the movements. Banerjee's article here is biographical, reflecting on his own shifting involvement with the movement. Born into a Calcutta Communist family, Banerjee found himself drawn to the Naxalite Movement while working as a journalist for *The Statesman* in the late sixties, and eventually joined its cadres in 1973, going underground. As is evident in Banerjee's article, party members romanticised stereotypes about tribal peasantry as natural insurgents. This was driven home to him one day when a peasant woman told him that one of her sons had joined the party, while the other was a dacoit. Banerjee's point is that there is a thin line between a revolutionary and a criminal—not only did the potential revolutionary and the potential criminal come from the same class, but also they often came from the same families (cf Hobsbawn [2003](#)).

The problem with such ideals of a 'backward peasantry' is that they result in Maoist programmes of reformation which sometimes not only have little relevance in specific local contexts, but also might in fact reproduce the very conditions of inequality and discrimination that the activists want to work against. In India, Shah ([2006](#), [2008](#)) has noted the repressive impact of brahminical ideals of drinking practices which inform the Maoist crackdown on village alcohol consumption. Poor *adivasi* men and women who participate equally in drinking rice beer and *mahua* wine, a central feature of village ritual and social life, ultimately suffer the costs of such Maoist programmes. The problem of Maoist policy in this case is significantly gendered, as the crackdown not only shows little understanding of the ritual importance of alcohol, but also, moreover, restricts the spaces for women to drink on the same terms as and with men, while the male rural elite selling foreign varieties of alcohol that were drunk exclusively by men remain untouched. This

may, indeed, be a significant problem in Nepal as well, argue Pettigrew and Shneiderman (2004), as such strident alcohol bans can not only alienate rather than attract, but also curtail the existing freedoms of women from hill *janajati* (ethnic) groups for whom alcohol consumption and exchange holds important symbolic power in cultural and religious life.

These experiences were to some extent mirrored in the Western heartlands of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. In the second part of her article here, de Sales shows how Maoist leaders in the Magarant Autonomous Region selectively objectified positive Magar culture such as dances, while reducing other aspects of Magar ritual and cultural life, in particular blood sacrifice, to barbaric activity and erroneous beliefs by which the villagers were imprisoned. De Sales focuses on the 2005 celebrations of two annual village festivals—the Bhume festival and the Jhankri Mela. In the former festival, the Maoists banned the sacrifice of a ram, saying it was a ‘backward barbaric practice’, while allowing dancing. At the second festival, the required twenty shamans were prevented from attending. The Maoist limit was three shamans per festival, and only for one day, on the basis that greater numbers of ritual specialists involved huge expenditure and excessive consumption of alcohol and, especially, chicken sacrifices. Lecomte-Tilouine’s article shows that these prohibitions on all religious festivals on the basis that they were ‘backward’ and ‘superstitious’ has meant that villagers were afraid of the resulting unhappy dead spirits or *bhuts*, which were now wandering around the village because they were not properly appeased by blood sacrifices at the festivals (see also Pettigrew 2004, 280). In Derauli, it is not only the prohibition of animal sacrifices that were forbidden, but also death rituals curtailed and the propitiating of ancestral spirits stopped. While villagers in Derauli attempted to hold a council and revolt against the Maoists, they did not act on their intentions as ultimately they were scared that the red army would cut out their tongues. In de Sales’s cases, however, the villagers did not accept Maoist policies passively, but boycotted the dancing at the first festival, and at the second, used a local Maoist leader to try and change the Party line on that particular occasion. The villagers sought to reject the image of ‘backward peasants’ that the Maoists imposed on them when they prohibited blood sacrifices.

The issue is that Maoist policy in this case is informed by the ideals of urban, educated middle class and higher caste leaders whose understandings of rural life were far removed from the social life of the people that they want to represent. The bias of this male leadership is also directly reflected in contradictory Maoist attitudes towards gender relations. Despite an ideological commitment to gender equality, there is a gap between rhetoric and practice (Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004). Undoubtedly, the movements in both countries have precipitated new experiences for women of all backgrounds, whether in learning to use guns for combatant women, or negotiating the fine line of safety between state forces and the Maoists for civilian women. In Nepal, following the peace process, female ministers, members of parliament and election candidates were fielded by the Maoists and other political parties. However, the positions of the male leadership on women’s issues remained largely unstated. While senior Maoist women acknowledge some successes (Yami 2007), they remain critical of their party’s record

(Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004; Comrade Parvati 2003a, b).² It appears that women's liberation is subsumed by the overriding Maoist goal of class struggle and that in their devotion to this goal, the Maoists in some ways continue to replicate hegemonic Hindu attitudes towards women. Despite claims to have transformed such institutions as marriage, there were widespread intimations that marriage was used as a means of controlling female cadres. Conversely, the lack of attention given to recruiting married women can be considered a reinscription of traditional divisions of labour, as Maoists required householder women to provide a village-based support network (Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004; Yami 2007). In some areas, this led to a return to the early marriage of girls in order to prevent their recruitment into the armed squads—another unintended consequence of Maoist policy.

Most repressively, the assumptions of a 'backward peasantry' have influenced the ways in which the states in question have responded to Maoist movements. Its most despotic consequences in India were felt in the state of Chhattisgarh, where in the district of Dantewada, the state has funded and armed a counter-insurgency group called the Salwa Judum, which in the local Gondi language means 'the purification hunt', and which is the focus of the article by Jason Miklian. As implied by its name, the operation's most prominent backer, a Congress Member of Legislative Assembly by the name of Mahendra Karma, sees the Maoists as a disease, arguing that its source, the villagers, must be cleansed or purified to get rid of it. Moreover, official Indian forces operating in the region often dismiss the violence as a consequence of 'ancient ethnic tribal hatreds' to justify shirking their duties of protection. Michael Taussig's (1984, 1992) insightful arguments are relevant here that if those labelled 'terrorist' are portrayed as less than human, then every form of terrorism attributed to them becomes permissible for one's self. In the rhetoric of those who justify the counter-insurgency, the 'backward' *adivasis* of rural Chhattisgarh become the Maoists' natural terrorist rebel force against which only equally terrifying measures can be successfully deployed.

In Chhattisgarh, this has meant the killing of thousands of combatants and civilians since mid-2005, forced eviction of at least 40,000 villagers in relief camps and the burning of their villages and the flight of 300,000 people from the area. In addition, local village youth were conscripted into the Salwa Judum militia (a force of 120,000 people according to Karma). As Miklian argues, others were given positions as Special Police Officers (SPOs) in order to increase the manpower of the Central Reserve Police Force with minimal financial or logistical outlays. Ramchandra Guha (2007), who visited these areas on an Independent Citizen's Initiative, argues that many tribal boys in their teens have joined the Salwa Judum for much the same reason as other boys had previously joined the Naxalites (or, as is argued by Pettigrew (2003), the Maoists in Nepal). These youth, who because of their education were disenchanted with working in the fields and the forests, were easily enticed by a job which pays a salary (even though it is only Rs 1500 a month) and gives them a certain status in society through the particular notions of

² Comrade Parvati is the pseudonym of senior Maoist leader Hisila Yami Yami wrote under this name when underground.

masculinity or machismo that emanates from the weapons they wield. Strengthened by the passage of the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act (CSPA), which gave forces greater flexibility in arresting suspected Maoists without hard evidence and constructed in such a way as to make it open to civil liberties abuses as is also evidenced by the imprisoning of the human rights activists Binayak Sen and the film maker Ajay TG, the actions of the Salwa Judum are not accountable to anyone.

Such counter-insurgency operations against the Maoists have some precedent in India. Most notably, in the mid-1990s, the Andhra Pradesh state government set up brutal special police forces, not accountable to any law, for eliminating Maoists. The best known of these is a well-trained anti-guerrilla outfit that lives and operates like the Maoists armed squads, called the 'Greyhounds'. In Andhra Pradesh, however, villagers were not co-opted into the counter-insurgency operations in the way they were in Chhattisgarh. These regionally specialised forces mean that areas such as the Dantewada region of Chhattisgarh, where families might have one son who is a Salwa Judum activist and another a Maoist, have suffered some of the country's worst repercussions from the Maoist movement.

In Nepal, where some of the worst violence was similarly inflicted by the counter-insurgency operations of the state security forces (both police and army), there were also regional differences in the ways in which violence has taken shape. As is clearly the case in Chhattisgarh, these regional differences are partly explained by the social fabric of the region and the rise of individual leaders such as Mahendra Karma. In their paper here, Thapa, Ogura and Pettigrew analyse the story of the village of Jelbang in Rolpa District in mid-western Nepal, where there was an unusually high number of deaths. More than 60 people were killed in Jelbang during the early stages of the 'People's War', primarily by the police. The authors ask why there were such a high number of deaths in Jelbang in relation to other villages in the area. In the detailed chronology of events that precipitated the deaths, Thapa, Ogura and Pettigrew demonstrate the importance of an analysis which considers the killings in the broader context of the social fabric of the village. In this case, the history of the spread of communism in the area is as important as the role of particular individuals who facilitated the entry of the police into the village. The authors trace the events, personalities and social interrelationships that led to the opening of two police posts in the village and the means by which one of them became a place where torture was commonplace and extrajudicial executions carried out. This article also addresses the role that violent state repression has in radicalising people and in prompting them to join the revolutionaries.

As in the Chhattisgarh case, in villages like Jelbang the police far exceeded their remit. The brutality practised in the Jelbang police post, which characterised the state's counter-insurgency, was widely acknowledged and attributed to the attitude of the political administration, the role of local intermediaries and their relationships with the police. Those who have perpetuated violence in both Dantewada and Jelbang have not been called to account for their atrocities. In these areas of rural South Asia, it seems that the construction of a 'backward peasantry' as supporting and fuelling the insurgency allows the state to participate in the worst kinds of violence with impunity. In the far flung forested regions of central and eastern India, in particular, the future looks very grim as the Indian government intensifies its

military offensive against the Maoists. We hope that some of the chapters in this volume will contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of what has happened and continues to emerge in these parts of rural South Asia and will help to avoid the fatal dangers of actions taken in response to shallow and simplistic representations and analyses of life in revolutionary war zones.

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