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WOMEN AND GENDER IN THE MAOIST PEOPLE'S WAR IN NEPAL:
MILITARISM AND DISLOCATION

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation explores changing gender dynamics during crisis and armed conflict to see how global/transnational movements of people, labor, and capital impact the appropriation and production of gender at the local level. The decade long (1996-2006) "People's War" in Nepal produced three key processes -- militarization, displacement, and altered embodiments of gender -- that impacted Nepali women and society. Through a study of women's position in Nepali political and cultural history and multi-sited ethnographic research on the People's War, the dissertation examines how crisis induced displacement and violence impacted and shaped gender dynamics at the local level and Nepali people's mobility at the transnational/global level. The latter has enabled the concept of a "Nepali diaspora" to be more visible and political, which is a strategy of survival appropriated by the globally dispersed Nepalis as their homeland reels under crisis and violence and as Nepalis continue to leave for work as migrant laborers. A close look at women's participation in the Maoist war and their representation by the Maoists as well as the state military brings new insights into women's agency through the embodiment of militancy and militarism. Yet, the "call to arms" for women in Nepal

raises important questions for the feminist politics of representation *vis a vis* other movements around the globe for peace and social justice. Taking a feminist interdisciplinary perspective, the dissertation explores the ways in which the bio-politics of body, gender, and sexuality are enmeshed with nationalism, ideology and economics and work in the production of the “migrant woman” and the “revolutionary woman” in contemporary times of transnationalism and globalization.

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Table of Contents

Abstract of the Dissertation	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Timeline	x
Introduction	1
Chapter One:	
Women, Gender and Conflict in Nepal: A Historical Overview	13
Overview of the Current Political Crisis in Nepal (1996-2006)	13
Early Political History, Society, and Culture: Contextualizing Nepali Women	23
Sati or ‘Widow Burning’: Politics of Agency and Victimhood	27
Women, Nation, Politics, and the Construction of the History of Bravery	36
Women and Development in Nepal: Reality and Representation	42
Women as Agents: Legacy of Liberation and Transformation	50
Citizenship: Personal in/and the Political	55
Women in the Maoist People’s War and Beyond	64
Chapter Two:	
Understanding the People’s War in Nepal: Discrepant Developments of the Conflict	72
Representations of Marginality and Identity Politics: Maoists Gaining Ground	72
Maoist Politics of Representation: Speaking to the Outside	76
Agents of Change: Women Rising for Social Reform	83
Violence, Militarization, and Displacement: Effects of the Crisis	87
Displacement	90
Militarization and Human Rights Violation	96

Gendered Mobility or Immobility of Women: Changing Gender Dynamics	100
Chapter Three:	
Learning from the Ground: Living with Conflict/Negotiating the Boundaries	108
The Stories of Two Civilian Women	110
Social Worker's Predicament: More Complex than What Meets the Eye	119
Women Representative of the Political Party: Violence is not our Path	126
View from the Opposing Side: A Police Officer Speaks his Mind	128
Chapter Four:	
Struggle to Make History: One Woman's Story of Becoming a Maoist	135
A Visit to a Maoist Area: Witnessing the Imagined	136
Asmita's Story of Becoming a Maoist	139
The 'Woman Question' in the Maoist Party of Nepal: Ideology and Reality	154
Women in the Maoist Politics of Representation: Current Situation	160
Chapter Five:	
Gendered Borders, Changing Boundaries: Materiality of Militancy/Militarism	167
Production of Revolutionary Women: Bio-politics of War?	170
Women's Entrance into the Royal Nepal Army: The Paradox of Opportunity	172
Women's Relationship to Nationalism and Militancy	177
Gender and Power: Masculinity, Femininity, and Something Else?	192
Militant Agency in Women: Where is it Going?	194
Chapter Six:	
Gendered Displacement in Crisis: Migrants and Mobility in Globalization	200
Crisis in Development: Uneven Development and the Maoist War	204
Nepali Bodies in the Economy of Free Trade	209

Moving Beyond Local Spaces of Violence	218
Global Mode of Production and Feminist Intervention	225
Chapter Seven:	
New Beginnings: Communities in Crisis and a “Nepali Diaspora” in the Making	235
Diaspora: A Term with Many Meaning	236
Nepali Diaspora in the U.S.: Political Activism During Crisis	259
North American Diaspora: Political Activism from Afar	254
Nepali Appropriation of Diaspora and Community Building	261
Nepali Diaspora, Nationalism and Flexible Citizenship	264
Diaspora: Agential Praxis or Epistemology of Survival in the New World	267
Conclusion	272
Bibliography	280
Curriculum Vita	298

Timeline

1768-9	Gorkhali unification of Nepal under Prithvi Narayan Shah
1814-16	Anglo-Gorkha War
1816	Nepal agrees to Sugauli Treaty, British recruit Gorkhas
1846	Jang Bahadur Rana becomes prime minister after Kot Massacre
1850	Jang Bahadur Rana visits Europe
1857-8	Nepal assists British in suppression of Indian Mutiny
1914-18	Around 100,000 Nepalis support British in WWI
1939-45	Nepal supports Britain in WWII
1947	Formation of Nepali National Congress
	India gains independence from Britain
1949	Formation of Communist Party of Nepal
1950	King Tribhuvan flees to India
1951	End of Rana regime, establishment of coalition government under King Tribhuvan
1960	King Mahendra imposes direct rule, banishes political parties
1980	National referendum, Panchayat system defeats multi-party democracy
1990	First Jana Andolan, or People's Movement, multi-party democracy restored, Constitutional Monarchy instituted
1991	CPN (M) and CPN (ML) unite to form CPN
	United People's Front established
1995	Prachanda's faction of Unity Center renames itself CPN (M)
1996	Baburam Bhattarai presents 40-point demand to Prime Minister Deuba

	February 13, People's War begins
1998	Kilo Sierra 2 police operation against Maoists
2000	September, Maoists overrun Dunai, Dolpa district headquarters
2001	February, Maoists adopt the Prachanda Path
	June 1, Royal Massacre
	August, first peace talks between government and Maoists
	September, second peace talks
	November, third peace talks, end of ceasefire
	November, King Gyanendra declares State of Emergency, army engages Maoists
2002	April, promulgation of Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Ordinance (TADO)
	August, dissolution of parliament
	October, King Gyanendra sacks Prime Minister Deuba, assumes executive authority and postpones elections indefinitely
2003	January, ceasefire between Maoists and government
	May, five-party agitation for end of royal rule
	May, peace talks
	August, end of ceasefire
2005	February, King Gyanendra assumes complete power, forms Council of Ministers, suspends all democratic rights and installs military rule
	November, 12-point understanding between Maoists and political parties in India

2006	April, Second Jana Andolan
	April, King Gyanendra relinquishes power
	May, ceasefire between government and Maoists
	November, Comprehensive Peace Agreement, entry of Maoists into political mainstream
2007	January, Maoists enter parliament

Introduction

This rifle is my jewelry. You hurry along with your housewives; we have to return to our bunkers and carry on our liberation struggle. . . Nepali women will not be freed by talking nonsense in five-star hotels in Kathmandu.¹ -- Asha Bista, Maoist PLA

When women want to escape from exploitation, they do not simply destroy a few ‘prejudices’; they upset the whole set of dominant values -- economic, social, moral, sexual. They challenge every theory, every thought, every existing language in that these are monopolized by men only. They question the very *foundation of our social order and cultural order*, the organization of which has been prescribed by the patriarchal system.² -- Luce Irigaray

From 1996 to 2006, a Maoist insurgency and State counter-insurgency produced a tumultuous political crisis in Nepal, a small South Asian nation in the Himalayas. Before a fragile peace that followed a popular revolution in April of 2006, the Maoists’ guerilla warfare and the State’s violence claimed more than 13,000 lives and destabilized the political, cultural, and gender systems along with the basic economic and development infrastructures.³ As with any armed conflict, the People’s War in Nepal included violations of human rights and civil liberties, extrajudicial killings, displacements and migrations, and sexual violence against women.⁴ At the same time, oppressed

¹ Pointing to her AK-47, Asha Bista, a sub company commander of the Maoist PLA, shouted these words to journalists covering the Maoists’ celebration of the International Day of Women on March 8, 2006. See “Women’s Day,” *The Nepali Times*, No. 290, 2006.

<http://www.thdl.org/texts/reprints/nepali_times/Nepali_Times_290.pdf>

² Cited in Grosz (1988, 126).

³ A detailed archived report of the numbers of deaths, disappearances, abductions, and violence related to the conflict can be found on the online network maintained by a Human Rights NGO called the Informal Service Sector (INSEC). <www.inseconline.org/hrvdata.php> >

⁴ After the Second Jana-Andolan (People’s Revolt) in April of 2006, the peace process between the various political actors began. Although the Maoists have declared a ceasefire, and the Nepal army has returned to its barracks under the supervision of the United Nations, the violence has not completely subsided. The displaced are still afraid to go back to their homes, the rate of migration to other countries has in fact increased, and violence continues at the local level, especially in the Terai (southern portion of Nepal bordering India). There are new independent armed groups, and organizations related to the Maoists, like the Young Communist League, are taking law, justice, and order into their own hands.

communities, such as women, the Dalits, the indigenous people of Nepal, the Janajatis have organized and raised their voices as never before in Nepali history.

The most surprising but crucial development during the People's War was the initiation of women into guerilla warfare by the Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA). The Maoist Party claimed that women made up 40% of their militia, and their goal was to make their participation equal to that of men. Clearly, the People's War brought about unprecedented developments in women's situations in Nepal. Like Asha Bista with her AK-47, some women have found empowerment through militancy, while many others have suffered the consequences of war: fear, death, and destruction of their everyday lives. Some, such as the Maoists, represent these developments as conducive to women's empowerment and agency. However, amidst an increasing culture of violence, it is crucial to look more deeply into the Maoist revolutionary ideology, their call to arms to women, and the politics of representation of women and gender employed by the Maoists to incite women to war. As the effects of the conflict have been multiple, nuanced, and contradictory, an understanding of it also calls for a nuanced and open approach. We may not be able to grasp the effects present events will have in the future. Yet, we can write about the "history of experience" in the present, which has its legacy in past structures of power and knowledge, by following a genealogical method.⁵

⁵ Although the term comes from Fredrick Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals*, the genealogical method is linked with Michel Foucault (1977, 1978) and pertains to a kind of analysis -- which is also termed anti-historical and subversive to the claims of grand narratives in history -- that considers the "unthought" in history and looks at the contingent turns of history rather than rational schemes to interpret events. The genealogical approach takes the subject of inquiry within the forms of power and knowledge and their implications for bodies, institutions, and societies in ways that are not often intentional. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *The History of Sexuality* (1978), Foucault illustrates the genealogical method by showing how modern disciplinary systems of control and punishment evolved as reforms of the pre-modern barbarity of the scaffold. In *The History of Sexuality*, he shows how the criminalization of sexuality was achieved thorough the discourse on sex. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault explores how the attempt to modernize and humanize the techniques of punishing criminals produced a "new power to judge" (23) and

In the first chapter, I contextualize Nepali women's gendered location and position in the past in order to bring historical context to the present crisis (1996-2006) and women's participation in the People's War. The first part of the chapter provides an overview of important events during the ten years of the conflict along with a history of the main political parties in Nepal and their struggle against the monarchy. I move on to explore the political, cultural, and gender history of Nepal, explaining historical practices like sati and widowhood, which powerful men and women utilized to constrain and control women as well as run the polity of the nation. Such practices of dominant castes and classes overshadowed the *comparatively* egalitarian gender practices among the indigenous, native communities. Finally, I look at the effects of the modern notions of rights and ownership in the form of citizenship, private property, nationalism, and development. The Maoist ideology has engaged women to participate in the movement through these notions of rights.

The second chapter explores the effects of the Maoist People's War and women's participation in it. I probe how the social, cultural, and ethnic politics arising in the 1990s after the democratic revolution of 1990 might have helped to provide energy for the Maoist People's War. This chapter attempts to understand the politics of representation that the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) employed at the local and global levels to garner the support of the marginalized in Nepal, such as ethnic communities and women, and of the international community. In addition, I examine the multiple effects of the war in the form of displacement, migrations, disappearances, and extrajudicial killings as well as life under the state of emergency and militarization. In

expanded that power into the micro-systems of disciplinary techniques through rules of codification, hierarchization, normalization, and control through mere observation or gazing.

Chapter Three, I draw from my interviews with individuals from Nepal who lived through the conflict. The analysis of the interviews gives a more vivid picture of some of the effects of the conflict that I explore in the previous chapter.

After looking at the effects of the People's War, I attempt to understand women who dedicated themselves to it. I begin Chapter Four by charting an individual woman's experiential and ideological journey of becoming a Maoist. Her journey illustrates the revolutionary Left's engagement with the "woman question" and the Nepali Maoists' politics of representation of women and gender. How can we read *agency* in women who have embodied the revolutionary ideology of the Maoist People's War?⁶ What are the complexities involved in constituting the category "Nepali woman" as an oppressed being along the lines of class only, which the Maoists have done to incite women to take up arms?

To pursue these questions in the next chapter, I delve into the representation of women as militant figures in the context of the increasing militarization of nations, the rise in civil wars, and the proliferation of weapons in "third world" countries in the last century. Chapter Five is an examination of the ways in which the bio-politics of body, gender, and sexuality are enmeshed with nationalism, ideology and economics and work in the production of the "military woman" and the "revolutionary woman" in contemporary times of transnationalism and globalization. Are the notions of transgression and transformation hostage to the networks of a new Empire in the form of global economy, which is run with the support of the transnational military industrial

⁶ The concept of agency has been critical in feminist scholarship and activism as well as the theories of social development and transformation (MacLeod 1992; Gardiner 1995; Bartky 1995; Ahearn 2001). Thus, agency makes an important part of my investigation throughout the dissertation, especially in terms of looking at Nepali women's situation in the conflict and their embodiment of militancy/militarism in particular.

complex? How should we read militarized bodies, such as those of guerilla women or army women, who have very little choice but to enter the military complex within the unequal transnational division of labor?

Questions about the agency of militarized women lead to the global situation of Nepali men and women and how the People's War has assisted, if not entirely effected, the movement of people from Nepal in the transnational economy. I further examine the issues that I raise in the last chapter on the liberal notions of self, right, and agency in the context of the political economy of the body within free-market economies. Thus, in Chapter Six, I explore the situation of Nepali migrant workers in Gulf countries and other places. By specifically looking at men and women leaving the country during the crisis period, I examine how "third world" nationals negotiate the layered structures of violence at home and in migrant places, which range from war zones to domestic workplaces. Women's mobility in the Nepali cultural and political context is important for the notion of agency. While women may break the sexual division of labor at home and experience change in the gender dynamic in local spaces, can they survive the imposition of the transnational division of labor, which capitalizes on gendered, classed, and nationally differentiated labor value to create a surplus?

The final chapter is a note of hopefulness as I look at the ways in which Nepali subjects enact agency even in moments of uncertainty and crisis. Amidst a structure of violence that is local, global, historical, and contemporary, the concept of a "Nepali diaspora" has evolved. Though the Nepali diaspora has roots in the history of British colonialism in South Asia, the People's War is a more recent catalyst of movement in contemporary times of global inequality. Diaspora is a survival strategy amidst

displacement and chaos. Furthermore, diaspora is a concept hitherto untheorized in the Nepali context as a means of political and social transformation. A diaspora that is appropriated and imagined to cope with the condition of displacement affects State politics in deterritorialized conditions of nationality, economy, and political activism. Yet, I also argue that the post-modern times of globalization have produced new subjects that are victims as well as agents depending on their location and position on the geo-political map. New challenges arise as the degree and pace of movements of people escalate to levels unprecedented in history.

Throughout the chapters, I tease out some of the major developments -- displacement, militarization, and changing dynamics of gender, culture, and identity -- that arose during the conflict and the contradictory effects they have produced in Nepali society. To that end, I argue that the Maoist People's War in Nepal brought about situations that are at once debilitating and empowering, constricting and volatile, and gendered and transcending. The crisis has indeed opened up new "interconstitutive spaces" in spite of violence, chaos, and uncertainty.⁷ The rise of a Nepali civil society during the crisis period is one such example. However, how these processes and events constitute new spaces and affect the future political, social, and economic developments in Nepal depends both upon global and local networks of power and knowledge and the subjects who traverse through these networks.

Method, Process, (Re)presentation: Theory Meets Feminist Practice

⁷I take the concept of interconstituency from Elizabeth Grosz's (1994, xii) theorizing on subjectivity as an interconstitutive process of "the inflection of mind into body and body into mind ... through a kind of twisting and inversion, [where] the one side becomes the other." However, I use the term to refer to a volatile situation like a conflict, when one does not know who is a friend or an enemy.

What can we know? How can we know? What can we do? And, above all, how can we represent? These have become difficult questions in the last two decades of feminist epistemology and research in the West.⁸ Although the “field of representation remains a place of struggle,” delving into these questions with a feminist angle has encouraged novel ways of looking at the place of women and men across cultures and nations and the inequalities among them that are problematic, debilitating, and constricting (hooks 1992, 3). Thinking about and acting to change such situations produces new thoughts and concepts, so new theories and categories have evolved along with new lenses to view the world and women’s place in it. Feminist scholars from South Asia (Mohanty, Spivak, Grewal, and Narayan, just to name a few) have argued that feminist politics should not be based on a hegemonic theory of universal oppression of women, but should be grounded in dynamic interconnections between the local, global, and transnational practices of knowledge and power, wherein the overlapping interests of women with hegemonic global powers also become visible. Women’s differences within a nation-state or at the local level vis a vis the global level must be taken into account as the structures of inequality are not just class based, culture based, or gender based. They are also discursively produced in the process of representing the other and the oppressed (Mohanty 1991; Spivak 1988b). Speaking on the problems of representation, Gayatri Spivak argues there is no unmediated representation of the other or the subaltern that is not colored by the interlocutor’s own interest and subjectivity; yet she also states that “the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation” (Spivak (1988b, 285). There

⁸ Many feminist scholars have contributed to such epistemology, research, and representation. Some are: Harding 1986; Hartsock 1983; Anzaldua 1987; Collins 1997; Code 1991; Ferré 1998; De Vault 1999; Twine and Warren, eds. 2000; Wolf 1996; Sandoval 2000; Spivak 1988a, 1988b; 1990; hooks 1992; Minh-ha 1989; Mohanty 1991.

is no alternative to representation except silence, and the latter is not conducive to deconstructing the prevalence of the “masculine economy” (Irigaray 1985).

Reductive epistemological thinking and representative practices can indeed distort the multiple realities of women and their actions as beings in different places and times. In the global-postmodern era, both the scrutiny of the specific local conditions of women and a universal epistemological lens are necessary to explicate the situation of oppressed women as the grid of power relations, which Michel Foucault (1978, 141) would call “bio-politics,” traverses through and across local and global spaces. We need to look at the “interconstitutive” spaces beyond an outside/inside dichotomy to understand how the local and the global cohere in affecting women as agents and victims and form and inform their consciousnesses, desires, and subjectivities (Grosz 1994). In this regard, Arturo Escobar and Wendy Harcourt (2005, 2-15) rightly call for a theory of “women and the politics of place” and argue that “women’s lived experience in a place” and their interaction with place, body, environment, and economy in all their diverse embodiments are essential in devising a practical feminist politics. My representation of Nepali women takes cues from the above feminist critiques of representation and, above all, Arturo Escobar and Wendy Harcourt’s arguments that, although no local places are unaffected by global places, there are still actions and struggles of women in local spaces that need to be understood and represented.

How new networks of oppression and subordination are produced with the “‘practices of difference’ in relation to bodies, environment, and the economy” is also relevant (Escobar and Harcourt 2005, 7). In other words, the ways in which different forms of bio-politics affect people’s everyday lives need to be examined beyond the

dichotomies of the oppressor/oppressed. The forms of oppression are microscopic, not only macroscopic, and extend like capillaries in the body pervading unfathomable and unforeseen sites. While culture and gender make up part of the geo-political differentiation agenda, women as a gendered and sexed category are often utilized as a space of intervention to seemingly create changes. However, the underlying politics of intervention are not always benign, nor are they unrelated to the value-producing “masculine economy” that we operate under. Take, for example, how in the name of adventure and travel, the civilizing of places and people, and the rescuing of women from oppressive cultures, Western colonialism subjugated people, claimed their lands, destroyed their ways of life, and enslaved them for hundreds of years. Today, there are more subtle incarnations of these old processes, such as a just war for security, democracy, freedom, and humanity. This is not to say that these processes have unitary effects upon people or that they have no agency or power to resist. They do. But the resistance seldom comes in the form of creative politics and non-violence when the processes are violent. Violence begets more violence, and that is what we are witnessing around the globe today. If we look closely at the world -- and my dissertation will show this -- women and men both are suffering under the claims of a just war, whether it is fought by the so-called revolutionaries in the local spaces or by imperial/global forces as civilizing missions and development projects for democracy, peace, and freedom.

I employ a genealogical and feminist interdisciplinary methodology that utilizes various lenses involving discursive and qualitative analysis of the issues (Foucault 1977, 1978; De Vault 1999). With this interdisciplinary methodology, the subject of research rather than the disciplinary techniques takes precedence: “it embraces and perpetuates but

also transcends disciplinary work” (Allen and Kitch 1998, 8). Rather than a systematic hypothesis or method leading the research agenda or the topic of study, it is the unholy alliance between theories, methods, and practices that opens up new possibilities in the process of investigation. Wendy Brown’s (1997, 94) explication of the interdisciplinary methodology in Women’s Studies may shed light on what I mean:

We need a combination of, on the one hand, analyses of subject producing power accounted through careful histories, psychoanalysis, political economy, and cultural, political and legal discourse analysis, and, on the other, genealogies of particular modalities of subjection that presume neither coherence in the formations of particular kinds of subjects nor equivalence between different formations. In other words, what is needed is the practice of a historiography . . . that emphasizes . . . contingent developments, formations that may be at odds with or convergent with each other, and trajectories of power that vary in weight for different kinds of subjects.

I utilize feminist scholarship and perspectives on women, gender, politics, and economy, theories of post-coloniality and transnationalism, Nepali history, and research on Nepal by sociologists and anthropologists, among other sources. However, my object of analysis privileges the category women as historical beings; “women’s experiences” and their own narratives and articulations of their experiences make it a feminist project (Grosz 1988). I focus on the category women not because I am unaware of the analytics of social constructions of gender, but because I believe that the lived experiences of women in local places have political and analytical significance in understanding the workings of the global within the local.

Likewise, my site of research is not singular but trans-national, multilingual, and multi-sited. I traverse through different geographic spaces as well as cyberspace in the process of research and writing. While I have been closely following media coverage of the Maoist People’s War and women’s involvement in the conflict for the last ten years, I

have also been a participant observer in many events -- lecture programs, seminars, conferences, and even demonstrations -- organized around the issues of political crisis and armed conflict in Nepal since 2001. My interviews with Maoist militia women are a significant part of my analysis of women's participation in the Maoist People's War. I conducted all interviews in a qualitative and semi-structured style in Nepali, although some of the interviewees also spoke some English. In addition, I interviewed fifteen women in the United States in the process of this project. Others I interviewed in Nepal include human rights activists, a police investigator, social workers, a Maoist commissar and members of her militia, housewives, domestic workers, and a woman member of parliament in Nepal. Research by international and national human rights organizations and NGOs proved useful, as did scholarly articles and previous books written on the conflict. For the everyday news and information regarding the political situation, I relied on the major newspapers published in Nepal (NepalNews.com, *The Kathmandu Post*, *Nepal Magazine*, *The Nepali Times*) and also on online news portals and blogs. For the news and views of the Maoists, I consulted their own publications, such as *Janadesh Weekly*, the website of the Communist Party Nepal (Maoist), and collections of their writings and proclamations in book form. Although I do not include the interviews I conducted with Nepali women in the United States in regard to migration and displacement in this dissertation, my interactions with them and with Nepali intellectuals have informed this dissertation.

This dissertation looks at the multiple ways in which the armed conflict and crisis have affected the social, cultural, political, economic, gender, and identity politics. Above all, my key argument is that the incitement of women to arms and the militarized

body of a woman cannot be read outside the discursive bio-politics over life and labor that greases the wheels of transnational capitalism, even when this option is offered as agency. Despite the Maoists' strong rhetoric of "gender mainstreaming" in Nepali society and polity, one sees men everywhere taking positions and making decisions -- women remain in the background waiting. The Maoists of Nepal claim that theirs is a politics based on terms devised by the dialectical materialism of Marx-Lenin-Mao, and that they will conduct their "absolute war" until they come to power. How women fare in this remains to be seen. At any rate, if a feminist goal is to represent women in history as "subjects capable of appropriating knowledge" (Delmar 1994, 5) rather than remain objects of knowledge, the existent structure of "language and representation" must be transformed, as Irigaray argues (Grosz 1989, 109). Perhaps, as Mohanty (2003, 42) suggests, "it is time to move beyond the Marx who found it possible to say: they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented."⁹

⁹ Here, Mohanty is critiquing the Eurocentrism in Marx, which is evident in his views in "On Imperialism in India" (Tucker 1978). Marx justifies English rule in India by saying that "Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history" (659). According to Marx, whatever history India had was the history of its conquerors, like the Persians, Turks, or Mugals, so it made very little difference that the British, the superior civilization, were destroying the inferior and old civilization of the Hindoos. Though accidental in nature, this invasion by the British, for Marx, represented the possibility of the regeneration of India through Western modernization (Tucker 1978, 659-660).

Chapter One

Women, Gender and Conflict in Nepal: A Historical Overview

Overview of the Current Political Crisis in Nepal (1996-2006)

In 1990, Nepal became a constitutional monarchy with a multiparty system of democracy after 30 years of direct rule by the Shah kings and several hundred years of oligarchy before that.¹⁰ In the period between 1960 and 1990, political parties were banned and democratic and communist forces suffered prosecution, jail, and torture, but they operated underground and continued their struggle against the partyless “Panchayat” system.¹¹ It is not possible here to lay out the history of the democratic and communist forces, but the two major parties, the Nepali Congress and the Nepal Communist Party in its various factions, at many points in history worked together above ideological stances to oppose autocratic forces in Nepal.¹² As during the movement against the Rana regime

¹⁰ For a detailed history of political movements, the Maoist movement, and communist parties in Nepal, see Karki and Seddon (2003); Hutt (2004); and Deepak Thapa’s “Radicalism and the Emergence of the Maoists,” Sudheer Sharma’s “The Maoist Movement: An Evolutionary Perspective,” and Krishan Hachhethu’s “The Nepali State and the Maoist Insurgency” in Hutt (2004). Also see Deepak Thapa (2003a, 2003b). The 1990 revolution is also called Jana Andolan I, or the People’s Revolution I.

¹¹ The Panchayat system is a traditional form of judicial/political governance where five elected members, usually high caste elderly men, represent the community to decide on important matters of justice as well as the rule of law, including social customs. The Panchayat system survives in India at the village level of governance and was even espoused by Mahatma Gandhi for its *swadeshi* or nationalist flavor. King Mahendra introduced the Panchayat system in Nepal in 1961, stating that the multiparty system had failed and was not suitable to Nepali soil. The Panchayat system slowly grew to become a full-fledged electoral system from the village level to the national level. Parties were banned, and representatives were elected for four different tiers of governance. The “National Panchayat” was the highest level of representation, equivalent to being a member of parliament. Within this system, the king himself was the supreme power who appointed the prime minister from the elected members of the National Panchayat. He then formed a council of ministers upon the recommendation of the king.

¹² The Congress Party of Nepal, or Nepali Congress as it is often called, evolved during the rebellion against the Rana regime and originated in the “Praja Parisad,” the first political party established in Nepal, in 1936. Led by one of the most famous democrats of Nepal, B.P. Koirala, who fought in the nationalist movement against the British in India, the Nepali Congress Party took inspiration from the Congress Party of India. It came to power briefly in the 1950s until King Mahendra dismantled the multiparty system and introduced a partyless Panchayat system. The Communist Party of Nepal came into existence in 1949 with origins similar to those of the Nepali Congress. The founder of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), Pushpa Lal Shrestha, began his political career as the office secretary of the Nepali Congress Party but left as he felt disillusioned with it (Thapa 2004, 22). In terms of origin, while the Nepali Congress shared ideologies with the Congress party of India and took inspiration from the nationalist movement in India

in the 1940s, the democratic and communist parties came together as a united front in 1990 to establish a multiparty system of governance in Nepal. The Nepali Congress emerged as the major democratic force after the election of 1991. Yet the Congress Party, which became the majority party in government for most of the next five years, was ineffective in delivering democracy, good governance, and development to the masses. Thus claimed the Communist Party of Nepal (Unity Centre), which foreswore elections and adopted the name CPN (Maoist) in 1995.¹³

This Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which had gone through multiple histories of growth, split, merger, and split until 1995, started an armed insurgency on February 13, 1996, following Mao Tse-tung's advice to bring together "the Party, the revolutionary United Front and the People's Army" for a successful revolution (Karki and Seddon 2003, 217).¹⁴ As the United People's Front, they put forward a 40-point demand to the parliamentary government formed by the Nepali Congress Party.¹⁵ The demands touched on issues of national sovereignty, secularism, freedom of expression, and cultural and political rights of ethnic communities. There was one clause on gender:

against British occupation, the Communists of Nepal were influenced by various international revolutions, such as the Bolshevik revolution, the Chinese revolution, and India's Naxalite movement of the 60s. They were called Naxalites because the insurgency started in the region called Naxalbari in North Bengal and spread all the way to the border towns of Eastern Nepal, like Jhapa. The Naxalites later formed the Communist Party India in 1969 (Thapa 2004, 32).

¹³ I rely on Thapa (2004) for the information provided here. Thapa cites Shyam Shrestha as stating that the "Unity Centre" led by Prachanda, who became the supreme leader of the People's War, foreswore elections during its "Third Plenum" on the "insistence of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement" (RIM) (36). The international factor seems influential in the activities of the left in Nepal since its inception. How the communist forces come together and split again under different names and after individual leaders is complex. Therefore, here I have only given a brief sketch of the political history to help the reader get some idea of how the People's War started.

¹⁴ Also see the Crisis Group Asia Report, *Nepal's Maoists: Their Aims, Structure and Strategy*, No. 104, 27 October, 2005, for a comprehensive study by an international group of experts on the Maoists in Nepal.

¹⁵ The Communist Party of Nepal was founded in 1949 in Calcutta, India, and since then communist ideas have evolved in Nepal and communist parties have grown and multiplied. While some communist ideologues have merged with the forces of the right, others have chosen to be reformists, and some have taken the route of the extreme left, like the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists). See Thapa (2004).

the equal rights of girls to parental property (Karki and Seddon 2003, 184).¹⁶ The CPN (Maoists) began the “People’s War” by destroying police posts in at least four regions in western Nepal, including Gorkha, whence the Shah Kings hail.¹⁷ Under the “First Plan: Initiation and Continuation,” the Maoists attacked and destroyed three police posts in the mid-western hills, a distillery factory in Gorkha, a Pepsi Cola factory, and the private property of a village landlord (Karki and Seddon 2003, 203).

In Gorkha, the government retaliated swiftly by shooting dead a high school student, suspecting him of being a Maoist. Two days after this incident, police shot and killed six more civilians in the mid-western region.¹⁸ The mid-western hills where the Maoists started the war had a strong communist presence since democratic elections in 1991. The coalition communist party called the United People’s Front (UPF), parts of which joined the CPN (Maoists), won nine seats in the parliament, “interrupt[ing] a great swathe of Congress-controlled constituencies” (Hutt 2004, 5). As the Congress Party won the majority of seats in parliament, it formed the first democratic government after 30 years of the Panchayat system. The Maoists and some journalists alleged that UPF and its supporters were “subjected to repeated abuses of power by officials belonging to the ruling Nepali Congress in these areas, with the result that the Nepali Congress, and the police force that did its bidding, came to be widely hated there” (Hutt 2004, 5). Truly violent activities against men and women of this region began in 1995 with Operation

¹⁶ For detail, see the “Maoists’ 40-Point Demands” in Karki and Seddon (2003, 183-187). The demands are organized under three categories: nationalism, public wellbeing, and people’s livelihoods.

¹⁷ Before the unification in 1769 under Prithvi Narayan Shah, the nation-state of Nepal was 46 little kingdoms or fiefdoms. Since unification, Shah Kings and Rana Prime Ministers ruled in Nepal (the Shah kings took back sovereignty from the Ranas in 1950 after the latter’s 104 years of autocratic rule).

¹⁸ The death toll recorded between Feb’96 to Nov’05 is 12,865. Among these, the state killed 8,283, whereas the CPN(M) killed 4,482. Source: Informal Service Sector (INSEC) at <www.inseconline.org>

Romeo to clear the area of Maoists.¹⁹ After the Maoists declared the People's War in 1996, the police launched an offensive, code-named Operation Kilo Sierra Two, against them in eighteen districts for a year (May 1998 to May 1999). "Within a period of a year, almost 500 people lost their lives at the hands of the police. Among the casualties, innocents far outnumbered Maoist rebels, and this benefited the Maoists."²⁰ These government acts further drove the people in that region toward the Maoists. They had no recourse but to retreat to the Maoists' camps in the jungle, where they organized to take revenge against the armed forces.²¹ The Maoists boycotted the parliamentary elections in 1999. While other political parties were busy with election campaigns, the Maoists were busy strengthening their army. They adopted a more offensive stand by September of 1999 by attacking a police base in Rukum. More than 500 police, including a Senior Superintendent, a District Police Officer, and eight Inspectors, were killed by the end of 2001.²² The Maoists emerged as a strong force as they declared the formation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and adopted a political line called the "Prachanda Path," named after the chairman of the CPN(Maoist) at the Second National Conference in February 2001. The army remained inside its barracks until 2001 despite police suggestions to deploy them as early as 1999. But things changed in June of 2001.

¹⁹ Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, the key ideologue of the Maoist party, in an interview stated that security forces raped women and beat them with nettles during these operations. See the reprinted interview from 1995 in Deepak Thapa (2003).

²⁰ Sharma, "The Maoist Movement." 49-50.

²¹ See Gautam and Manchanda, "Women in the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal" for more detail on the situation in villages where most men and some women entered the jungle, being trapped between the armed forces and the Maoists.

²² Sharma, "The Maoist Movement." 50.

In a massacre of June 1, 2001 in the palace allegedly committed by the crown prince Dipendra, King Birendra and his nuclear family and some other relatives died.²³ The immediate family of the king's brother Gyanendra escaped, however, while Gyanendra, who was reportedly not at the palace during the massacre, became the new king. Nepali Congress led the government then, but Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala was forced to resign, and Sher Bahadur Deuba, who was leading an offshoot of Nepali Congress called Nepali Congress (Democratic), became the Prime Minister.

After the royal massacre of June 1, 2001, with the already existing conflict between the democratically elected government and the communist rebels, a third party emerged to struggle for power: the new king. In contrast to his deceased brother, King Gyanendra was very assertive in consolidating his power. He brought the military, a close ally of the palace, outside of the barracks onto the streets. Until the attacks of September 11, 2001 in the United States, the Nepali government received little material support to quell the insurgency other than from India and Britain. After 9/11, the United States gave the Nepali government more than \$30 million in security and military support as the "war against terror" became the mantra.²⁴ The Maoists of Nepal became terrorists

²³ Eleven people, including the crown prince (the alleged killer), died in the massacre, while several others were wounded. No serious investigation occurred after the massacre, and the bodies were cremated right away. The government press conference held after several days brought out some people who were present at the palace party as witnesses to verify that it was the crown prince who shot his father and other relatives. See the synopsis of the Nepali report in English: "Synopsis of the High Level Committee Report on the Royal Palace Incident" at <http://nepalresearch.org/politics/background/committee_report.htm> A report by Bhagirath Yogi, "Royal Palace Killing: Loose Ends," in *Spotlight* (22/06/2001) also provides an interesting analysis of the palace incident and the press conference held by the government. It is available at <<http://www.nepalnews.com.np/contents/englishweekly/spotlight/2001/jun/jun22/coverstory.htm>>

²⁴ This figure does not include other kinds of development funding and directly relates to curbing the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. After the King seized all executive powers in February of 2005, the United States was compelled to back out of forcing the political parties to make a truce with the King. Between 1996 and 2000, the U.S. gave about \$5.6 million in different forms of military and security aid. After 9/11, the amount increased tremendously, making it over 30 million US dollars. The United States supplied 20,000 M16 automatic assault rifles to Nepali security forces, along with over \$29 million in military funding since 2001, reports Amnesty International (June 15, 2005). Other major countries supplying arms

according to the Nepali State and the U.S. government, and the latter has not removed them from their list. With more funds and weapons entering Nepal, the killing and violence escalated. The Maoists snatched some weapons from the security forces and procured others from outside. Although the communist rebels got substantial support from the common people in the early years, their popularity dwindled since their violent tactics cost innocent lives. As of now, the conflict resulted in more than 13,000 dead and hundreds of disappearances, making Nepal top the list of state sponsored disappearance cases in 2005 according to Human Rights Watch reports.²⁵

Along with the thousands of internally displaced people, a great number of men and women migrated for work to the Middle East, Asia, and Europe.²⁶ Though running away from the war at home, Nepalis, especially men, ended up working in other crisis ridden and war ravaged places, like Afghanistan and Iraq.²⁷ Even women migrated for work in great numbers, despite episodes of violence and restrictions from the government against certain Gulf countries. To summarize, Nepal's crisis resulted in migration, militarization, and displacement, the key issues that I will be exploring in the subsequent chapters.

to Nepal included India, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and South Africa. Also reported on <http://www.cdi.org>

²⁵ A detailed archived report of the numbers of deaths, disappearances, abductions, and violence related to the conflict can be found on the online network maintained by a Human Rights NGO called the Informal Service Sector (INSEC) at www.inseconline.org

²⁶ Although the government banned women from going to the Gulf countries, nearly fifty thousand women entered Saudi Arabia through illegal channels, the minister for Information and Communication told the Nepal News.com in October 2004. According to a recent report of the Department of Labor and Employment (2006), 105,233 persons left for jobs in other countries in the previous seven months. The reports speculate that on average, 300 to 350 people leave the country for work every day. See Kantipur Report, March 3, 2006. Sexual trafficking of women and children also increased tremendously.

²⁷ In 2005, 12 Nepali truck drivers working in Iraq were taken hostage by an Islamic group called Al Suna Ansar and killed in the most merciless manner possible. There are reports of the hiring of ex-Gurkha soldiers by companies like "Global Risk" as security men in Iraq. See *Nepal Magazine*, November, 2004.

In 2002, King Gyanendra dissolved the House of Parliament and ruled as chairman of the cabinet, which he filled with former Panchayat (royalist) leaders, from his father King Mahendra's time. The mainstream political parties, such as Nepali Congress, found themselves out of power. Such machinations did not convince the communist rebels to renounce violence. Nepal as a nation-state edged closer to becoming a "failed state" or a military state, as the Royal Nepal Military enjoyed the backing of the palace and powerful countries like the United States and Great Britain. February 13, 2006 marked the tenth anniversary of the "Maoist People's War," but it also marked the second year of autocratic rule by King Gyanendra, who further overstepped the boundary of the 1990 constitution by sacking the prime minister and forming a cabinet with himself as head of state on February 1, 2005. Since the king ruled as the sovereign power in the country, the constitutional powers saw a need to come together. In November of 2005, the disempowered political parties reached a 12-point understanding with the Maoist rebels to provide a way out of the political stalemate. They signed the agreement in India. Although U.S. foreign policy, as mediated by the U.S. ambassador James Moriarty, encouraged a political settlement that provided a truce between the autocratic king and the mainstream political parties and excluded the Maoists, the political parties had enough of the king's heavy-handedness. By this time the civil society of Nepal emerged as a strong force, and it did not support the two pillar theory of monarchy and the political parties coming together to crush the Maoists.²⁸

²⁸ Made popular by the Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci (*Prison Notebooks*), the term "civil society" includes people independent in their thinking: they are not personally invested in the running of the State, the military, the economy, or the market. However, the ways in which the civil society is formed is not the same as in Gramsci's time; since culture transforms a society, the civil society actors today operate through institutions and communities invested in development work, religiously affiliated work, and political-ideological affiliations. There was no formation of a civil society in Nepal under the one party Panchayat system of governance, however, after 1990 and since the Maoist People's War became

Despite the civil society and political analysts' criticisms against the American government's Cold War era approach to the Maoists in Nepal, the U.S. diplomatic policy in Nepal did not change its view of the Maoists as violent ideologues who wanted to bring a communist dictatorship to Nepal.²⁹ Ironically, the American administration, along with the European Union and India, often stated there was no "military solution" to the conflict in Nepal. But American policy was to say one thing and do another as the American government never stopped empowering the Royal Nepal Army in multiple ways. Under the garment of "non-lethal weapons" and strategic help of various kinds for "security reasons," American strategy was to keep funding the army during the years after the royal massacre.

The Maoists, on the other hand, had three main demands at the basic level before giving up their violent measures: a roundtable conference, an interim government, and elections to a Constituent Assembly to write a new constitution for Nepal, with the ultimate goal of Nepal becoming a republic. To push the government to sit in talks with them, they started a series of attacks in 2001.³⁰ Their first big attack against the government security forces came from April 2-7, 2001, when they attacked and killed 70 police. They abducted another 69 in July, but the parliamentary government remained unable to mobilize the army, which listened only to the palace. Then the government and

violent, this concept and formation have been quite operational. The civil society is made up of people affiliated with non-governmental organizations, academicians, past politicians, human rights activists, and journalists. See Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato (1994) for a discursive understanding of the development of the concept of civil society and its current formations.

²⁹ Interviews with James Moriarty, the U.S. ambassador to Nepal (07/06/2004-05/22/2007), by some major newspapers, including the BBC, explicate some of the U.S. foreign policy views towards the Maoists and the conflict in Nepal. See "Nepal's Political Crisis: A look back, A look forward" at <http://nepal.usembassy.gov/sp_02-15-2006b.html> and "Interview with James Moriarty" (2/12/2007) in <<http://www.kantipuronline.com/interview.php?&nid=100469>> Also see the Embassy's website and its press releases : <http://nepal.usembassy.gov/speeches_media.html>

³⁰ For a detailed timeline of the Maoist attacks and other major political developments see, "Major Political Developments Related to the CPN (Maoist) and the Insurgency" (181—205) in Deepak Thapa and Bandita Sijapati (2003b).

the Maoists held a series of roundtable talks in August, September, and November, but they ultimately failed.³¹ One starkly notable phenomenon of the peace talks was that not a single woman representative appeared from either side. As the peace talks failed, the ceasefire ended and the Maoist attacks resumed. King Gyanendra and the government led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba declared a state of emergency on November 26, 2001 and officially labeled the Maoists “terrorists” in April of 2002, with bounties on the heads of the Maoist leaders. In April of 2002, the king also gave a directive to the parliament to pass a bill called the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (control and punishment) Ordinance, or TADO, which became the supreme law of the land and the justification for terrorizing civilians in the name of exterminating Maoists.³² While TADO became a tool to wipe out the Maoists, the state of emergency lasted for almost nine months until August of 2002, depriving people of their fundamental rights. In October of 2002, the king sacked Prime Minister Deuba as inefficient and assumed all executive powers for himself. He appointed a prime minister and asked him to form a cabinet under his directive. The king’s first prime minister was an old timer of the Panchayat period, which ended in 1990 after the first People’s Revolution brought democracy. The king became more autocratic until the end of his cabinet rule in April of 2006.

In the meantime, since the peace talks failed, the Maoists took advantage of the ceasefire to strengthen their military power through training and collecting weapons and

³¹ The first round of peace talks was held on 30 August 2001, and the other two were held on 13 November and from 14-15 November of the same year.

³² The examples of the inhuman atrocities and torture inflicted upon the detainees were publicized by Maoists News papers like *Jana Aastha* as well as other mainstream newspapers like the *Nepali Times*. For example “The prison Diary” of Bijayadeb Bhattarai in the form of testimony was first publicized by *Jana Aastha* and then by *The Nepali Times* No. 290 (17-23 March, 2006), where the ascribe talks about witnessing a pregnant Tamang girl being kicked to death among other things.

equipment, which they often looted from government security forces. In September of 2001, they announced the formation of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), whose Supreme Commander was Prachanda, the chairman of the Maoist Party. The Maoists for the first time attacked the Royal Nepali Army in Dang in November of 2001 and brought the army into the conflict. This provided an excuse to deploy the army, which until then played an indifferent role. Armed with TADO, the military and armed police came down heavily on the public while, despite heavy casualties, the Maoists continued their recruitment and expansion of their army. For the most part, TADO made people sympathize with the Maoists and helped them gain ranks.

The Nepali State's militarized violence produced the most human casualties, especially civilian casualties. While the Maoists targeted development infrastructure, institutions, physical properties, and certain classes of people, the state military's key targets were human bodies. The state security forces accounted for more than two thirds (almost 70%) of the number of people killed.³³ Besides the loss of lives through violence, people suffered psychological, physical, and economic traumas. The security forces and the Maoists are equally responsible on this front, which I will explore in more detail in later chapters. People left their homes to search for work and to avoid persecution, death, or physical harm. Although internal migration and seasonal migrant work are not new phenomena in Nepal, the kind of displacement people suffered during the last ten years was of a different kind. People became refugees within their own country. They also suffered under protracted states of emergency coupled with insurgency and militarization at the hands of the army and the Maoists. These forms of suffering were the fruits of Nepal's most recent war. To more fully understand this

³³ See Human Rights Violations (HRV) data recorded by INSEC. <www.inseconline.org>

suffering, its causes, and its impact on women and gender in particular, it is necessary to reach back in history long before this most recent conflict began.

Early Political History, Society, and Culture: Contextualizing Nepali Women

Women in Nepal are not a monolithic group but are diversely constituted along different class, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and ideological modes of production.³⁴ However, in modern Nepal,³⁵ the dominant narratives and hegemonic ideologies of femininity, gender, caste, religion, and nationalism touch most Nepali women. Here the “dominant narratives” refer to Hinduization and Sanskritization in the aftermath of the Gurkhali conquest and unification of the formerly sovereign 22/24 kingdoms or fiefdoms into Nepal in 1769 CE.³⁶ Prithvi Narayan Shah, the first to lead the Gorkhali empire, called the newly reconstructed Nepal a “char jaat ra chattis barna ko phulbari”³⁷ (a flower garden of 4 caste groups and 36 sub-groups). However, the unity in diversity that Prithvi Narayan Shah advocated and envisioned remained only rhetorical in

³⁴ Meena Acharya and Lynn Bennet’s five volume series *The Status of women in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Center for Economic Development and Administration, T. U., 1979-81) provides a comprehensive account of the diversity of women in Nepal, where there are more than 75 ethnic groups that speak roughly as many dialects from different language groups. Some of the important anthropological studies on women in Nepal include but are not limited to: Jones 1976, Bennett 1983, Schuler 1987, Allen and Mukherjee 1990, Watkins 1996, Adams 1996, Ahearn 2001, March 2002, Maslak 2003.

³⁵ The time after 1768 is designated as the start of the modern period in Nepal, which coincided with the rise of the Gurkhas and the conquest of the Baisi/Chaubisi Rajyas (22/24 kingdoms) under the Gurkhali king Prithavi Narayan Shah. See Rishikesh Shaha *Modern Nepal (1769 – 1955)*, vols. 1 & 2. Before, only the Kathmandu valley, the area of the modern capital city, was known as Nepal, and even today some elderly people refer to the Kathmandu valley as “Nepal.”

³⁶ See Dor Bahadur Bista’s *Fatalism and Development: Nepal’s Struggle for Modernization* (1991) for a brief but comprehensive perspective on Nepal’s geographic, political, psychological, cultural, and developmental history. One of his key arguments is that Nepali society suffers from an upper caste tendency to place agency on the outside, which he calls “fatalism,” a belief in fate. As Bista himself acknowledges, his attempt to represent complex social processes in a heterogeneous place like Nepal relies on “generalization” and should be read with caution as “the book is centred in the cultural systems of the major groups of the high caste Hindus” (7). Also see John Whelpton’s “Unification and Sanskritisation” in *A History of Nepal* (2005).

³⁷ Although known as a brave warrior and a uniter of dispersed people into a nation called Nepal, Prithvi’s cruelty towards those who resisted his invasion has only recently come under criticism. For example, he supposedly cut off the noses and ears of people taken prisoner during the invasion of Kathmandu/Kirtipur.

the years to come.³⁸ The Gorkhali army continued its mission of territorial expansion for another 40 years, even after Prithvi's death, until the British East India Company forced them to negotiate the treaty called *Sughauli Sandhi* in 1816 CE (Shaha 1990). Soon after Prithvi's death, the power grabbing started between his daughter-in-law Rajendralaxmi, who was also the regent queen (1777-1785 CE), and Prithvi's second son Bahadur Shah, whom historians praise as the only *true match* to his father's martial courage and leadership.³⁹ The British East India Company's increasing hold over India's northern and eastern regions and Nepal's expansion to those corners clashed and produced internal conflicts in the governance of Nepal. The court politics became worse in later days with power struggles between the Shah kings, regent queens, and *bharadars* (courtiers), who were affiliated with different parties. The clashes of interest among the internal political powers were not hidden from the British East India Company's sight, and the British utilized every opportunity to strengthen their diplomatic base in Nepal.⁴⁰ Taking advantage of the muddy situation, the ambitious Jung Bahadur Rana through a coup d'état became the first Rana prime minister in 1846 CE. With Jung Bahadur's ascent to power, "a strong pro-British ruler" emerged in Nepal who completed the task of rendering Nepal a "semi-colony" of the British (Blaikie et al. 1980, 35-36).⁴¹ Jung Bahadur made the

³⁸ Bista (1991, 162) argues that the noble and farsighted concept of nationalism held by Prithvi Shah, "who would have been happy to be have been anointed by the priests of all ethnic groups, such as Limbu, Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Tharu and Dhimal," was impeded by the institutionalization of a hierarchic caste tradition in the Rana period and beyond.

³⁹ Rishikesh Shaha (1990, vol. 1) makes this argument in regard to Bahadur Shah, and the same is also expressed by Baburam Acharya (2005), a lead historian of Nepal.

⁴⁰ For more on the relationship between Britain and Nepal, see Husain (1970). The "British Ministry" in 1840 led by resident Brian Hodgson came into effect during one of the most difficult times in court politics and palace intrigues, climaxing in the coup d'état by Jung Bahadur Rana in 1846 CE (Whelpton 2005).

⁴¹ Although Nepali historians disagree with the assessment that Nepal was a British colony, which it was not, I agree with the "semi-colony" concept. Nepal was dependent on Britain in many ways, including for its sovereignty as a State, since the Saughali Sandhi. According to this treaty, Nepal could have no diplomatic relations with any other Western country without the permission of the British until 1923. After

process of Nepali recruitment in the Indian-British army smooth and assisted the British in crushing Indian rebellions, including the great Sepoy Mutiny in 1857-58. His relationship with the British was as much for personal gain as it was to negotiate with their technological power and increasing influence over the subcontinent. On the home front, Jung Bahadur sealed his position by following an “agnatic principle” only within the Rana clan; thus, he centralized political and economic power within a small enclave of Ranas or those associated with them.⁴² The struggle for power shifted to the Shah kings and queens and the Rana prime ministers, who ruled the country in the name of Shahs. For most of the Rana rule of 104 years (1846-1950 CE), the general public was barred from education, political activism, and anything that seemed a remote threat to the Rana oligarchy.⁴³ Dalit and schedule caste men and women were prohibited from gaining literacy, although the British system of education began to influence the later days of the Rana rulers, at least for their own kind.⁴⁴ Some Rana prime ministers, such as Dev Shamsher, were quite liberal and education minded. He opened up almost two hundred schools throughout the country, but the schools were “closed down under the suspicion of being instruments of treason,” and Dev Shamsher’s younger brother Chandra

the British Residency was established in Kathmandu, the British closely scrutinized Nepal’s diplomatic relations with other countries.

⁴² For more on how Jung Bahadur usurped political power see “The Kot Massacre: The Emergence of Jang Bahadur as the Strong Man of Nepal” in (Shaha 1990, 1:218-270).

⁴³ This does not mean there was no resistance to Rana oligarchy. Despite grave persecution, death, exile, and decasting if the involved were of Brahmin caste, many people protested and actively worked to end the Rana’s autocratic rule, and they finally succeeded in 1950 CE. See Shaha (1990, vol. 1) or Whelpton (2005). The later Rana prime ministers did open schools and colleges to show their liberalism in the changing world, which had its effect in Nepal. With revolutionary ideas coming from India, where the movement against the British was strong, and Nepali activists working with Indian nationalists for independence, it was a difficult situation for the Ranas, who had mostly been strong allies of the British. One of the prime ministers even opened a girls’ college called Padma Kanya, which remains one of the largest women’s colleges in Nepal.

⁴⁴ Jung Bahadur Rana opened up a school for Rana children inside the palace soon after he returned from his tour to England and France in the 1850s. Although it remained Darbar (Palace) High School, it was moved outside the premises of the palace. This English medium school allowed the entrance of mostly upper class/caste children, and the subjects taught there were confined for the most part to the British Isles and India, apart from Nepali and Sanskrit (Bista 1991, 119).

Shamsher exiled him after only four months in office (Bista 1991, 119). The majority of Rana rulers discouraged work that was not caste and custom bound. Thus, the poor did not attend school. Those with access to education came from the upper castes or upper class and were male.

Older Nepalis say that sexual exploitation of women in the Rana period was notorious, and some Ranas had harems in their palaces. Polygamy was (and still is, despite being illegal now) widely practiced. The Ranas often preferred girls from certain ethnic groups to serve as “palace girls,” or *nannies*, a gendered connotation bearing a stigmatized identity that stayed with the woman and her family even after she stopped working for the palace. While sexual mores were upheld with enforced structures of caste bound relationships, they did not apply to those in power. If a powerful Rana man, or any privileged man for that matter, fancied a girl or a woman, he could abduct her from wherever he spotted her regardless of her will.⁴⁵ As the dominant historical narratives pay little heed to “subaltern” concerns or simply leave them out, these atrocious practices remained informal gossip, escaping the attention of historians documenting so-called real facts.⁴⁶ Women who served in the palaces as maidservants,

⁴⁵ As the historian Shaha (1990, 2:127-128) reports, Rana Prime Minister Juddha Shamser notoriously picked up women he fancied and returned them to their husbands or fathers “with a few rupees clutched in their hands.” He had numerous unacknowledged illegitimate children, and at least 19 sons he acknowledged (Shaha 1990, 128). He did not acknowledge daughters. Nanda R. Shrestha (1998, 149) also alludes to this kind of sexual misconduct as characteristic of the Rana feudal regime.

⁴⁶ My use of the term subaltern follows Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), in which he describes those who occupy a subordinate status vis a vis a dominant group in a hegemonic social/political formation. Other scholars have expanded and modified the Gramscian subaltern framework. See Raymond Williams (1977), Stuart Hall (1980, 1986), and Guha and Spivak (1988) for deeper explorations. Though I write of the absence of representation of subaltern and marginalized people, I do not intend to stand in and sublate the people I purport to represent. As the issue of representation is fraught with difficulties and there is no unmediated representation, I take my position as an observer, and at most as an interlocutor. In Nepal’s case, one often sees “Dalit” and “subaltern” used interchangeably. The category Dalit refers to an identity category to express an historical oppression constituted by caste, culture, and religion. Although class and economy play a role in other oppressions, they are not prerequisites in the making of a Dalit. There have been attempts to address the issues of the Dalits in Nepal lately. See Yam

nannies, and concubines may emerge as protagonists in the political and nationalist history of Nepal and not remain fictional characters of a writer's imagination if the questions of history, authority, and fact and fiction are blurred for a moment.⁴⁷ We rely on fiction to understand the historical conditions of so-called ordinary women before Nepal opened up to research and documentation in the early 50s. The most accessible information about Nepali women before then centers on the Shah regent queens of the modern period, aside from a few other royal female figures of ancient and medieval times. Although the lives of privileged women like these tell little of most women and their conditions, the narratives of the dominant group may provide clues to tangential histories of women sublated under the dominant discourse. This includes discourses of later researchers writing on Nepali women. The practice of widowhood, which still exists, and *Sati* and slavery, which existed until the 1920s, are patterns of patriarchy to rule and regulate women's agency and how they are used in the articulations of gender, culture, and nationalist history in Nepal. It is important to look into this history if we are to understand the political and cultural situation of women in the present.

Sati or 'Widow Burning': Politics of Agency and Victimhood

Bahadur Kisan, *The Nepali Dalit Social Movement* (Lalitpur: Legal Rights Protection Society, 2005) and *Dalits of Nepal: Issues and Challenges*, edited by Prabodh Devkota (Kathmandu: Feminist Dalit Organization Nepal, 2002), a short collection of essays that address issues that Dalits face in Nepal.

⁴⁷ If fiction is a form of representation of social reality, Diamond S. Rana's novels *Seto Bagh* and *Basanti* may provide clues to facets of lives and socio-cultural conditions of the period. Baburam Acharya, a leading historian of Nepal, sheds light on the powerlessness of the ruled people of Nepal during the Shah-Rana period. His *Aba Yesto Kahile Nahos* (*May this Never Happen Again*) is a collection of major historical events narrating the killing, deception, scheming, coup d'états and oppression since unification in 1769. Krishna Abiral's investigative novel *Rakta Kunda* (Kathmandu, 2007) sheds light on the lives of women as workers, queens, and princesses in the palace and the visible and invisible ways in which the system exploits women and how they seek to control and exploit in turn. Although some call this novel a fictitious account created to defame the palace, there are several grains of truth in it to judge by events surrounding the palace.

As far back as the 5th century CE, a queen refused to commit *sati* and instead became a regent so that she could help her young son in matters of the kingdom.⁴⁸ Her son Manadeva urged his mother, Satyawati, not to commit *sati* after the death of her husband, King Dharmadeva. This is an important revelation of the practice of *sati* in Nepal, perhaps the first documentation of *sati-pratha* in the whole of South Asia.⁴⁹ Although much research is needed to find out how *sati* worked in Nepal and what kind of agency women had, it is clear that *sati* existed. Though Manadeva earned great affection for his good deeds and for preventing his mother from throwing herself on her husband's funeral pyre, *sati* lingered among upper caste Hindus into the twentieth century. There is much about the history of *sati* in Nepal that remains unstudied. The early twentieth century was a revolutionary period in South Asia and other parts of the world against colonialism, imperialism, and oppressive practices, and such revolution touched Nepal as well. The Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shamser (1901-1929) outlawed *sati-pratha* in 1919 and banned slavery in 1924. Despite their feudal and oppressive history, Rana rulers like Chandra Shamsher, who obtained a modern education in India, tried to modernize the society by introducing liberal values and opening universities. Old texts like the *Vamsabali* (1877) relate that even Jung Bahadur Rana after his tour of Europe tried to restrict *sati-pratha*, but not with much success. Under the influence of the Hindu Brahmin priests, who controlled the lives and deaths of women, court politics did not

⁴⁸ The term *sati* in Sanskrit means one who “follows her husband” in everything, including death. The anglicized version is *suttee*. There are scholars who use the different spellings to define different meanings related to the practice. Now *sati* is usually used as a noun, which also signifies a living woman devoted to her husband, not only one who dies on the pyre. *Suttee* is used as a verb, which signifies the act of the ritual-burning itself.

⁴⁹ John Whelpton states the inscription about Manadeva at the Chagunarayan temple dated 465 CE is “probably the first reference to *sati* (widow-burning) in any South Asian inscription” (19). Another early reference to *sati* is in a monument (520 CE) in Sagar (Madhya Pradesh) in India. See Welpton (2005, 19).

allow the outlawing of the practice (*Vamsāvalī* 68).⁵⁰ Although many see *sati-pratha* as the murder of women sanctioned by a hegemonic society, some contemporary feminist discourses on *sati* examine the complexity in it and seek women's agency and self-determination in the practice.⁵¹ It is especially interesting to note the association of a sati-woman with the nation-state and nationalism.

Some Nepalis link mythical-historical tales of a sati-woman's curse to the state's dilapidated condition. Elderly people often repeat the phrase "sati ko sarap pareko desh" (a nation cursed by a sati) to make sense of the miserable underdevelopment and chaos, as if the only fate of a cursed nation were dilapidation. The act of *sati*, sacrifice by extinguishing the will to live, gives the sati-woman divine power to bless or curse as she wishes. In her annihilation she becomes a hero for the society. In light of the irregularity of *sati-pratha*, its defenders assert an inherent justice through the discourse of will in the practice to make it seem fair and equitable. The message implies, "Don't turn someone into a *sati* unfairly or unduly, or be ready to face the consequences of her curses that can turn against you." However, the will of her husband can fold into the apparent will of a woman committing *sati*. After marriage, there is only one body, the marital body, which divine will conjoins. But the male body takes precedence in this conjoining, so when it dies the rest must die or live as non-entity. In other words, for a married woman, the husband is not the *other* but her *self*. There is no dialectic or reciprocal war between the

⁵⁰ The British outlawed what they called suttee in India in 1829, but the practice occurred frequently even after that in northern India. As recently as the 1980s, the Roop Kanwar incident shook India and the world with varying emotions. For Jung Bahadur's view on Sati, see the *Vamsāvalī* or *The History of Nepal*, translated from Parbataya by Munsī Shew Shunker Singh and Pandit Shri Gunanand, Editor, Daniel Wright, MD (Cambridge: University Press, 1877, 68).

⁵¹ Feminist scholarship has dealt with *sati/suttee* amidst debates on women's agency, victimization, and the politics of representation (Daly 1978, Spivak 1988b, Sangari and Vaid 1996, Mani 1989). However, much is still unknown about sati in South Asia. A look at *sati-pratha* from the angle of politics and governance in South Asia is warranted, and Nepal's political history will prove important in the study of this contentious tradition.

two subjects. The contract of Hindu marriage, formulated after the *Laws of Manu*, means that a woman has no will but her husband's, who becomes her proprietor.⁵²

Yet, the cultural practice of *sati* is portrayed as woman's bravery, courage, and loyalty to go through a trial by fire, the equivalent of what men would exhibit on the battlefield when they fight to save their nation or national-cultural integrity against the enemy or an outsider. But unlike her male counterpart who owns the right to bodily integrity, a woman has no such right to personhood or individuality apart from that of her husband. Her social and bodily integrity are marked and delimited by her husband's. His will is hers, even in death, the ultimate expression of the erasure of boundaries and bodily integrity. Nevertheless, a paradoxical mix of agency and victimization is imbued in the script of the sati-woman who undergoes the ritual sacrifice of her body. The alternative to committing *sati* was widowhood, where life extended beyond the funeral pyre but was lived as a non-being with no power to curse or bless, and the status of loyal hero no longer applied. Widows lived lives devoid of any individuality because so many things were proscribed for them. If any widow fell from the pyre and lived she would be given to the lowest rank even among the untouchable caste groups, and continue her life among them an untouchable for the rest of her life. In a Hindu society, widows occupied the realm of the living-dead. They depended on their sons or close relatives if they were lucky, and many lived in temples and places of charity as liabilities the so-called normal society despised. They worked as housekeepers and cooks if from the Brahmin caste,

⁵² According to *The Laws of Manu*, "A virtuous wife should never do anything displeasing to the husband who took her in marriage, when he is alive or dead, if she longs for her husband's world (after death). [157] When her husband is dead she may fast as much as she likes, (living) on auspicious flowers, roots, and fruits, but she should not even mention the name of another man. She should be long-suffering until death, self-restrained, and chaste, striving (to fulfill) the unsurpassed duty of women who have one husband...[165] The woman who is not unfaithful to her husband and who restrains her mind, speech, and body reaches her husband's world (after death), and good people call her a virtuous woman..." (115-116)

while they themselves were forbidden to eat nutritious food. They were proscribed from sleeping on a comfortable mattress, remarrying, wearing bright colors, and appearing on auspicious occasions like weddings and other festivities, for they were seen as bad luck.⁵³

Not all widowed women in Nepal suffer the same kind of inhumane treatment these days; some are blessed with more open-minded families. However, even when they do not suffer materially, widowed women in a Hindu household suffer psychological pain as they have internalized the societal view that they do not possess *good karma* and are inauspicious. The customs surrounding widowhood are starting to change as activist women challenge them more pro-actively following the People's War. There is a cultural revolution regarding women's place in society, and many are calling into question gender roles prescribed for and appropriated by women, which I will discuss in more detail in later chapters.

Historically, *sati* was probably practiced only among the upper castes in India, mostly the Rajputs, and later by the Brahmins and the Baniyas (business caste) in India (Sagari and Vaid 1996, 1990). In Nepal's case, only royal and courtly women, who belonged to the Chetriya caste, and Brahmin caste women endured this ordeal. There are citations of sati in history books until as recently as the 19th century, but no detailed account of sati in Nepal exists. Literary and historical evidence suggests it was not imposed uniformly, which we can tell by the prevalence of widowhood and documented examples of women who did not commit sati for one reason or another. However, one of the most interesting facets of *sati-pratha* in Nepal is how men exploited this tradition for

⁵³ Not all Nepali widows endure the hardships prescribed for the upper castes. Newars, Rais, Tamangs, and Gurungs do not follow caste based laws on widows and are more lax about widow remarriage. In fact, Rais marry off their daughters-in-law like their own daughters if they become widows and are young. There is much written on the plight of widows in caste based cultures in India and Nepal. See Leela Dube (1997); Martha Chen (1998, 2000). In Nepal's case, see Bennet (1983), Cameron (1998), and Kathy-Lee Galvin (2005) for the lives of widows in Nepal.

political power. In addition, some women used it to gain and consolidate power within their own agnatic groups at the expense of other women. Although it stemmed in part from religious and traditional constructs that deemed a married woman nonessential without her live husband, *sati-pratha* equally served political and economic purposes. For example, when a woman burned along with her dead husband, the rights to property transferred to the nearest male kin in the absence of male progeny. In addition, the institutionalization of the practice in Nepal seems rooted in the political circumstances of the country and women's position of power in the court. Although some historical evidence, such as the story of Satyawati, implies that women had the power to make the decision whether to immolate themselves or not, there is much evidence to the contrary. Volition in *sati* is more or less a romantic notion. Yet, at least in Queen Satyawati's case, the historians assign agency to the queen herself, the individual person, in regard to her decision to not commit *sati*. Even if there is not enough evidence to assess the circumstances of the fifth century and what stopped Satyawati from becoming a *sati*, we can at least surmise that it was an arbitrary practice to some extent. However, when we come to the modern period in Nepal, the agency of the individual woman shifts to the agency exercised by those holding local political power or vying for it.

The modern period (1779-1950) in Nepal shows arbitrary instances of enforcing *sati* when convenient to people in power. After Pratap Singh Shah's death, the courtiers exempted Rajendralaxmi, the regent queen and mother of Rana Bahadur Shah, from committing *sati* in 1777 CE. Another queen, Rajarajesvari Devi, burned with several other women in 1806 CE so that the king's second wife, Tripurasundari Devi, whom the *Mukhtiyar* (equivalent to a prime minister) Bhimsen Thapa favored, could become the

regent queen. According to Shah, Bhimsen Thapa “contrived to bring about the *sati* or ritualistic cremation, of Rajarajesvari, Rana Bahadur’s eldest queen, along with fifteen other wives, mistresses, and maidservants, and thus made it possible for his own candidate, Tripurasundari, to become the Regent Queen” (Shaha 1990, 1:107). Indeed, Bhimsen Thapa stayed a *Mukhtiyar* for a long time (1806 to 1837) until his opponents and people he victimized trapped him with the charge of murdering a prince. He was jailed and reportedly committed suicide in prison (Shaha 1990, 1:107-158). Violence, intrigue, and plotting were common paths to power during the period of the Shah-Rana regimes. Women’s roles, however, in these circumstances were mediated by court politics largely controlled by their male relatives. As the historical narratives reveal, women who came to power either became victims to these practices or emulated them, usually on behalf of their sons (Hada 2005, 143-149). The period from 1769 CE until 1919 CE, when *sati* became illegal, is an interesting time to study the practice vis a vis political power and the role of the “body politic” in the governance of a nation. However, my motive here is to contextualize Nepali women’s practices and positions in Nepali history and society, and not present a detailed study of *sati* in Nepal. It is also to make sense of the dominant political and social terrain that has marginalized women and kept them out of the power game for the most part. Whether the ideology of the *sati*, “one that follows her man,” is still imposed upon women and is operative in large sectors of modern Nepali society and politics is an important question for consideration even in the 21st century.

The position of women in Nepali history is fraught with paradoxes and contradictions. Women’s cultural and ethnic diversity in Nepal makes it hard to

categorically mark one group of women above another in a vertical ladder of oppression. However, Hindu women of “untouchable castes,” who also call themselves *Dalits* these days, may bear the burden of oppression more heavily than other groups, despite the perceived laxity in sexual norms in their communities. In other words, they may remarry if widowed, divorce is not a taboo, and they do not usually live in seclusion. Yet, as Mary Cameron observes, “The process of naturalizing caste and gender ranking in Hindu culture has far-reaching ontological and conceptual consequences” (1998, 46). Because the scheduled caste groups belong to the Hindu religious system, patriarchal culture operates even more adversely against women of the untouchable castes, who become doubly abject or otherized. They bear the caste burden and the burden of being the “female sex,” which has a polluting body that bleeds and gestates. According to Hindu ritual laws, women become “like untouchables” during their menstruation and are even referred to by the scheduled caste names, sometimes to connote their state of being as they are not allowed to touch things that are considered sacred. While all women are rendered polluted for their corporeality, lower caste women occupy the place of permanent “abjectness.” Therefore, despite their perceived freedom in certain areas, the bondage of femaleness weighs upon them more heavily than on women belonging to non-caste groups or higher caste groups. In this instance, the universal notion of oppression of women does not hold without homogenizing the vast differences in how women experience oppression even in a local context. The scheduled caste groups, the women especially, are rendered the ultimate “service class” to the whole of society.

Women in Nepal hold a paradoxical place of both power and victimhood, agency and opposition to it, making it difficult to produce narratives of one at the expense of the

other. It is true that there are figures like Brikuti Devi, who made it to the national pantheon of heroes, and queens like Satyawati, who is praised for not committing *sati*, implying agency in herself. However, the tradition of either putting women on a pedestal or on the bottom of the hierarchy largely remains. Religious traditions like the *Kumari* (the virgin goddess), Deuki (temple girl), or Jhoma (Bhuddist female priestess) signify anomalous practices that imply both otherworldly power embodied by the female and women's enslavement to cultural and religious ideals of a society. The *Kumari* especially is revered as a living goddess and is worshipped as the embodiment of *Shakti* (divine female energy) until she reaches menarche.⁵⁴ But social complications arise when she stops being a goddess and has to adjust herself to being a regular woman in *everyday* Nepali society. Historically and culturally speaking, women in Nepal can signify power or enjoy association with the powerful. The problem is that they are appointed to places of power or degradation without self-determination or autonomy. The patriarchal society finds ways to curtail and contain women's power, and thus their agency, in different forms: sometimes as sacrificial figures, like the *sati*, and other times as embodiment of the divine, such as the goddess *Kumari*. While women could signify power and creation, patriarchy and men regulate and mediate them: women become powerful objects, not subjects in their own right. They embody power, but most of the time they do not regulate it or use it to their full advantage. Furthermore, the power they embody is seen as so dangerous that it needs containment through rituals of purity and chastity and control of their sexuality (Bennett 1983).⁵⁵ Failure to channel and contain the power in

⁵⁴ For more on the cult of Kumari see Michael Allen's *The Cult of a Kumari: A Virgin Worship in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point, 1996).

⁵⁵ Lynn Bennett's ethnographic study of high caste women in Nepal explores the ways in which notions of culture and religion constrain and curtail high caste women's everyday lives in Nepal.

the right way and in the right direction results in losing that power. It is not that *females* do not have power, but females as gendered *women* do not. While the mythical and religious history in Nepal accords a special place of power to the female, cultural and political practices toward *women*, a gendered construct, have largely been adversarial toward them, as in most of South Asia.⁵⁶ We see a manifestation of this notion of woman's power as a "private thing" in political practices in Nepal, where women support men from behind, from the private sector. Women enjoy a little power only in their homes, temples, or mythical history. Overall, although sati-tradition is no longer practiced, the tradition of "woman as follower of man" still holds supreme in the construction and operation of Nepali society and polity.

Women, Nation, Politics, and the Construction of the History of Bravery

Although the dominant political history excludes women or pays little attention to their actions, women emerge occasionally in the annals of Nepal as competent players and actors.⁵⁷ They especially appear in stories of the construction of nationalism and bravery. Stories of women and children defending the borders and making sacrifices during war earn validation and praise. An especially noted martial story is the Nala-Pani war (1814), during which women and children came to aid the Gorkhali army defending the fort of Kalanga Hill against the British (Shaha 1990, 1:121-124). However, not much is written about women outside the limelight of bravery, and common women appear as footnotes once in awhile in the dominant constructions of the political history of Nepal.

⁵⁶ Although known as a Hindu dominant country, Nepal's religious practices are better defined as syncretism, a merging of different religious and cultural practices. Buddhist, Hindu and Animist practices have come together to define the cultural Hinduism widely practiced in Nepal. On the other hand, Nepal is a historical centre for Mahayana Buddhist practices. While female sexual energy takes a central place in Mahayana Tantrism, goddess figures in Hinduism, like Kali, signify both creation and destruction. Unlike the social reality of women, the female force in the mythical universe is overtly superior.

⁵⁷ For more see Ganga Karmacharya Hada's *Queens in Nepalese Politics: An Account of Roles of Nepalese Queens in State Affairs (1775—1846)* (Kathmandu: Educational Publishing House, 2005).

The patriarchal and ruling classes, imbibing the colonial constructions of the Gorkhali identity of bravery, forged the history of Nepali nationalism (Des Chene 1991, Onta 1996). The subaltern or Dalit concerns about the representation of Nepal and Nepali history have not yet fully emerged as important questions of investigation, although the process has begun. The rewriting of Nepali history to make it inclusive and diversified is warranted, but we have not even begun to write women's history, not to mention subaltern women's history, in Nepal.⁵⁸ Nepali modern history is written from the perspective of the powerful and the dominant, and thus it is predominantly the history of the Gorkhali conquest, unification, Sanskritization, the lives of the Shah and Rana rulers, and their relationship with the British East India Company in the 19th century. Fortunately, some women actors find representation in the dominant history. The queens of Nepal surface because many regent queens ruled in a short period of time and played important roles that historians could not easily slight. Although Nepali historians in general imply that such women became pawns in the hands of their male palace relatives and were unable to rule by their own decree, there are documented incidents of their intelligence, power, and extraordinary comportment, which only more in-depth research will fully bring to light.⁵⁹

As some scholars of Nepali history, such as Onta (1996), argue, Nepali modern history and Nepali nationalism are constructed largely on narratives of bravery of the erstwhile Gorkhali empire. These became the foundation for the institution of autocratic

⁵⁸ There are some interesting anthropological studies of various women of Nepal by social science researchers. For example, Bennett (1983) on Brahmin women; Schuler (1987) on women of Tibetan descent in the Mustang valley; Aziz (1978), Ortner (1978), and Adams (1996) on Sherpa women; Cameron (1998) on Dalit women; March (2002) on Tamang women; and Molnar (1982) and Ahearn (2001) on Magar women, to name a few.

⁵⁹ A few studies analyze the roles queens played in political matters in Nepal. It would be fascinating to look at Nepali queens' actions during the height of British colonization of India in the 19th century. There is one such recent study devoted to the queens of Nepal by Ganga Karmacharya Hada (2005).

Shah rule that started in the 1960s with a non-violent coup d'état by King Mahendra, who started the partyless Panchayat system. The construction of *bivhutis* (national heroes), the eulogizing of Gorkhali martial prowess, and the uniqueness of Nepali identity as different from its neighbors became the bricolage of Nepal as a modern nation-state. This attempt to construct Nepali nationalism privileged not only a masculine imagery of the nation-state but paid little attention to the diversely gendered Nepali society and culture, which was also ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse.⁶⁰ The equation of bravery with the nation-state marginalized groups, including women, that were not recognized as “martial races” and thus could not identify with such metaphors of bravery and masculinity. This construction of nationalism and citizenship alienated many. The people of the Terai or Madesh region, who usually identify themselves as “Madeshi,” were also excluded, consciously or unconsciously, from this national imagery.⁶¹ As for gender, if men from the hills or *pahad* had role models like Amar Singh Thapa, Bal Bhadra Kunwar, and Bahadur Shah, women had mythical and historical figures like Sita, Sabitri, and Vrikuti to look up to. Sacrificial figures like Sita and Sabitri symbolized *dharma* based on the Hindu notion of female sexual purity, while Brikuti became the embodiment of cultural, religious, and national representation in foreign soil. It is only

⁶⁰ As Onta (1996) explains in his dissertation, although the citation of Gorkhali bravery in the unification era was key to the construction of Nepali nationalism in the 60s and 70s, none of the Gurkha soldiers who fought in the great wars of the 20th century and made Nepal famous by earning the Victoria Cross were included in the national pantheon of the *bir* (brave). Thus, Gorkhali identity was employed while excluding the real Gurkha soldiers, who belonged to different ethnic groups in Nepal and may not have identified with the term over their own Janajati groups, but nevertheless were known and recognized as the Gurkhas abroad. Also, while the “Gurkha soldier” syndrome was partly a colonialist construction, the erstwhile Gorkhali empire exploited a “Gorkhali identity” during the time of unification and thereafter.

⁶¹ After Jana Andolan II (2006), Madesi political and cultural identity issues emerged with new zeal, with resulting violence and exclusion. Although Madesh has many indigenous people who long lived there, migrations from the hills and borders of India changed its demographic and linguistic composition at least since the time of the unification of Nepal. As identity issues became increasingly complex during the crisis, national identity vis a vis ethnic, regional, and political identity took on a new face in the restructuring of the nation-state called Nepal.

after Nepal became a multiparty democracy in the 1990s that questions of belonging, identity, and citizenship were probed from the perspectives of the marginalized, and women have started raising their voices. Women's rights as human rights are increasingly taking hold in the Nepali social, political, and economic landscape, alongside voices of backlash and criticism of women's rights as a borrowed concept from the West and feminism as a practice destructive of nationalist culture.

The exclusive Gorkhali nationalism under the Shah Kings in the 60s, 70s, and 80s further Sanskritized and Hinduized the diverse Nepali socio-cultural milieu by imposing homogenous social, cultural, political, and gender structures.⁶² As King Mahendra (1955-1972) propounded the one party Panchayat system with the help of the feudals in the villages and the upper castes of the society, Nepal's diversity eroded further with the nationalist mantra of "one language, one dress, and one nation," which predominantly resembled the language, dress codes, and religious practices of the upper castes and class.⁶³ The institutionalization of the Nepali language, which is Sanskrit derived, as the official national language discouraged the speaking of other native languages, for development and modernization was achieved by embracing the hegemonic practices of the new Nepal. The *New Muluki Ain* (new law of the land) of 1963 CE, though it banned untouchability and formalized equality under the law, was very much based on the ideologies of patriarchy and the Hindu cultural belief system's supremacy of the father,

⁶² See the work of Bista (1967, 1991), Bhattachan (2001), Gurung (1998), and Gellner et al. (1997).

⁶³ Nepal became a Hindu Kingdom constitutionally in King Mahendra's time. One interesting thing King Mahendra did was bring young boys who impressed him in some way during his travels in the countryside to the city and provide them with a modern/Western education. Some of the boys stayed in the palace and grew up with his children. Most of them became successful, and many aided the Panchayat system. I mention this to show both Mahendra's altruistic nature as well as how gendered this practice was that selected only boys for educational empowerment.

king, and cow, which consolidated women's subordinate position in society.⁶⁴ With this *New Muluki Ain*, the institutionalization of women as secondary human beings and second class citizens became complete: women had no rights to parental property, which sons had at birth; men had a right to marry another woman if the wife could not produce a son; only the father passed on citizenship rights.⁶⁵

The new Nepali nation as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) of unity in diversity that Prithvi Narayan Shah articulated with his “Nepal as a garden with a diversity of flowers” was indeed far from the subsequent reality. Rana rule (1846-1951) weakened the dream, while the subsequent Panchayat call for “nationalist development” suffocated diversity in favor of “one nation under the King,” who was supposedly an incarnation of Hindu god Vishnu. Even modern technologies like the radio, camera, and newspapers were exploited in the creation of the new Nepal under the godlike leadership of the King (Onta 1996). Sooner or later, modernization and development were unavoidable in Nepal, a process made historically necessary by developments around Nepal and in the world. However, in Nepal's case, it happened with a push toward the ideological construction of one culture, one language, and one identity, which further eroded diversity and devalued indigenous cultures and their practices in favor of entrepreneurship, mercantilism, and hard work. As the social scientist Bista (1991) argues in his book *Fatalism and Development*, the caste-based leadership, which was a minority, imposed its own hierarchy, caste and gender based models and practices that

⁶⁴ The first *Muluki Ain* was promulgated by Jung Bahadur Rana, the first Rana Prime minister, in 1854 CE after his visit to England in 1850 CE. See Whelpton's *A History of Nepal* (2005) for more. Some translate the *New Muluki Ain* as New National Code, but I prefer the more literal “New Law of the Land.”

⁶⁵ Citizenship rights changed after Jana Andolan 2006, and now mothers can also transfer citizenship to their children. However, the interim constitution of 2007 is still biased against women who marry non-Nepali citizens, while there is nothing punitive for men who do so.

were detrimental to the egalitarian spirit of the indigenous people of Nepal.⁶⁶ Bista also points out that foreign development practitioners relied heavily on the fatalistic and paternalistic leadership of Nepal's elite without paying attention to cultural and linguistic diversity in Nepal. Although more egalitarian gender practices existed among some communities,⁶⁷ the prevailing social constructions did not favor these differences since Nepal was modernizing and developing under the values of the dominant. Slowly but steadily, people were interpellated into dominant Hindu ideological constructions of gender and the sexual division of labor, which were modeled after an idealized medieval period where everyone had a place in the hierarchy (Tamang 2000).⁶⁸ As if modernization could only be achieved by decree from the top, the state, many dominant practices of discrimination against women became institutionalized in the governing of Nepali society.

Likewise, as scholars argue, this homogenization of cultural practices of gender for political and economic stratification by the state had adverse effects upon communities that practiced comparatively egalitarian expression of gender.⁶⁹ Furthermore, the erasure of historical specificity of culture, gender, religion, and women's agency in local spaces helped to produce "Nepali women" as a monolith, a

⁶⁶ Of course, romantic notions of indigenous women as free and liberated have been demystified by works such as Schuler's (1987), whose investigation on polyandrous marriage and the high rate of non-marriage among women in Chumik, Mustang shows a more complex side to polyandry and the plights of poor women, single women, and women who want autonomy.

⁶⁷ For some examples of egalitarian social and gender practices in Nepal, see Ortner (1978, 1996).

⁶⁸ Although different caste groups existed in Nepal, some argue that the caste system in the Nepal valley became more entrenched during the medieval period, particularly during the reign of Jayasthiti Malla in the 14th century. See Welpton (2005, 28-34).

⁶⁹ In her research Tamang articulates different ways in which "the Nepali woman" category constructed during the Panchayat era (1961-1990) homogenized the diversity of women with discourses of femininity and domesticity and helped the de-politicization of women's relationship to citizenship and the state. When I give examples of indigenous women as *more* liberated, it is a comparative perspective vis a vis an *average* high caste women.

victimized lot in the “women and development” literature coming out from Nepal.⁷⁰

Women as a historical category can still be used for strategic political mobilization within a local, regional, and even global context since women worldwide experience some kind of discrimination based on their gender and sexuality. Yet, they do not experience them the same way universally. In the instance when it becomes a universal rhetoric, it could adversely affect different women’s real-life situations along the lines of national, ethnic, racial, economic, linguistic, and gender identity. The smoothing out of differences among women victimizes some women even further as it fails to account for differences not only at the global level but also at the local level.⁷¹ In many cases, it also robs existing agency from women when it badly needs acknowledgement. The analysis of women in development discourse in Nepal will further clarify my points.

Women and Development in Nepal: Reality and Representation

What the outside world knows of women of Nepal and their existential circumstances today comes mostly from development discourses and statistics collected since the 1950s, when foreign development agencies and banks entered Nepal with development missions. In the international arena, women in Nepal are hardly known for their achievements in literature, their fight against colonialism and imperialism, and their

⁷⁰ In her often cited piece “Under Western Eyes” (1991), Chandra Mohanty speaks to the dilemma of Western liberal feminist practices that purport to construct women as a universally oppressed lot. This attempt at universalizing women’s oppression leaves out locational and historical differences among women and their diverse experiences, and “first world” women benefit from the suffering of “third world” women. This has never been more true than in contemporary times of heightened economic globalization and geo-political power differences among nations. The kind and degree of oppression women undergo is not universally equal, nor is it fair to envision a politics that relies on notions of equality. Furthermore, the politics of representation constructs categorical differences along the lines of religion, culture, or nation of non-western and “third world” women, which further marginalizes them as a monolithic, oppressed group denied any agency and voice and always spoken for or represented as the other.

⁷¹ Mary Cameron’s study of “lower caste” peoples and women in Nepal is a case in point. See Cameron (1998).

feminist struggles against oppressions at the local level.⁷² Those being the case, the volumes of work by non-Nepali researchers and Nepali scholars, and many non-governmental organizations⁷³ show the disproportionately marginalized state of women in Nepal.⁷⁴ There is overwhelming representation of the debilitating situation of girls and women compared to men in Nepal. The human development report attests to the fact that women's situation vis a vis men in Nepali society is not very encouraging even at the dawn of the 21st century. In contrast to most other countries, Nepali women's mortality rate fell below men's until recently.⁷⁵ While the literacy rate for men is 65%, it is only 43% for women, which brings down the overall literacy rate for the whole country.⁷⁶ Most frightening of all is the maternal mortality rate: 540 women out of 100,000 die during childbirth, while the lifetime risk of maternal mortality is 1 in 24.⁷⁷ Yet the central government expenditure for defense from 1994-2004 was exactly double the

⁷² During the war with the British, women fought despite not being part of the Gorkhali army. As I mentioned, at one time in Nepali political history, queens exercised a considerable amount of power and played a role in the diplomatic history of the country. Social reformers like Yoga Maya and Maya Devi fought against the Rana regime and feudal oppression in Nepali society. Women writers like Bishnu Kumari Waiba (Parijat), Prema Shah, Banira Giri, Sita Pandey and many others I cannot name here have contributed to Nepali literature. Some of these women writers, such as Parijat, deserve much more recognition than has been given so far internationally. In 2007, Narendra Raj Prasai, a male writer, published a compilation of women writers before 1960. Called *Narichuli*, it introduces the lives and writings of 224 women from as far back as the early 19th century in Nepal, while 52 influential women writers are presented in the English version, *The Summit of Women Writers*.

⁷³ The non-governmental organizations grew as part of people based unions, and in contemporary times, they make up a big part of the "civil society" sector, which is supposed to be independent of the military and the state. There are many kinds of non-governmental organizations with different objectives and missions -- religious, political, cultural, and altruistic. In regard to NGO/INGO involvement in the development sector in Nepal since the 1950s, see Meena Acharya (1997) and Bhattachan and Mishra (1997).

⁷⁴ See Laxmi Keshari Manandhar and Krishna B. Bhattachan edited *Gender and Democracy in Nepal* (2001); *Women, Development Democracy: A Study of the Socio-economic Changes in the Profile of Women in Nepal* (1995). For statistical research on women and gender, see The Human Development Report on Nepal by the United Nations, The World Bank. Also see Acharya and Bennett, *The Status of Women in Nepal* (1981).

⁷⁵ The latest statistics provided by the Human Development Report of 2004 put women's life expectancy above men's: Men: Women: 60.5: 61.5. The change in the number could also be due to the significantly larger number of young men who died during the insurgency in the last decade.

⁷⁶ Nepal Human Development Report, 2004. <<http://hdr.undp.org/>>

⁷⁷ Source: <<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Nepal>>

amount of money spent on the health sector.⁷⁸ Some argue that women's lives have improved to some extent, especially in the areas of health and literacy, but the overall data show an enormous gap between men and women in almost every sector of development. For example, despite the increase in women's literacy rate in the last 30 years, the 22% gap between men and women's literacy that existed in 1981 still existed in 2001.⁷⁹ While there is a chasm between the development conditions of males and females in general, the resources for women's development seem to go toward data collection most of the time rather than implementation of programs. The data collection and studies of women's situations are mostly done by men, who then become the beneficiaries of the development capital brought for the sake of women. Although the governmental and non-governmental organizations have attempted the approaches of WID (Women in Development), WAD (Women and Development), and lately GAD (Gender and Development), empowering women and girls in Nepal has been a very slow process.⁸⁰ While the local situation is slow to change, international attempts to intervene in women's conditions have little effect.

The Nepali nation-state ratified several international conventions on women without reservations. These include adopting the U.N. decade (1975-1985) for women, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted by the U.N. in 1979, and other U.N. Security Council resolutions on women, such as 1325. The declaration of the International Decade for Women by the U.N. in 1975 brought some changes to development policy building

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Nepal Human Development Report, 2004. <<http://hdr.undp.org/>>

⁸⁰ See Nanda R. Shrestha's *In the Name of Development: a Reflection on Nepal* (1998) for critical observation of development practices in Nepal, which he sees as a failure.

toward women, if not real change in the situation of women. Being a signatory to CEDAW, Nepal was compelled to take some steps in regard to women's rights. Some reform happened in the areas of parental property rights, marriage, and divorce, in addition to more programs and organizations that addressed women's condition through government development plans (Acharya 1994, 479-495). As more external funds entered to improve women's lives in Nepal, organizations like Women's Services Coordination Council (WSCC, 1977) addressed concerns raised by the United Nations and other donor agencies in regard to gender discrimination. Because political parties were banned, women's organizations that were political in nature remained underground. Some examples were Nepal Mahila Sangh (Nepal Women's Organization, 1947), an affiliate of the Congress Party, and Akhil Nepal Mahila Sangh (All Nepal Women's Association, 1951), an affiliate of the Communist Party of Nepal. Under the partyless Panchayat system, the queen played a direct and dictatorial role in overseeing women's development programs. She appointed all WSCC members and the activities it carried out (Acharya 1994, 479-495)). Although the WSCC encouraged efforts by others for women's development, and opening up a non-governmental organization was not legally barred, any organization related to women's development had to pass the red tape of the Council, which checked on the organization's finances, expenditures, and so forth. As Meena Acharya states, because the queen was the head of the Social Services National Coordination Council, it was extremely difficult for someone without royal patronage to run a non-governmental organization (Acharya 1994, 485). Later, in 1987, The Women's Development Division was established within the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare,

and women's cells were also established in some other ministries related to education, agriculture and development (Acharya 1994, 485-486).

Thus, until the end of the Panchayat era in 1990, development programs followed a top down model, and the royal family oversaw, controlled, and mediated the development programs, finances, and people who worked in this sector. In this way, although women's development started as early as the 70s, very little was achieved in terms of gender equality through programs like Women in Development (WID) and Women and Development (WAD), implemented simultaneously in the 70s and 80s. For a long time, there was almost zero percent trickle-down effect of the resources from the urban to the rural and grassroots level. The urban elite population with political patronage controlled the resources brought in the name of poor people.⁸¹ It was a statistics prone development model that documented the abject conditions of women in Nepal but did very little to changing their situation. Yet, such documentation of women increased the entrance of foreign aid into Nepal, and more policies and plans were built to improve women's situation without much care for implementation. This trend did not subside even after the start of liberal democracy in 1990. Gender and Development (GAD) became the new entity in the development sector among NGOs and INGOs, but, though there are definitely some changes where the effort is genuine, the pace of developing the lives of women in rural areas is still not very encouraging. As the local politicians and their families moved into the capital city in the aftermath of the 1990 political change, the group capitalizing on the development sector through nepotism and cronyism multiplied and corruption grew. In other words, although the political and

⁸¹ See Nanda Kishore Shrestha's *In the Name of Development: A Reflection on Nepal*, where he makes a cogent analysis of why modern development has failed in Nepal and sees the fault not only in the elite population of Nepal, but also in the foreign development experts.

market situations liberalized in the 1990s, the beneficiaries were largely urban middle-class people and those with access to politicians and their networks. The heavily politicized scenario of the development sector in the 90s is the result of political party workers and political party leaders' families getting involved with non-governmental development work as they had easy access to the funds. Excessive politicization of Nepali society reaches beyond the development arena. Although naming people here would not be wise, even some human rights organizations and individuals who run them have political party affiliations. The education sector is the most politicized place in Nepal as very few students, faculty, and staff are not immersed in party politics.⁸² Not even all civil society members have shed their political and ideological biases.

While earlier it mattered to have political connections to rise in government jobs and the police force or to get hold of a scholarship to study in a foreign country, in the 1990s it mattered to have political connections to work for development projects or to get funding for a project. The most developed sector in Nepal in the 1990s was the "NGO culture" -- in a tiny country like Nepal, there are an estimated 15,000 NGOs. And many of these NGOs at the local level operate as sister organizations of one of the political parties. In other words, even the non-governmental sector is dominated by political and ideological agendas.

While some blame women's debilitating situation on the patriarchal and male-dominant Hindu cultural traditions, others argue the reasons are poverty, corruption, difficult geographic terrain, and lack of resources. Currently, gender mainstreaming is the new mantra of every development organization -- governmental and non-

⁸² Recent appointments (May 2007) of the vice chancellors of three different universities in Nepal were divided between Congress, United Marxist Leninist, and the Maoist political parties.

governmental. It is no longer only about women's empowerment. In the early 90s, one of the positive aspects of the growth in NGOs was that at least some educated women in the urban areas got opportunities to grow outside the male dominated institutions in the government sector. Yet, this was a small number of women who lived in the cities and struggled to raise their voices against inequalities in property rights, discrimination against women in law, and sexual violence against women.⁸³ This does not mean there were no women activists in the villages, but their resources were fewer at the local level, and the resources came from the urban based organizations that mediated the funding. Having some experience in the NGO sector in the 90s, my own observation was that non-governmental organizations were in the hands of the political parties and dominated by men with the mobilization of a few likeminded women filling the quota for women's inclusion. Despite large growth in women's involvement in NGO activities, only a few women rose as leaders in the non-governmental sector.⁸⁴ Otherwise, women again filled the rank and file positions in the NGOs, unless women started the organizations. The NGO culture grew to the extent that there are more NGOs than villages in Nepal. Jokes about family NGOs and political party NGOs were not for nothing. As the NGO culture flourished, the common phenomenon of male leader and female follower continued.⁸⁵ However, though men filled the decision making positions, there was pressure to include women and minority communities as the money was brought for their empowerment.

⁸³ Women led organizations like Centre for Women and Development, Forum for Women, Law and Development (FWLD), Saathi, Maiti Nepal, and Shtrii Shakti are some that are based in Kathmandu.

⁸⁴ For example, the NGO Federation of Nepal, the largest umbrella organization of NGOs in Nepal with 3,400 NGOs as members, has mostly men in the executive committee. This has been the case since the inception of the federation in 1991.

⁸⁵ Most often one will find the president of an NGO is a man and the treasurer or secretary a woman. It is also likely there are three men in a four member executive committee.

The effects of NGO culture for women have been mixed since 1990. Although middle class and educated women benefited from the NGO culture and to some extent were empowered, ironically, the diversion of educated middle class women into the informal sector and development activities aided male domination in politics. Despite the increase in the literacy rate and education, women still fell behind men in every sector of leadership development, and especially in political leadership. Throughout the democratic praxis of the 90s, women were sidelined from state level politics and from leadership positions within the political parties.⁸⁶ One can count on one hand the number of women in positions of significance in the government during the last ten years. In the elections, the best women achieved is just above 6% in the parliament, and not more than one or two women ended up occupying ministerial positions in the government.⁸⁷ Until the end of 2006, not a single woman ambassador represented Nepal to other countries. Aside from a few token names, who would not have been there if not for their historically powerful husbands or male guardians, women in Nepali politics remain on the periphery (Acharya 1994). Women are utilized as an expendable group useful for electoral campaigns. Men usually control and mediate whatever power they exert in the public arena.

The “add and stir” approach to gender diversity or ethnic diversity in an organizational structure has worked in such a way that women remain far behind men in exhibiting leadership and exercising control over their rights. Moreover, this culture of male as the keeper/leader and female as the herded/follower even in the non-formal

⁸⁶ None of the major seven or eight political parties in Nepal have a woman as president. Sadvavana Party is the only one with a woman figure as its head, but even then it is mostly in name: Anandi Devi is the wife of a former leader, and some people started a new party in her name.

⁸⁷ In the interim government since the Jana Andolan 2006, there is one woman minister (Urmila Aryal, UML) in the entire cabinet of 20 people. The cabinet is supposed to be reformed soon with the entry of Maoist members before the CA elections.

sector owes much to caste-based Hindu assumptions about the female as the weaker sex and in need of control and direction. Yet, social structures are never complete in themselves in constraining people, although they may produce hegemonies that are time and space bound. Especially in a heterogeneous society like Nepal, hegemonic towers are built on crumbling foundations. The more diverse the society is, the more smoothing out of differences there is and coercion to generate consent. Thus, there are more chances of rebellion and rupture. Likewise, cultural diversity among women in Nepal is a strength to counteract hegemonic notions on women that get cemented over time and become naturalized laws for generations to come. One has to remember that on the other side of domination lies acts of resistance, which have always been there but are written out of representation and acknowledgement.

Women as Agents: Legacy of Liberation and Transformation

As stated earlier, researchers studying Nepali culture often argue that women's status in some indigenous or hill Janajati groups is better than in the caste-based Hindu communities.⁸⁸ Indigenous and Janajati scholar Krishna B. Bhattachan agrees with this statement but asserts that women from many indigenous cultures suffer because of the imposition of “bahunbad” (Brahmanism) and the Sanskritization of the diverse Nepali society and culture (2001, 153-167). According to Bhattachan (2001, 156), although *Muluki Ain* professes *de jure* equality to the genders, it is *de facto* biased against women since it is based on “*Dayabhag* and *Mitakashyara Sampradaya* of Banaras and Bengal Gharana and also under the Hindu State and Hindu-biased Constitution.”

⁸⁸ While the Janajati or indigenous cultures are often perceived as more egalitarian by outside scholars and Nepalis, scholars like Mary Des Chene (1991) caution against exaggeration by pointing out that Janajati hill women also are constrained in many ways.

Despite the observation that indigenous women are more liberated in the private realm of their community, in the modern nation-state of Nepal the public realm is dominated by Indo-Aryan patriarchal values. As Bhattachan(2001, 161) notes, “[Since] [m]any indigenous peoples were coerced to go through the process of Hinduization or Sankritization or Nepalization resulting in the loss of their traditional language, religion and culture[,] . . . the males of indigenous communities may be even more strict than their Hindu counterparts in exploiting, subjugating and oppressing women.” Thus, whatever power women exercised within their own communities has not remained unaffected by the hegemonic cultural values. Notwithstanding the perceived sexual freedom, laxity in widow remarriage, and property rights among women in the caste groups at the bottom of the hierarchy, like the “untouchables,” hierarchical notions on sex still put them in a subordinate position (Cameron 1998). Leaving aside the question of who oppresses the indigenous women more, Nepali women in general share an overall sense of subjugation by dominant practices that favor patriarchal constructs of masculinity and ownership. Many perceive an overwhelming amount of Janajati and indigenous women’s participation in the People’s War, which shows their dissatisfaction with the status quo.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, whether this dissatisfaction is with cultural and class oppressions of the dominant kind or also emerges from local and familial situations of gender oppression within their own communities needs further consideration. Therefore, when I speak of women in the Nepali state, the relationship is mediated by various factors of caste, race, language, religion, and historical experiences of cultural and religious colonization that

⁸⁹ Hisila Yami, a woman Maoist leader at the Central Bureau of the Maoist party, states there are more Tibeto-Burman and non-Aryan women in the Maoist movement. Gautam et al. (2001) also emphasize the larger participation of Janajati women in the Maoist movement. However, Judith Pettigrew and Sara Shneiderman in their article “Women and the Maoist: Ideology and Agency in Nepal’s Maoist Movement” (*Himal Magazine*, January 2004) state that “The supposition that janajati women make up the majority of Maoist women remains unsubstantiated.” Source: <http://www.himalmag.com/2004/january/>

were domestic in nature, although not entirely unrelated to colonizing forces from the outside. Yet, with the use of the category “Nepali women,” I also imply that under the modern construction of the nation-state and nationalism, women in Nepal suffer patriarchal domination cross-culturally, although in various degrees, despite their differences along lines of caste, ethnicity, religion, and class status. Women’s oppression in Nepal cannot be studied with only a top-down model along the lines of caste or even class.

As stated previously, few studies raise questions about the mediated agency of women and their heavily truncated representation in government in Nepal despite women’s engagement with revolutionary and nationalist movements since ancient times. When Nepali history books mention women, it is only as defenders of national borders and protectors of cultural and religious values. The martiality of women is eulogized, such as when they supported Gorkhali troops against the British during the *Nala-Pani ko Yudha* (the Nala-Pani War) in the years 1814-1816 CE. However, history books almost never record women who fought against the oppressive cultures they lived in. During the Rana regime of 104 years, women raised their voices alongside men against the autocratic rule. Yet stories of revolutionary fighters and social reformers like Yogamaya (1860-1941) and Durga Devi (1918-1971) seldom gain attention.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ There is increasing interest in the work of Yogamaya, and women active in social movements now cite her. However, until Barbara Nimri Aziz (2001) published her findings in the form of *The Heir to a Silent Song: Two Rebel Women of Nepa*, based on her research in the 80s on these two revolutionary women, not many even in Nepal knew about them, not to mention the rest of the world. Most Nepali history books do not mention them, and those that do speak against them as “mad-women.” However, their legacy is preserved by women who still run an *ashram* (spiritual abode) for ascetics and women abandoned by their family. In the ashram, women renounce their worldly desires, or they have been renounced by the world. These women consider Yogamaya their spiritual leader and guide. Aziz’s research opens up avenues to think of different kinds of feminist sensibilities that grow in remote corners of the world. Behind the spiritual practices of Yogamaya lay a great sense of responsibility towards fellow women and a radical transformation of society through local spiritual means.

Yogamaya was an ascetic, poet, and political agitator who threatened to immolate herself if the Rana Prime Minister Juddha S. Rana did not give in to her demand for divine and just rule free from autocracy. She was arrested and imprisoned with her followers, many of them women, and eventually was released. In a political rebellion against child marriage, caste discrimination, and bans on widow remarriage, Yogamaya with 69 followers took a *Jalsamadhi* (immersion in water to be one with the eternity -- an honorific ritual sacrifice of body) in 1941 by jumping into the Arun River.

While Yogamaya's strategy of rebellion was spiritual, Durga Devi was an advocate, patron, and prosecutor who believed in worldly justice. A widow herself, she fought for women's rights, sometimes quite aggressively, and apparently never lost a case. Durga Devi's passion for fighting for women wronged by society and men was more than exemplary.⁹¹ However, she and Yogamaya were virtually erased from history books even though Durga Devi lived until as recently as 1971. They raised their feminist voices against women's oppression in their own way, with the techniques, tools, and resources that were at hand, without having any contact with the Western feminist world. However, the social attitude to their activism resembled the West's toward feminists. As Aziz explicates, their rebellion and their agency were deemed "women's stories" by authorities and dismissed from public knowledge. It is appropriate to quote Aziz (2001, xxviii-xxix) here:

⁹¹ Durga Devi's passionate activism for wronged women lives through the example she set in the village she lived in. In the late 60s, a deaf young girl who was basically an orphan was raped by a policeman in the village, but she could not speak the name of the culprit. Although Durga Devi was getting old, her energy was strong. She said, "Yes, the girl cannot speak, but she can see" and took her in front of every man, young or old, in the village. The girl stopped at the police station and pointed to the policeman. Durga filed a case of rape against the policeman, but the system protected him. He got posted to a different region and ran away overnight. However, Durga supported the girl financially and the family she lived with, and a baby girl was born to her. According to Aziz, they still live in the village, and she saw the 12 year old girl going to school. See "Durga Devi: Advocate, Patron, Prosecutor" in Aziz (2001:88-113).

It became evident to me that these women did not simply slip away into obscurity. They were pushed. Public dismissals of Yogamaya and Durga Devi as fanatics and trouble makers were deliberate. The efforts made to ensure that these women's history was *never* known bring us face to face with a central issue in history making -- the application of selective memory. Those in control -- from the Rana despot to the officials, priests and teachers, judges and merchants -- conspired to keep women as a whole out of Nepal's history. Those in power placed themselves at the center and women at the edge. Not only did authorities refuse to acknowledge their own failures and the need for reforms, which these women highlighted -- they denied these women. They were obscured.

The obscurity of women in Nepali history relies on the misogynist and patriarchal attitude embedded in the caste based Hindu religion and Manu's *Dharmasastra*.⁹²

Women do not have a "rudra ghanti" (Adam's apple), the lack of which supposedly makes them loquacious and gossipy as they cannot keep their tongues under control, and thus cannot be taken seriously. When women protest, rebel, and speak out, the misogynist culture seeks cultural and biological narratives to render the speakers insane and portray their utterances as inaudible as they do not conform to the dominant script. The silencing of Yogamaya and Durga Devi was couched in narratives of sexual deviancy, insanity, and hysteria, a time-honored practice of misogynist cultures:

They dismissed Shakti Yogamaya as morally inferior. Even today, rumours persist that 'she was (just) a religious fanatic who threw herself in the river in a nihilistic fervor.' Sexual laxity was another characterization of Yogamaya. They say she was a *prostitute* and her followers were *sexual deviants*. The kindest rumor about Yogamaya was that she was a *communist* . . . As for Durga Devi, she was brushed aside after her death. She was 'too smart' in the

⁹² Manu was a precursor of the laws and morals in Hindu society. In the compilation called the *The Laws of Manu* (Penguin Books, 1991), one finds many misogynist expressions coded for the control of women. For example, Manu compares women with a field where men sow their "seeds" (201-203). He despises widows, women who cannot produce children, and women who only produce daughters (206-207). His advice that "A girl, a young woman, or even an old woman should not do anything independently, even in (her own house)" (115) had an enormous impact on caste based societies that modeled their moral and political laws after Manu, as in India and Nepal. He says, "In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's, and when her husband is dead, under her sons'. She should not have independence" (115). While there is no limit to what Manu says about women, it is telling that Manu's *Dharmasastra* became the primary document for British formulated legal codes for India, the institutionalization of which had an enormous effect on the heterogeneous cultures of India.

courts, and could not be compromised. But in the public's consciousness, Durga was made to appear '*mad*.' (Aziz 2001, xxix – xxx, my emphasis)

Although those who controlled the history of Nepal dismissed women freedom fighters like Yogamaya and Durga Devi, as Aziz shows, their work reverberates in today's women's liberation movement in Nepal, which will come under discussion in the chapter on the current crisis in Nepal. Since Durga Devi's death in 1971, much has changed in the world; but women's struggle remains the same. Women are fighting against widowhood, child marriage, and polygamy, and for the rights to property and land, citizenship rights, political representation, and more. Above all, women in Nepal are fighting to prove their existence alongside men as human beings capable of self-determination, knowledge, and courage.

Citizenship: Personal in/and the Political

Although women's literacy rate improved and women in urban areas benefited from NGO development practices, women remain far behind men in every sector of development.⁹³ While women have limited access to grassroots politics and are mobilized to garner electoral support, women's access to leadership in formal electoral politics stops at the middle level, and they have miniscule representation at the top of the hierarchy. It remains a "man's territory," although with the Maoists' entrance into parliamentary politics and their commitment to 40% representation of women in their party, women's representation should certainly increase.⁹⁴ Otherwise, whether it is citizenship rights, parental property rights, rights to reproduction, or the right to land ownership, even the modern and democratic constitution of the 1990s did not transcend traditional and patriarchal concepts about women. Above all, citizenship rights remained

⁹³ See Nepal Human Development Report, 2004.

⁹⁴ See Indira Sharma (2001, 101-104) for accounts of male dominance in parliamentary politics in Nepal.

strongly patrilineal, and thus patriarchal.⁹⁵ One hears and reads arguments for not giving women the right to transfer citizenship to their foreign spouses because Nepali women would be duped by foreign men, mostly Indian, who would marry Nepali women to propagate their lineage and their value systems -- national and cultural -- on “Nepali soil.” Nepal would become a “mini-India,” they argue. This protectionist argument is rather ironic given the sale of Nepali women to the Indian flesh market every day. Nepal as a territory is protected from contamination by the outside, but women who leave the territory are on their own -- disowned by the nation-state, a real example being the neglect of women sex-workers who are returned after contracting diseases like AIDS. Thus, the underlying concern in the citizenship rights issue is not the protection of women, but the protection of patriarchal power, the name of the father, which runs through the construction of the modern nation-state to its core. Even royals in Nepal marry women from princely families in India and vice versa, and many upper class families follow suit, but the exchanged item is almost always the woman. It is also acceptable for men to bring wives from other parts of the world to Nepal. The constitution confirms this tradition with a provision granting citizenship to a woman married to a Nepali man. However, the same does not apply to foreign spouses of women. Moreover, until recently, generations of citizenship-less children lived in Nepal

⁹⁵ *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 2047 (1990)* (Kathmandu: Law Books Management Board, 1999) states “(1) A person who is born after the commencement of this Constitution and whose father is a citizen of Nepal at the birth of the child shall be a citizen of Nepal by descent. (2) Every child who is found within the Kingdom of Nepal and the whereabouts of whose parents are not known shall, until the father of the child is traced, be deemed to be a citizen of Nepal by descent” (Part 2, Article 9, pg 4). The language is masculine throughout. According to the constitution, women hold no right to bestow citizenship to their children as the law recognizes the father as the granter of citizenship. In terms of foreigners married to Nepali citizens, Nepali men give citizenship rights to their wives, and their children automatically become citizens. Nepali women who married foreigners did not have that right. Recently (November 26, 2006), however, the newly restored House of Representatives passed a Citizenship Bill recognizing the right to citizenship through mothers. Still, while the bill says that foreign women who marry Nepali men get citizenship if they renounce their other citizenship, it is silent about foreign men who marry Nepali women.

as the State did not recognize the children of single women, children with foreign fathers, or children of undocumented fathers, like those of the Badi women, who were initially cultural entertainers but were forced to practice prostitution for survival. Almost three million people were deprived of citizenship certificates, mostly people from Madesh (the southern part of Nepal bordering India) and some Dalits from the hills who were not versed in modern ownership and rights discourses (Lawati 2005, 287-300).⁹⁶

As the key to mobility is citizenship, which is necessary to acquire a passport, it was a difficult situation for many people who never thought of themselves in terms of modern citizen subjects or identity paper carriers. This problem was not addressed until as recently as 2006, after the April Revolution, or Jana Andolan II. Likewise, until recently, for the mainstream political parties in Nepal, equal “citizenship rights” regardless of gender and ethnicity remained a rhetorical and electoral strategy, but not a concern once they were elected. The history of *bir* (bravery) and *bikas* (development) define the modern notion of belonging or citizenship. As Onta states, “The dominant national culture in Nepal characterizes a *bir* identity as being central to Nepali citizenship. A *bir* history provided historical depth to the Nepali nation whose future is guided by the state’s project of *bikas*. Hence a *bir* identity and a future defined by *bikas* are really two facets of the dominant notion of Nepali citizenship” (Onta 1996, 333). Because the notion of bravery was pushed to forward development, the latter was understood to be a masculinist endeavor, with others following the brave and the best of the nation. There was no questioning of the plans laid out by the nation’s protectors and defenders.

⁹⁶ For more, see Mahendra Lawoti’s “Constitutional Protection of Minority Rights” in Lawati (2005).

One small example of my own experience with the gendered politics of citizenship, however banal and subjective it may seem, will illustrate what I mean. A few years ago, I had to renew my Nepali passport. When I got the forms, I was disappointed that they still followed the decree of the 1964 Citizenship Act, which is pervasively male-centric. It was 2001, and nothing had changed, even after the constitution of the 1990.⁹⁷ I had to renew my Nepali passport again in 2006. This time, the form was in English, but the rules and restrictions remained the same. Two stipulations angered me the most and made me realize my status as a secondary human being: 1) “For inclusion of child/children’s name in the parent’s passport, please include . . . (iv) copy of father’s passport. . . . A child, whose father is not a citizen of Nepal, is not eligible to obtain a Nepali passport.” 2) “Those, who marry after arrival in foreign country and wish to include their *husband’s family* name in the passport, must submit a notarized copy of marriage certificate, for the first time” and include \$25 extra for this amendment. What about Nepali men who marry in a foreign land? Also, as men rarely take their wives’ names, they do not have to go through the second stipulation, nor are they ripped off economically by paying extra. This provision is just for women.

The discriminatory system of citizenship speaks volumes about patriarchal interpretations of and control over women’s reproduction, both material and physical. Women visibly reproduce the human species, but until science and technology came to men’s rescue, a particular man’s contribution to reproduction could not be proven easily. Engels speculated in his *The Origins of Family, Private Property, and the State* that the rise of private property gave men a claim over their progeny, resulting in the domination

⁹⁷ See *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990.*, published by His Majesty’s Government, Ministry of Law and Justice, Kathmandu, Nepal.

and ownership of not only the public realm but also the private realm and by extension women (Engels 1978, 734-759). With the advancement of private property, the rise of capitalism was inevitable and the saga of different forms of control through capital emerged. In modern nation-states, the primacy of the man-citizen-subject over the woman-subject is based on the notion of the dichotomic view of the protector and the protected, and cultural myths and religious practices are twisted to strengthen that view.

Likewise, constructions of masculinity and femininity based on sex enable discourses on citizenship rights and those who arbitrate them. Historically, in the modern nation-states, the active arbitrators of rights were the patriarchs, who made women into symbols acted upon by men, the nation-state, and the colonizers, who came to save them. Women's reproduction -- in the form of children as raw material until they are subject to society -- became secondary to the arbitrary power of the nation-state controlled by men, who held the power to authorize and guarantee the children's right to the state. Fear of the outside weighs heavily upon societies in a transition phase to modernization, and such nations resort to various means of control and preservation of the past, in some instances violent means. This is manifest in the attempt to control women through citizenship lest they leave the herd or become invaded by the outside culture. After all, women are termed the repository of national and ethnic culture as well as the reproducers of life.⁹⁸ Thus, when foreign women enter the "insider" culture, the patriarchy is less threatened as tradition assumes women conform to the insider-culture they marry into, in name and in

⁹⁸ See Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989) and Deniz Kandiyoti (1991) for women as carriers and symbols of national cultures. On women as reproducers of species-life and the ideologies that spring from that, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1974) is a great dissection of the material, psychological, and biological situation of women in society.

deed.⁹⁹ This is usually touted as women's positive ability to adapt and negotiate -- the "good woman" syndrome. At the same time, a woman must constantly prove her loyalty to the family she marries into if she wants any share of property and ownership as she is *disinherited* from the family she was born into. In a Hindu household, traditionally, girl children are disowned from the beginning and kept as an "arkako naso, galako paso" (something you must return to someone someday, least it becomes a rope that snags your throat), so they grow up preparing themselves for an imagined home somewhere else. The father's house is not theirs; it is their brothers'. Even when a young woman goes to her husband's household, "she has to prove her allegiance to the new agnatic group by giving birth to a son and remaining faithful to the group" (Acharya 1994, 481). This, Meena Acharya argues, has political ramifications for a girl child: "These social conditions of her existence shape all her aspirations and actions, including her political engagement" (1994, 481). As political engagement is contingent on a secure economic base and freedom of mobility, which are denied women from birth in the Nepali cultural milieu obsessed with the sexual purity of women, it is self-evident why Nepal has so few women leaders and active women politicians (Acharya 1994, 481).

The citizenship rights issue stems from the patriarchal, Hindu dominant, and masculine definitions of nationalism, rights, and ownership. Women's access to citizenship, and thus their rights as national subjects, has always been partial and mediated through men. With globalization and economic neo-liberalization policies

⁹⁹ I am using terms such as insider or outsider as analytical categories and not prescriptive models to think in terms of a given culture and people. I am aware of critical light shed on the dichotomic categorization of cultures, peoples, and things, and the emergence of the notion of the third-spaces or in-between spaces (Minh-ha 1989; Bhabha 1989; Sandoval 2000), which is useful for breaking rigid binary thinking. However, despite the liminality of boundaries, people characterize their differences in terms of dichotomies, so notions of inside/outside are still operative to map cultural, religious, and other differences. Still, the operations of differences are contextual and time specific.

encroaching into every corner of world, people move either as postmodern agents in their own right or as commodities propelled by global restructuring processes. The pattern of men and women moving to other countries under the WTO treaty on labor services points in this direction. In this movement, workers from “third world”¹⁰⁰ nations or economies go to industrialized and developed countries, not the other way around. Interestingly, the movements facilitated by “global restructuring” processes push people to adapt to modern forms of identity formation. National identity papers in the form of passports are crucial to crossing borders, even though theories of a shrinking world and global citizenship float around as if everyone has access to the privilege of globetrotting. Transcending imaginary spaces might be easier, but crossing spatial borders, places with barbed wire, is not so easy. It is a fact that people die trying to cross borders every day.¹⁰¹

In contemporary times, citizenship is key, for it is the road to a passport and establishes your identity as a subject of a modern nation-state. In Nepal’s case, since women started traveling outside the country for work, their relationship to the nation-state became an important issue. Earlier, women cared little about the citizenship certificate. Now, the need for a passport for travel has revealed women’s situation as secondary subjects whose rights to mobility are in men’s hands.

¹⁰⁰ “Third World” is a contested term, but I use it consciously for lack of a better word and for the currency it has in the era of globalization in demarcating differentiation and global inequality. The term can also critically interrogate the dualistic North/South spatial demarcation based on cultural prejudices against the people of the South. For critical perspectives on the term “third world,” see Chilla Bulbeck (1998); Trinh Minh-ha (1989); Uma Narayan (1997); Ghosh and Bose (1997); Sara Suleri (1991); and Mohanty (2003) among others.

¹⁰¹ Just to give the example of the United States, we hear of people dying while trying to cross the U.S. border from Mexico. Human trafficking is a billion dollar industry these days. People are hurled in lorries, vans, and boats under suffocating conditions, and many die on their way to their destination. See P. Martin and M. Miller, “Smuggling and Trafficking: A Conference Report,” *International Migration Review*, Vol 34/3 (2000): 969-975.

One way in which the male dominated state controls women is through the curtailment of mobility at the local level and beyond. One simple example is discouraging women from marrying outside their cultures. The State also curtails women's mobility at the level of political leadership and access to resources and economic power. Therefore, if the State makes a connection between violence against women in Gulf countries, sexual trafficking of Nepali women, and women's travel outside of Nepal, one needs to think more broadly of what other factors are at work. The connections between women's mobility and trafficking in general and sex trafficking in particular are blurred, and women are rendered sexual objects needing continuous protection, at least in name. Why not bar women from entering India? Why are more than a hundred thousand Nepali women rotting in Indian brothels? Why not bar men from going to the Gulf or to Afghanistan as well? At one point, six to seven Nepalis were dying in Gulf countries every week due to labor conditions, and most of these deaths were men. Men are also dying in Afghanistan. As a recent investigative report suggests, there are more than 10,000 Nepali men working as security guards or in other capacities in Afghanistan.¹⁰²

As more women left Nepal in the last decade than ever before, it makes sense to ponder women's mobility and their relationship to the nation-state. If we look at the question of citizenship, women's rights are mediated through men, the de facto citizens of the nation-state. Although we should not discount much theorized notions of women as the reproducers of national and community boundaries and as the repositories of nation and culture men are the active mediators, at least in state and political affairs, of women's

¹⁰² Bhoj Raj Bhat, "Banduk Bokna Jane Haruko Bichalli" (trns. The dire situation of those who went to carry guns), *Nepal Weekly*, December 9, 2007. <<http://www.kantipuronline.com/Nepal/aabaran.php>>

rights to citizenship.¹⁰³ Mediation becomes a core issue in the production of culture and place in diaspora and displacement. Women are termed “powerless mediators” and more or less seen as repository vessels of culture and values. Men are powerful by virtue of their mediating power bestowed by the law and nation-state. Although women do mediate, their mediation pertains to the domestic and is not worthy of the realm of the public-political power.

The People’s War brought many changes in the social and gender dynamics in Nepal. Women’s mobility in turn raised new and complex issues. Now women have gone to other countries as migrant workers and moved abroad to live in a kind of diaspora different from the one they knew in their own country.¹⁰⁴ Women are also entering new gender roles and professions previously considered masculine or reserved for men. These trends affect women’s relationship to citizenship and national and cultural identity. With more women leaving as migrant workers to other countries, they are faced with new questions of belonging and affiliation, new questions of ownership and obligations. Likewise, the issue of transnational identity or diasporic identity in terms of national and cultural affiliations comes to the fore even more strongly for women who in a way never

¹⁰³ See *Woman-Nation-State* edited by Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias (New York: St. Martins, 1989) and *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women’s Sexuality in South Asia* edited by Kumari Jayawardena and Malathi De Alwis (London: Zed Books, 1996); Deniz Kandiyoti, “Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation,” *Millennium Journal of International Studies* 1991, 20, 3:429-43, and *Women, Islam and the State* (London: Macmillan, 1991)

¹⁰⁴ While I cannot here delve into a girl’s social and psychological construction in Nepali society, at a very personal level, girls and women experience a sense of diaspora and displacement. Most Hindu Nepali girls are socialized from early childhood to think the “home” they are born into is not really their own. They constantly negotiate their identity and learn to imagine, painfully in many cases, a different home their parents will marry them into. It is difficult to grow up with disownment from the start, and having to work hard to create a home may be bitter if they fail to please the family. A boy never experiences the estrangement his sister is forced to embody; rather, he learns to grow up feeling ownership and power in his father’s house and the place he is born into. In short, Virginia Woolfe’s words in *Three Guineas*, “As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world,” in some way speaks to the state of girls and women in a patriarchal society.

had a home or lived in a perpetual diaspora, something I will explore further in the next chapters.

Women in the Maoist People's War and Beyond: The Politics of Representation

Thousands of women took to the streets to protest during Jana Andolan II, but they were never seen taking part in decision making at the upper level of political restructuring in the entire ten years of crisis. As seen in the conflict resolution and peace talks in Nepal, women can be militants and coordinators in the villages, but apparently cannot coordinate peace talks and arms-management, or take part in writing the interim constitution and political restructuring at the upper level. There has been no representation of women at any senior level talks between the government and the Maoists.¹⁰⁵ Women have held almost no senior level political posts during the last ten years. I spoke to an influential woman leader in Nepal who is a member of parliament and represents one of the major Communist parties. She pushed for the 33% quota for women in government after the restoration of parliament in April 2006. In that context, she imparted to me that “The struggle is triple just for being a woman . . . We are constantly told to rise above our gender and sex and work for the party.”¹⁰⁶ Women's sacrifice is called for everywhere: at home, in politics, and inside the party. This is not only characteristic of the mainstream political parties, but, despite their claim of 40% women in the People's Liberation Army, of the Maoists too. A Maoist district level coordinator and former commissar told me diplomatically, “Everything is Prachanda . . . Women need to struggle for their rights. Our party's policy is that we employ our

¹⁰⁵ Since the Maoists started the People's War in 1996, there have been at least six major peace talks between the Maoists and the government and later with the mainstream political parties, but not a single woman has been a representative at the negotiating table.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Bidhya Bhandari, the member of the Parliament, taken in July 25, 2006.

strength where it is needed, not who needs to be at the peace talks or *what gender* is represented in the top ranks.”¹⁰⁷ The question of who represents whom and what kinds of bodies speak for others becomes a very poignant issue here. Taken literally, the comrade’s words amount to saying your body does not really matter, and neither does your gender, so the historical materialism of gender difference is rendered insignificant. Have women come so far that their material experiences of gender and corporeality do not matter anymore? Of course, men can represent women or speak for them, but is that the same thing? This practice is especially noteworthy given that women’s suffering during the crisis was represented as related to cultural constructions of gender differences, femininity, and notions of female sexuality.¹⁰⁸ The gendered representation of women has called forth policy building, has been used to ratify international treaties, and has brought in foreign capital to change the situation. Furthermore, the Maoists made gender discrimination against women a key catalyst for the People’s Revolution. However, while various groups have politicized women’s gendered situation for political and economic gains with the rhetoric of victimization, there is no actual effort to change it.

From the peace process to the Seven Party Alliance agreement with the CPN(M), these developments reflect “gender indifference” of a unitary kind, as if men are able to speak for women on a corporeal level. This process has written off the significance of the bodily presence of women at the negotiating table. Do women as a corporeal presence no longer matter except in electoral or propaganda politics? If one reviews the

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Asmita, the Maoist Commissar and district coordinator of the Maoists at the time of the interview, taken in Nepal in July, 2006. In January of 2007, she also became a member of the legislature from the Maoist side when they joined the government.

¹⁰⁸ Reports prepared by human rights organizations, national and international, and newspapers portray women’s oppressed and victimized situation. The political leaders speak of women’s oppression and decry the victimization of women during the conflict, but women’s representation in the party hardly matters.

literature produced by human rights organizations and media representation of the conflict, which are widely available in the internet, one reads incessantly about the unique victimization of women in Nepal.¹⁰⁹ Many want the gender “woman” to be a cash cow, and few refrain from speaking for the poor, victimized women of Nepal. But when it comes to power sharing and inclusion in policy making at the upper level, women’s participation seemingly does not matter. Here woman as gendered being becomes a useful category to be exploited for economic and political gains, while women as a representative category at the national and local level becomes threatening. Has the crisis brought about such open conditions that markings of bodies alongside historically prescribed ideologies of gender, race, or culture have simply dissipated? One cannot say the same about the latter two categories. Perhaps, like the functionalist social constructionists’ dream, it would be desirable to write off the gendered text of production and reproduction and not have to think in terms of man/woman, male/female dichotomies as they exist and are operational along unequal power lines. However, giving up the political category woman/woman as a gendered construction would also wipe out the material history and lived experiences of the majority of females. It would also wipe out every trace of women as a body politic, a political constituency with the hope of revolution and transformation, insights well represented by feminists all over the world.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ While almost every major NGO has publicized the plight of women during the conflict in their yearly reports under the category “woman,” and women’s situation in the crisis is also abundantly represented by the journalists and the media, it remains at the level of rhetoric of representation. This is not to state that women are not victimized or to deny the suffering, but to point out how the rhetoric of representation can marginalize women further.

¹¹⁰ There are, of course, different ways in which feminists have thought over the issue of women’s subordination or woman/women as historical/material categories. While there are differences of approach and disagreements between them, the works of Irigaray (1985), Hartsock (1983), Spivak (1988), Grosz (1986, 1993), Riley (1988), Young (1990), and Mohanty (2003) point to the need to recognize the practices

To put it bluntly, “women’s equality,” or the more current “gender equality,” remains elusive in Nepal, despite the proclamation of new laws for the “protection” of women. It seems the issues of nationalism, economy, and *culture* take precedence over the “women question” or their rights as human beings. Male leaders portray themselves as being in a better position to handle these affairs than women. Even the most liberal champions of women’s equality have been reluctant to translate propaganda politics into praxis. In the Maoists’ 40-point demands, the so-called landmark document, there is only one touching on the question of women and gender: “Girls should be given equal property rights to those of their brothers.”¹¹¹ The first nine are devoted to nationalism, and the rest to restructuring the state. The perpetual slighting of the “women question” continues in the trajectory of left politics, while the right always comes up with different excuses to sideline women, or gender for that matter, as a useless discourse in the bigger picture of political restructuring. Is the gender question not related to the “nation-state”? After all, women are the producers of human beings, who produce capital and labor in turn. Are women only used as the *mediators* of value, as Levi-Strauss theorized half a century ago? The followers of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist (MLM) ideology in Nepal believe giving precedence to class equality will take care of other ills. For the Maoists, the key to gender inequality lies in the realm of private property, which is the precursor of class inequality and all other inequalities emerging from it. However, if one looks at the history of revolutionary movements, one might wonder why the MLM ideology did not produce a single female head of state. How long can women wait for class equality to

of gender alongside different corporealities of bodies, the ways they are marked, and their lived experiences, apart from the social construction of genders, racial identities, and practices of subordination in history. Moreover, whose knowledge and experience, and whose voice and deeds, becomes the basis of policy making for the future that will affect all in society. These are important issues to be considered before seeking the destruction of each and every category.

¹¹¹ See “The Maoists’ 40-Point Demands” in Karki and Seddon (2003, 183-187) for all the demands.

take place so they can hope for gender equality? Why is women's representation always secondary to other revolutionary questions of justice and equality, as if the "women question" is outside these others?

I probed these very questions during my participant observation in Nepal when I went to a village under the Maoists' control and watched a district coordinator instructing her comrades. A woman leader in charge of regional level organizing, she was also a coordinator between the central bureau and district, which was just below the central committee of the Maoist leadership and above the district committee members. In the early days of the movement, she fought as commissar of an all women's battalion. Now she was a political commissar, but she stated that position and designation meant little in the Maoist party since one does whatever work the committee assigns. She said she might have been the first woman commissar to lead a squad in 1997-98. Back then, the Maoist People's Liberation Army was not founded, and the Maoists were poorly armed.

Asmita, as she was made popular by the press, kept breastfeeding her year old daughter as we spoke. In my more than two hour conversation with her, Asmita spoke on class and caste oppression and how gender oppression was interrelated:

Unless and until class oppression is over, gender oppression will exist as it is only a product of the first. The source is class. There are classes in society -- the 5% rule over the rest, and the laws favor only those 5%. . . . Yes, at first, it seems like gender difference is the cause of the problem [of inequality and oppression], but it's only a surface reality or an 'appearance' (*roop*) which is visible to our eye. In 'essence' (*sar*), class is the key . . . Until the proletariat govern and the old government is destroyed to the bones, there will be no change.¹¹² Those who are below will go up and those on top come down -- they will meet in the middle. *There is no point in fighting alone* . . . All oppressed men and women need to

¹¹² "Appearance/form" and "essence/spirit" are Marxist terminologies that express the dual nature of reality as explained by Marx. Nepali Marxists have translated these terms as "roop" (form) and "sar" (essence) in Nepali. They also coincide with other dualistic terms like abstract/concrete, form/matter, mind/body, male/female, etc., which go back to Plato and later get developed by Rene Descartes.

fight together against the elite class. First, we need to take on the ruling class together. . . *and there can be internal struggles later.*¹¹³

Asmita clearly sees gender oppression as a byproduct of class and cultural oppression. Yet, if we look closely at the entire conversation I had with her and examine her trajectory of becoming a Maoist, we see forces of sexuality and gender play a significant part in shaping her revolutionary consciousness, not just class. Yet, many women who joined the Maoists privilege class inequality as the source of their support for the People's War. Why? What is at stake for women in the Maoist movement if they speak of gender and sexual subordination as the key issue propelling them to join the revolution? To explore these and other questions of representation and exclusion that I have outlined in this chapter, I look at women's situation during the conflict and especially their participation in the People's War in the next three chapters.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have broadly looked at the ways in which cultural, economic, national, and political constructions have affected women and gender in Nepal historically. Taking important historical practices like *sati* and widowhood alongside more egalitarian practices of gender among the indigenous communities, I have argued that women are not a monolithic group in Nepal, nor should my use of the term "Nepali women" be understood in a narrow sense. The purpose of this chapter is to familiarize readers with a genealogical history of women and gender in the modern nation-state called Nepal as well as review Nepali national history in general. As there is no publication dedicated to women in Nepali history, I have drawn from different sources to give readers both diachronic and synchronic aspects of women's historical and

¹¹³ Interview taken with Asmita in Nepal in July 22, 2006.

contemporary situation in Nepal. The first part of the chapter provides a brief political history of Nepal coupled with an overview of significant developments during the People's War. In the second part, I explore Nepali women's position from multiple perspectives -- from ancient rituals to modern development practices -- to better understand the role they have played or not played during the armed conflict. While the purpose of the chapter is to familiarize readers with the dominant political, cultural, and economic history of modern Nepal, a more significant objective is to make them aware of how these processes and events have affected and contributed to the People's War in Nepal and rendered women secondary subjects/objects in Nepali society.

Documented discrimination against the female sex is ubiquitous in Nepal, as in many other places in South Asia and the world. Women are not a universally oppressed lot without agency. Yet the reality of the majority of women in the world today is not a situation of empowerment if we believe the data and statistics. There is no question that the People's War raised hope for transformation of women's social status as secondary human beings in their own families and society, following the second-class citizenship status the nation-state bestowed. Although the modernization of Nepal has been underway for the last forty years, only a small percentage of women in the urban centers have benefited from higher education, jobs, and freedom to travel outside the country. The abject conditions of women emerge in the statistics on women in Nepal, where women's mortality rate was lower than men's until recently, female children's survival rate is lower than male children's, and women's literacy rate is significantly behind men's. In this instance, we cannot afford an analysis that takes an ideological or merely rhetorical perspective to prove something wrong or right. What is needed is a broad and

plural perspective, a praxis perspective, “to know” and “to do.” For this to happen, we need to let women speak their mind even as we try from our own location and position to understand how we know and what we know, which should guide what we do. In the following chapters, my aim is to do just that, though at times it may seem confusing and not like a clear narrative that everybody understands easily. But the issues too are not crystal clear.

Chapter Two

Understanding the People's War in Nepal: Discrepant Developments of the Conflict

Why the violent People's War started in the seemingly peaceful country of Nepal has puzzled many. Furthermore, why so many women participated in the war is another key question. In a country where a large percentage of women is considerably behind men in every social and political sector, their involvement in the People's War as well as women's representation among the Maoists deserves serious consideration. Did the Maoists tap into the grievances of women? What are the immediate outcomes of the war and its effects on women, men, and gender dynamics in Nepal? How did people experience the People's War as it was happening? This chapter is an attempt to understand the People's War in general and, in particular, trace the Maoists' politics of incitement and representation since the beginning of their movement. I explore different factors contributing to women's involvement in the People's War and its effects on the Nepali social, ethnic, and gender landscape, drawing from media reports, published field research, other researchers' interviews, and interviews I conducted in Nepal and the United States.

Representation of Marginality and Identity Politics: Maoists Gaining Ground

The representation of marginalized voices in their many forms -- cultural, aesthetic, and political -- motivated support from many communities, including women, for the Maoist People's War in Nepal. Since the Maoist movement started, there has been more heterogeneity in the representation of cultural celebrations, festivities, dresses, and languages, although this trend was on the rise since the democratic movement of the early 90s. However, Maoist initiatives effectively politicized multicultural

representations by promoting native or indigenous dancing, singing, and celebrations.¹¹⁴ This trend encouraged indigenous people to revive and reclaim their practices, religions, and languages, while larger segments of the society are learning, some for the first time, about the existence of plurality and diversity in Nepal.¹¹⁵ Instead of remaining the esoteric topic of research for academics and intellectuals from Nepal and abroad, indigenous, Dalit, and Janajati people are claiming their languages and cultural practices openly. During the People's War, cultural and ethnic identity politics notably increased.

As I pointed out in the first chapter, Nepal's project of nation building and nationalist development did not incorporate its diversity of ethnicities, religions, languages, and cultural practices. More than thirty years of Panchayat governance attempted to unify the nation-state under the notion of homogeneity, which privileged the upper castes with their Hindu codes and values, thereby excluding and alienating large segments of the population that fell outside of that framework. This practice also devalued the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of Nepal. As it was, many people were left out of the projects of "modern development" and the construction of a new Nepal. The restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 shed light on issues of multiculturalism, and the indigenous and Janajati groups, Dalits, and women from various constituencies raised issues of structural inequality and discrimination. But not much changed in the positions of power. One significant difference from the Panchayat time of governance was significant growth of the non-governmental sectors in business as well as in social work and the humanitarian sector. International NGOs entered Nepal in large numbers,

¹¹⁴ See *The Eight Glorious Years of the Great Nepalese People's War*, which is a long documentary film full of cultural programs. Footage of the film appears on <<http://cpnm.org/videos/WebLibrary/Final.htm>>

¹¹⁵ Video footage of the Maoist cultural programs, conventions, and conferences are widely published on the World Wide Web. One can view the videos published by The Maoist Party on their websites, such as <www.krishnasenonline.org> and <www.cpnm.org>

and local NGOs mushroomed. In some instances, these organizations helped the empowerment of marginalized people, and the marginalized populations slowly began to establish formal and informal organizations. Issues of linguistic and ethnic diversity and identity became significant as Nepal ventured into new democratic ways of governance, at least in theory.¹¹⁶ Organizing around identity categories in terms of ethnic, linguistic, and regional differences ensued, and so did voices of dissent against the status quo. This was a change. During the Panchayat time, although hierarchical differences between different groups were manifest in every sector of social life, identity was not allowed to become a political issue simply because the autocratic Panchayat regime was able to project a façade of peace and harmony within diversity through repression that crushed any dissent from the hegemonic Nepali national identity.

However, under the veneer of harmony and syncretism, rebellion was building during the Panchayat rule. With Jana Andolan I (1990), a further opening up of Nepal to modernization and economic liberalization brought different modes of production, consumption, and identity formation. In terms of social and political awareness, the 90s brought a sweeping transformation in people's ways of thinking through communication technology and connection to the global information system. Development practices in the form of literacy programs aided the rise of social and political consciousness among a large number of people, especially women, who were far behind in literacy.¹¹⁷ Literacy helped to engender and, in some cases, strengthen identity politics among marginalized

¹¹⁶ The national census in 1991, which listed 26 ethnic groups, 30 castes, 3 major religions, 20 Tibeto-Burman languages and more than 15 Indo-Aryan languages, helped to show the heterogeneity of Nepal empirically (Gurung 1998, 85). For further information on Nepali identity, see John Whelpton (1997), Anne de Sales (2003: 326 – 57) and Susan Hangen (2000).

¹¹⁷ See Anna Robinson-Pant (2001) for a study of the impact of literacy on rural women in Nepal.

people.¹¹⁸ With literacy came the ability to enter new modes of knowledge production and an understanding of social, economic, and political practices beyond the local. Many ethnic communities started a politics of dis-identification with the dominant, Hindu-based, hegemonic values of society. Some Janajati organizations formally rejected holidays like *Dashain* and *Tihar*, major festivals in Nepal with Hindu origins, as hegemonic impositions by Hindu caste groups. This rejection of so-called national events symbolized the autonomy and self-determination sought by dominated groups that had long endured the imposition of other cultural values. Alongside the rejection of cultural practices like *Dashain* came embracing, identifying with, and appropriating traditions, cultures, and languages that were formerly considered backward and had been disappearing.

When the Maoists launched a war against the “old state” in February of 1996, it was an opportune time to politicize the marginalized communities’ grievances and channel the energy of groups seeking broader representation in governance and national identity projects. In many ways, their objectives and the Maoists’ merged in terms of seeking equality in social, religious, linguistic, and national questions. Most importantly, Maoist voices helped the marginalized to look into the nexus between traditional and local forms of inequalities, which they call feudalism, and new forms of structural inequality at the global level, which they call imperialism and colonialism. Although not

¹¹⁸ In *Invitations to Love*, Laura Ahearn notes how political magazines like *Lapha Traimasik* and *Kairan Masik* in the 90s informed people about their cultural and political rights and encouraged them to resist “hegemonic Nepali language and Hindu religion” in favor of Magar ethnicities (179-180). Ahearn points out the important ways in which literacy projects impacted people in the village she lived in for several years. Through the study of love letters exchanged between young men and women in the village of Junigau, Ahearn’s ethnographic exploration of a Magar village in Nepal delves into many facets of Nepali politics, culture, and development. Using “a practice theory of meaning constraint” (56), she analyzes development discourses, especially adult literacy classes, their effect on young and old in the village, and how their individual actions and understanding of “being developed” or modern further affect their social and political community.

directly affiliated with the Maoist Party, many ethnic and Dalit identity based organizations and women's rights groups gave their direct and indirect support to the People's War. The public support gave a new dimension to the rebellion that started as a reformist cultural movement but became a violent communist insurgency, which many people did not quite expect. Although the Maoists gained the support of local people, it was not enough to conduct a full-fledged war against the State without alarming the regional and international community. The Maoists played with propagandist forms of representation of the marginalized. They especially utilized gendered and identitarian symbols of ethnicity and class to speak for them.¹¹⁹ For example, the figure of a woman in her peasant garb carrying a gun was meant to engender empathy/sympathy for her location of class, gender, and ethnicity as well as project empowerment and liberation.¹²⁰ Below, I explicate the Maoist politics of representation.

Maoist Politics of Representation: Speaking to the Outside

In the last ten years of the Nepali conflict, images of gun-toting women guerrillas in the hills and plains of Nepal have been a staple of major newspapers and media. Displacing images of women stooping under heavy loads on their back, shoulders, or head -- made popular by trekkers, researchers, and popular magazines like *National Geographic* -- are the combatant women carrying AK47s, M16s, or SLRs. Despite rampant poverty, corruption, and the tough geographical terrain, Nepal's image in the world was the quaint, peaceful *Shangri-la* where Buddha was born and natural beauty

¹¹⁹ Since the beginning of the war, the question of ethnicity in the Maoist movement has been a key one. There have been arguments, sometimes by the Maoist leadership itself, that the Maoist army is mostly comprised of people from the Dalit and the Janajati communities, like the Magars. This view is also contested as there is no published account of which ethnicity is dominant in the Maoist movement. However, it is evident that the top leadership is mostly made up of upper caste males.

¹²⁰ The photos of women carrying guns can be seen on book covers written on the conflict (see Onesto 2005; Karki and Seddon 2003; Thapa 2003) as well as in news stories about the Maoist conflict.

was abundant. The Maoists argued this was wrong, a façade that hid oppression, discrimination, and domination rooted in the cultural and political history of Nepal. This could only be changed by altering the image of Nepal through a different ideology: total destruction of the old State and creation of a New People's Democracy.¹²¹ The Maoists promoted the new representations precisely for their effect in people's minds -- that Nepal cannot be defined by the dominant historical powers anymore, whether local or global. They wanted to dispel the notion in the international arena that Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology is dead or is dying slowly in Cuba or China. Images of armed and uniformed young men and women, some of whom barely look fifteen, send a strong message: the Maoists want to plant the red flag on the top of the world.¹²²

The Maoists aided the dissemination of almost exotic images of guerilla women and men to exploit the international media for propaganda politics, mainly to attract international attention to what was happening in Nepal.¹²³ It is a well known fact that the Maoists welcomed international journalists and were receptive to their queries. Not a single foreign journalist suffered direct harm from the Maoists, who perpetrated violence on local Nepali journalists and continue to do so.¹²⁴ When foreign journalists visited the

¹²¹ Such sentiments of creating a new state by destroying the old are too numerous to cite here. This vision is frequently expressed by the Maoist leadership as well as the cadres in conversations with people and in their publications and proclamations. For example, see Comrade Parvati, "People's Power in Nepal" in *Monthly Review*, Vol 57, No. 6 (November 2005). < <http://monthlyreview.org/1105parvati.htm> >

¹²² See Li Onesto's interview of Prachanda, the Chairman of the Maoist Party and the supreme leader of the People's War, entitled "Red Flag Flying on the Roof of the World" in *Revolutionary Worker*, no. 1043, 20 February, 2000. Source: <www.rwor.org>

¹²³ Publications like Li Onesto's *Dispatches from the People's War in Nepal* and her interviews with Prachanda in the *Revolutionary Worker*, an online journal, disseminated Maoist voices to the world, at least in the early days of the movement. Onesto's writing on the Maoists and their struggle, which may be largely true, is very one sided -- she has not a single word of criticism of Maoist violence.

¹²⁴ Li Onesto published her journal entries in the form of a book, *Dispatches from the People's War in Nepal*. She was the first foreign journalist to visit the Maoist area and interview Prachanda. Her interviews were published by the *Revolutionary Worker*, an online journal of the Revolutionary International Movement (RIM). Although journalists needed permission from the Maoist government to do research in

Maoists' camps, they often organized welcome programs with indigenous cultural shows and performed mock drills. The reporters captured such performances and brought them to the outside world.¹²⁵

My own experience of visiting a Maoist controlled area to observe and talk with one of their party members substantiates their desire to court the foreign press more than Nepali journalists or researchers.¹²⁶ This is not to say that they did not want to talk to locals, but the Maoists could not blindly trust people, especially those from Nepal. Thus, only those who came through trusted Maoist networks were able to observe and listen to them. When I arrived, they were surprised to see me and told me they were expecting a foreign journalist; apparently, someone who looked like me and dressed like me could not be a foreigner, yet I was a different Nepali in their eyes.¹²⁷ "I am a Nepali, so I hope I did not disappoint you terribly," I said. While I was glad to talk to *someone important*, I was also worried I might have displeased them. Fortunately, our talk went smoothly. It was interesting, though, that later during the interview, Asmita¹²⁸ kept making a distinction between her and "people like me" by saying that "you would not know about these things," which mainly referred to oppression, inequality and the hardships that women endure in the rural areas in Nepal. Although she may have been right in her

their area, there was less opposition from the Maoists when it came to foreign journalists, as long as they came through connected sources.

¹²⁵ One such reporter-journalist is Kevin Sites, who travels to so-called "hot zones" to get his stories. See Sites' "Meet the Rebels" at <http://hotzone.yahoo.com/b/hotzone/blogs4448> for his report on the Maoist army and their representation of force.

¹²⁶ I visited a Maoist controlled area in July of 2006 after the peace process between the mainstream political parties and the Maoists was underway. Not all Maoists had emerged from the underground, so it was difficult to get in contact with them, and the atmosphere was still fearful.

¹²⁷ I wore a fairly traditional but modernized dress called a "Kurta Suruwal" that loosely covers, depending on the style, most of your body; this dress has been accepted by most modern Nepalis as a "proper dress" for girls and women, including the Maoists.

¹²⁸ The person I interviewed called herself Asmita. She was a coordinator between the district level and the bureau, the top level. She was also a former commissar who headed an all women's battalion in the early days of the Maoist war

assumptions about me, it was also true that she was working from conjecture and outside appearances. While I saw myself as an insider, someone who grew up and was educated in Nepal, not just a researcher coming from America to study Nepali women in the Maoist movement, I sensed that, to her, I did not qualify as an insider who understood the pain of “real Nepali women.” A wall of perception divided us as different people/women. Although we shared many similarities -- age, gender, caste, motherhood, nationality -- and took interest in the ways in which inequality worked to oppress people, she could not entirely trust me. My location in the United States of America, a supplier of weapons to the Maoists’ opponents, made me suspect, but my being Nepali was perhaps even more problematic. Whether because of fear of the Maoists or fear of the government security forces, very few Nepali reporters had direct contact with the Maoists.¹²⁹ Both the Maoists and the military perpetrated killings, torture, and abductions of Nepali journalists during the crisis.¹³⁰ Perhaps the Maoists were suspicious of the local journalists as they were fighting an underground war. In retrospect, the Maoist controlled areas often hosted only foreign journalists, and even when native journalists visited, it was usually to aid the outsiders.¹³¹

¹²⁹ People got most of their news about Maoist activities from the Maoist networks themselves. The Maoists’ publicized their everyday news, proclamations, and agendas on their own formal and informal networks. Newspapers like *Janadesh Weekly* and websites like <www.krishnasenonline.org> or <www.cpnm.org> were and are key sources of information on Maoist activities, along with FM radio stations in Maoist controlled areas. This is not to say that the mainstream newspapers did not report about them. The RNA bulletin board also reported on them.

¹³⁰ The human rights violation data put forward by the Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC) puts the number of journalists and photographers killed until December 2006 at 18. Out of the 18 journalists, 11 were killed by the State security forces. Also, among the 85,185 kidnapped people by the Maoists in the ten years of war, many of them were journalists. Source: <<http://www.inseconline.org/hrvdata.php>>

¹³¹ Insider/outsider identities are considered problematic and contested for the absoluteness these terms may represent, and there are identity terms such as “inappropriate other,” “halfie,” “hybrid,” and “in-between” to break the dualist tendencies in identity construction. However, people consistently categorize things within their own perspective and according to their experience of the world. Despite their deconstruction, there is no running away from categories. Thus, the terms outsider/insider are very much used to designate experiential forms of knowledge that are experienced differently by people in different locations and

It suffices to say the Maoists handled foreign reporters with much diplomacy when they could. It was not within their means to internationalize the People's War in Nepal and attract the attention of the outside world, including the United Nations, when the world was reeling under the "War on Terror" after 9/11. Inside Nepal, there were independent newspapers and publishers that worked to disseminate their views and plans. While the Maoists regularly publicized their declarations through their own websites and newspapers, such as *Janadesh*, many Nepali mainstream newspapers, like *The Kathmandu Post* or *Kantipur*, also publicized their write-ups and declarations.¹³² Thus, the local press did give them some voice.

In the early days of the rebellion, there was not much press coverage on Nepal's conflict, but after the royal massacre in June 2001, and then 9/11 in the United States, the U.S. government branded the Maoists as terrorists. The international press coverage on the Maoists in Nepal usually highlighted the guerilla warfare and compared them to other revolutionary movements, like Peru's Shining Path.¹³³ In the international community, while not many knew what was going on, those familiar with Nepal and its social and economic circumstances had mixed feelings toward the situation and the Maoists' violent tactics to change the system. The Maoist politics of representation had an effect. It is

positions. The increasing adoption of identity categories such as native/global/diasporic, or citizen/migrant/immigrant, substantiates our behavioral tendency to organize knowledge through dichotomies. While I consider my own role here that of an objective observer, I by no means deny that I have subjectivity tainted by my own location and position of class, education, caste, and gender. Yet, I come to study the crisis and the effects of the crisis from my own subjective objectivity. I do not believe in "authentic insider" knowledge about the People's War in Nepal, and I do not pretend to play that role. What I offer here in terms of the politics of representation appropriated by the Maoists comes from my subjective-objectivity based on other subjects' views on the issues.

¹³² Maoist leader Dr. Baburam Bhattarai's write-ups frequently appeared in *Kantipur* and *The Kathmandu Post*.

¹³³ See Bhagirath Yogi, "Peru ko Pachi-pachi" (Following Peru), *Nepal National Weekly* in <<http://www.kantipuronline.com/Nepal/bidhora%20bislesan4.htm>>. On the academic front, see Stephen Mikesall, "The Paradoxical Support of Nepal's Left for Comrade Gonzalo" in Thapa (2003); Andrew Nickson, "Democratization and the Growth of Communism in Nepal: A Peruvian Scenario in the Making?" in Thapa (2003); Also see Michael Hutt (2004).

disconcerting for people to see an innocent looking girl or boy aiming a gun at an imagined enemy. Questions may arise in their minds when a disarming young woman, almost shying away from the camera, clutches an AK47 as her most precious possession. The Maoists wanted people to look at those images, wonder about the lives of such people, and, if possible, sympathize with their cause. If we look at the early images made popular by reporters like Li Onesto (2005), almost all the militia women who are carrying guns are in plain clothes -- they do not project any virile image of militarism or militancy. Women who are pointing their guns at you smile, and many of them look away.¹³⁴ They appear disorganized and poor in resources, and sometimes they almost seem to be posing in a naïve jest. On the other hand, the Maoist leadership was not jesting, nor were they displaying these images to the public for nothing. It was both a projection of victimization and a call for empathy with their movement.¹³⁵ Many people saw a Nepal different from what they imagined before.

The constant emphasis on images of “gun-toting” women was the Maoists’ deliberate attempt to project women as both vulnerable and empowered; vulnerable because they looked naïve and simple, empowered because they carried guns. On the other hand, as the Maoists needed to recruit, they knowingly exploited images of their cadres to show they were there for real and not just in rhetoric. The politics of incitement at the local level was at work -- people began to think the Maoists were powerful since they had guns. Such images also helped them to gain attention internationally as people

¹³⁴ See the cover photograph of the book *Dispatches* by Li Onesto, and the photographs on pages 106 and 111.

¹³⁵ It is obvious from interviews of Prachanda and other Maoist leaders how ill prepared they were for war with the State until as late as 2001, and how they lacked resources. See interviews of Prachanda in Onesto’s *Dispatches* (2005), and Baburam Bhattarai in Deepak Thapa’s *Understanding the Maoist Movement* (2003). Also available are the views of these Maoist leaders on the Maoist Party’s homepage: <<http://www.cpnm.org>>

often crave sensational and exotic news. At the same time, those images at the local political level generated larger public consent among many unsatisfied with the political establishment. The Maoists positioned themselves as a formidable force that could challenge the status quo and realize the dream of a new Nepal. Obviously, the effects on the public mind were diverse.

For the international community, hearing about “Nepali Maoists” on TV and the internet may have been strange, especially to those who thought of Nepal as a peaceful, provincial place where little happened. But the Maoists understood they could gain recognition as a legitimate revolutionary force by exploiting the global media’s craving for the exotic. They needed the outside world to recognize them so that such recognition would affect local politics. Otherwise, a homegrown revolutionary movement run on resources collected from donations, extortions, and looted banks would gain little attention. Thinking economically and strategically, the Maoist appeal to the foreign press was understandable given their access to the world of global informatics. In many respects, the globalization of information technology in the mid-90s was a boon to the Maoists. Just as the internet became more available and popular, the Maoists started their war. Although they lived underground, and much of the time in the jungles, they were connected to the world through mass produced communication technology. Without telephones (satellite, cordless, and cell) and the World Wide Web, global mobilization to the Maoist cause would have been impossible. The Maoist leadership for the most part operated from India, from where modern information technology aided their movement. Nepalis living outside Nepal learned about the conflict and everyday happenings in Nepal more from the internet and news blogs than anywhere else. Thus, if the “People’s War”

was to replace “Maoist terrorism,” the Maoists needed to internationalize their revolution globally through images of those participating in the war. “Do these people look like terrorists?” they needed to ask, and tell the world how they were different. In addition, those images lured foreign journalists who like adventure and risk to come and research the Maoists further. The Maoists knew better than to prevent the foreign journalists from spreading their agenda to the world.

Whether it was Li Onesto’s *Dispatches* or Deepak Thapa’s *The Kingdom Under Siege*, *The New York Times* or the BBC World News, people saw faces of Nepal never presented before in such a way. As the war continued, the images of crisis and devastation became artifacts in creating a conception of Nepal different from *Shangri-la*. How far the Maoists came since the proclamation of their war shows their propaganda politics garnered support. The initial rebellion turned into a real war and unbridled crisis for several years. The second step in understanding the People’s War is the involvement of women in it and how it happened. In the following section, I assess the agentic and debilitating developments during the People’s War.

Agents of Change: Women Rising for Social Reform

In the early days of the Maoist movement, many took the movement as social and cultural reform that initiated the modernization of Nepal by analyzing and, where possible, outlawing the traditional, religious, and cultural practices that treated many, including women, as secondary human beings. Especially popular among women was the barring of alcohol and gambling in rural areas, where the movement was strongest.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ As Rupa Dhital (CWIN, 2002) shows, alcohol and drug abuse is prevalent amongst children and especially street children in urban centers in Nepal. People in Nepal also understand that alcohol consumption by men is often related to domestic violence and male violence against women and children. As development studies imply, alcohol consumption in excess and gambling are low development

Thus, despite the initial slighting of questions of women and gender in the forty point demands, women's participation in the early days of the People's War was overwhelming. The support especially came in rural areas when the CPN(M) stood against patriarchal oppression in the forms of enforced widowhood, polygamy, the caste system, and untouchability. Many women's organizations played a key role in this process by helping the Maoists, and the Maoists were smart enough to engage the women who were already in the field doing the work. The Maoists had already started to court women through an organization called the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary), or ANWA(R). This organization was especially influential in recruiting women into the Maoist Party through ideological and cultural reform.¹³⁷ ANWA(R) played a key role in indoctrinating girls and women into the ideology of the Maoist party before the People's War began. ANWA(R) was involved in campaigning in the villages against alcohol, which contributed to domestic violence, malnutrition, and poverty. The campaigns against alcohol, gambling, and widowhood practices were the Maoists' key "social cleansing" mechanisms, which proactively brought rural women into their fold since, thus far, nobody in power had listened to their grievances.¹³⁸ Women were more aggressively proactive against alcohol and gambling than men as such social ills most

indicators in societies that are prone to them. However, in Nepal's case, the use of alcohol cannot be equated with abuse and violence in all communities and in all circumstances. The Maoists in later days realized this fact and became more lax with particular ethnic communities, like the Magars, who make alcohol part of their rituals and culture. Nevertheless, most people in Nepal would agree that excessive alcohol consumption contributes to domestic violence and poverty.

¹³⁷ All Nepal Women's Organization (ANWA) is a sister organization of the United Marxist-Leninist Party of Nepal, which the Maoist party calls revisionist and not representative of true communist values. Likewise, ANWA(R) believes they champion the true cause of women with their "clear stand regarding male supremacy and private poverty" (Parvati 2003:170). For ANWA's view, which sees ANWA(R) as extremist and driven by "narrow sectarianism," see Sujita Shakya's "The Maoist Movement in Nepal: An Analysis from the Women's Perspective" in Karki and Seddon (2003). Shakya criticizes the Maoists for dividing women's organizations and not recognizing the contributions of other women who are not affiliated with ANWA(R) but still work for gaining "maximum rights for women's emancipation" (387).

¹³⁸ The news reports about the alcohol ban are too numerous to cite here. For an example, see "Anti-liquor Campaign" in *The Kathmandu Post*, June 16, 2001.

negatively affected them. With the help of women's organizations, the Maoists were quite successful at prohibiting alcohol production and consumption in many villages in Western Nepal, and they even shut down or destroyed a few alcohol factories.¹³⁹

However, despite having some success in some parts of the country in the early days of the People's War, there were concerns of culture and livelihood that stalled the proactive move to ban alcohol.¹⁴⁰ Alongside the anti-alcohol campaigning, Maoist women took up the issue of Nepali widows, whose plight I described in the first chapter. During the conflict, the number of widows significantly grew as many men died. Thus, ANWA(R)'s role, as its activists professed, was to work toward the elimination of discrimination against widows by encouraging widow remarriage as well as discouraging customs associated with widowhood.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ There was some anti-alcohol activism by a grassroots women's group called the Aama Sumuha in the late 1980s, but the government did not pay much attention to their call. Neither did it confront the issue of deregulated alcohol production in the name of cultural freedom and revenue increase. The government neglected the social ills borne by Nepali society, in particular by its women, until "confronted with the fire and brimstone of the Maoist women," as Shaubhagya Shah puts it in his "The Other side of the Alcohol Economy" in Thapa (2003). The alcohol issue has been controversial within the Maoist movement as well. There are ethnic communities, like the Magars from Western Nepal, who require alcohol in their ritual practices and cultural events, and there are individuals who make their living by producing home brews and selling them to locals. Thus, on the basis of cultural identity, people within the Maoist party itself contested the alcohol issue. Many Maoist cadres came from the so-called *Matwali* (alcohol drinking) communities, and the Maoists did not wish to lose their support base in those communities. Yet, the problem of alcohol is as real in Nepal as anywhere else, and women who did not necessarily support Maoist tactics of violence supported their take on it.

¹⁴⁰ There are also stories about people brewing alcohol to make a living under displaced conditions due to the Maoists. See "Subsidized food being misused for brewing alcohol" in *The Kathmandu Post*, Sept. 1, 2003. Ironically, one of the reasons the Maoists wanted to ban alcohol production and consumption in the villages was to stop the conversion of food grains like rice and millet into alcoholic beverages, a practice that took away nutrition from the family and children in order to produce alcohol for the consumption of the adult males.

¹⁴¹ In Nepal, widowed women are not permitted to wear red, the color of auspiciousness, fertility, and good luck. Widowed women wear black, white, yellow, or faded colors. They are also forbidden to wear certain jewelry and makeup, and in some traditional Brahmin families they are not allowed to eat meat, garlic, onions, and other foods that are considered Rajasic or Tamasic, meaning they produce desire. Widows are supposed to give up desire and sex and think of the next life with their husband. As the war claimed many men, there are many young widows. One organization, Women for Human Rights, counted 7,000 widows in 23 districts most affected by the conflict. Among the 7,000 widows, "two-thirds of these were younger than 30, a third were illiterate and only two percent had college education." Activists estimate there are at

While women's organizations associated with the Maoists were vocal about widowed women's rights, they also worked to stop child marriage and polygamy in villages, where they are common. The Maoist People's courts punished polygamists and those who married girls, at least in the Maoist strongholds. Although the effects of the Maoist social awareness movement are difficult to measure in urban areas, women certainly benefited from Maoist voices at the grassroots level. The lack of representation of women in governance, the justice system, policy making, and leadership became an important issue. Since the Maoists emphasized issues of marginality and discrimination, there has been some reform in reproductive rights, property rights, and marriage and family laws regarding women. Where the laws are still discriminatory, like the citizenship rights laws, women's rights activists are contesting them.

Overall, the Maoists in the beginning years generated consent from women due to their social and cultural movement to end discrimination. Many women in rural areas identified with many issues the Maoists raised in terms of gender discrimination, class inequality, and untouchability, hoping for liberation from traditional patriarchal domination and societal oppression.¹⁴² Likewise, many women in urban areas and middle class women, who are generally reluctant to heed criticism against the bourgeoisie, secretly hoped the attacks on discrimination against women would empower them as well.¹⁴³ After all, despite being educated or well off, many women suffer the same patriarchal discrimination and gender inequality in the urban and so-called civilized

least 15,000 widows who are a product of war, in one way or another, and they may live ostracized lives if the state does not protect their rights.

¹⁴² In their research on the Maoist dominated areas, Manchanda and Gautam (2003) explore in detail the why many rural women supported the Maoist uprising.

¹⁴³ As the Maoists supported many women's rights issues, women's rights activists in the NGO sector were empowered, which is seen by some of the changes made by the government in property rights, citizenship rights, and reproductive rights during the conflict years.

spaces. The Maoist movement gave impetus to addressing domestic violence not as a private matter dealt with inside the family, but as something needing legal and psychological attention.¹⁴⁴ Thus, in the initial days of the People's War, the Maoists gained support from a large number of women, who were not aware of how the war would unfold or of its debilitating side effects. Most people did not expect the Maoists would grow so powerful and form their own army, and few knew the State would react with the repression of TADO. In the following section, I will explore how a movement that started with voices of social and political reform turned into a violent crisis at all levels of social existence.

Violence, Militarization, and Displacement: Effects of the Crisis

As early as November of 1995, a few months before the People's War started, the coalition government of the Nepali Congress, the Rastriya Prajantra Party, and the Sadbhavana Party launched "Operation Romeo" in the Rolpa district in western Nepal.¹⁴⁵ According to an interview with Baburam Bhattarai, 1,500 armed policemen undertook the task of unleashing "terror against the poor peasants of that rugged mountain district in western Nepal" (Bhattarai 2003a, 43).¹⁴⁶ More than a thousand people ranging in age from twelve to seventy were arrested, and hundreds of them were severely and inhumanely tortured to the extent that "[m]ore than ten thousand rural youths, out of the population of two hundred thousand for the whole district . . . [were] forced to flee their homes and take shelter in remote jungles" (Bhattarai 2003a, 43). Many of the arrests

¹⁴⁴ The active participation of urban women's NGOs during the conflict years speaks to this situation. On gender based domestic violence in Nepal, see Rekha Lohani, *Private Sphere of Domestic Violence, a Violation of Women's Human Rights: A Case Study of Nepal*, MA thesis, Drew University, 2004.

¹⁴⁵ As I already mentioned in chapter 1, the government formed by the dominant mainstream parties like the Nepali Congress enacted oppressive search operations like Romeo and Kilo Seirra in the name of hunting down radical communist forces who were opposed to government policies.

¹⁴⁶ This interview took place before the Maoist' officially launched their war in 1996. The interview was first published in *The Independent*, Kathmandu, vol. 5, no. 41, 13-19 December, 1995.

were young women. While “an eighteen-year-old girl from Gam VDC was raped” in police custody, eight other girls were “stripped to nudity and tortured with ‘sisnu-pani’” (nettles) (Bhattarai 2003a, 43).

As Baburam Bhattarai narrates the early days of the war, women’s entrance into the Maoist movement was linked with gendered violence against women by the Nepali State. Instead of considering the 40 point demand presented by the Maoists to the administration, the coalition government retaliated with blind force. Many civil society members and human rights workers portray this government operation as a foolish move that deteriorated conditions in the area and left no choice for the villagers but to rebel (Thapa 2003; Gautam, Bashkota and Manchanda 2001). After the Maoists declared their war against the state a few months following this operation, authorities administered more covert and overt forms of control and police brutality. With the murder of a husband, brother, or close relative, the rape and torture of a wife, sister, or daughter by government security forces, the survivors fled to the forest and turned to the Maoists. Ironically, the government’s brutality toward people in this region helped the Maoists to attract more women to their cause and advanced their recruitment.

In the years before the Maoists officially announced the People’s War, it was the democratic government of Nepal that perpetrated violence, coercion, and power mongering. The “People’s War” was seen largely as a positive force for socio-cultural transformation as well as a way to bring the corrupt government back to democratic praxis. People were frustrated with the changes of government every six months, corrupt ministers looting with both hands, and internal squabbles within the political parties. As the groups that suffered historical inequalities saw no change in policies and practices,

they drifted to the Maoist party and their call for change. Likewise, the Maoists enjoyed the support of journalists, civil society members, human rights activists, and Janajati and Dalit organizations.

However, when the Maoists applied insurgent tactics by targeting and killing innocent individuals, such as teachers and farmers, and destroying development infrastructure and public and private institutions, they entered a second phase in their revolutionary war, the purpose of which was to create fear. While the Maoists argued that government neglect of their demands and its use of force compelled them to use violence against what they called “reactionary forces,” their use of force did not always target the government.¹⁴⁷ The second phase of the Maoist war started with the creation of the People’s Army, especially after the government’s Kilo Sierra Two operation in 1998.¹⁴⁸ At that time, the Maoists’ violent activities confused many sympathizers and organizations that supported Maoist demands in the early days. The forced recruitment of young people in the Maoist army, pressure to join their militia, and kidnappings of people to attend their cultural programs were some practices that disillusioned the public. A massive trend of displacement and migration, which I will discuss in detail in a later chapter, ensued as people were caught between the Maoist army and the government’s armed forces. After the royal massacre in June of 2001, the war intensified, especially under the autocratic tendencies of the newly crowned Gyanendra. The third phase of the war really started after the government promulgated TADO. The Maoists held a central level convention to begin a new phase in their war. As they planned new strategies to topple the government, Nepal’s people lived under a state of emergency and military

¹⁴⁷ See “The Maoist Statements and Documents” in Karki and Seddon (2003).

¹⁴⁸ See Sudheer Sharma (2003).

hegemony. Militarization became the daily rule under the long state of emergency and the unlimited power the royal military enjoyed. During this phase of the crisis, the government forces and the Maoists both crossed the limits of humanity and broke human rights accords signed by Nepal. With the government security atrocities and the Maoist acts of violence, the demographics in the villages changed. People fled their homes and moved to district headquarters or to the capital city in great numbers.

Displacement:

Displacement has been one of the most visible human tragedies in Nepal in the ten years of conflict. The displacement within Nepal is described as “internal displacement,” and people who are thus displaced are termed “Internally Displaced Persons” (IDPs), following the United Nations’ definition of IDPs as “...persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.”¹⁴⁹ Although the United Nations’ designation for the displaced is the gender-neutral “persons,” the experience of displaced people is not devoid of constraints produced by their gender, class, cultural and political orientations, and locations. However, one common experience of all the displaced is the fear of bodily harm and death -- it is about life security.¹⁵⁰ According to the Home Ministry reports, the number of displaced is just

¹⁴⁹ See “The Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement,” United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) online. http://www.reliefweb.int/ocha_ol/pub/idp_gp/idp.html.

¹⁵⁰ The non-governmental human rights organization INSEC’s report “Conflict Induced Displacement in Nepal up to End of 2004” categorizes fear and terror as the key factors of displacement among people. The displaced have been put under the category “by State,” “by Maoists,” and “Due to Terror.” Interestingly, among the registered number of displaced at 50,356 people, 25,199 fall under the category of Terror, while 3,827 are displaced by the State, and 21,320 are displaced because of the Maoists.

above five thousand, but this number is for relief distribution measures, and the government does not want to recognize all the displaced for political and economic reasons. NGO reports estimate the number of internally displaced people to be anywhere from 100,000 to 500,000.¹⁵¹ Whatever the exact number, this human tragedy is one of the bitterest fruits of the crisis.

There are at least two factors effecting these displacements. One is the Maoist insurgency, while the other is the counter-insurgency led by the government's armed forces. When the People's War started, the first to move from the villages were the mainstream political party workers and the school teachers, the primary targets of the Maoist insurgency.¹⁵² The rebels sent out letters to common people asking them to give donations in the form of money, goods, and grains, and demanding one of their sons or daughters for the movement. They threatened bodily injury or destruction of property for non-compliance. When people saw the Maoists acted on their threats, those who could left their homes and lands. The mainstream political party leaders, political cadres, and middle class people who fled could afford to live in the cities or the towns, at least for some time. Business people who could afford to give "donations" were able to negotiate with the rebels. Ironically, some of those who were able to negotiate with the Maoists and stayed on could be termed feudal landlords, whereas those less well off fled because of the Maoist rule of "one house one member" for the People's War. Every group, class,

¹⁵¹ In the report "Internally Displaced People of Nepal" by the Institute of Peace, Bandana Shrestha and Som Niroula state that the real number of displaced might be about 150,000. A credible NGO called The Informal Service Sector (INSEC) is reluctant to claim an exact number. Its 2004 report states the number as of 2003 to be 38,191, which does not account for people who have migrated abroad. However, many NGOs estimate the number as high as 300,000 to 500,000. See "Nepal's Growing Refugee Crisis: A Report," conducted by a group called Alternatives in March 2005.

¹⁵² Among the political party workers the Maoists killed, Nepali Congress workers suffered the most. Until July of 2000, 136 Congress workers were killed, while the UML lost 22 and the Royalists lost 19 (Hachhethu 2004: 66).

and ethnicity suffered. But the Maoist insurgency targeted school teachers, farmers, and policemen from the start. Teachers were punished for promulgating a “bourgeois education” and siding with the feudal and imperialist forces. The Maoists banned the teaching of Sanskrit and murdered numbers of its teachers.¹⁵³ Policemen were targeted for working for the “old state” and for corruption. Among the security forces, policemen paid a higher price because they had a poor image in Nepali society and they had to fight the Maoists first.¹⁵⁴ The Maoists’ taxation system and the burden of providing them with food and shelter bore down upon the villagers. As the rebels destroyed the development infrastructure and drove the non-governmental organizations and development workers away, they deprived the remote areas of whatever development infrastructure they had. In most of western Nepal, where Maoist control was strongest, small children, middle-aged women, and old and infirm people fended for themselves in abandoned villages.¹⁵⁵

The earlier internal displacements began with Maoist intimidation and threats of “bhautik karbahi” (destruction of life and property), coercion into their ideology, and calls for the sacrifice of citizens’ lives and their children’s lives. Later, the Maoists became more forceful in their indoctrination as they started kidnapping students and teachers and summoning local people to their mass gatherings and lecture programs. When such methods did not work, they used torture, bodily disfigurement, and execution

¹⁵³ A documentary film called “Schools in the Crossfire” (2004) depicts the tragedy of the school teachers as well as the students, who were forced to participate in the People’s War to the extent that some parents left villages in order to rescue their kids. In the ten years of the conflict, government public schools opened only intermittently, and months of moratorium prevented children from getting an education. For their part, the Maoists declared the education taught in Nepal was not nationalistic or useful for people’s everyday struggles. They called it a “bourgeois education” suited only for the small middle-class.

¹⁵⁴ According to human rights violation data provided by Informal Service Sector, 1364 policemen and 689 army personnel were killed during the war, from February 13, 1996 to December 31, 2006.

¹⁵⁵ A detailed study of these conditions appears in Shova Gautam’s *Women and Children in the Periphery of the People’s War*. Also, see Manchanda and Gautam, “Where There are no Men: Women in the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal” in *Women, War and Peace in South Asia* (2001).

style killings to show examples of their justice system.¹⁵⁶ Last but not least, their ideological propaganda targeted school children and the youth in the villages and small towns for recruitment in the Maoist militia and the PLA. Sometimes they succeeded, and other times young men and women fled. When the pressure to join the Maoists increased under the “one house one member” rule (for the PLA) and people could no longer pay them taxes or feed them on demand, there was no recourse other than to leave. Most of the middle classes and lower-middle classes left for the cities or for India, but the poorest of the poor could not even do that. Many stayed on because they thought they could negotiate and remain neutral in the conflict. However, they were wrong. War hurls everyone in. The following narratives sum up the pain and suffering faced by many men and women in the early years of the conflict:

Sharan Bahadur Bhandari says: “They came to ask for taxes once, and I gave 50 pathi (about a ton) of rice. Later on, they asked for my son. All of my four sons had left the village for fear of being conscripted in their army, so they came for me. . . They made me sit on a pressure cooker bomb, but did not blow it. They finally released me on the promise that one of my sons would join them within two weeks. I left the village with my wife. Three days after my departure, they padlocked my house.”¹⁵⁷

The 23 member joint family of Bhandaris finally came together after living dispersed all over the Kathmandu valley to ask the government to recognize them as refugees or IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons). But the government ignored their pleas. As I will later illustrate, the efforts to organize the displaced for their rights under the state have been

¹⁵⁶ Reports like “Maobadi Jyadatiko Birod” (Kantipur daily, May 5, 2005) are common from the ten years of war. In this particular report, the reporter sums up the atrocities against a village: a 73 year old man’s legs hacked off with a khukuri, a 12 year old boy beaten severely, and a mother of an infant beaten almost to death with an iron chain. Three other people were killed as the Maoists ambushed the village of 166 people, detonating bombs, destroying houses, and beating up young and old. At least 12 people in that village suffered abuse and torture from the Maoists in that incident. The reporter states: “The villagers don’t think these Maoist atrocities will stop or that anyone can stop them. Therefore, people are slowly leaving the villages and becoming displaced.” (My translation)

¹⁵⁷ My translation from Nepali to English from *Nepal National Weekly*
 <<http://www.kantipuronline.com/Nepal/bisthapan.htm>>

repressed by the government itself, not to mention the Maoists, who shot and killed the president of the Association of Maoist Victims, Ganesh Chilwal, in broad daylight on the 15th of February, 2004. Before I go into detail, here is another excerpt on the victimization of innocent civilians.

Sharada Regmi of Rupendehi says: “It was just getting dark outside ... we were eating our supper. Two or three men came for my husband. They took him out. A little way away, there were about 15-16 others waiting on their bicycles. After taking him a little farther away, they asked for a Khukuri, a Nepali knife, and an axe from the villagers. But when nobody volunteered to give them one, they found a Kodalo (a big garden spade) and hit my husband’s knee, crushing the bones to pieces. . . I do want to go back to my village, but they will kill us. I can’t go back until there is peace.”¹⁵⁸

Sharada lived in a tiny rented room in a crowded corner of Kathmandu, and her husband needed medical help. She also had to support two little sons. Her husband could not even go to the bathroom by himself. They were getting by in the village by running a small convenience store with money from a little piece of land mortgaged to a bank. Her husband was a member of the United Marxist-Leninist Party of Nepal, also a communist party, but the Maoists accused him of being an informer.

Ganesh Chilwal, the slain president of the Victim Association, had a story like Sharadha’s husband. Maoists took him a distance from his house, beat him severely on his arms and legs, and left him to die. “My six year old son witnessed everything, and he now says he will grow up and take revenge,” said Chilwal to interviewers (Bhattarai and Karki 2003, 96).¹⁵⁹ Later gunned down by the Maoists, Chilwal was critical of the government for not doing enough to help the displaced, though the government talked of allocating funds for the victims since 1999. Chilwal “organized peace rallies, hunger

¹⁵⁸ My translation from Nepali from *Nepal National Weekly*
<<http://www.kantipuronline.com/Nepal/bisthapan.htm>>

¹⁵⁹ See Karki and Bhattarai edited *Whose War? Economic and Socio-cultural Impacts of Nepal’s Maoist-Government Conflict* for more examples of such sentiments and situations in the conflict in Nepal.

strikes, interaction programs, and street protests to demand compensation and justice for the victims,” but the government used indiscriminate force to crush their voices, sometimes with batons and tear gas, other times by taking them into police detention (Bhattarai and Karki 2003, 96).

According to the *Nepal Weekly* report, the displaced had demanded either that the government give them food, shelter, and clothing or declare them to be Internal Refugees under the UN guidelines. But the government failed to do either. When UN representatives visited them, the displaced compared themselves with tens of thousands of Bhutanese refugees who, after being expelled from Bhutan for their ethnicity, have been living in the border area of Nepal for more than a decade. The internally displaced asked the United Nations representatives in April of 2005, “If Bhutanese can stay in Nepal as refugees, why can’t we, who are inside Nepal, be recognized as internal refugees?”¹⁶⁰ However, as Madhav Dhungel of the *National Weekly* analyzes the situation, “The government is not in the mood to give the displaced the status of IDPs because then they will have to recognize other groups of the displaced as well, who are primarily displaced due to fear of falling into the crossfire and the government security forces’ atrocities. The number thus suffering is huge.”¹⁶¹ Interestingly, the State viewed the “politics of recognition” and the “human rights” issue the displaced put forward as a threat. The State also failed to protect its citizens from the “terrorist” others. In a way, the State needed the displaced to show the violations of the terrorist others, the Maoists, but it did not want the IDPs to air the State’s dirty laundry in an international arena. The Nepali State did not address the victims’ situation or allow them to exercise their basic

¹⁶⁰ Nepal National Weekly, <http://www.kantipuronline.com/Nepal/bisthapan.htm>. (my translation)

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

right to seek protection under the International Human Rights Laws. It also did not want to look as if it could not handle the situation of the displaced since this would make it seem like a failed State, which is what the Maoists' hoped to achieve. Nepali civilians were caught in between. They were caught between displacement and militarization, and the latter increased the former.

Militarization and Human Rights Violations

Since the insurgency started, some of the same nations that preach human rights, such as the USA, Britain, and Belgium, supported the Nepali government against the Maoist uprising. They provided the Nepali government with small arms, military aid, and “non-lethal weapons,” some of which the Maoists stole to escalate the violence.¹⁶² The entrance of more arms and ammunition empowered the military, and the process of weeding out the Maoists escalated. Nepali civilians lived under a new kind of “terror of protection” by the Royal Nepal Army. Not surprisingly, almost every report by the non-formal sector points out that about 70% of the abuses committed against civilians came from the government security forces. The military, which was silent until the Royal massacre of 2001, became more aggressive in exterminating the Maoists, despite the warning from the international community as well as civil rights groups that there could be no military solution to Nepal's conflict. However, a few months after the royal massacre, 9/11 happened in the United States. This gave King Gyanendra the opportunity to mobilize the army against the “terrorists”. Slowly, the new regime brought the state machinery back to the Panchayat time, when the king was the sovereign ruler of Nepal. The king used article 27 in the constitution of Nepal, which gave

¹⁶² Between 1996 and 2000, the US gave about \$5.6 million in different forms of military aid. After 9/11, the US gave more than \$30 million in military and security aid in the form of weapons, training, and equipment. See the reports on <<http://www.cdi.org/>>

emergency powers to him in times of crisis. He used it to dissolve the House of Parliament, which made the political parties virtually powerless. Under the “state of emergency” for almost a year, the government announced ordinances like the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance/Act (2001), granting extraordinary powers to the security forces to arrest people on the basis of suspicion of “terrorist” activities. Thus empowered, the Royal Nepal Army conducted its counterinsurgency against the Maoists, and large numbers of civilians suffered for nothing. The promulgation of TADA, also called TADO by some, led to a great number of disappearances, extra-judicial killings of innocent civilians, and sexual abuse of women in prison cells by the government security forces. After 10 years of conflict, some disappeared are emerging from their graves.¹⁶³ Up to 2001, the conflict claimed 1,800 lives, but the intensity of violence reached a new high after TADA: the government killed 606 people in the first month of the state of emergency, while the Maoists killed 153 civilians and 300 Royal Nepalese personnel.¹⁶⁴ During the period of TADA, Nepal was on the road to military repression, and the Royal Nepal Army discounted international human rights laws. The terrorizing and torture of the civilian population reached a new height. A woman in a remote district of Western Nepal narrates her experience of living under militarization.¹⁶⁵

‘I was at home when the army came by on patrol. My niece, a child of six, ran into the house in fear. They chased after her, firing at my house. They even came to the door and thrust their SLRs inside, firing. My mother was shot in the knee. My niece was shot near her stomach . . . All because a child of six had run from them!’

¹⁶³ For extra-judicial killings and summary executions by the security forces, see “Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Civilians Struggle to Survive in Nepal’s Civil War,” a report published by Human Rights Watch, October, 2004, Vol. 16 No 12 (c).

¹⁶⁴ See Karki and Seddon, *People’s War in Nepal*, 38.

¹⁶⁵ The excerpts above are from Manjushree Thapa’s *Forget Kathmandu: The Elegy for Democracy* (Delhi: Penguin Press, 2005), who traveled in the conflict areas and interviewed people. See pages 212-213.

She said that one woman, of 22 years, had been raped here. Some time later, another, 24, and a third, 25, had also been raped. 'They were all married, with little children,' she said. 'The army raped them when they came to search their houses. How could they save themselves? Their husbands have all accepted them, because they weren't to blame. But imagine their shame.'

'Yes, the army dropped bombs from a helicopter . . . All the crops were burned. The army wants to punish us.'

A much publicized story is of 15 year old Maina Sunuwar, who was taken by the Nepalese security forces on February 17, 2004.¹⁶⁶ Fifteen soldiers of the Royal Nepalese Army came to the house of Devi Sunuwar, Maina's mother, who did not live too far away from the capital city of Kathmandu. Devi had witnessed a gang rape of her niece and the killing of villagers by security personnel just days before. The soldiers came for her as well. When they could not find Devi, they arrested her daughter Maina instead. When the father begged that they not take her, they told him to bring his wife to the barracks and take his daughter back. A few months passed without any sign of Maina. Finally, on April 21, 2004, a national weekly published a letter stating that Maina was tortured and killed as a result of electric shocks applied to her breasts. When international organizations based in Kathmandu enquired about the case, the Royal Nepalese Army replied that Maina was killed while trying to escape, which they said of any extrajudicial killings they committed. The Army also claimed the police performed a postmortem and the body was handed over to the family. Despite these claims, there was no evidence of a postmortem, and the family received no body or information about Maina for months. Through much pressure from international human rights organizations, the reality of Maina's death finally came out. In December of 2006, the army presented a report to The

¹⁶⁶ The case was registered at NHRC on 25 February 2004. The information is in The Asian Human Rights Commission archives at <<http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile/php/2005/1350/>>

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) that Maina was “subject to torture in the presence of seven army officers and soldiers, including two captains who ordered that Maina Sunuwar’s head be submerged in a large pot of water for one minute six or seven times, then she was given electric shocks in her hands and feet several times lasting one and a half hours.”¹⁶⁷ She was then blindfolded and handcuffed at a building where she was tortured and left to die. Although Maina’s story is only an indication of the atrocities endured by many women and men, it provides an example of the methods and inhumanity of the security forces in Nepal during the conflict and especially during the operation of TADO.

Bogendra Sharma of the Centre of Victims of Torture Nepal (CIVICT) estimates there were at least 20 thousand cases of torture in Nepal every year. CIVICT reported that until February of 2005, the government security forces committed 79% of the cases, while the Maoists carried out 21%.¹⁶⁸ The CIVICT report makes clear the government security side perpetrated the majority of the torture.¹⁶⁹ CIVICT also claims they have registered cases of torture amounting to 23, 310 in the last 15 years. The Human Rights Commission of Nepal (NHRC), on the other hand, has only 334 registered cases. The discrepancy in the data on torture and violence emerges partly from the fact that people do not go to places like the NHRC to register their torture because they fear further persecution. Also, the psychological state of people is not measurable by any data and statistics, and there is no denying that during the crisis people lived in fear of the government security forces and the Maoists. Likewise, gendered and sexualized forms of

¹⁶⁷ “NA Responsible for the Custodial Death of Maina Sunuwar: OHCHR,” December 21, 2006 in Nepalnews.com.

¹⁶⁸ See the CIVICT report 2004 for details on the kinds of torture at <http://www.civict.org.np/news2004/CAT%20Report.pdf>

¹⁶⁹ It should be stated that the organization CIVICT was accused of corruption and misrepresentation of data in 2005.

violence went unreported because of the stigma for women and their families, though the reported cases of sexual abuse at the hands of military and police are now increasing.

How the consequent displacement has affected social constructions of gender and sexuality in Nepali society will be explored in the next section.

Gendered Mobility or Immobility of Women: Changing Gender Dynamics¹⁷⁰

Before the People's War started, women traveling outside the country for work in a *bidesh* (foreign country), whether legally or illegally, were looked upon with suspicion and, most often, in a derogatory way. Yet, Nepal shared and continues to share an open border with India, and every year an estimated seven to ten thousand women and girls, and young boys as well, are trafficked across the border to India, and from there to other countries.¹⁷¹ This tragic trend has been on the rise during the crisis years as young people migrating from their villages to urban centers for work get duped by middle-men and the pimps who cajole them into getting jobs in India and traffic them into bonded labor or sexual slavery. AIDS, as well as other sexually transmitted diseases, increased in urban as well as rural areas, with "100 new cases being recorded every month."¹⁷² That the sexual vulnerability of women and the young rose to unprecedented levels during the

¹⁷⁰ I explore in detail in chapter 5 how Nepali women's outward mobility in the form of migrant labor can be understood vis a vis local gender norms and the transnational division of labor.

¹⁷¹ From 1995 to 2000, the trafficking of people increased by 50%, and trafficking is an industry amounting to more than 7 billion dollars per year. According to Noelleen Heyzer of UNIFEM, "It is estimated worldwide that between 700,000 to 4 million women, children and men are trafficked each year into modern forms of slavery. Fifty thousand of these are trafficked into the United States alone. The purposes of trafficking not only include prostitution, debt bondage and domestic labor, but also the 'trafficking of children as slave labourers, camel jockeys, child soldiers and sex slaves' (1)." See Plenary Address: "The Human Rights Challenge of Globalization: Asia-Pacific-US: The Trafficking of Persons, Especially Women and Children" (Honolulu, Hawaii, November 2002).

¹⁷² Quotes are from "Insurgency Contributing to Propagation of HIV/AIDS" (Nepalnews.com, Nov 30, 2004), which states that HIV and AIDS have increased with the crisis and the rising migration for work. Many women of the villages bear the burden of male migrant workers' carelessness when they contract diseases in the brothels of India and give them to their partners when they return. The cover story "Migration: Boon or Bane" highlights how "large numbers of migrant workers are carrying HIV to rural areas, infecting their wives and other people." The disease is rising also because brothels in India return HIV-infected Nepali women and girls, who in many cases go back to sex work as that becomes their only means of survival (*Spotlight Weekly*, vol 22, No 37, March 28-April 03, 2003).

crisis shows the interconnection of the political, economic, and sexual dynamics of a society. A Nepali friend of mine living in the U.S. with her graduate student husband shared with me that in her four month visit to Nepal she witnessed things she never had before: “Nowadays it seems as if even a small village tea-shop is unable to sell tea if it does not have a young woman in the background to attract the customers. From villages to towns, I witnessed this everywhere, and felt really bad about it.”¹⁷³ A study that sampled “175 restaurants, 40 massage parlors, 61 dance restaurants, and 29 other business shops or locations” found that commercial sex was widely promoted to keep their businesses profitable and in many cases just to break even.¹⁷⁴ Sexual vulnerability of poor and displaced women increased during the crisis in different ways. Likewise, many Nepali migrant workers in India did not return due to fear of extortion, forceful recruitment by the Maoists, or government repression. Their long term stay abroad meant an increased chance of carrying sexually transmitted diseases when they came back to Nepal. In addition, their absence meant less economic security for their families back home and weakened support systems in their households. In western Nepal, where most of the migration took place, male migrant workers proved health hazards to their wives and communities. The prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases is significantly higher in areas where men go to India as seasonal migrant workers.¹⁷⁵

On the other hand, the displacement of men from villages gave rise to female-headed households, and women performed multiple gender roles, some of which were once proscribed for them. There are some places in Nepal that are virtually emptied of young people, men and women. In these places women were seen doing what is usually

¹⁷³ The conversation took place in Nepali.

¹⁷⁴ “Insurgency Contributing to Propagation of HIV/AIDS” (Nepalnews.com, Nov 30, 2004).

¹⁷⁵ See “Migration: Boon or Bane?” *Spotlight*, November 3, (2003).

termed *lognemanchekeo kam* (men's work): women ploughed the fields, roofed the houses, and even performed rites for the dead. These were acts only men did.

Many observers of Nepal have remarked on this changing gender dynamic and the contradictions the conflict brought (Gautam, Basnkota, and Manchanda 2001; Sharma and Prasain 2003). Shova Gautam and Rita Manchanda are of the view that the female-headed households and the changing dynamic of labor could be symbolic of women's empowerment.¹⁷⁶ The notion of changing labor dynamics could be interpreted in many ways and needs to be looked at in its plurality.

On the one hand, the conflict created situations to alter gender roles, which seemed empowering to some. It often happens in revolutionary wars that women end up being the supplier of labor in all sites. The conflict makes it a necessity rather than merely the policy of the party, though the party might make it seem that the revolutionary policy is what mobilizes women. One can also argue that domestic spaces were transformed into revolutionary war spaces. Especially during the first phase of the People's War, the Maoists' most popular weapons were household items like pressure cookers, machetes, and axes. Instead of being a kitchen item for cooking food, the pressure cooker was transformed into a bomb. At one point, the government banned the carrying of pressure cookers in Nepal. The Maoists used traditional gender roles of women as housewives, who retrieved water from public taps, foraged for wood in the forests, and organized events in the community, to mobilize other women when they came in contact during their daily chores. What were normally considered mundane

¹⁷⁶ Gautam and Manchanda take a more cultural approach to women's empowerment, which makes sense in a largely patriarchal society like Nepal's. However, we must bear in mind that economy and ethnicity/caste play an important part in shaping the dynamics of people's lives and their access to power. In places like Rolpa, Rukum, and Kalikot in western Nepal, where much displacement took place, ethnicity and people's work cultures vary as many men are seasonal migrants.

activities for women were transformed into revolutionary spaces, and domestic objects became tools of war, creating a form of *gendered militancy*. This showed that domestic spaces are not necessarily passive places, and revolutionary politics could be spawned out of these spaces. Ideologically, this also showed the use of local knowledge systems by the Maoists to prove that there is no space empty of tools for agency and resistance; it is the ways in which we perceive them that render them insignificant. Here gender itself became a useful political category for the Maoists, who utilized the gendered roles of women to their advantage.

On the other hand, when the insurgency and counter-insurgency really hit home, the debilitating effect of the war upon women and those left to fend for themselves makes one wonder about the fleetingness of their empowerment. Therefore, while I concur with Gautam and Manchanda that the crisis empowered women in different ways, it is early to speculate that women's appropriation of masculine labor will permanently change the social and ideological structure of gender.¹⁷⁷ Provided there is potential to change the oppressive gender structure through female-headed households, one also needs to probe

¹⁷⁷ Female-headed households increase during conflict and wars (Thiruchandran 1999, Perera 1999). Also, urbanization and industrialization create female-headed households in villages as men leave to work in the cities while women take responsibility for the family and the children. Peterson and Runyan in *Global Gender Issues* write that, "By the early 1990s, one-third of the households in the world were headed by women, and the highest numbers of these were in the Third World (reaching more than 40 percent in parts of Africa and the Caribbean)" (135). Janet Henshall Momsen argues in "Myth or math: the waxing and waning of the female-headed household" that there are no real data to substantiate the "orthodox" claim of one-third of households in the world being female-headed (146). Momsen states that female-headed households have been stigmatized as poor, which in turn has helped to create a myth of the feminization of poverty (149). However, there are data claiming that 70% of the world's poor are women (UNIFEM 2000); so households headed by women may not necessarily be empowering, unless we remedy the institutional/constitutional barriers to women's growth. What we need to do is go beyond the gendered constructions of male or female headed households as markers of empowerment and look at many factors, such as ethnicity, class, culture, and access to institutional power, that shape women's or men's sense of empowerment.

where it is actually happening and in what social, cultural, and ethnic contexts.¹⁷⁸ Most patriarchal notions on gender prevail even in areas most affected by the crisis. The urban areas gained people, and there are few displaced males from households there. As those who remained in the villages were the most vulnerable and had no way even to get out, female-headed households became common in those places and circumstances, not because women were empowered institutionally but because they had to assume the responsibility. In many of these places, the men were already absent half the year to earn income from seasonal migration or had joined the Indian or British army, so their absence did not necessarily create a new space for altering gender oppression. Looked at from an economic perspective, men's displacement from places where life was already hard created more stressful conditions for families and added burdens to women's already burdened lives. In subsistence farming economies, losing a member of the household means losing labor power. In many places, men who usually returned from seasonal migration or army service to help the family in the field could not due to fear of the Maoists or the military. Nor could they bring their remittances home.

Although these changes in gender dynamics in the long term may produce a more egalitarian outlook towards the gendered division of labor, the immediate effect of the female-headed household for the poorest strata of society does not necessarily translate into more empowerment for women. This is largely because women's access to institutional networks and power centers is very limited. It very much depends on the economic and cultural conditions of women at a given moment for the female-headed

¹⁷⁸ There is a great deal of material on aspects of female-headed or women-headed households (Vecchio and Roy 1998). In the West, traditionally, female-headed households have conjured racial and pathological stereotypes and have been linked with poverty and emasculation (Moynihan 1965). However, in contemporary times, female-headed households have received more complex treatment, and some researchers see them as beneficial to children (Blackden and Bhanu 1999).

household to work as an example of empowerment. First, their access to institutional power needs to be strengthened. Rather than taking men from families, education and promotion of social awareness of discrimination are better ways to change the dynamics in families and in a caste and class based society. Thus, I do not interpret women taking on roofing or plowing as necessarily empowering in the long term. Only when girls go to school like boys and men share in the household work and take care of children in the presence of women can we say there is change in the gender dynamic or sexual division of labor.

Furthermore, economic vulnerability can cause more oppressive gender situations for women, as seen in the rise in female sex workers in the cities and the trafficking of women into the sex industry. Many of the sex workers are from displaced families as people have to make a living and support other family members, who may be old, disabled, or unable to work; this means that young women and children are exploited economically, physically, and sexually.¹⁷⁹ A report termed “Insurgency Fueling Flesh Trade” captures the situation of women caught in the conflict and struggle for survival.¹⁸⁰

Kathmandu, March 28, -- Rima, 20-year-old mother, and her husband found it difficult to stay in their village near Nepalgunj, the headquarters of Banke district in the mid-western region, due to continuous threats from the Maoists. The couple fled their village and left for Nepalgunj, as it was the nearest city and presumably safe from the Maoists, to make a living. Rima felt fortunate as her husband found a job as soon as they reached Nepalgunj. The happy life ended immediately after her husband, the sole breadwinner, disappeared without a trace. Illiterate and without any technical skills, Rima started working in a local hotel as a dishwasher. As the days passed, the hotel owner forced her to ‘serve’ the customers. She had no choice but to follow the orders of her employer lest it cost

¹⁷⁹ In the early days, when people started leaving their homes, there was no network supporting displaced families or organized movement of internally displaced persons. No international humanitarian agency mobilized its resources until later. The Association of the Maoist Victims came into existence, but they were persecuted by government forces as well as Maoists, who killed the leader of the organization. Many displaced people lived in open areas, such as Ratnapark and Tudikhel in the capital city, where they cooked food, slept, and waited for something to happen.

¹⁸⁰ See <<http://www.Kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=35647>>

her her job. She thus entered the oldest profession in the world. Already pregnant, Rima is now continuing her profession as a sex worker.

Rima's is one of thousands of stories of women who have become victims of the sex market. One of the critical differences during war and conflict between men and women is that the men are not vulnerable in the same ways as women. Women's economic and ethnic location can augment their sexual victimization.¹⁸¹ As the report further states, while upper caste women were also vulnerable to sexual labor, the *Dalit*, *Badi*, and *Janajati* women, who are at the bottom of the caste and economic hierarchy, were the most affected and sexually vulnerable. Besides falling prey to the flesh market, women were violated by the security forces of the government during the conflict, and such actions were not totally unheard of from the Maoist side either.¹⁸² Women's Rehabilitation Centre (WOREC), a non-governmental organization, conducted a study in a Maoist controlled area which showed that, out of the 142 women the study group interviewed, 5% were raped by security forces. Almost all women under custody suffered either physical or psychological violence or both. While many women suffered arbitrary arrests, abductions, and disappearances of their men, others were made widows. Among all the cases, 64% of the women were between ages 15-25, young women vulnerable to sexual abuse. This report also indicated that the degree of vulnerability due

¹⁸¹ Impacts of Armed Conflict Pushing Girls and Women into Sexual Abuse and Sex Trade, a report prepared by Save the Children (Norway), stated that many female sex workers (FSWs) blamed the conflict for choosing the sex trade. "Some 19 percent of FSWs in the report have stated that they joined the sex trade due to the conflict. The study was carried out in Banke and Bardiya districts and nearby VDCs of Nepalgunj and Gulariya municipalities. The report has outlined conflict related threats, displacement, and lack of education as major causes of women entering the sex trade. . . The report has included 29 percent FSWs from Dalit, 26 from Badi, 16 from Chetri and four per cent each from Tharu Brahmin and Tharu communities. It has also included 13 per cent from Janajati community in its report. Sita Ghimire, an official with Save the Children (Norway) who was also involved in preparing the report, said that the Dalits and backward communities are much more vulnerable. . . 85 percent of the respondents believe that the sex trade would decrease with the end of the conflict."

<<http://www.Kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=35647>

¹⁸² See <<http://www.worecnepal.org/research.html>>

to ethnicity was large, and the indigenous/tribal groups were more vulnerable to abuse. As vulnerability at the local level usually leads to larger structures of violence, women and girls are at risk of trafficking in places of displacement. Many women who ran away from local structures of violence ended up in the flesh market in cities or in India.

Conclusion:

The complexity of the People's War cannot be understood from the immediate effects, though documentation of what people experience will certainly provide important insights into the future while assessing the impact of the war. Therefore, I have provided various glimpses of the agency, victimization, contradictions, and complexity that an armed conflict brings to a society. As the above exploration of different developments during the People's War reveals, its effects have been plural and cannot be mapped as simply positive or negative, nor can we give a verdict on the notion of empowerment felt by women in general. Throughout my research on the People's War in Nepal, I came across multiple perspectives. Interestingly, very few people observing the war closely gave a perspective of it as totally good or bad, especially in terms of women's situation. In the following chapter, I present voices of some who speak of the conflict as they endured it from their own locations and positions in society. While these voices may not be representative of the whole conflict, they convey a sense of its complex nature, people's different outlooks toward it, and, above all, what it means to live in the midst of an armed conflict. While I offer my interpretation of their experiences, I realize that my own location and position might have colored the re-presentation, and I do not claim an unmediated portrayal of their voices here.

Chapter Three

Learning from the Ground: Living with Conflict/Negotiating the Boundaries

At this point, it is still difficult to ascertain the impact of the Maoist People's War beyond the immediate effects, some of which I discussed in the previous chapter. Whatever objectivity one brings to understanding the war and its effects is based on reported information, much of which depends upon hypothesis and speculation. Even when it is a firsthand account, questions of mediation, reception, and transmission of the facts become important to analyze the experiences presented as truth. It is the complexity of the effects from the conflict that emerges from the opinions, views, and experiences of people who lived through the People's War in Nepal. As the dynamics of the conflict include ever changing strategies, one sees many contradictions and paradoxes. Despite living far from the place of conflict, I have not been unaffected by the events in Nepal. I grew up in Nepal and came of age before the conflict started. I left Nepal not long after the People's War officially started in February of 1996. Political strife had already begun within the government, and the Maoists were sending warnings to people, pamphleteering, demonstrating against the government, and boycotting elections. However, most middle-class urban Nepalis did not understand the dimension of the impending war that the Maoists were planning from underground. Perhaps even the Maoists had not imagined the proportion of their movement and its consequences. Kathmandu's middle-class paid little attention to things that did not directly affect their lives. Nepal outside the Kathmandu metropolis is "out there," as if the hills surrounding the valley protect it. But this chapter is not specifically about the experiences of middle-class urbanites from Kathmandu. What I present here is a subjective-objectivity of my

own location and understanding of the armed conflict in Nepal, which I draw from people I interact with. Although we cannot speak for or represent “the truth” about the war in its totality, we can reflect on and represent ideas, events, and experiences and get ideas about the past that people understand as history. I present diverse voices that may help us understand the contradictory effects of the armed conflict and the lived experiences of some people, especially women, during the insurgency period. Although the narratives about the conflict that I present here are not unmediated representations, presenting them as witness accounts leaves room for readers to make their own observations.

The Stories of Two Civilian Women¹⁸³

Shanti, whose name means “peace” in Nepali, told me her story of more than a quarter century in a fragment of a time. Married at twelve to a man she liked, a mother at thirteen, and widowed at twenty-five, Shanti’s story is not typical even in Nepal. She described how she gave birth at the age of thirteen: “I was deep in the forest when my first daughter was born... I was there to forage for wood. I cut the baby’s cord and carried her home by myself. Now my daughter is older than I was when I gave her birth.”

Shanti worked as a temporary housemaid in my relative’s house in Kathmandu. She was brought there especially to take care of a new mother and her baby. In Nepal, it is common practice to massage a newborn daily for a period of months, and to massage the mother for at least a few weeks after the birth. Newborns are massaged several times a day so they sleep peacefully. Shanti’s work was to massage the newly delivered woman and help her with the washing related to the baby. But she also ended up washing most of the extended family’s clothes. With the money she earned (about \$20 a month),

¹⁸³ My unrecorded conversations with Shanti and Hema took place in Nepal in July of 2006 in Nepali.

she planned to put a new tin roof over her village house in the Terai. Shanti's lodging and food were taken care of, and she obtained extra cash once in a while as tips and clothes as gifts for her and her kids from different members of the family. By Nepali standards, it was not too bad of a deal. However, she left behind two small sons and a teenage daughter in her village in the care of her old and ailing in-laws. Most of all, she worried about her daughter leaving school after fourth grade despite the teachers telling her she was smart and should continue her studies.

Shanti belonged to a community of Chepangs, who are indigenous people of Nepal and many of whom, until recently, lived in the forest.¹⁸⁴ While modernization has touched many Chepang communities and foreign agencies¹⁸⁵ have supported their development, because they entered late into the development game and only recently were included in national development policies, many of them struggle. Until recently, most of them had no citizenship certificates, and their literacy rate was almost nil, for the government paid little attention to educating the Chepangs. However, the forces of economic globalization directly affected their livelihoods as the forests and rivers they used to rely on were destroyed, and modern development paradigms encroached upon their eco-friendly lifestyles. While some Chepang people have firmly based their livelihoods on farming or agriculture, and some are venturing into small businesses,

¹⁸⁴ There are about 28,000 Chepang people in Nepal according to the census of 2000. Unlike other ethnic groups in Nepal, the Chepangs are understudied by anthropologists. See Navin K. Rai (1985) and Peter Schuthof (1987).

¹⁸⁵ See the report *Gathering of the Concerned on Chepangs, Resources, and Development, Chepang Identity & Awareness: Report of the Second Gathering of the Chepangs and the Concerned* (Kathmandu: School of Ecology, Agriculture and Community Works, SNV/Praja Community Development Programme together with Minority Rights Group, London, 1999). Besides foreign development agencies taking an interest in Chepangs, there are Christian missionaries who have established themselves as spokespersons for the Chepang people. It is interesting to note that Chepangs are one of the ethnic groups, like Tamangs, targeted by evangelical Christians, who have said and written that the armed conflict in Nepal offered them an opportunity to share "God's word."

others still live a nomadic life and dwell in both spaces, in the forest and in the villages. In other words, many Chepang people are in a transition phase. As ethnic identity politics increasingly become more intransigent and ethnicities made into political tools exploited for electoral politics, Chepangs have not remained unaffected. Chepang communities, like other ethnic communities, are involved in the politics of the People's War in one way or another. The push and pull to different zones of being, knowing, and making are reflected in Shanti's narrative. Her daughter's growing disinterest in school could be related to many things, but above all, one should consider how it relates to the cultural and political transitions their community faces at the end of a decade-long armed conflict and the push to modernization and development.

Shanti dearly wanted her daughter to continue school, but as a widow, she was the only member of the household who could raise enough cash to take care of her other monetary needs. Her work in the city was supposed to be temporary, but in getting to know her for a month, I felt her grow more and more used to the city life of cars, lights, television, and the hustle and flow of people.

Shanti's daughter's education was one of the frequent topics we discussed with each other. She worried about her daughter being too shy and not listening to the teacher's advice not to drop school. While she talked about her daughter, I wondered what might happen to the young woman. What forces tried to influence her for better or for worse? Maoist motivators and recruiters in the villages, pimps who brought Nepali girls to India (lately, Chepang girls have become frequent prey), Christian missionaries trying to save her soul, or simple village ruffians. Of course, I am imagining the worst,

but these are not unlikely scenarios for a young woman going through big transitions in a Chepang community.

In our conversation, we turned to the crisis situation in the villages, even though we were in the middle of a three month long ceasefire between the Maoists and the government security forces. I wanted to know Shanti's experience of living through the conflict as a Chepang woman. The recent April Jana Andolan (April 1-21, 2006) brought a long awaited respite to many people. The atmosphere in the city was peaceful, at least on the surface, but despite the seeming calm, uncertainty and fear of the unknown future loomed large. When I walked around Kathmandu, whether it was a cyber cafe, a restaurant, or the street, I found places strangely crowded with people, a situation not normal when I was growing up in the 80s and even in the 90s. It was a different city. I was afraid and uncertain -- it felt like people watched me all the time. Kathmandu seemed unsafe. Yet, inside homes people talked freely about matters that one might not have dared to before.

I asked Shanti many times about the Maoist and military activities in her village in mid-eastern Nepal. She came from a Maoist stronghold called the Makwanpur district. Every time she started talking about the war, she had a desperate look on her face and her voice throbbed, as if she choked with fear and excitement at once. Only those who witnessed such events could express what she did. "I saw many headless, bleeding bodies by the river . . . we stopped going to the river out of fear. One of my acquaintances was gang raped and she died on the way to the hospital. Many women stopped going out after that incident." The villagers Shanti described during the conflict did not take the Maoists' side or the military's. One incident she narrated involved a

search operation by the military. In the middle of the night, security people in plainclothes knocked at her door. She was not sure whether they were military or Maoists. Her kids slept next to her. Despite being terrified, she opened the door. They searched everywhere and questioned who her daughter was as they did not believe she could have a daughter that grown up. She had to produce a witness, so they knocked at her in-laws' house nearby, and they confirmed the relationship. As Shanti ran a liquor shop where both Maoists and military forces came to drink, talk, and spy on each other, she knew many of the combatants' faces. But she did not recognize these men.

At times I suspected her involvement in the Maoist movement and wondered if she was hiding in the city. But I had no way to prove my guess. The story of her husband's murder in the middle of the night by unknown people with a knife or knives made me want to ask more questions, but Shanti was reluctant to talk about it. In fact, she did not talk much about her husband, and I did not push her to. I did ask her if she suspected that either the military or the Maoists were involved in the killing. Her reply was a calm "no". She said it had nothing to do with the conflict, but that someone killed him for his money. Nobody was caught or held responsible for the murder, though.

Coming from an indigenous community that is considered one of the oldest in Nepal and "primitive" in development paradigms, Shanti did not think of herself in terms of those linear and hierarchical mappings of people. She did not think of herself as a victim either. She was aware that people have different ways, but her own ways were not inferior, and she did not hesitate to express her consciousness of things around her. It was interesting to hear the only thing she said when I asked her what she thought about the Maoist movement. "I would never want to kill people for things I don't have. . . I

would rather beg.” I was aware she might have been frightened to tell me what she really felt, as she had no reason to trust me. I tried to talk in an empathetic way about the Maoists and observed why some people might opt for violence in a society like ours, where there is so much discrimination. But Shanti just listened and said little. Perhaps she wondered why a middle-class woman living in the United States would have sympathy for the Maoists. Though I do not know how Shanti truly felt about the Maoists, she expressed disgust at the violence and killing and the divided community in her village, where no one trusted anyone. A “culture of terror” (Taussig 1987) pervaded people’s lives with chronic fear and mistrust, feelings that affected all strata of society.¹⁸⁶

Hema comes from the landowning middle class and an upper caste family, and she had more to say about the Maoists. Not very educated but urbanized, Hema is a housewife whose children studied in the city and stayed with relatives. Though she grew up in an urban environment, she and her husband look after their family farm and remain in the village most of the year. Both Maoists and government security forces, mostly the army, invaded their home quite often, but their “good reputation” among the village people apparently saved them from real harm from the Maoists as well as the military. Although both sides of the conflict threatened them many times with *bhautik karbahi* (physical harm) and the Maoists demanded “donations,” the Maoists did not physically harm them. They paid such donations, gave food grains, and loaned them a tractor, which the Maoists used to carry people to their cultural programs or mass mobilizations. About the Maoists she declared: “Oh, these people have no manners. They come and sit on your bed without taking off their boots, they lie on your bed with their feet up, and we

¹⁸⁶ In her ethnographic study, Judith Pettigrew captures how people in rural Nepal suffer, negotiate, and resist the culture of terror the armed conflict has engendered. See “Living Between the Maoists and the Army in Rural Nepal” in Hutt (2004).

can't do much. Sometimes they come in the middle of the night and ask you to cook food or demand a place to sleep. Women are especially bad . . . *Kasto besomati Aaimaiharu* (very uncultured women)." The last phrase described the female guerilla soldiers who visited her home. "Since they carry weapons, you are scared to say anything . . . but I don't like them behaving with us in that way as we don't behave with them in a bad way." It was obvious Hema did not like the guerilla women violating her private space and behaving in an "unwomanly" manner. However, this is a small example of the ways in which armed conflict engendered a culture of terror and violated people's sense of order and control of their lives.¹⁸⁷

Yet people are not without agency. They use whatever social skills, cultural practices, and networks they can to resist the violence and create order in their lives. Despite fear and uncertainty in terms of what the Maoists might do to them, Hema's family opted for negotiation with them in the early years, as many people did. At least they did not have to leave the village and be displaced in the city like thousands of other families and her own relatives from western Nepal, most of whom now live in rented apartments or with relatives in Kathmandu. Her relatives' situation was worse as the Maoist insurgency hit the west harder than the mid-eastern regions of the Terai in Nepal. However, when the new king mobilized the military in 2001, Hema's family had a new fear to deal with -- the army, which had a base in a forest not far from her village.

Empowered by TADO, the army did not see her family's compliance with the Maoists

¹⁸⁷ As Pettigrew delineates, violence operated on many different levels in Nepali society during the armed conflict. Although it is more visible in the physical form of torture and death, "the impact of the conflict is embedded not only in the social landscape and in people's bodies but also in the geographical and spiritual landscape" ("Living Between the Maoists..." 280). When the Maoists and the military invade people's homes, bomb them from helicopters, or force information from the villagers, they violate people's spatial arrangements by disregarding their sense of interiority and exteriority. In a way, intrusion by the Maoists or the military symbolically violates people and their sense of selfhood, even when they are not physically harmed.

favorably. As Hema said, the army not only made rounds frequently in the village, it also started to pick up people, sometimes pretending to be Maoists and often coming in plainclothes in the day or night. The military abducted her husband and blindfolded him as they interrogated him in an unspecified area. But they let him go, unlike many others who suffered torture or never returned. Hema may not have known, but during this time King Gyanendra promulgated TADO. This “terrorism control act” gave the Royal Nepal Army the extraordinary directive to start a counterinsurgency, the effects of which people are still experiencing with their many “disappeared” relatives missing.¹⁸⁸ International human rights laws meant nothing to the military even though Nepali soldiers have long served in the United Nations’ peace keeping forces. Although in some cases habeas corpus worked to produce the detainee, most of the time the army ignored people’s inquiries about their lost family members. Sometimes the military tried to make it seem like the Maoists took them, but the Maoists seldom abducted people without announcing their motives and almost always took responsibility. The situation was made worse as many people did not know what habeas corpus was. When human rights organizations filed complaints about violations of habeas corpus in the name of the disappeared people, most often the military led them astray. In some cases, people did not want the help of the human rights activists as they were afraid of being targeted further by security forces. They also feared their detained relative being subjected to more punishment or even death because getting help from human rights activists was considered being against the government. As army personnel committed extra-judicial killings and passed them off as violent encounters, people remained silent rather than employing methods that upset them

¹⁸⁸ According to an International Committee for the Red Cross report, as of June 1, 2007, even one year after the ceasefire, there were still 937 disappeared people from the war period. Source: <<http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/interview-nepal-080607>>

further. According to Hema, the military took at least eight people she knew from her village area. The people in the village did not know who took them until later since the army came in plainclothes and sometimes nobody saw them. People did not know where to look for them or what to do. There was terror in the air of a different kind. When some were let go after a few days of being beaten and tortured, then they knew who had taken the others as well. As I was talking to Hema, her mother-in-law came in and said, “Then we were more scared of the army than the Maoists. At least you knew when the Maoists took people. When the military does, no one knows what happens to them.”

The fear the Maoist guerillas inspired in the village was real, but the worse of the two was the military personnel, whom Hema characterized as being there to enjoy their power. It was interesting to hear her repeat the same complaints she had about the Maoist soldiers. Army personnel too kicked chairs in her house and sat on her bed with boots on. Many human rights organizations have represented the predicament of the people in the middle. They had to constantly negotiate with the State and the Maoists and walk a fine line of not having any obvious loyalties to either one. At the same time, they had to fake loyalties to some extent when each party visited them. Yet, compared to many other people’s situations during that time, Hema’s family was lucky. They had it better than those who were displaced and lost loved ones.¹⁸⁹

Shanti and Hema’s experience of the conflict in a rural area speaks of the experience of many people who are caught in the middle with a “culture of terror” enveloping their lives. If testimony means anything, I offer them as witnesses of the violence people lived through. As a widowed woman from an indigenous community

¹⁸⁹ There is always some news about the difficulties of the displaced, who are still not allowed to go back to their homes or claim their lands even after the peace process has been underway since May of 2006.

and a single mother of three children, Shanti has a different struggle from Hema's even as the conflict subsides. Yet the psychological fear they both endured will affect their lives forever. Now let us turn to another position and voice.

Social Worker's Predicament: More Complex than What Meets the Eye

Meena works with a development agency, primarily a donor agency to non-governmental organizations in Nepal. She is a program officer looking over rural development programs the agency funds. Her job includes field visits, so she travels extensively to oversee projects in remote villages accessible only by plane or foot. Through this job, Meena has traversed the difficult but beautiful geographical terrain of Nepal, where she encountered the hard life of those in remote districts. Meena has worked in the development field for almost ten years now and experienced the ups and downs of social workers during the conflict. In the late 90s, Meena lived and worked in the mid-eastern hills, which became one of the Maoists' strongholds. I interviewed her in June of 2005, when she came to the United States to attend a program at the School of International Training related to conflict resolution, peace, and reconstruction. As someone who saw the conflict firsthand and lived for a number of years as a development worker in what became Maoist territory, Meena's experiences and views were important to me. As friends, we often discussed the situation in Nepal in our communications with each other. This time, I taped my semi-structured interview with her. I especially sought to probe the situation of development work in Nepal as well as women's development and empowerment during the conflict. It should be noted that, as the People's War swept over the villages, there was a crisis in the development field and NGOs left. Despite a presence going back to 1962, the American Peace Corps abandoned Nepal in 2004.

Many local NGOs stopped their work, while some moved to new places. I asked Meena about the situation of women and the notion of their empowerment that was circulating at the time.

According to Meena, although there are some signs of changing gender dynamics, since the war started, women's work burdens have actually increased in the rural areas:

They have to look after the family, their children, and elderly relatives and also work in the field. I have seen many women plowing and roofing in the villages; there are no adult men there. In western and mid-western Nepal, the most conflict ridden areas, there is a lot of displacement of people, and young men have left their homes. There is so much hardship for women in the western region. People can support themselves well only for a quarter of a year, and the rest of the time they have to find work outside their villages or rely on seasonal migrant work. Now the conflict has made it even worse. Those who are left behind in the villages must deal with pressure from both the army and the Maoists. The physical burden is as it is, while the psychological burden has increased. Sometimes, those seasonal migrants cannot even come back as they are afraid of the Maoists and the army. They also fear they will lose their money if they come back.

Since the beginning of the war, the Maoists had strongholds in the hills of western and middle-western Nepal, where an American development agency called USAID conducted rural integrated development projects for more than a decade.¹⁹⁰ That region also suffered small scale conflict since the beginning of the early 1990s, when Nepal became a multi-party democracy with a constitutional monarchy. According to Meena, although the People's War certainly brought about significant change in gender dynamics, women's lives there had not become easier. As a development worker and past student of Sociology-Anthropology, Meena felt we needed to look at the whole situation and not just the separate parts. This also seemed to be the prevailing view of people sympathetic to the Maoist cause, and interestingly, also the view of the Maoists, who continue to say

¹⁹⁰ I look more closely at foreign development initiatives in Nepal and their possible relationship to the crisis in Chapter 5.

that revolution requires sacrifice and crisis brings contradictions that are unexpected and not always positive. Meena's view was that the Maoist movement also brought about complex situations. "What have the Maoists changed then in the last ten years?" I asked.

Well, they have stopped child marriage in the west, completely for those below 16. Anyone who does it will be punished, so people don't do it anymore. Widow re-marriage has also started. They are giving a red sari and tika to widowed Hindu women. This activism is especially more vibrant in Chitwan and Nawalparasi districts. Our office was presented with a documentary of the changed lives of widowed women, who expressed happiness that they will not have to live with stigma anymore. They seemed confident about their future. I have seen the documentary of the project. However, this change is not just due to the Maoists; many other NGOs working on women's rights were also involved in this campaign for widow rights.

During the Maoists' cultural campaign against the so-called "social ills," they had been vociferous against traditions that oppress women, such as widowhood and child marriage. However, development work stalled in Nepal since the Maoists did not permit NGOs that did not comply with their demands to work in the villages. Thus, although the Maoists initiated a certain kind of awareness raising, they ousted mainstream foreign development agencies, which, according to them, worked undercover for imperialist forces under the façade of development. As a project coordinator to local NGOs that receive funding from Meena's agency, she monitors their work in remote areas. I asked her how the NGOs that her agency works with handled the situation.

Yes, many NGOs pulled out. But I think the Maoist pressure changed the way development work is being done in Nepal. You have to take into account that the government has also been very reluctant about the NGOs and sometimes charged them with being pro-Maoist. Where there are NGOs still working, the government has become very suspicious of them as they have been unable to go into those areas. Even the military cannot go. They go in a group and come back after a few days. Yet the NGO people are working there. Of course, they have to communicate with the Maoists. The Maoists say they are not against development -- but they especially don't seem to like American and UK funded projects. They are also skeptical toward the Indian government, which supplied a helicopter and other army equipment to repress the Maoists. In terms of

development work, the conflict forced the donor NGOs to be more transparent and go to the “poorest of the poor.” Earlier, the NGOs used to work just around the town or the town headquarters. There were very few NGOs working in remote areas like Jumla or Dullu. Now the local NGOs also have to be more transparent as the Maoists demand they show their funding sources, project outlines, and target dates of completion . . . This way, the NGO worker is less liable to commit fraud, which has happened a lot in Nepal. People say it’s difficult for NGOs to work, but those NGOs that are transparent and genuinely working for people are still active, and they are also in good communication with the Maoists to continue their work. The Maoists have not driven them away. However, those that are more politically inclined, the Maoists don’t like them. In reality, people who work in the field, who are committed to Nepal’s development -- the Maoists have actually helped those people. When people say it’s difficult work, they are not always telling the whole truth. Earlier, *the middle and upper middle class NGOs* did not have projects in the remote areas, but now that the Maoists do not let them work in the district headquarters, they are compelled to go inside to remote places. This is certainly a positive step.

As Meena points out, class and political ideologies influence even development workers and the projects they undertake. Since the NGO culture entered Nepal in force in the early 90s after the advent of liberal democracy, many NGOs had ties with political parties. Many middle and upper class individuals with political affiliations capitalized on resources flowing from foreign donors. To some extent, NGO work consisted of organizing seminars, talk programs, and speeches in the name of development. This is not to say there were no serious NGOs working at the grassroots level, but a large amount of money went to overhead expenditure and running the organizations. Very little trickled down to the grassroots level. The Maoists took this issue seriously and acted as they saw fit. They banned certain NGOs and development agencies from the villages and threatened them when they were unwilling to leave. In some cases, the Maoists accused the INGOs, especially the American ones, of being part of a larger project of imperialism working to make easier the global governance of third world countries. American government policies toward the Maoists of Nepal were not seen as positive, and after

9/11, the USA further antagonized the Maoist Party by putting it on its list of terrorist forces. Although Nepalis generally see the modern British as more democratic than the Americans, in this case, resentment against British organizations stemmed from the help the British government gave to Nepal's army. On the other hand, many Scandinavian and Canadian organizations operated without much trouble since the Maoists perceived them as more socialist and justice oriented. Whatever the case may be, Maoist dissatisfaction with non-governmental organizations shook up the development sector. As Meena said, some reform took place within the NGO sector due to the fear the Maoists created. However, although the Maoists criticized the political nature of NGOs, they were not apolitical in their own exploitation of the non-governmental sector. Many allege the Maoists let pro-Maoist NGOs work in exchange for "donations" and pre-approval of projects.

During the insurgency, "donations" were a big issue for development workers, as they were for farmers, teachers, and business people. But as the Maoists wanted to claim authority as the "new government" in the areas of their influence, the NGOs needed to acknowledge their authority by registering with them. This was another strategy of the Maoists to assert their legitimacy as a political and administrative power in the villages. Meena said, "I have heard they ask donations of 5 to 10% from the projects. They call it 'yudda kar' (war tax)." So, if the NGOs wanted to work in the Maoist strongholds, they abided by their rules. However, the Maoists could not always enforce their rules where their control was weak. Sometimes, according to Meena, the NGO workers confronted the Maoists, asking such things as, "If you want us to register with you, where is your office?" Yet, Meena admitted that the donor agencies did not actually know if the local

NGOs gave donations to the Maoists or registered with them. If they did, they would not have announced it and thereby risked the government's reprisals. Yet, when the Maoists openly taxed government teachers, the government could do nothing. When the teachers refused to pay, the Maoists killed them or forced them to leave. While we can only conjecture what the NGOs did to stay put in the Maoist strongholds, it is only logical to speculate that most of the NGOs paid dues to stay put and work with the Maoists, just like the farmers, shop keepers, and teachers had to do. The Maoists' treatment of the teachers was the worst of all during the insurgency.

According to Meena, school teachers faced much hardship. She said, "You must have seen the documentary called *Schools in the Crossfire*. That situation is very much true in villages. The Maoists want to give what they call a '*Janabadi Siksha*' (people oriented education) to the children and the teachers. Whoever does not obey, they term them 'class enemies.' They also take students and teachers to their education camps for a few days and free them after their training." When the news reported kidnapped students from rural schools, it was usually about the Maoists' "people oriented education."

Forcing donations, kidnapping children for re-education, recruiting children for the PLA, and driving NGOs from rural places did not create a good impression of the Maoists locally or internationally. Halting development work and destroying much infrastructure did not improve the lives of the rural poor. Meena elaborated on some of the hardships the Maoists caused: "In the villages, the Maoists ask people to feed a group of 10-15 people, and sometimes take their chicken, goat, grains or whatever they can get their hands on, which makes it hard on people who can barely survive themselves. Furthermore, when they do feed the Maoists, the security forces come after them,

accusing them of giving shelter to the Maoists or calling them Maoists or their sympathizers.” Many civilians suffered the government forces’ brutality for feeding and giving shelter to the Maoists, which in turn caused displacement. Although Meena concurred that displacement increased during the conflict, she emphasized that the Maoist war should not be understood as an “ethnic conflict” or even a “civil war,” as some people called it:

You know, “Mongolian” groups have been going out to work in Hong Kong and Korea and Japan long before the war started. They have less education and very few or no political connections, and thus have fewer chances of finding jobs or doing better in Nepal. They either join the Indian army, or, if better off, the British Army, or leave to work in other countries. Now, if they have joined the Maoists, it’s not because they hate the upper castes, but primarily for economic reasons. The unemployment rate in the Dalit community is also another reason why a great number of them have joined the Maoists. In the Maoist party, many in the top leadership are from the upper caste, but at the command level there are a lot of ethnic, Dalit and scheduled caste groups. They have Bahun, Chetri, Magar, Sarki, Kami, Sunar, Tharu, and Madhesi in the Maoist party. Yet, because there were more militia members in the PLA from the Dalit and the ethnic groups like the Magar, more of them have died in the war. A lot of Magars have died in Mugu, Rolpa, Rukum, Nawalparasi, and many Dalits in the far west, mid-west regions of Nepal. You hear lots of new names that you never might have heard before. People are claiming their cultural and linguistic identities.

Meena held the view that the People’s War was not an ethnic conflict, although ethnic identity politics rose during the war. She also emphasized the diversity in the Maoist party, though the leadership was mostly upper caste men. But the higher ranks of the PLA were more ethnically diverse. When I interviewed Meena in the summer of 2005, the repression was at its height. She did not bring some of the books I had asked for because she was afraid the authorities would not let her past the checkpoint at the airport. There was fear everywhere of the royal government, which ruled with the military and cracked down on any dissent. This, ironically, turned the tables against the establishment. The King’s repression pushed the mainstream political parties to make a

truce with the Maoists, who also looked for “*abataran*” (a safe landing) as they were tired of fighting from underground. Meena represents the educated and conscious civil society member’s voice, something that grew in the last five years of the conflict. In many ways, what Meena expressed substantiates the complex and volatile situation during the armed conflict and what it engendered in positive, negative, and complex-liminal forms.

Woman Representative of the Political Party: Violence is not our Path

Bidhya Bhandari is a member of parliament who came to active politics after the death of her husband in 1993. He was a liberal communist and a charismatic leader who advocated *Bahudalia Naulo Janabad* (Multiparty New-Democracy of the People). His popularity as a leader of the United Marxist Leninist Party of Nepal (UML) ended abruptly when the jeep he rode in plunged off the road into a river. His body was found only after a few days. When I talked to Ms. Bhandari, she said her husband became the target of a conspiracy due to his immense popularity among all kinds of people. She emphatically stated, “They killed him; it was murder.” In the early 90s, Madan Bhandari was possibly the most charismatic political leader. Thousands went to the open space in the heart of the city to hear his *bhasan* (speeches). People talked of him in a hopeful way. Because she belonged to a communist party herself, though a liberal one, I was interested in how Ms. Bhandari saw the Maoist politics of empowerment for women. I asked about her party’s view of the People’s War, and she replied,

As I have said before, the bombs and guns are not a problem in and of themselves, but it is the wrong use of them that creates problems. Bullets don’t fly and hit your chest or mine without someone making that happen -- there is a doer behind the deed. The Maoists started a war with weapons for the wrong reasons. Their strategies and tactics rely on placing landmines and blasting bombs, but we want them to change their way ideologically and peacefully. Our main goal throughout the conflict has been to bring them to peaceful negotiation. We don’t care if

tomorrow they snatch political seats from us; if it happens in the interest of the nation, so be it. We don't mind that, but there must be peace in the country. In terms of my views on women's involvement in the Maoist war, there is a variety of issues. One good thing is they have challenged the concept of women's biological destiny as reproducers since there are so many women fighting as guerillas. This has also forced the Royal Nepal Army to accept women in the armed forces. But at the policy and leadership level, there are very few women in the Maoist Party at the central level. They seemed to be using and exploiting women as work horses to cook, clean, and carry guns. Women have always done that, so what's so radical about that? [laughs]. Those women who left everything behind -- education, home, family -- to work for the Maoist cause may regret it later when the war is over. I hope that does not happen, but as you see, the way communist regimes have worked in the past, that very well could be the case.

As Bhandari expressed, the United-Marxist-Leninist Party worked hard to bring the Maoists to the table. The leaders of the UML went to Delhi to negotiate with the Maoists and the other mainstream political parties, and from that the 12 point agreement was born. While Bhandari did not agree with the Maoists' violent tactics to achieve their ends, she appreciated some of the positive changes the crisis brought women: "The positive part of the conflict in regard to women's situation is that the marginality of women in the constitution has been made clear during the period of the crisis. Nepali women's exclusion has been internationalized through the United Nations." She also gave credit to the Maoists for sensitizing women at the grassroots level about their rights, which NGOs did not achieve in decades of work. "Now women have become more forceful at the grassroots level, more conscious and strong, and they have been able to present themselves with more confidence," said Bhandari. However, in the political sector, especially at the leadership level, women were still *followers*:

In terms of women's situation within the mainstream political parties, there has not been as much progress as there should be. But a lot has changed since the Panchayat period. You know, we have to compare our situation with before 1990. You are right; women have been more or less sidelined during the peace process at the leadership level. At the central level there is no progress, but at the grassroots level there is a lot of women's involvement. There is at least a 20%

increase in women's participation at the local level. Within the UML, we have about 10% representation of women at the legislative level. There are six women representatives out of 68 representatives in all. Yes, when you get involved in the party politics, you have to put the *party's interest* before the personal or the gender issues. What we can do is to help the party make favorable policies toward women.

Although Ms. Bhandari faulted women in the Maoist party for being “followers,” her articulation about her own party suggests that women have to follow the party line if they want to see any change, which basically means that women must heed the male leaders who control the party. Despite having some active women members, men dominate the leadership positions in the UML party. In addition, Bhandari admits the consciousness raising efforts of the Maoists at the village level have resulted in a more positive environment. Yet, Bhandari's contention that the Maoists' guns and bombs may not be the answer to the problems of thousands of poor men and women seems correct in light of what I described in the previous chapter.

View from the Opposing Side: A Police Officer Speaks His Mind on the Maoists:

Bikram¹⁹¹ is a police inspector who worked for a special task force of the security police at the time of my interview with him. He told me he belongs to a branch of the secret police that studies international terrorism in Nepal. I sought to learn from him the security forces' view, at least the one they project to the public. Obviously, he did not approve of the Maoists and their political views. However, even when people mediate truth with their own ideology, they impart information that represents their reality. Much depends on the listener's own location and ideology, which further mediate what is presented to her as reality. Although I was mostly interested in women in the Maoist army and women in the Maoist party, Bikram talked about the political and

¹⁹¹ The interview was taken on July 10, 2006 in Kathmandu. The name of the officer is changed.

organizational sides of the Maoists, factors that impressed him. What Bikram said about the Maoists provided insights into some of their inner workings and how they operate as a group. According to Bikram, the Maoists are strong not because of numbers, but due to their organizational skills, devotion to the cause, and chain of command:

Before the Maoists attack, they do a careful feasibility study of the place. They have real good organizational skill -- they have developed it well throughout. They take information from the small teashops, and usually they have informants in every area. They carry out sudden attacks sometimes. An example is the recent attack in Palpa. They had no plan to attack Palpa before the April Jana Andolan in 2006, but they did since they thought they could overrun it easily. There are 1,000 to 1,500 hardcore fighters in the Maoist army. In bigger attacks, they conglomerate at least four to five divisions of their army. There are many women in their divisions; I would say at least 50/50 in terms of male/female ratio.

Bikram surprised me by saying women may comprise 50% of the Maoist army when the Maoists themselves claimed only 40%. However, the number of hardcore fighters sounded convincing given there were different projections. “Why so many women?” I asked.

Because women are not in a leave and run situation once they join the Maoist army. They are more in a do or die situation, so they stay with the Maoists. The reason is, with men, they can run away easily and look for jobs elsewhere, but with women it is not that easy and they don’t know many channels, so they remain and fight. Women are sacrificing more, because once they are in, there is no way out. In the beginning, the Maoists attracted men by putting one or two women in their squads. Men joined the groups thinking they could do whatever they want with the girls. It was their motivation tactic to lure more men as they would say that in communism we don’t care about sexual mores; there is freedom to do whatever with the women in the sections.

No doubt the Maoists would not appreciate Bikram’s take on their recruitment tactics. In fact, I put the question about sexuality among the Maoists to Asmita, a previous Maoist Commissar, who called it the regressive forces’ ploy to defame them. To be precise, she said, “This is slander created by the enemies of the movement to defame and demoralize

our party and the militia.”¹⁹² In Asmita’s view, the rule of law regarding sexual behavior was so strong within the Maoist Party, it was simply impossible to act in that way.¹⁹³ It is also true that reports of Maoists committing sexual violence came very rarely, while many accused the army and the armed police of rape and abuse of women. Yet, what Bikram said about women’s situation once they joined the PLA was likely true given the Maoists’ strict rules as well as Nepali society’s outlook towards them. There was almost no social or security mechanism to reintegrate those who wanted to leave the PLA and come back to civilian life. Although there has been some news of Maoists surrendering to government protection and the government’s willingness to reestablish them in society, it rarely happened in a serious way. The Maoist rank and file fear disciplinary action against them as well as the mistrust of the public and the government security forces. In this situation, one can imagine how difficult a woman guerilla’s return to mainstream society would be without proper mechanisms to help her situate herself. There are complexities and contradictions in the claims of both the Maoists and the government security forces. More curious to know the security view, I asked Bikram, “What do they tell women to convince them to join their party? How do the Maoists motivate women?”

With women, it was mostly inculcated through the sense of revenge as many security officers (army and police) indeed acted in excess and brutally with women during search operations. They raped women in front of their brothers and fathers. So there is a sense of revenge -- *badala ko bhavana* -- in women who have joined the Maoist army. At the same time, when the Maoists demanded “one house one member,” many boys and men ran away, but women could not do

¹⁹² Interview with Asmita, July 22, 2006.

¹⁹³ The Maoists have disciplined people for violations of sexual conduct. A senior woman Maoist leader who is quite famous was supposedly put through disciplinary action for sexual misconduct. But there was not much news about the man being disciplined. It seems the Maoists, after all, have not been able to control peoples’ sexual desires and attractions. But they have used marriage as a “moral channeling” of sexual tension within their members and army. Many young soldiers or militia are married within the army. There was a recent report that many Maoist women have been delivering babies at the Maoist camps since the peace process began. Asmita told me they have provisions of leave for pregnancy or for nursing mothers, if the soldier wants it. She herself gave birth to a daughter while underground.

that so easily, so they were caught in the middle. In many instances, they have taken women by force -- *jabarjasti garera*. This was their party policy -- the middle west of Nepal is heavily affected by this trend. And Magar people are more affected than any other group of that region. Mainly Magars are fighters. Army commanders are also Magars, but political commissars are Brahmin. Their hierarchy goes in this pattern: party, *sena* (army), *jana bargia sanghatan* (people's organizations of different kinds) -- all three need to go together smoothly. The army submits to the party and is directed by the party leadership. In every battalion there will be both a company commander and a commissar, who represents the party. And it is the commissar who has the overall power to direct and dictate to the battalion and the company commander. The political representative is more powerful than the army commander; that's their ethos.

Bikram acknowledged the sexual atrocities of the security forces, which came as a surprise to me. I asked him how he got his information, and his answer surprised me even more: "We get it directly from them. As soon as it passes, we get the information right away." When I remarked that the police must have planted people in the jail cells, he only laughed in response. Changing the topic, I asked if the Maoist army is loyal to the party, or if there is a chance of division between the two. He replied,

No. They are very dedicated; there is no chance. They are like *nang masu* -- the finger and the nail. Yes, we do hear of some scuffles in the news sometimes, but that is mainly because of the lack of communication between the different levels of workers -- the lower level cannot always understand the messages of the leadership. They also have many young people there who do not always think and act properly. They get frustrated easily. Their work is to break people's bones and leave them. At any rate, the Maoist party has a strong grip on their workers. They are taking everything very well and smoothly -- there is great discipline and dedication among their members [he emphasized this point many times]. Of course, the workers are also very scared that if they go against the party, they will be killed, and that also generates loyalty.

Bikram helped me understand aspects of the security forces' views of the Maoists.

Although a policeman himself, Bikram's perspective toward the Maoists wasn't entirely negative. Nor was it very positive. His views were matter of fact. To further understand the life of a policeman investigating the Maoists, I asked questions related to his work, which I present in an interview format:

Author: *How do you interrogate people you take into custody?*

Bikram: Well, first we concentrate on strategic and operational issues. We like to know their immediate plans so we can stop their moves. For example, in Kathmandu, there is a Maoist cell of STF (special task force) of at least 150, and their job is to target individual people and kill them, explode bombs, and destroy targets. During our interrogation, we look mainly for their friends, their members, weapons, bombs, etc. We have to do it within a day. Otherwise, there is no use since we won't be able to prevent them. Secondly, we inquire about their strategies -- what are their party's fighting tactics -- *rananiti*, who comes where, and what their whereabouts are -- we ask for information on individuals.

Author: *Aren't you afraid walking around freely being secret police? Don't people suspect you? For example, you are talking to me right now.*

Bikram: We know when they make us a target because we also have our own network of information. I have to be concerned with my own security. People who have died in Kathmandu were careless and let it happen to them. You have to be careful about your movements and not become an easy target.

Author: *What are the sources of their support?*

Bikram: They ask for "donations," war tax.

Author: *So they must have relations with the business people?*

Bikram: Yes, they ask for millions from them. And they give it right away. If I go now and ask for money from some businessperson, he will give it me too! I just have to tell him I am a Maobadi. Well, Maobadis also have been cheated by imposters. At the same time, there are Maobadis who are taking money and buying property for themselves or in their relatives' names. There is a lot of misuse of money in the Maoist party. They just brainwash the lower level Maoists. There is a leader in charge of every region, and they have all these plans, but mostly it is all a fraud. Their main agenda is to come to the government. Now they are really tired of fighting with the army as they know they cannot win by fighting anymore underground, nor can they hit the army barracks. As the army would not go to the jungle to fight them, there was this stagnation and they were losing momentum on their side. But now, since the April Revolution happened, there is talk of bringing them into the Nepal army.

Author: *You talked about recruitment of women by force. Could you say a little more on that?*

Bikram: Their political commissars are very good -- they are good speakers and motivators. While there are few women commanders, there are more political commissars who motivate women at the lower level to join the army. Also, the security forces are not seen as positive by the women in the Maoist party and the army.

Author: *How many weapons do they have?*

Bikram: We don't really know of the weapons purchased on the black market in India and China. They did loot some weapons from the security forces. In my opinion, if there was to be an impartial election, they would lose -- people are fed up with them. And the Maoists are also very scared. However, they might get together with the United Marxist Leninist party, the other major communist party in Nepal. They are almost one.

Author: *We often hear that Maoists are terrorists. Do they have relations with any terrorist organizations outside?*

Bikram: Actually, my main job is to look at international terrorism in Nepal. . . and I would say no. They do have affiliations with the Indian Maoists but not with terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda and their like. Some of the fighters were trained in Sri Lanka, but that's another matter. The Congress and other communist parties cannot match them on any fronts -- the Maoists have very educated and very able people in place. They have the support of the human rights people who speak in their favor; they have also been able to cultivate good international relations. Their supporters are many in Belgium and in America -- they are very organized in this respect. Yet the ground reality is, they only tell the good things to people. Their ultimate goal is to bring their government.

Author: *What do you think about the recent acts of the King's government to suppress the Jana Andolan?*

Bikram: No, I did not like the way things were handled. First, they should not have imposed the curfew, which made people more agitated with the government. They should not have cordoned off zones -- barred areas in places. Why did they do that? The *Khulamanch bhasan* (mass meeting in an open space in the city) would not have done any harm to anyone -- these little things agitated and frustrated more people.

Author: *What are the age groups in the Maoist militia?*

Bikram: There is a range. They are as young as 14, but some look younger than they really are. They have children in their army also. But they are all kept in the forest; they don't bring them to the town or the headquarters; if the journalists publicize these stories, they will kill them. That has happened in the past. Well, they don't like people who write against them. They are very cruel -- extremely cruel.

Most of the things Bikram told me are not unheard of, especially the extortion of money or resources from people, the recruitment of child soldiers in the militia and army, sexual violence against women, and their ultimate goal of planting a red flag on the top of the world, or bringing the government of the proletariat to Nepal. However, in my interview with Bikram, I heard something I had not previously come across in the media: not all security forces are completely unsympathetic to the Maoists' causes. It is important to hear not just how the security forces operated against the Maoists in the battlefield, but how they viewed them as humans, politicians, and revolutionaries.

Bikram said nothing new against the Maoists that the media and other resources had not

already highlighted. Despite being a police officer himself, he held a sort of objectivity in his arguments and told me what he perceived to be true. He admired them for things he thought they did well and expressed his views according to his experience. Above all, he acknowledged the brutality of the “security forces,” who acted in excess with women during the insurgency. This was quite bold for a man in his position. Of course, what he imparted to me was colored by his own location and position, which shape his subjectivity and opinions. The point is that we cannot access “the truth” about the Maoist People’s War except from the contradictions that have emerged during the crisis. As the voices that I represent here reveal, the upheaval caused by the armed conflict and the crisis in cultural, social, and political structure have opened up new spaces to think about development, gender, sexuality, culture, identity, and political restructuring of the state.

What I have tried here to present are the diverse voices rather than a compendium of witnesses to prove or disprove what people actually experience during war and conflict. More or less, although mediated through me, I have tried to present their experiences as theirs without much intervention and analysis on my part, which I believe is necessary to leave room for further analysis by other readers. Their stories cover many facets of the conflict and the subject positions of individuals and, by extension, the larger society. This is the only way we can grapple with the complexity of the People’s War in Nepal. There is no one truth, no one way of knowing what the conflict engendered in Nepal and how it started. If individuals are more or less representatives as much as they are products of the society they live in, then these narratives reflect the experience of a larger society as well. Although subjective, and thus subject to biases of class, gender, caste, location, and many factors of mediation, the experiences represented here speak

precisely of those differences, but they also present an opportunity to read between the lines and see what may cut across those differences and emerge from there. As we saw, the individual stories were not really individual -- there would be no story of an armed conflict and crisis in such a situation of singularity. What I have tried to show is that although experiences may be represented as subjective, subjectivity is also formed and transformed by being in the collective, and individual subjects are not marked outside of communities of people and their experiences. Through people's own voices, I have tried to present how the Maoist movement started as the People's War and produced discrepant developments in different sectors of society as well as in individual people's lives. What it brought to women and how it transformed their lives for better or for worse are issues that I raise here, but the next chapter will highlight the voice of the Maoist side -- in particular, the women of the Maoist movement.

Chapter Four

Struggle to Make History: One Woman's Story of Becoming a Maoist

*"All history has been a history of class struggles . . ."*¹⁹⁴ -- Friedrich Engels

*If women were to set themselves to transform History, it can be safely said that every aspect of History would be completely altered. Instead of made by man, History's task would be to make woman, to produce her. (Helen Cixous, "Castration and Decapitation" in *Out There: Marginality and Culture*)*

Hamile-chai Ithihas banauna napaune? Aaimile nageko banduk padkidaina bhanthe, tara padkido rahecha, aafnai aakhale dheke. Aaimaile kukhura pani katna saktaina bhanthe, tara hami aajakal Rango pani aafnai hatle katchu (Sharmila, Maoist militia)
[Trans: Don't we have the right to make history? They used to say, a gun that a woman jumps over could never fire again. But I saw with my own eyes that it fired. They used to say, women can't even kill a chicken, but now we kill male water buffaloes with our own hands.¹⁹⁵]

History will recognize only those women as conscious beings and epoch-building-hailing brave warriors who will play a dynamic role in this liberation movement. (Comrade Prachanda, Chairman of the CPN (Maoist) and the supreme leader of the People's War)

Freedom is always the Freedom of dissenters (*Freiheit ist immer Freiheit der Andersdenkenden*).
– Rosa Luxemburg

¹⁹⁴ Robert Tucker (ed.) *Marx-Engels Reader*, 472. From the Preface to the German Edition of 1883.

¹⁹⁵ All translations from Nepali are mine, unless noted otherwise.

A Visit to a Maoist Area: Witnessing the Imagined

Why do women take life threatening risks? Why do women become guerilla soldiers? My desire to talk face to face with women who were active in the Maoist Party and the PLA took me to the Kavre Palanchowk District of Bagmati Aanchal in Nepal. Through a social worker friend of mine, I planned to meet another social worker, who would then put us in contact with the local coordinator of the Maoist Party and bring us to the area under the control of the Maoists, who were holding a training camp. After a three hour journey by bus from the capital city of Kathmandu, we found Maya Devi¹⁹⁶ waiting for us on the road in Khadichour. Once I arrived, I realized that we had to wait for a signal from somewhere. During a lunch of noodles with eggs, I talked with the social worker who was helping us to meet the coordinator, who in turn would arrange for us to go to the Maoist area and meet with the people there.

After two hours of waiting and talking, we were met by a man who asked us to follow him to take a bus back toward the way we came. While this middle-aged gentleman with a friendly smile and small stature made me comfortable, one could sense the quiet nervousness among us. The situation was hushed despite the cease-fire and the peace process underway in the capital city between the Seven Party Alliance and the Maoists. After we met the coordinator, he did not talk to us, but we quietly followed him as the social worker urged us on. We got on a bus bound for Kathmandu, but got off at a small town after about 10 minutes. We were instructed to walk to the Maoist camp area by the coordinator, who told the social worker that the camp was very close to the town. It was a hot day in June, and the mid-day sun was shining brightly. As we walked up and down in the heat, I wished I had an umbrella. Then I thought of how the Maoists would

¹⁹⁶ Unless noted otherwise, I use pseudonyms to protect the identity of the people presented here.

perceive me -- a weakling who could not even walk a little without an umbrella. My friend and I became more nervous as we were going to a place that we had no idea about. We could not ask much since too many questions could jeopardize our meeting, or so I thought. We wanted to put a brave face on it and tried to show no fear of the Maoists. Even after half an hour's walk, the *sibir* (camp) was nowhere on the horizon. I had read reports about how the Maoists made people walk for hours and days, sometimes without shoes. Our coordinator, Mr. Khem Prasad, did not say much but kept walking a little ahead of us. My friend and I exchanged private glances and laughed at our nervousness once in awhile. We mostly talked to Maya Devi, the social worker, and tried to make small conversation to make ourselves comfortable and less nervous. After walking for about 40 minutes, we came across a rudimentary gate decorated with Maoist flags, messages, and posters stating something akin to "Welcome to Maoist Land." When we saw the gate, we breathed a sigh of relief, thinking we would not have to walk for hours, as we had feared.

Yet, although the gate welcomed us, our fear had not totally subsided. Now we had entered the area of the Maoists, as the signs on the gate proclaimed. Earlier, most of my discomfort was due largely to the unknown nature of what I was venturing into, not because I had to walk a few miles in the sun. Before we saw the gate, I had started to fear the worst as I was not familiar with the place and the coordinator did not say much about how far we had to walk. I thought perhaps the Maoists wanted to teach us a lesson about how it feels to walk in the hot sun for hours, something city women normally do not have to deal with. The stories in the media had indeed influenced my perception of the Maoists to some extent. In the villages, walking is not for exercise; people have to

walk for hours just to do their daily chores -- fetch water, procure fodder, or see a doctor. Even the road we were walking on was rudimentary and not graveled properly, but the buses traveled on such roads carrying loads of people. The road was carved into the side of a hill, and the open side looked down to a river hundreds of feet below. Much of the time as we walked, the side of the road overlooking the ravine below seemed dangerous. In fact, only a day or two after my walk on that road, a bus carrying a load of people plunged off of it and into the river, killing and injuring scores of people. The Maoists came to their aid. Back in Kathmandu, I read the news with trembling hands and a faint heart. We had not taken the bus back after visiting the Maoist camp because it looked risky. As we were walking up to the camp that afternoon, Mr. Khem Prasad had touched the ground to show us tire tracks only inches away from the edge of the cliff. Saying something about the narrow road and the carelessness of the driver, we had shivered with fear. On our way back, a bus with loads of people inside and on the roof passed us, but we preferred to walk.

We started to see small houses as soon as we passed the gate. Not even five minutes from the gate, we stopped at a small house. It was adjacent to the road but a little below it, and it looked over the river flowing forcefully below. The house looked newly built and provisional. Since it was below the road, we had to carefully crawl down from the uneven wall and find a safe landing in front of the door. As we entered the house, I saw a woman sitting in the middle of the floor leaning on a wooden pillar or post supporting the roof in the middle; a few men were dispersed here and there looking at different newspapers, and a woman with a child sat nearby. There were piles of dry corn with husks on the floor. A few straw mats covered the parts of the floor where people

sat. Popular movie posters and advertisements covered the stone walls. I could not tell if this house was a permanent abode or just a temporary meeting place of the Maoists. Most probably, it was both. There was a floor above us, and I am not sure if there was anyone there listening to our conversation, sleeping, or doing any number of things. After we entered, a few more people, including one young woman and an older woman with a child, also came in. There were a few young men already sitting there and talking to Asmita, their leader. As our coordinator introduced us to Asmita, a few more men wandered in and out, while a few sat there the entire time listening to our conversation. A baby girl who was just starting to crawl was brought to Asmita mid-way through our conversation; she played on the floor when Asmita was not breastfeeding her. Asmita's daughter was nicknamed Rosy. While we briefly talked about motherhood and breastfeeding in public, I playfully asked whether the daughter was named after Rosa Luxemburg, the feminist-communist fighter from Poland and Germany. She said it was her brother's choice to give her that name. In Nepali, Rosy (Rojee) means "the favored one; one you choose from among many." In the hours that I spoke to Asmita, she told me much of her own story, which I present in translation but otherwise as unfiltered as possible.

Asmita's Story of Becoming a Maoist¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ The narrative presented here is from my taped interview with Devi Khadka (alias Asmita) on June 22, 2006, Khadichour, Nepal. Here I present the interview in more or less the way it took place that day. The interview was conducted in Nepali among two social workers, who were with me, and a few Maoist cadres, who were there with Asmita. The works of Rita Manchanda and Shova Gautam (2001), Mandira Sharma in Hutt (2004), Li Onesto (2005), and Manjushree Thapa (2005) also provide narratives of women who have joined the Maoist movement for different reasons. These women writers themselves hold different ideological perspectives and approaches to the study of women in the Maoist Party in Nepal, and many are skeptical about women's empowerment through involvement in the Maoist war. Li Onesto, an American journalist sympathetic to the Communist cause in Nepal, is a clear exception. Yet there are some similarities in their understanding of the reasons for women joining the Maoists. According to them, some of the key reasons for women joining the Maoists are domestic violence related to alcohol abuse, State violence against family members or themselves, and aspirations for cultural change. My conversation with

It is not so easy to tell you about everything in such little time. How I became a Maoist has a long history. But you asked me, so . . . In a class based society, our family also became the victim of feudalism. The landlord's oppression was the key to my family's misery and destitution. His name was Dal Bahadur Khadka, and he was the feudal lord in our district. My father was a simple and uneducated man, so the lord tricked him into putting his fingerprints on papers related to our land, telling him there was something wrong with the papers and he was going to correct them. But we lost most of our land to him as he had tricked my father in order to grab our land. He did that to many villagers. Although we were not totally destitute and had enough to survive, after he took the land, we lost more in trying to fight a court battle against him. My father, being very simple, gave up on the lawsuit and did not pursue it further. We lost everything and became destitute after being an average family that had enough to survive and was doing fine by Nepali standards. My father died that year.

But this man, the feudal lord, was such an evil person that he took the land of a widowed woman with five children. He made the woman marry her daughter to his son and took her property. Moreover, he raped both the mother and the daughter, who was his daughter-in-law, and drove them away after taking everything. Although the whole village was scared of him, this incident made the villagers fight back. Even the village Pradhan Panch (chief), Lila Bahadur Khatri, was with the villagers and asked them to fight against the feudal lord. Dal Bahadur Khadka, the lord, came with 48 *gundas* (goons) against the village, and he died during the encounter. After that incident, almost the whole village was jailed. My brother, who was only 20 at the time, also got jailed. He was imprisoned for five years and was killed at the age of 25. We had lost everything, and now my brother was also dead. It happened in 2043 BS (1986 CE), when I was still very young -- I was only 10-12 years old. From a fairly well to do family, we became a destitute family. We had lost everything, so we could not get a good education. Later, my brothers worked hard and struggled to study, but we had lost so much that it was too hard for us to get a decent education. It was all because of that feudal lord. Because of him, so many people are still suffering. *This instilled hatred against the class system in me at a very young age.* The law was in his hands, the police and the goons too. Actually, even in the present People's War of 10-12 years, I did not feel the depth and level of oppression at the hands of the police that I did in 1980. We, the small kids in the village, used to sing: "Makuri ko jal, shoshak Dale ko balla aayo kaal" (Spider's web, oppressor Dale is finally dead). Our children's minds were so psychologically affected by these events and the social reality of oppression that we learned at a very early age that the "oppressor class" was the death of poor people.

It was in B.S. 2048 (1992 C.E.) that I heard there was a Communist Party, which was good to poor people and their cause. Initially, I was influenced by the

Asmita is presented in a format that may read like a linear narrative, but it was not. There were breaks, pauses, and interjections from people sitting around her and listening to us. Although I asked most of the questions, the other two women social workers also interjected and asked her to clarify some of their own questions. As the baby was present during the conversation and there were other members from her side doing their work in different corners of the room or some just listening, the interview was by no means an isolated event between her and just myself. It was more of a semi-public event.

United Marxist-Leninist Party of Nepal (UML). Then there was no Maoist Party in Dolakha district. One of the teachers of my brother was very influential in initiating us into the Communist ideology. Before the advent of the multi-party system in 1990, I was involved at the local level during the Jana Andolan-I, but in 1992, after much research and thinking, I committed myself to the United Front, part of which became the Maoist Party of Nepal and led the People's War in 1996. I thought it was the best party to represent the cause of the proletariat in a class based society like ours. I worked as a local party member at the village level until B.S. 2053 (1995). When the Jana Yudha (People's War) started after a few months in February of 1996, I became more active. In 1997, I got arrested and was jailed for three months. This was a great turning point in my life. The state perpetrated a terrible crime against me. I was young and delicate then. I was working as the president of the All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary), also known as ANWA(R), under the rules and rights provided by the new constitution of 1991 CE. I had not done anything illegal. We had the constitutionally given right to organize peacefully and have rallies, demonstrations, and protests under the new constitution. In due course, we were preparing for our Association's first district convention and we were disseminating information to the public about the convention. They arrested me in the midst of doing that. They kept me in jail for three months without any warrant. They did not let me meet with any family members for 28 days. The kind of treatment I got there from the simple policemen on up to the District Superintendent of Police changed my whole outlook towards the State, and my belief in the system was completely shattered. Here, the law was all façade -- it was actually a place where women were raped and abused by the holders and protectors of law and order. I was repeatedly raped during my time in the jail. I realized that this law and order were not for women and their wellbeing. It was a place where women were abused under the cloak of protection [a long silence, and tears rolled from her eyes].

In terms of personal feeling and experience, one does not face a bigger ordeal than the one I was made to go through in jail. Whatever comes after *this kind* of experience, they will all pass easily -- everything seems easier after this. *That's the limit; there is nothing that a woman can resent more* [meaning sexual violence and rape in particular]. It was because of the State that my brother, who was so dear to me, even more than my parents, died in jail. They did not even give us the body. But our enemies celebrated when he was dead. A woman has her bodily integrity, respect for her body, but even that was taken away from me by force. *You see, if a person is journeying, she can return only if there is a bridge. There is no bridge here.* All those people who are involved in the People's War, they are traveling like one-way travelers. That's why they are so dedicated and stubborn -- there is no turning back for them. The State has left no bridge, no room for them. There is no other path for them. The old State has fomented their rebellion by torturing them and providing them with no option but to rebel. *Look at me: what future do you think I have?* Do I have a future? No.

[I said, *Of course you do, now that the Maoists have signed the peace deal with the other political parties, and the House of Parliament is reinstated*].

Of course, I do from our side, but that's our own doing, and it's like that one way journey without bridges. Do I have another choice? Has the Nepali State given me any other choices? I am also a citizen of this country, like you. Had they left some room for me . . . maybe I would not have taken this one-way road. Had the State not behaved with me in such a cruel and inhuman manner in 1997, perhaps I would not have been so much on the offensive. *Maybe, I would have been more defensive than offensive...*

Yes, I did have an ideology and joined the movement initially because of my views. Of course, I did not become a Maoist just because of that one event at the jail. *However*, had I not experienced this sort of death in jail, I am not sure if I would have acted with such resolve, such bitterness, to be on the offensive -- I may have or I may not have. I am not saying that just that one event made me so committed, but it indeed changed me a lot. I am not sure if I would have joined the movement with such commitment and resolve, had I not been subjected to such treatment. While events are not everything, they do instill a sense of resolution in people. *You know, it's me who has gone through that experience; you have not, so you don't know what it is like.* One feels such a deep sense of resolution against those oppressive forces when one has to endure such degradation. One feels like there is nothing to lose as even the fear of death vanishes when one becomes subject to the nature of violence that I experienced in jail.

At the time of my interview with her, Asmita was a People's Liberation Army Company Political Commissar and a District Coordinator reporting to the Central Bureau of the Maoist Party. She became a member of parliament from the Maoist side when they joined the government in January of 2007.¹⁹⁸ Although Asmita's story is not a blanket representation of all women in the Maoist party and how they got initiated into the People's War, looking at the narratives of other writers and researchers on the Maoist movement in Nepal, one may find some similarities in the stories women tell.¹⁹⁹ But are

¹⁹⁸ Asmita became a member of parliament on January 15, 2007 from the Maoist side under the interim constitution ratified during the peace process.

¹⁹⁹ Analysts have argued that police violence and especially rape of women in Rolpa during Operation Romeo in 1995 became a catalyst that turned many men and women into rebels. See Shova Gautam's *Women and Children in the Periphery of the People's War* (Kathmandu: IHRICON, 2001) and the interview with Baburam Bhattarai, "The Phobia of Guerilla War is Hounding the Reactionaries" in Thapa (2003). The works of Gautam and Manchanda (2001); Mandira Sharma in Hutt (2004); Li Onesto (2005);

there similarities between the experiences of men and women who join revolutionary movements? How can Asmita's emphasis on the "sexual violence" as a defining moment in her subjectivity be understood within the discourse on gender equality from the radical left and Nepal's Maoists?

In her study of guerilla women in Latin America, Karen Kampwirth in *Women and the Guerilla Movements* argues there is no fundamental difference between men and women in terms of their reasons for joining revolutionary guerilla movements (1-19). As the repressive mechanisms of the State heighten during times of rebellion and insurgency, it spurs families and communities that would otherwise be neutral to take up arms. Kampwirth rightly states that the conflict affects not only the political and the economic, but also the relational, familial, and community dynamics. However, although women who join revolutionary movements may share similar social and economic backgrounds, and their family members' ideological leanings often affect their consciousness, there have been women who singularly make decisions to rebel based on their individual experiences during armed conflict. "It may well be that a woman who herself has suffered rape by a government soldier or who has seen her mother or sister being raped will think about power and injustice rather differently than her male comrades who either have not been politicized by rape at all or who have, but assign different meanings to that experience" (Enloe 1990, 203). Therefore, at first, what Kampwirth states holds true in the case of Asmita, who was influenced by her brothers' interest in Communist ideology and politics. But ideology and "family traditions of resistance" (Kampwirth 2002, 11) alone cannot interpellate people to sacrifice their lives or walk a path of nihilism. Her

and Manjushree Thapa (2005) also provide narratives of women who have joined the Maoist movement for different reasons.

constant emphasis on the personal injury in the form of rape and sexual abuse in jail speaks volumes about her personal resolution to dedicate herself to the Maoist cause.

Many feminist researchers have demonstrated that the practice of sexual violence against women in war and crisis moves the cultural and political dynamics of war and fuels the agency of the opposing sides.²⁰⁰ Even during revolutionary wars, the practices of gender-based violence are deliberate strategic choices, especially perpetrated by the dominant side against the rebelling side. A police officer whom I interviewed in Nepal revealed, “Many security officers (army and police) indeed acted in excess and brutally with women during search operations. They raped women in front of their brothers and fathers. So there is a sense of revenge -- *badala ko bhavana* -- in women who have joined the Maoist army.”²⁰¹

Although not all women who have joined the Maoists share the experience of sexual violence, the frequent sexual violence against women by the police and the military forces in front of their male relatives pushes women as well as men related to them to further their rebellion with the motive of revenge. Many women who are sexually violated feel shame, guilt, and worthlessness even in a supportive community.²⁰² Often, women’s controlled sexuality and reproduction are symbolic of and central to cultural, racial, and ethnic difference, religious purity, the honor of a community, and the

²⁰⁰ See Menon and Bhasin 1998; Lentin 1997; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002, among others.

²⁰¹ Interview with Bikram, July 10, 2006, Kathmandu Nepal.

²⁰² A peasant woman, Amada Pineda, talks of the experiences of women who were raped by the National Guard during the Nicaraguan Revolution. Although her husband understood and accepted her, as many other peasant men did, she herself expresses her feeling this way: “I *did* feel ashamed, for everything I’d been through. It was terribly traumatic. I felt like I smelled bad, and I couldn’t get rid of the smell” (Randall 1994, 89).

transmission of masculinity of men.²⁰³ Men most often do not go through the same sexualized trauma from bodily and psychological violence during wars and conflicts. However, this is changing with women's participation in the military industrial complex, as seen recently with the U.S. war in Iraq.²⁰⁴

Interestingly, the exploitation of women's bodies seems to work perversely in support of revolutionary movements, such as the one Asmita became part of in Nepal. When women are raped in front of their family members, the sexual violence incites the onlookers to revenge and rebellion against the violators. This is not to imply that rape is in any way a necessary evil for social change, just that rebellions gain momentum as the other side attacks the female body under a social script of gendered "body politic" enacted through raw violence. However, women's "sacrifice" remains largely unacknowledged even though their exploitation may even be secretly wished for in order to unsettle the social structure to produce crisis. I will elaborate on what I mean.

Some Maoist leaders in Nepal did acknowledge that sexual violence against women by the government security forces incited more people to join the Maoists.²⁰⁵ Yet, despite a lot of rhetoric from the Maoist party about the "woman question," how the unequal gendered operations of bodies as male and female affect women differently than men remain secondary considerations in theorizing social/sexual oppression and

²⁰³ See Menon and Bhasin (1998), Kandiyoti (1991), Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989), and Jayawardena and De Alwis (1996) for the ways in which women and gender function in the reproduction of nations, cultures, and identity symbols during nationalist resurgences, ethnic conflicts, and territorial wars.

²⁰⁴ See Timothy Kaufman-Osborn (2005, 597-619). When one looks at the pictures, the female soldier Lynndie England seems to be torturing the prisoners. However, as Kaufman-Osborn's arguments show, England's performance is only a sign of what lies beneath the "disciplinary techniques" of the military institutions where misogyny reigns supreme, and an attempt is always underway to produce differential forms of masculinity and femininity through performance.

²⁰⁵ Baburam Bhattarai, the second in command of the Maoist Party and the People's War, speaks of the sexual violence against women by the government security forces in Western Nepal. See "The Phobia of Guerilla War is Hounding the Reactionaries: Interview with Baburam Bhattarai" in Deepak Thapa, ed. *Understanding the Maoist Movement* (2003), 43. The interview was first published in *The Independent*, Kathmandu, vol. 5, no. 41, 13-19 December, 1995

inequality. Indeed, comparatively speaking, the Maoists, who take “lived experience” as key to theorizing inequality and oppression, have made progress in thinking about women and gender, but class and ideology still take precedence in the practices of Maoist radical materialism (Young 2004). Therefore, the restructuring of the state, society, and polity under Maoist radical politics includes little about “the woman question” and the question of gender, despite the Maoists’ acknowledgement that women “hold half the sky” (Parvati 2003, 171). In the radical left movements of South Asia, the issue of gender and sexual difference is often skirted or left untheorized after the conflict unless it serves to evoke the primacy of class inequality caused by feudalism, colonialism, and imperialism. The importance of the latter categories cannot be denied in unequal power relations at a global level, but they cannot always be the central determinants in looking at relations between peoples and genders within a local social milieu.²⁰⁶

What Asmita points to with her unfolding of the multiple interlocking networks of oppression in society implies a subjectivity that is both a product of her volatile class location (they were not always poor) and bodily violence that she endured in a jail cell under a social script that designated her a sexed being. She was made to realize her moral, social being as “human and female” at the same time. Whatever agency she exhibited as a Maoist activist later cannot be examined outside her experiences in jail as a “sexed being.” At the same time, it is also important to notice the ways in which she

²⁰⁶ This seems at least largely true of South Asian radical left movements of earlier times, when party leadership, which usually consisted of educated, upper caste people, was not able to break with feudal patriarchal norms. After some success in the political sector, the “woman question” fell out of the restructuring agenda. See a Stree Shakti Sangathan publication called *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telengana People’s Struggle* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989) and *A Space Within the Struggle: Women’s Participation in People’s Movements* by Ilina Sen (1990).

becomes constructed as a “woman sexual victim” of the security forces because the Maoists indeed exploited this image of victimization of a woman.²⁰⁷

Yet, why is the language of communist revolution always classed and gender neutral? Despite these gendered events and experiences that influenced her journey toward becoming a revolutionary warrior, when asked about the fundamental roots of oppression, Asmita herself locates it in class: “The root cause is class oppression . . . the gender oppression is a corollary evolution created by class. Until and unless the class oppression is done with, gender oppression will remain.”²⁰⁸ Despite her emphasis on her experience of sexual violence in the jail and how that event changed her whole perspective on life and living, she speaks the language of orthodox Marxism, which privileges economics and class over other categories of experience, such as gender, race, sexuality, and nationality. While she constructs her experience in the jail where she was sexually violated as the defining moment of her militancy and her emergence as an offensive force, she uses that radical emergence of agency that consolidated her revolutionary subjectivity on behalf of the proletarian masses that she is fighting for. Could it be also that there is as yet no justified political language except Marxism to voice her frustrations and anger?²⁰⁹ What does this say about the ultra-left’s influence on women who shy away from recognizing gendered violence and bodily injury at the subjective level as defining factors of their political and subjective experience?

²⁰⁷ One needs to remember that Asmita’s story of rape in the prison cell was one of the most publicized among many other stories of sexual violence against women by the government security forces. She remains an important political figure vindicated by the Maoists from the brutal and inhuman forces represented by the police.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Asmita, July 22, 2006.

²⁰⁹ Thanks to Elizabeth Grosz for pointing out this important question.

Feminist critiques of Marxism have given us many tools to think through the silence of women or the silencing of them within the radical left.²¹⁰ Within the parameters of classical Marxism, which evokes the experiences of the proletariat as the determining tool for analyzing oppression and inequality, women can speak only with the proletariat or mime their actions and methods. When a feminist materialist lens is applied to this mimicry, women move to become the “sex class” who are oppressed by virtue of their gendered location or bodily situation (i.e. Hartsock 1983, De Beauvoir 1953). Women of the radical left might need to analyze “sexual politics” within the local and global “political economy” of sex if they want to meet the challenges posed by deterministic theories of economy as the nodal point of unraveling oppression and gender oppression in particular.²¹¹ Many transnational feminist scholars who do not necessarily rebuke the insights forwarded by Marx’s transformative politics have made clear the failure to analyze the workings of gender with patriarchy, racism, colonialism, and imperialism throughout history.²¹² The evidence suggests that those who rationalize Marxism as a scientific methodology of eradicating oppression have not taken heed of feminist insights on sex and gender. Nor have the modern revolutionaries who follow the mainstream/malestream doctrines of Marx-Lenin- Trotsky-Mao.²¹³

²¹⁰ See De Beauvoir 1953, Firestone 1970, Eisenstein 1978, Barrett 1980, Hartsock 1983, Rubin 1997 (1975), Irigaray 1985.

²¹¹ On sexual politics see the works of early radical feminists like Kate Millet *Sexual Politics* [1970] and Shulamith Firestone *The Dialectic of Sex* [1970]. On political economy, see Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women” [1975] in Nicholson (1997).

²¹² See Enloe 1990, Spivak 1988, 1994; Mohanty 2003, Mies 1986, Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983, Sassen 1988.

²¹³ The marginalization of the ideas and views of left women thinkers and revolutionaries is something notable in history. Women like Rosa Luxemburg from Poland and Germany, Clara Zetkin from Germany, Lithuanian-born Emma Goldman from the U.S, Ch’iu Chin (Qui Jin) and Jiang Quing of China are some women revolutionaries whose political and ideological views never entered mainstream/malestream ideology of the left. Even when they are talked about, they cannot escape the gendered connotations of femininity and womanhood, which is revealed in the ways in which Mao’s wife Jiang Quing was treated and made into a figurehead of cruelty.

Therefore, despite Mao's argument that local knowledge systems are important and that "the specific dynamics of individual societies . . . operate in their own particular times," the proponents of the People's War voice a deterministic sense of history and economics, as if "all the aspects of culture and ideology are merely the reflection of economic relations" (Young 2004, 19).²¹⁴ The Hegelian concept of progressive history and development, the self/other dichotomy, the precedence of idea-thought-consciousness over body-feelings-experiences, and the Leninist scientificity of radical materialism and war envelop Mao's call for "local epistemological" practices and listening to "people's voices." There is a vision of development based on progressive steps: from agricultural feudalism to industrialism to the proletarian ruled socialist utopia. Imagining utopias has its place, but, throughout history, women are called upon to sacrifice in the name of patriarchal utopias, whether of the communist kind or of modernity in the form of democracy, nationalism, and globalism.

Asmita's narrative gives a glimpse of the utopic vision of Nepal's Maoists, who call for women's sacrifice in the name of "total war" and "patriotic nationalism" but are reluctant to acknowledge the "sexual politics" of representation that they themselves exploit to mobilize and incite women to war and movement. In other words, the Maoists have invoked images of women raped by the government security forces and the sexual exploitation of Dalit women and poor women at the hands of the rich and the powerful men. They have opposed the sexual objectification of women by the media and entertainment industry to speak for women and against other women as class enemies.

²¹⁴ According to Young, it was Althusser who tried to cleanse Marx of the stigma of "economic determinism" that rested on the single contradiction between capital and labor and the Hegelian single dialectic of self/other with his concept of "overdetermination." However, the complexity of Marx's views in their entirety is not what moves the revolutionary Marxisms, which mostly focus on the doctrines of the *Communist Manifesto*. See Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy* for a more complex reading of Marx and his philosophy.

Yet, women leaders of the Maoist movement shy away from making gender and sexuality key categories of women's oppression and often remain silent about the gender inequality internal to the Maoist Party itself. When asked about their reasons for joining the movement, only female cadres state that they are ending women's oppression along with destroying feudalism, imperialism, and a class based society.

The Maoist Party has indeed used gender discrimination and sexual violence as tools to forward their political agenda and draw more women into their fold. This is not to say that women are not sexually abused or there is no gender discrimination in Nepali society. But the issue is that there may be a disavowal of women's real situation in this exploitative sexual politics of representation. The Maoist party upholds the old mantra of feudalism, imperialism, and class inequality as the root causes of oppression and the main roadblocks to an egalitarian gender dynamic. The Communist adage "gender follows class" is repeated again and again, just as women follow men in leadership positions. This rhetoric pervades Maoist speeches, articles, and newspapers, including women's write-ups for women. For examples, one could look at the Maoist publication *The Janadesh Weekly*, which is called *Adha Sansar* or *Adha Aakash* (half of the sky or the world) in Nepali, an analogy for women, who cover half of the world's population or space, which is inspired by Mao's notion that women hold half of the sky.

The *Janadesh Weekly*, which literally means "dictates or verdicts from the people," is famous as a "mouthpiece" of the Maoist party. It carries a regular column on women. This space is especially reserved for speaking to women and what's happening on the women's front in the Maoist movement. The ideologies of gender, nationalism, militancy, and history cohere to produce a "revolutionary woman," and various authors

spell out how women should move ahead toward the path of liberation. Activists who fight in battle or women who work as motivators and leaders in different capacities in Maoist related organizations write of their experiences. Most often, the ideological pieces are similar in tone and rhetoric. Below, I translate a publication from *Janadesh* (June 27, 2006) titled “Present Day Women’s Revolution and Points to Consider,” by Amrita Thapa. The article came at a time when women from different political parties were on the streets protesting their lack of representation in the peace process and the interim constitution, which will be the basis of government until the constituent assembly is held and new laws are written. She writes,

With the foundation of the glorious People’s Revolutionary War of ten years and the 12 point agreement between the CPN(Maoist) and the SPA, brave people led the 19 day Jana-Andolan (People’s Revolution) and showed the global community what they really wanted. The leader of fascism was made to bow down. Then were born the 25 points of agreement and 8 points of agreement between the SPA and the CPN(M). Within this political climate, Nepali women - who fought for nationalism, democracy, and the livelihoods of people in the Nalapani war with the British (1814-16 AD) as well as the B.S. 2007, 2028, 2036, 2046, 2052 and 2063 Jana-Andolans -- are now struggling for their representation. Women from the Seven Party Alliance have been struggling time and again, and they have our organization’s moral support in this struggle. This struggle may help to fight for the rights of the 51% of the population who are doubly oppressed, and this struggle is also important for encouraging the lay women to participate in the revolution and for the institutionalization and organization of the rights we gain after the success of the revolution. However, even after the devolution of the class society or the society of the elites, women will still have to struggle with the cultural, religious, social, political and economic construction of the patriarchal society. As far as principle goes, this struggle is not entirely wrong. Yet, women need to examine and discuss what is right and what might be wrong considering the state of things now. Women who are active in the liberation movement need to pay attention to some of these factors below...²¹⁵

In what follows the first paragraph, Thapa lays out several different points that women in the movement should consider before hitting the streets in protest. They are:

1) The question of strong dedication to ideology or a hold on ideas, 2) Keeping politics

²¹⁵ *Janadesh Weekly* <<http://www.krishnasenonline.org/janadesh/31.htm>>

above everything, 3) A realist analysis of the problem, 4) Remaining vigilant against bad or worse situations, 5) The ways of struggle, 6) Tools and strategies for struggle. In her attempt at persuasion, Thapa utilizes Marxist and Maoist analogies and argues that women should be more concerned about the end outcome, which will be the Constituent Assembly elections and the new constitution of Nepal. This will then ensure women's rights and equality. As she states,

Don't look at the form or what meets the eye. The essence is of the ultimate importance, which is the eight point agreement, wherein article seven ensures that the problems of class, caste, and regional and gender discrimination will be solved. . . For example, did Indian women get liberated just because Indira Ghandi became the Prime Minister of India? No, they did not. Thus, it is not the changing of the form of a person [in this case from men to women] that will change the State structure, but we have to create a new structure that will change the old structure. One should not be too concerned with the process, but with the outcome of the process or the result. . . . Feudalism is the ultimate roadblock to women's liberation, and the republic is the best way toward women's emancipation.²¹⁶

This write-up appeared just after the 19 day demonstration in April (2-21) 2006, during which more than 20 people died before King Gyanendra relinquished his power and the House of Parliament was reinstated as the executive body to govern the country until the constituent assembly election was held. Since then, the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance have held peace talks in which the key points of discussion were the monarchy, the Royal Nepal Army, the constituent assembly election, and the management of the arms of the Maoists. None of the three major peace talks between the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance have included women representatives. When women were not made part of the process of writing an interim constitution, which was to establish the codes and policies to run the interim government before the constituent

²¹⁶ Ibid.

assembly elections were held, women came to the streets protesting against this neglect from the Seven Party Alliance and the Maoists.

As Thapa opines, women's representation is not the ultimate goal of the Maoist concept of liberation and the emancipation of society. She follows a belief in a theoretical trajectory where gender follows class. Sexual or gender difference is simply not a matter of concern, as if class predates the theories of social constructionism of not only genders but of bodies and the different corporealities they exhibit. This is something the Maoists are missing despite much analysis and theorizing of oppression.

What will happen to the dream of a woman who wants to make history, who wants a part in history with her story written on it? If women as bodily representatives are not important, what kind of history will women write? What kind of history will be written on women's behalf? What will happen to girls like Sharmila, who barely looked fifteen but dreamed of making history by joining the Maoist militia: "Why are women behind? Can't women do something? Make something out of themselves? Yes, they can also do, be. Why aren't we in history or part of history? Can't we also make history?"²¹⁷ Sharmila's words were not mere words, but a reflection of her experiences of a gendered location in society as a female whose fate was more or less already written. There are many girls and women like Sharmila who have joined the Maoists in the hope of gaining equality and opportunity. They wish to not be treated like a lesser sex that cannot fire a rifle lest their bodily defilement prevent the rifle from working properly.

This brings me back to Asmita's saying that women have a "follower mentality" and need to break that tradition. Is this something specific to women? Or is it something inculcated by the gendered social construction that women and men both become

²¹⁷ Interview with Sharmila, July 2006, Kavrepalanchowk, Nepal.

followers to some extent in matters political and otherwise in Nepal? Otherwise, why are radical communist leaders so intent on implementing Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism as scientific methods of transformation and development while they are considered trite, Eurocentric, or utopic by much of the world, including the places where these ideas came from? Amrita Thapa questions the raising of women's voices for "equal representation" with a strong criticism of Indira Gandhi, the first woman prime minister of India and South Asia, as not really representative of women.²¹⁸ She also argues that we should not worry about the method, the process, or the bodies as male and female while working toward a goal, as if gender difference simply does not matter. What does such an idea imply for Asmita's experience of sexual violence in jail and the Maoist representation of her as a "sexual victim" to mobilize their politics? Thapa espouses a gender-neutral approach to work and change and argues that we should be concerned with the ultimate result. Yet, can one result or one approach work for everyone? She is right in saying that we should be concerned about the results, but should we not also be concerned about the methods, practices, and process of how we get there?

The 'Woman Question' in the Maoist Party of Nepal: Ideology and Reality

When Samukta Jana Morcha, or the United Front, a coalition of communist parties, put forward the 40 point demands to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in 1996, there was only one article that directly touched on the "woman question" or the question of gender equality: "Girls should be given equal property rights to those of their brothers" (Karki and Seddon 2003, 185). This key document that served as a red-book to initiate the People's War emphasized nationalism, citizenship, and ethnic inequalities. There is no mention of "equal rights to citizenship" for women, women's right to choose,

²¹⁸ *Janadesh Weekly*, Year 15, No. 31, June 27, 2006.

or rights to equal “political representation” in national politics for women. It seems that, while the Maoists seized the opportunity to “speak for” women at the rhetorical level so that they could garner support, they gave very little space to “women’s issues” compared to questions of nationalism and economy in their actual practice. Although the Maoist leaders themselves acknowledged these omissions in the later days of their revolutionary war and admitted the importance of women for their movement, this historical document speaks volumes about the pattern of slighting the “woman question” in many left movements, despite their great claim to understand oppression as relational.

The Maoists opted for radical measures to rectify the inequality of class. However, the gendered practice of rendering women second-class beings and citizens at a national level continues. Most importantly, the Maoists failed to think of women as serious “political” beings in their own right, which unfortunately has been a trend in the political practice of the Left along with slighting gender as a category pertinent to modes of social oppression.²¹⁹ Likewise, a large number of Nepali women observers and researchers (i.e. Gautam and Manchanda 2001, Gautam 2001, Shakya 2003) of women’s conditions in the Maoists People’s War argue that the gendered nature of the public/private and political/domestic dichotomy has not really been dismantled as much as the Maoists claim. Hisila Yami is a spokesperson of the Maoist Party and one of only two women central members. Yami herself has pointed out that there needs to be more work done in regard to equality among the genders within the Maoist party itself and its

²¹⁹ As Robert Young has argued in *White Mythologies*, orthodox Marxism, represented by MAMA, “is really a cross-dressed PAPA” that never dealt with its Eurocentrism and Phallocentrism (3). A trace remains, we can surmise, even in the “third worldist” later developments of Marxism, as reflected in internationalist socialist movements like those of Mao Tse Tung and Franz Fanon, among others. However, this analysis is still shaped by our location in the economic food chain and deserves more critical scrutiny related to class, race, and nationality rather than a simple assertion of good versus evil.

affiliate organizations throughout Nepal.²²⁰ It is evident that, for the Maoists, the centrality of class and nationalism overrides other inequalities. To state briefly, the revolutionary Left's failure to address the issues of women and gender adequately leaves many women revolutionaries dissatisfied with the "People's War" not only in Nepal and South Asia but worldwide.²²¹

Maoist representation of women and gender tells multiple stories. According to them, women's situation became a key social factor in mobilizing women in the movement, to the extent that some of the senior leadership alludes to the efficacy of women in multiple sectors, from their relational strengths in generating consent through their membership in the community to their appropriation of militant ideology. However, though the Maoists touted women's participation in the war, they did not seem to take the "woman question" seriously until women embodied the militant ideology of masculinity and sacrificed in war. Comrade Prachanda, the chairperson of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and the supreme leader of the People's War, confessed this in his interviews.

Before the initiation [of the war], the woman question was not seriously debated in our party. . . Then, right after the initiation, the question came up -- it boldly came up. And especially in my experience, I was thrilled when, during the first year after initiation, I saw the sacrifice women were making in the main region, in the struggling zones -- their militancy, their heroism, and their devotion. When I saw women masses come into the field, then we started to debate seriously the woman question . . .²²²

Though the Maoists considered the woman question only after witnessing women's sacrifice in the early years of Maoist People's War, women's gender roles became social

²²⁰ See Parvati <<http://www.monthlyreview.org/1105parvati.htm>> November (vol. 56, no. 6).

²²¹ U. Vindhya's "Comrades-in-Arms: Sexuality and Identity in the Contemporary Revolutionary Movement in Andhra Pradesh and the Legacy of Chalam" sheds some light on this matter.

²²² Cited in Onesto, *Dispatches*, 179.

capital waiting to be tapped by the Maoists for their revolutionary war. Although the call was to destroy traditional gender norms and create a new society, ironically, the traditional gender roles proved effective in mobilizing women for the revolution. In “Women’s Participation in the People’s War,” Comrade Parvati says:

Where women are not directly involved in guerilla warfare, they are working as a support force for the People’s War. They function as organizers, as ropagandists, as cultural activists, as logistics suppliers, as nurses for wounded fighters and cadres, as espionage workers, as cover for the party cadres or combatants, as visitors, and as a source of inspiration in jails and in martyr’s households. They are also trained to prepare locally made explosives . . . *Because, culturally, women have been associated with household work, women activists have been most effective in mobilizing the masses in new areas, where they are easily accepted at the household level.*²²³

As Parvati and Prachanda both confess, the primary involvement of women and their utility in the early days of the war was mostly relegated to and realized in the domestic and relational spheres, not in the combat zones.²²⁴ But as the movement grew, more women were recruited in the militia and turned into combat forces. Even more than ideology, it was necessity that became the mother of invention in this case. The Maoist leadership realized that if they were to forward a full-fledged war, they needed more combatants, which could only be had by recruiting women into the PLA. Although they were at first reluctant, they were desperate to increase their army, so they not only turned to women but also to teenagers, who would be considered child soldiers by international standards.

²²³ Comrade Parvati, “Women’s Participation in the People’s War” in Karki and Seddon (2003), 171-173.

²²⁴ Here I am also thinking of Franz Fanon’s *Dying Colonialism* and the feminist critique launched at him for his apparent sexism in the manner he talks about women involved in the Algerian war (Ann McClintock, Rey Chow). For Fanon, domestic space and cultural differences embodied by Algerian women became beneficial for the revolution as they provided a mask under which to carry out the revolutionary activities against the French colonialists. Here, the domestic space and traditional attire of women, like the veil, became logistical warehouses to carry out the revolution. Of course, there is more to Franz Fanon’s “sartorial semiotics” and his politicization of the veil in Algeria than meets the Western critical eye, but that is for another time.

As the war expanded, women were recruited for combat. In fact, there seemed to be little confidence on the part of the Maoist leadership in women's capacity to become guerilla soldiers and fight in war. However, by the end of the third year of the People's War, women were fighting on the front lines, along with doing other propaganda work in the background.

I was eager to work in the Party before. But then, after joining the squad, I was involved in an encounter and became even more committed. There were 14 of us going from one place to another, and the police ambushed us. One of our comrades was killed, and now I have a strong commitment to take revenge. I will fight against the enemy as long as there is a drop of blood left in my body. I am very happy now, and we will certainly achieve our goal. (Onesto 2005, 165)

It seems that the ideology of militancy became stronger once women were sent into combat as they witnessed death and violence firsthand. The sense of sacrifice as well as revenge also increased as they saw their comrades dying or hurt. As the sense of sacrifice and revenge increased, their commitment to war also strengthened, as we see from the rise in the number of women guerillas from hundreds to thousands by the end of 2006. Alongside sacrifice and revenge, *martyrdom* was an important factor influencing the commitment of the female guerillas to the People's War. Martyrdom is an interesting concept for girls and young women who are denied "hero" status in their family and society, where hero-worship goes to the male guardian, whether he be domestic or political. "Shahid" (martyr) was a word not used for women in Nepal, so when a woman working for the Maoists says that "We also want history," I am led to think of another erasure of Nepali women's representation in history. According to the women Maoists, Yogamaya may have earned martyrdom status as she fought against the Rana regime with all her might. However, while male nationalist revolutionaries of that period, like Dharma Bhakta and Sukra Raj Sastri, were given that status, she was not even mentioned

in history books. Thus, I am led to believe that many women in the Maoist party are fighting with weapons for “symbolic capital” of a different kind, a kind other than that symbolized by class equality, even though they are unable to voice it for fear of reprisal within the Maoist movement itself. While it may seem romantic, more and more girls and women who are attracted to the Maoist call to arms are joining in hope of generating cultural capital, historical capital, and power capital within their families and society. In other words, they want to prove by their sacrifice that they are not weak, inferior followers. They want to risk their lives to prove their being, their existence.

Comrade Parvati starts her essay by quoting Marx: “Anybody who knows anything of history knows that great social changes are impossible without the feminine ferment” (2003, 165). She further argues that women have “more to gain from the movement than do men; that is, for them it is not only a question of escaping from class oppression but also from gender oppression. After all, breaking off double chains requires greater strength and greater will!” (Parvati 2003, 173). The Maoist leadership seems to have understood the situation of women and what will motivate them to join the war. However, the lack of power within the party itself, which is clearly dominated by men, makes women Maoists opt for caution and not voice their opinions and hopes openly lest they be charged with deviating from the main goal and creating factionalism. As with many revolutionary movements in the world, Nepal’s Maoist movement has indeed called for women’s sacrifice, but mostly as followers on the basis of their relationality with men. While the Maoists have exploited gender as a category of oppression and tried to include women as they deem fit in the movement, the primacy given to economics, politics, and nationalism overshadows the concerns about gender

inequality and oppression born through the practices of gender ideology. However, as it is still too early to predict the situation of women in the future within and outside Maoist politics, one can only hope that the Maoists are serious about the “woman question” and the primacy of the construction of sex and gender in political and cultural economy.

Women in the Maoist Politics of Representation: Current Situation

Although women’s true roles and positions in the Maoist party as well as the PLA are hard to guess at because of the movement’s underground and secretive nature as well as its heavily propaganda based politics, numerous reports imply that women have a significant presence in the Maoist movement. The number of women killed, the cases of disappearances, and the sexual violence perpetrated against them by the government security forces all bear witness to their participation. It is speculated that the Maoists’ People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is comprised of at least eight to ten thousand armed fighters.²²⁵ There are part-time and full-time militias at the local level, and they get to rise from their ranks to join the PLA if they show promise as guerilla fighters. Women are supposed to constitute almost 40% of these numbers, which is quite astounding in itself.

While it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of the Maoist population out of the estimated 26 million people of Nepal, their alleged control of eighty percent of the geographic area of Nepal at one point reveals that there had to be a significant number of people who were Maoists, were sympathetic to their cause, or were under their control.²²⁶ However, it should be noted that the Maoist controlled areas were sparsely populated,

²²⁵ Until 2005, the count was under ten thousand. Since the Jana Andolan II, the count has gone up to 30,000.

²²⁶ The woman Maoist leader Parvati writes that they control 80% of Nepal. See <<http://www.monthlyreview.org/1105parvati.htm>>

and geographic control does not translate into control over a corresponding percentage of the population. With the peace process underway, the arms management has also begun under the supervision of the United Nations. Now the Maoists have claimed that the number of the soldiers in the PLA is above 30,000 -- a significant rise from the previous ten to fifteen thousand soldiers until 2006.²²⁷ If women make up 40% of the Maoist army and the militia, there would be more than 12 thousand women in the PLA alone. However, it is unclear in what ways the 40% figure represents women's participation in the Maoist Party. According to the Maoist publications and interviews, women's participation and positions in the Maoist party are on par with men's and are in the process of being further strengthened.²²⁸ According to Li Onesto (2005), who visited a Maoist controlled region in the early days of the war, women worked in "3-in-1 committees," where they were party members, in the PLA, and in the United Fronts mass organizations. Aside from being guerilla soldiers, a large number of women in the Maoist Party work at the local level and outside the *base area*²²⁹ as organizers, coordinators, and support system builders.

However, some mainstream media reports and journalists who have researched women's situations in the Maoist Army have argued that women do not participate as much as claimed by the Maoists, and even where they are involved it is largely relegated

²²⁷ Surendra Phuyal "Nepal Signs Disarmament Deal," 28 November 2006. Source <<http://www.news.bbc.co.uk>> The United Nation's Mission to Nepal (UNMIN), which is overseeing the disarmament process of the Maoists, reports that there are 30,853 combatants and 3,428 weapons (Nepalnews.com, Feb. 23, 07). According to UNMIN there are minors in the Maoist PLA, something the Maoists have refused to acknowledge. Source: Nepalnews.com, March 21, 2007.

²²⁸ See Yasodha Timsina's interview with the Maoist leader Jayaputi Gharti in *Nepal Magazine*, 18 Feb. 2007, <<http://www.kantipuronline.com/Nepal/sambad.php>> and "Interview with Woman Leaders" by the International Brigade in <<http://aroadtothefuture.org/womenleaders/htm>>

²²⁹ The "base area" is the area that is relatively under the control of the Maoists, where guerilla soldiers roam more or less unhindered and a different revolutionary culture is introduced. For example, there might be cooperative farming, a childcare centre, and a commune.

to cooking, cleaning, carrying loads, and organizing and coordinating at the local level.²³⁰ Some even allege that the Maoists use not only women, but children as “human shields, as porters to carry dead Maoists fighters, as housekeepers and cooks and in some extreme cases, as sex slaves” (Thapa and Sijapati 2003, 161-162). It is only in the later days of the Maoist movement that one hears of women holding commanding positions in the army.²³¹ In my conversation with Asmita, who reported to the bureau of the Maoist Party, she informed me there were 50 to 60 women like her who worked as political commissars and reported to the central bureau or the central leadership.²³² According to Asmita, active members in the Maoist Party had to be multi-taskers and do whatever the Party required them to do.²³³ Despite some very serious allegations on how the women are used by the Maoists, it cannot be denied that women constitute an important part of the Maoist Party and the PLA.

Women’s participation in the Maoist People’s War in Nepal is represented in the international media and by local analysts as an astonishing and unforeseen development. As women in Nepal are usually represented as illiterate, poor, and dominated by patriarchal oppression, there is an overwhelming feeling among *the educated* and the *enlightened* that they need to be made conscious of their rights and their situation, as if

²³⁰ See Manjushree Thapa (2005, 171-251) and Sujita Shakya (2003). In regard to the sexual conduct of the Maoists, there are different views, but not many of them are substantiated by evidence. Gautam, Baskota and Manchanda (2001) report that there is sexual misconduct in the Maoist Army, where every Guerrilla unit includes two or three women, but they provide no substantial evidence to prove their statement. Sujita Shakya (2003) also writes that there have been reports of sexual misconduct by the Maoists, and gives the example of one Kaile Giri, who raped a child. But this was also a case where the Maoists acknowledged the misconduct of their party member, who was Deputy Chairman of the “People’s Government.” Otherwise, the Maoists deny the charges of sexual misconduct and describe the strict code of conduct that they have to abide by. Failure to abide by the rules leads to different kinds of reprimands by the party. They also argue that these allegations are created by the reactionary elements to defame Maoists. Whatever the case may be, there are certainly cases of the government security forces raping and abusing women.

²³¹ See Comrade Parvati. <<http://www.monthlyreview.org/1105parvati.htm>>

²³² Interview with Devi Khadka (alias Asmita) on June 22, 2006.

²³³ Interview with Asmita, June 22, 2006.

they are unaware of them. Such a critique misses the fact that awareness itself is not enough to change a situation that is ensnared in a network that took hundreds of years to weave. Despite being aware of the situation, oppressed people are not able to change it overnight. Maoist women activists themselves say that it will take time to change women's situation, and women will have to sacrifice on many fronts to get there.²³⁴ But outsiders who say that Nepali women are motivated by "false consciousness" to join a movement that is largely controlled by men assume a lack of agency among women.²³⁵ One cannot deny that these very conditions of marginality provide women experience and a perspective that people at the center lack or simply cannot perceive. What is important to note here is that women's participation in the Maoist People's War is indeed overwhelming, despite the leadership at the center being dominated by men. Whether led by their own subjective consciousness or being interpellated ideologically from the outside, women have become important actors in the Maoist movement and the People's War in Nepal.

²³⁴ Asmita and other Maoist women imparted this to me during my conversations with them. During the talk, I was forced to understand their agency rather than to interpret what they were telling me with my own lens -- I was made to *listen* to them and understand their perspective and not to muddle their words with my own experience. See Parvati (2003) and other Maoist women's write-ups under the column "Adha Aakash" in *Janadesh*, a Maoist Weekly. If one looks without bias at the pieces published there, one sees women who are participating in the Maoist movement know the challenges and the struggles that they have put themselves in. Although their scribes are full of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist rhetoric and the language they speak is not necessarily understandable to everyone, they *know* their place in society and history and are acting in full consciousness of their subjectivity.

²³⁵ Not many commentators on the Maoist movement talk of women's participation when they are criticizing and analyzing it. Yet, it is precisely the omission of women that hints at their subjective views. In other words, their observations are not unmediated representations of objectivity, but their own subjectivity informs the ways in which they describe the movement. See Shah, "The Himalayan Red Herring" in Hutt (2003). Although Manjushree Thapa's journalistic write-ups address women's issues, she challenges the view that women are involved overwhelmingly in the Maoist movement. In her book *Forget Kathmandu*, she actually implies that there is a "false consciousness" working in women's participation as revolutionaries. Her descriptions of the Maoist women she meets in her journey make them come across as naïve and young women who do not know what they are involved in. She also doubts the number of women involved in the Maoist movement. Especially see the chapter "The Massacres to Come."

Representation in its many forms has been a key strategy for the Maoist Party, from their 40 point demand presented to the government in 1996 to the number of representatives they sent to the renewed House of Representatives in January of 2007. While other political parties have only paid lip service to the “women’s cause,” after the April Jana Andolan, the Maoist Party has shown efforts toward the empowerment of women in a concrete way. In the interim legislature formed in January 2007, the Maoists sent 29 women to fill 83 of the seats allocated to them among the 305 seats in the parliament. In addition, among the 83 Maoist seats, they kept 73 for themselves and recruited ten candidates who did not belong to the Maoist Party but represented various sectors, such as the civil society, military, and social services. Despite the low profile given to senior women in the Maoist Party, its commitment to 40% representation of women in all sectors of governance is commendable. Of course, this gesture has not escaped the critical eyes of those who say it is propaganda politics and yet another ploy to get women’s votes during the real election. Although this criticism may or may not be valid, at the moment, it is only the Maoists who are representing the constituency never given space before by other political parties. In addition, they have covered not only women’s representation but also Dalit and Janajati groups, who have only token representation in other political parties. As one observer writes, “The company of candidates sent by the Maoists into the parliament has shaken the foundation of the old guard ‘representative’ democracy. The Maoists have shattered some elite-centric values that were practiced by ‘democratic’ parties in Nepal as traditions.”²³⁶ However, one

²³⁶ See Pramod Dhakal, “Road to Fair Representation,” NepalNews.com, January 24, 2007. <http://www.nepalnews.com/archive/2007/others/guestcolumn/jan/guest_columns_11.php>

needs to remember that politics is still in play, and the Maoists would not likely become the majority party if there were an election today.

Yet, when the 83 parliamentarians of the Maoist party entered the premises of the Parliament, people were awed at the diversity and the ethnic, cultural, and economic reality they represented. January 15, 2007 was not just a historic day in the lives of these people, most of whom may not have ever imagined it in their lives. The people at large were also amazed to see this transition in Nepali politics. Women, so-called simple villagers, and Dalits had become people's representatives, a right and a privilege seldom bestowed upon them by the ruling classes in their own communities, not to speak of the nation at large. The Maoists' precedent in Nepal of sending 40% women representatives to the parliament is certainly commendable, but how far their politics will go in this regard, only time will tell.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, I have charted an individual woman's social, experiential and ideological journey to becoming a Maoist. Her story leads to the complexities of constituting "Nepali women" as a unitary political category of the oppressed and to the politics of representation of the Maoists and their politicization of the issue of women's representation in various ways. One of the key points discussed here is women's initiation as warriors and fighters by the Maoist party, and how important women's performance is for their representation as qualified to rule and embody power. It is this representation of women as militant figures that interests me most here, given the situation of increasing militarization of nations, civil wars, and the proliferation of

weapons in the so-called “third world” countries, which I will be discussing in more detail in the next chapter.

The Maoist leadership argues that the representation of women in combat uniforms is necessary to project the image of strength and militancy embodied by the women guerillas in the People’s War. The idea is that the projection of women as warriors also helps dispel the myths regarding the female sex as biologically inferior and weak, and so unsuitable for soldiering and battles. Images of women carrying a baby in one arm and a rifle in the other have been widely circulated during liberation movements, as seen in the People’s War, in Vietnam, or in Nicaragua. If the images of women fighters symbolize the mobilization of a whole society, they also encourage more women to join the movement. Aside from the images being circulated, women’s participation is quite real in revolutionary wars. For example, one third of the participants in revolutions in Vietnam and in Nicaragua were women (Goldstein 2003). However, despite women’s great participation in revolutionary movements, their sacrifices are not often recognized and their representation wanes as the war reaches some sort of resolution and peace.²³⁷ In this light, it is important to examine the “absolute war” forwarded by the Maoists as a “just war” and their call to women to pick up arms and embody militancy.

²³⁷Goldstein’s study sheds light on this issue by looking at many revolutionary movements in the world. For historical examples of women’s participation in revolutionary wars and what happens after the war is over to women militants, see Margaret Randall’s *Gathering Rage: The Failure of Twentieth Century Revolutions to Develop and Feminist Agenda*, Sandino’s Daughters Revisited: *Feminism in Nicaragua*, Ilja A. Luciak’s *After the Revolution*, and *We Were Making History* published by Stree Shakti Sangathana.

Chapter Five: Gendered Borders, Changing Boundaries: Materiality of Militancy/Militarism in Nepal

The triumph of imperialism leads to the destruction of culture, sporadically during a modern war, and forever if the period of world wars . . . is allowed to take its course to its logical end.²³⁸
-- Rosa Luxemburg

“This rifle is my jewelry. You hurry along with your housewives; we have to return to our bunkers and carry on our liberation struggle.”²³⁹ Asha Bista, a sub company commander of the Maoist PLA, shouted these words to journalists covering the Maoists’ celebration of the International Day of Women on March 8, 2006. Pointing to her AK-47, Asha elaborated to the journalists: “This is part of our effort to make up 50 percent of the army ranks with women. Our women are capable of using AK-47s and other weapons in the future . . . this is what will allow us to defeat the State’s M-16s. We are *forced* to carry arms like these to liberate women. Nepali women will not be freed by talking nonsense in five-star hotels in Kathmandu.”²⁴⁰ As Asha expresses, her embodiment of militancy and use of a weapon are made necessary by the lip-service that has previously passed as women’s development and women’s empowerment in Nepal.²⁴¹ Her words also reflect the sentiments of many people who are critical of women’s development discourses in Nepal; especially those that happen in the form of seminars, talk programs, and workshops organized in expensive venues in Kathmandu and in other

²³⁸ Cited in Dick Howard (1971, 24), *Selected Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg*.

²³⁹ Originally published in *Himal Khabarpatrika* (14-28 March, 2006). Cited from *The Nepali Times*, No. 290, March 17, 2006.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ We are supposed to understand that Asha is wedded to the revolution and the rifle is her jewelry. Conventionally speaking, jewelry is a significant part of women’s identity and status in many cultures of Nepal. For example, traditionally, one can tell the marital status of a woman by looking at her clothing and jewelry. Unless they are widowed, most women do not easily give up wearing jewelry of some sort, especially if they are married. They would be the target of speculation regarding their character, conduct, and beliefs. Thus, when a woman displaces jewelry for guns, one should understand the implications of her words: Asha warns of a women’s cultural revolution in the making, one that sheds patriarchal notions of women’s identity resting in the normative understanding of marriage, jewelry, and traditional values.

parts of the world.²⁴² As Asha sums up in her last sentence, the Maoist vision of transformation for women in Nepal is different from the one in motion thus far. Asha's distrust of liberal discourses on women's rights and development that take place in urban areas is not just hers; a large number of women at the grassroots level likely feel that way. The implication of class inequality is evident in Asha's utterances, and the idea that class inequality is the root cause of all other oppressions, women's or otherwise. Keeping with the Maoist view of transformation, Asha's response to women's inequality is a class based militant struggle: unless grassroots women embody militancy to fight oppression, their sisters who talk in seminars will not bring much change in their lives. Ironical as it may be, one cannot help but notice the sense of power and self-determination she exudes with the help of the assault weapon she carries.

The Maoist People's War in Nepal has made militancy a viable option for many young women looking for an opportunity to channel their anger and desire to change their situation as well as the situation of other women that they witness every day. Asha's embodiment of militancy and representation of such as power speak to the ways in which the Maoist insurgency has channeled women's agency and incited them to a violent means of taking control over their lives. The "freedom to be," self-determination, and autonomy that the Maoist militancy seems to give women are radically different from the gendered roles the patriarchal society allows women in Nepal. At the same time, it is also important to notice the ways in which armed conflicts have arisen in the aftermath of decolonization after WWII in some parts of the world, and some nations have invested

²⁴² Nowadays it is routine that representatives of the NGOs and international organizations are flown to various parts of the world to attend seminars and conventions. Many people seek jobs in this sector for all the perks, benefits, and foreign capital they provide.

large amounts of wealth in strengthening their military in the name of security.²⁴³ The recruitment of more human bodies for carrying guns, whether the bodies are women or men, stems from both developments: armed conflicts and the growing military complex.

Is the militancy embodied by revolutionaries who fight from the margins the same as the militarism expressed by those in power? The Maoists would certainly make a distinction since they see themselves as fighting against a specific kind of militarism, namely the oppressive militarism of the State. Yet, force and violence are the means both groups use, although one offers itself as the legitimate keeper of social order, while the other attacks the oppressive forces of the social order, which utilize a *hegemonic militarism*. I call it a hegemonic militarism because the state sanctioned militarism is produced as a social necessity to keep order and give security and protection by generating consent from the people, who participate in its functioning. However, there are times when militancy and militarism converge or imitate each other. The borders between the two are liminal and permeable, and there is always the danger of “revolutionary militancy” turning into “hegemonic militarism,” as we have seen happen with many militant (communist) revolutions (in Russia, China, Cambodia, and Zimbabwe, just to name a few). In the instances where militancy captures the central power that militarism operates from, it ceases to be a resistance force applied from the margins. It can easily turn into State militarism and even fascism.

However, as I will explore later, women’s expression of militancy historically and at present cannot just be located within the class struggle of communist revolutions or even in nationalist struggles against imperialism. As Asha articulates, women’s

²⁴³ For example, countries like India, China, the United States, North Korea, and Pakistan, just to name a few, invest enormous resources in their military, even though all of these countries have large numbers of poor people.

expression of militancy in Nepal is necessitated by the normalized state of violence and subordination of the female sex embedded deep in the social fabric. For Asha, only extreme measures may assuage the grave differences, not reformist agendas carried on by liberal urban women whose interests and lives differ from those of women at the grassroots level. Asha's point that only strong measures can undercut the roots of oppression is correct; however, at what cost? Does not violence often beget more violence? What lessons can history and the politics of life, labor, and reproduction teach?

Production of Revolutionary Women: Bio-politics of War?

As Foucault (1978, 141) states in "Right of Death and Power Over Life" from *The History of Sexuality*, in the eighteenth century there emerged a technology of power and discipline over life in the form of "anatomy- and bio-politics," which was then utilized by state institutions and diverse social bodies, including the army, schools, police, administration and the family. According to Foucault, in the Western world, the emergence of the techniques of bio-politics started an era of "bio-power," which maximized the human capacity "to be" and "to do" (1978, 140). But, alongside this immense divulging of power and knowledge came the formation of "techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of population," which eventually made the "development of capitalism" possible (Foucault 1978, 140-141). As bio-politics made indispensable the "investment of the body, its valorization, and distributive management of its forces," it brought the "life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power, into the sphere of political techniques" in the Western world (Foucault 1978, 141-142). Although Foucault acknowledges the immense possibilities and creative forces that bio-power unleashed, he also points to the negative consequences

it brought to the world. “Modern man is an animal whose politics places existence as a living being in question, that is, for the entire human species on this earth” (Foucault 1978, 143). What Foucault states makes sense when one looks at our world of war, violence, and crisis and the capacity that human beings have amassed to annihilate the planet’s life with the weapons we have created and the wars we fight. And we have done so in the name of the survival of not only some individual or sovereign but on “behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. . . The atomic situation is now at the end point of this process: the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual’s continued existence” (Foucault 1978, 137). Foucault’s critique of the Hegelian dialectic of self/other and the colliding of consciousnesses in a life and death battle has defined the modern ontology of life and living: “The principle underlying the tactic of battle -- that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living -- has become the principle that defines the strategy of states” (1978, 137). In other words, the notion of modern humans’ existence is based on persistent war and violence at the ontological level, where risk, war, and death define one’s right to life and to humanity. If we take heed of Foucault’s insights into the workings of bio-power and bio-politics as they have operated in the discourses of war, colonialism, racism, bodies, and sex and sexuality, we need to question the ideologies that have emanated from this very order, which is Western and patriarchal. Will urging women to war and violence as the only viable route to being liberated and human (defined by the norm “man”), or equal to men, be productive in the long run? Most importantly, what do women have to offer from their own material experience in history?

In this vein, I attempt to look at the ways in which bio-politics is operative in the production of “military women” and “revolutionary women” in the global and transnational networks of power, knowledge, and services. Furthermore, is bio-power, which gives rise to the notions of agency, transgression, and transformation, itself hostage to the contradictions of capitalism? It is also necessary to look at the situation of a guerilla woman or an army woman who has very little choice but to enter the military complex under the constraints of economic globalization. Then the question of women’s liberation through armed conflict becomes even more complicated. Is revolution possible under the globalization of the networks of bio-politics? How is revolutionary subjectivity formed, and how is women’s agency utilized for nationalist projects?

Women’s Entrance into the Royal Nepal Army: The Paradox of Opportunity

In the documentary film *The Sari Soldiers*, a young woman who is barely 19 years old tells her story about joining the Royal Nepali Army to take *revenge* for her brother’s death at the Maoists’ hands.²⁴⁴ She uses the word *revenge* to describe her reasons for joining the army and explains that her family, her father especially, has been very supportive of her decision. Her father actually was not only supportive, but was the main person to encourage her to join the newly formed female combat force in the army, the first of its kind in Nepali history. She looks smart, innocent, even coy, and full of life, but also determined in her mission. While the daughter is showing the camera her room with images of her favorite Bollywood film stars on the wall, her mother is sitting on a sofa crying. Tears rolling down her cheeks, the mother says she fears for her

²⁴⁴ The documentary is directed by Julie Bridgham and has been shown to limited audiences in a preliminary form.

daughter's life. She has already lost her only son, and she cannot think of losing her only daughter to this war.

The Maoists have time and again argued that women's militancy in Nepal is a historical necessity and the only way to transform women's debilitating situation. The Maoist Army (PLA) states that women make up 40% of its ranks, with the goal of reaching 50% in the future. United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) statistics on Maoist soldiers from March 2007 put their numbers at 30,872, registered by the Maoist Party in mid-February of 2007.²⁴⁵ If women make 40% of the combatants, there should be at least 12,348 women combatants in the PLA, which is an astounding figure in itself in a place where most people would have never seen a gun except for in movies. However, to judge by figures provided by journalists in their camp visits, the women guerilla fighters in the PLA cannot be as many as claimed by the Maoist party.²⁴⁶ While the Maoists were very vocal about women's necessary participation in the combat zone, in 2003, the Royal Nepal Army (RNA),²⁴⁷ now called the Nepal Army, also opened its doors to women in combat positions. Earlier, their participation in the RNA was relegated to administration, civil service, and technical areas.²⁴⁸ When the RNA announced female recruitment for just above a hundred combat positions, 1,375

²⁴⁵ <<http://www.nepalnews.com.np>>

²⁴⁶ It is difficult to speculate on the real number of women guerillas. As the PLA used to move from place to place before the registration, people outside the Maoist party could only rely on what they were told. But many of the now registered soldiers might actually be militia members rather than guerilla fighters. One recent report after the combatants were registered in February of 2007 stated that there were 450 females in a camp of 1,500 combatants. There are other reports that also put women at slightly lower numbers. These numbers seem more or less consistent. The figure here is taken from the report "Malnutrition afflicts female combatants" by Amrita Anmol, *The Kathmandu Post*, May 14, 2007.

²⁴⁷ I will be using "Royal Nepal Army" (RNA) as a historical term whenever I am referring to events prior to when it became the Nepal Army in June of 2007.

²⁴⁸ According to the Nepal Army (NA) website, the "Nepal Army aims to maintain 5% female work force of the total strength of the army" (<http://www.nepalarmy.mil.np/>). The official website of the NA also states that women have been working as soldiers in the NA for more than 40 years, and the first female recruits were nurses in 1961. Since then, women have been working as nurses, clerks, doctors, engineers, lawyers, parachute jumpers, and military police. However, as the website says, women are less than 5% of the army of about 90,000.

applications flowed in.²⁴⁹ This was telling given that the RNA and the Maoists were fighting a deadly and ongoing war. The women applying for the positions could have ended up fighting against other women. Still, some women's rights activists hailed the RNA's decision to open the door to women in the "national army," and they called it a way forward for Nepali women's empowerment. The chairperson of the National Women's Commission said, "The decision will smash the traditional thinking that women are fit only for household chores."²⁵⁰ Many nongovernmental organizations working on women's rights also welcomed this development as an empowering process for women in Nepal. At a time when people were displaced from their homes, had no jobs, and were leaving the country in large numbers each day in search of jobs elsewhere, it must have been a respite for some women to get jobs inside their own country, especially in the Royal Nepal Army's special program.

In both instances of women's recruitment into combat forces, the politics of representation play a role in persuading them to join. Both parties try to be the champion of gender equality by speaking for women and including them as representatives. Ironically, the RNA, which was breaking basic human rights laws, was apparently opening up space for women through their right to bear arms within the military, something previously proscribed. The key question here is, how is the "militarist ideology" mobilized by both antagonists, and to what end? In what kind of geo-political and bio-political economy and "social order" are "military women" constituted or produced? Can this ideology of "military prowess" translate into liberation and transformation for the oppressed, including women, in the contemporary world of armed conflicts and militarization? What forms of "gendered agencies" (such as Dalit, women,

²⁴⁹ See Sanjaya Dhakal, "Activists Hail Nepal's Landmark Move to Recruit Women in Army." <www.oneworld.net.>

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

or indigenous nationalities) are mobilized in the New World Order of armed conflict? In addition, women's participation in the old State-military complex cannot be taken as a free choice that is devoid of racial, cultural, gender, and class politics in Nepal or in other parts of the world. In countries where military service is voluntary, like in the United States and Nepal, the military draws its lower level recruits mostly from economically underprivileged communities as these people find hope of upward mobility.²⁵¹

It is important to look at the intricacies and complexities involved in the local politics of representation of women and the global politics of democratization and re-territorialization of space, and to explore the gendered, classed and raced technologies and politics at work in the production of a "military woman" in discrepant locations. Although the combat work that women do in the revolutionary army and the traditional army may seem similar, looked at from these multiple perspectives, we will find different shades in the politics of militancy and militarization of women in Nepal.

One needs to remember that the call to arms to women in Nepal by the Maoists as well as the Royal Nepal Army is based on the liberal "equality principle" of gender. Yet this "equality" also pits women against each other as class enemies or ideological enemies, as is evident in the case of women joining the army to take revenge against their family members' killers. In addition, most women who join the military or even the

²⁵¹ Nepali social and sexual morality discouraged women from the higher castes or class to join the army or the police except in rare cases. Now that the Maoists have opened up a new tradition of having women in powerful positions in the military, and the Nepal Army is recruiting women, perhaps the old notions will change. Yet, it remains a fact that mostly women and men from economically disadvantaged groups and minorities or new immigrants join the military for the benefits of education, citizenship, and other perks that they would not be eligible for otherwise. Likewise, in the United States, many who join the army come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. A disproportionate number are Black, and a growing number are Hispanic. According to Goldstein (2003) "Currently, 45 percent of the US military women are women of color, a greater proportion than in the population at large" (87). In the year 2000, Blacks made up 22.4% of enlisted soldiers (but only 8.6% of officers) when they were 12% of the civilian population. The percentage of Hispanics in the United States military more than doubled from 4% in 1972 to 9% in 2000. Source: Aline Quester and Curtis Gilroy, *Women and Minorities in America's Volunteer Military*. Available online at http://www.dtic.mil/dacowits/research/Women_Minorities_in_Amer_Vol_Military.pdf

police force traditionally enter low-level service positions and come from the economic underclass or belong to ethnic groups more than upper caste groups.²⁵² In Nepal, this is largely the case with men too who join the military and the police force at the lower level. Usually, the officer level authorities come from the educated middle class. The many police and army personnel who were killed during the People's War in Nepal belonged in great part to the same classes and ethnic backgrounds as the Maoist fighters at the lower level.²⁵³

Despite women's empowerment at the local and economic level, the mainstream military institutions on a macro level pit women against other women, the poor against the poor, and the disadvantaged against the disadvantaged. The militarization of women through the traditional military complex positions women in a relationship of antagonism against each other and at the service of patriarchy and a narrow sense of nationalism. Such a scenario has unfolded in many places in history. For example, in ethnic conflicts like in the former Yugoslav region or in Rwanda in Africa, or in Sri Lanka in Asia, militarization has pitted women against women (Lorentzen and Turpin, eds. 1998).

Enloe (1988, 219) states, "So long as the social order is working as it should in a patriarchy, and so long as military doctrine, technology and recruitment are compatible with that social order, the military does not have to spread its tentacles too deeply into the rest of society." It was not until the Maoists disrupted the social order by recruiting

²⁵² Of course, there are exceptions at the professional level, where a few middle and upper class women whose family tradition is to join the army have also joined as officers. There are at least two women generals in the Nepali army who rose to that rank only in the last few years, but they belong to the medical and engineering wings.

²⁵³ Most of those killed on the Maoist side have been Janajati people like the Magars. The HRV data provided by INSEC reports that there were 1,348 policemen killed by the Maoists and 16 that were killed by the State. In terms of the army, 23 were killed by the State and 666 were killed by the Maoists. There is another category called "security personnel," which was invented for security purposes during the conflict. 136 security personnel were killed by the Maoists and three by the State. Source: <www.inseconline.org>

women fighters and challenging the State that the Royal Nepal Army thought of taking in women for combat. By arming some women, the military was shielding itself from criticism of gender inequality. Likewise, as the army in Nepal was loyal to the palace, it could also have been a ploy of the palace to present itself as more liberal toward women. Interestingly, the Royal Government did a few things in women's interests, like passing a bill for reproductive rights, making abortion legal, and removing the restriction on women travelling to Gulf countries for work. However, as Enloe expresses, the fear of crisis in the social order may have instigated these developments. The patriarchal nationalist agenda was mobilized to control the social disorder and chaos, which had the support of a large number of women, mainly those in the PLA. Therefore, it is critical to discuss the involvement of women as soldiers in revolutionary wars and in nationalist propaganda, where a different kind of militancy or militarism is advocated.

Women's Relationship to Nationalism and Militancy:

Feminist scholars on women's relationship to nationalism and the State have argued that women's participation in nation building is not devoid of gendered politicization of women's bodies and their labor power intertwined with historical experiences of colonialism and imperialism.²⁵⁴ The mythical and culturally situated gendered notions about the female body and women's labor play out in modern constructions of nation and home even more profoundly if not always visibly. Echoing Benedict Anderson, Kandiyoti (1991, 382) writes:

Nationalism describes its object using either the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, *patria*) or home (*heimat*), in order to denote something to which one is 'naturally' tied. Nationness is thus equated with gender, parentage, skin-colour -- all those things that are not chosen and which, by virtue of their inevitability,

²⁵⁴ See Jayawardena (1986), Uval-Davis and Floya Anthias (1989), Kandiyoti (1991), and Narayan (1997) in particular.

elicit selfless attachment and sacrifice. The association of women with the private domain reinforces the merging of the nation/community with the selfless mother/devout wife; the obvious response of coming to her defense and even dying for her is automatically triggered.

Although nationalisms are not devoid of internal contradictions, the nationalism that is constructed in opposition to colonialism and imperialism has pitted women against their own individual desires and their freedom on behalf of the so-called greater good of the family, community, or nation-state.²⁵⁵ Women's militancy during these revolutionary movements is seen through the prism of nationalism rather than women's desire to politicize their issues. The nationalist discourse usually overshadows their issues, and women become its tools. Likewise, when women opt for radicalism, the nationalists see women's militancy as intervention from the outside and their issues as irrelevant to the needs and health of the nation-state. In her study of women's participation in the political and nationalist struggles of many East and South Asian countries in the 19th and the 20th centuries, the South Asian feminist Kumari Jayawardena has shown otherwise. She states that feminist consciousness in Asia emerged in the process of women's struggle against feudalism, colonialism, and imperialism (Jayawardena 1986, 1-24). Instead of being imitations of Western feminist movements (which the nationalists often assert), "third world" feminisms grew in the process of knowledge sharing and activism during revolutionary movements. Whether it is against colonialism, feudalism, or ethnic oppression, women's involvement in revolutionary movements in many countries historically (France, Russia, China, Vietnam) and currently (Sri Lanka, India, Israel,

²⁵⁵ Uma Narayan's analysis of Indian nationalism against British colonialism in *Dislocating Cultures* and Sikata Banerjee (2005), *Make me Man! Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India*, provides important insights into the situation of Indian women in the nationalist movement in India.

Palestine) has been very significant. As Jayawardena (1986, 23) notes, women workers have been at the forefront of militant movements:

The 1918 Rice Riots in Japan were triggered off when women port workers refused to load rice and were joined by other workers; this led to a long struggle and a political crisis. In China in 1922, many thousands of workers in 70 Shanghai silk factories went on strike, calling for increased wages and a ten-hour working day; this was the first important strike by Chinese women workers. In India and Sri Lanka, in the years after World War I women workers were active participants in militant industrial agitation and strikes. To give only one example from the region, the most militant activists of the Ceylon Labour Union which led the strikes in Sri Lanka in the 1920s were women factory workers in Colombo; they used to dress in red, were the most vociferous of the strikers and picketers, and formed a bodyguard for male trade union leaders during demonstrations. In Iran, Egypt, and Turkey, women were to join with men in the formation of left-wing political groups and trade unions, in spite of repression and adverse conditions for mobilizing the people.

Despite the documentation of women's sacrifice and struggle during revolutions and times of change, the public memory and history largely neglect them.²⁵⁶ While history has shown that women can fight as combatants (Goldman 1982), women as militants as well as logistical actors are indispensable in revolutionary wars (Fanon 1965, Randall 1981, Kannabiran et al. 1989, Lorentzen and Turpin 1998, Luciak 2001, Kampwirth 2002). However, despite women's contributions as militants in oppositional struggles throughout history, after there is apparent control of the situation and a sense of normalcy in the social order, women's goals always are lost. Most of the women are pushed back into the "private sphere," something ironic since, unlike the "private-

²⁵⁶In South Asia, one such instance of a women's uprising was in the Princely State of Hyderabad in India during the 1940s. The Telangana people rose up against the feudalism of the Nizam (the prince) as well as the British, who directly and indirectly supported hierarchy during their rule over India. *We Were Making History* (Stree Shakti Sanghatana, publisher) documents the narratives of women who participated in the struggle as militants and supporters. Communists in Andhra Pradesh and northeastern India include a large number of women as supporters and guerilla fighters. Women militants are equally active in the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist movement. For historical examples of women's participation in revolutionary wars and what happens after the war is over to women militants, see Margaret Randall, *Gathering Rage: The Failure of Twentieth Century Revolutions to Develop and Feminist Agenda, Sandino's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua*.

domestic” designated as women’s space, the “private-corporate” male spaces rule the economic world and influence the public and political. The volatile gender roles and the blurred public/private spaces during war times once again congeal in a differentiated, dualist, and hierarchical way in the aftermath of war. Why?

Some researchers (Luciak 2001) on revolutionary movements argue that the inability to prepare women as leaders during the struggle and war poses problems later during the reconstruction phase. In retrospect, women seem to be used more or less as an indispensable but expendable labor force. While militants are made out of women, their militancy in the struggles and revolutionary wars fades as the leadership is almost always in the hands of the males.²⁵⁷ Looking at the research on revolutionary war and the ways in which women have been involved in the People’s War in Nepal, women are used in multiple ways. Most of the female labor force is utilized as already operative in their communities: women feed, cook, hide people, collect information, create propaganda, train revolutionaries and mobilize other women while remaining in the domestic space.

To come to the main point, there is virtually no war, either traditional or revolutionary, which women have not been a part of despite war being seen and talked about as a “manly matter.” Yet, has war ever brought power, glory, fame, or riches to women themselves, besides those associated with powerful men? There are only a few mythical stories of women’s bravery, but they also contribute to the nationalist history that serves patriarchy. This raises the question of why and how women are mobilized

²⁵⁷ Ilja A. Luciak (2001) in her study of resistance movements in the three countries observes that “The revolutionary Left has been more receptive than other political forces in heeding women’s call for justice” (xix). Yet, she also points out through her research that, despite the revolutionary Left’s liberal views towards women’s empowerment in general, they have been slow in understanding the importance of “gender mainstreaming.” In other words, the revolutionary Left has been loath to democratize its political organizations with sensitivity toward gender, something new Left revolutions, like in Nepal, seem to be paying attention to. Much remains to be seen in the future. So far, revolutionary struggles have not been able to effect much change in women’s leadership alongside men.

and produced as militants during wars but consequently vanish once the war is over, as if women are the “reserve army of labor.”²⁵⁸ Perhaps it is because the logical consequence of every militant movement is ultimately militarism, and women are not seen as fit to control from the center, whence militarism operates.

In the modern world, a member of the military is commonly understood as a soldier or warrior who fights for the citizens of a nation-state and guards its territorial boundaries. Historically, the formation of military institutions can be seen as tied to the notion of citizenship and a creation of civic virtue in men with the duty to protect and defend their motherland or fatherland, but later on this concept expanded to the projects of imperialism, colonialism, and conquest (Elshtain 1987).²⁵⁹ Linked to the concept of protection and defence are the gendered notions of masculinity and manliness, required traits for military work that supposedly cannot be inculcated in all *races* or appropriately embodied by all.²⁶⁰ Those who did not have such masculine and martial “traits” could not belong to the masculine or martial races, something interesting to look at from a social constructionist view of gender and race. Notions about race and ethnicity played a key role in the construction of gendered identities about masculinity in colonial spaces and also in the construction of military power that the imperial forces made out of the

²⁵⁸ “Reserve Army of Labor” is a term used by Karl Marx that “describes the pool of unemployed and partially employed workers in capitalist societies. According to Marx, as capital grows, so does the demand for labor: However, as production is mechanized, the demand for labor is reduced. The resulting surplus labor pool prevents workers from negotiating their wages and working conditions when labor demands increase. Marxist feminists have applied this theory to women by arguing that women constitute a flexible labor reserve that can be utilized by capital in times of growth when their labor is required and then sent home during lean times. Married women, especially as part-time workers, can be exploited in this way, since they have household duties to return to during economic recessions” (*Encyclopedia of Feminist Theory*, 426)

²⁵⁹ See Jean Bethke Elshtain’s *Women and War*, especially the section on “Armed Civic Virtue” for the discursive side of making a warrior or a soldier.

²⁶⁰ See Connell (1987), Enloe (1983), Elshtain (1987). For example, the British colonialists used their notions of masculinity to map the different races of India, creating a continuum of the most masculine to the least, where some races failed to exhibit “men” and were called “effeminate.” The British picked their army from what they considered the most masculine races in India and barred others from serving in the army, a practice that still influences today’s Indian army. See Mrinalini Sinha’s *Colonial Masculinity: the ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in Late Nineteenth Century India* (1995).

native people, creating division among the native people themselves. Sex difference alone was not enough to perform “imperial” masculinity, but race was a deciding factor in how much masculinity was embodied and exhibited by a man. In this scenario, one can easily imagine the place held by women in the military institutions in history. Women, who are considered the “inferior sex,” would “naturally” be excluded for not having enough of what it takes to protect and defend.

Unlike militarism, which is often related to a history of imperialism and conquest, militancy is often related to revolutionary struggles of the proletariat and to the nationalist struggle against imperialism, though many countries also use militarism to forward a patriotic nationalist agenda.²⁶¹ Yet, there are some distinctions between the two despite their close relationship with war and masculinity.²⁶² The militants are forces that are ideologically prepared as soldiers, even if not trained in warfare tactics, while the army idealizes a gendered masculinity that is historically reserved for and inculcated in the male sex. Women are encouraged to be feminine and shun violence or anything remotely akin to being masculine or male, as if the two are synonymous. Where women are allowed and used by the traditional military forces, they often endure the pressure of being feminine or are expected to behave as “women” would. In other words, “Militaries

²⁶¹ Rosa Luxemburg, the champion of socialist democracy in Germany, in her essay “Militia and Militarism” makes a distinction between militarism and militancy. She likens “militarism” to the contemporary military-industrial complex as it increases the profits and the power of the capitalist classes and produces a structure of “social enslavement” for the working classes (142). Militancy, on the other hand, is something that the militia embodies in the course of a “political struggle.” In other words, the militia in the “people’s army” is a subject created to overturn the structure produced by “militarism,” in which “the power and domination of both the capitalist state and the bourgeois class are crystallized” (147).

²⁶² Of course, there are real differences between the ideologies of militarism advocated by the military industrial complex and militancy as a political and ideological model imagined by revolutionaries. In military institutions there are no individuals -- they are different parts of the body, making the military function. However, evolutionary militancy in its crudest form need not be a gendered phenomenon; anyone, male or female, can be a militant, and one does not always need to show loyalty to a mass organization or an institution. Unlike the military soldier, who answers to a bigger network of law and order, a militant, like a terrorist guerrilla, may not always answer to anyone except himself or herself or his/her organization. The latter is not necessarily loyal to the nation-state he/she lives in, while the former must show loyalty to the nation-state.

need women -- but they need women to behave *as the gender 'women'*” (Enloe 1983, 212). At the same time, military “training depends on the denigration of anything that could be considered feminine; to act like a soldier is not be ‘womanly’” (Tickner 2001, 57). As Ann Tickner explicates, “The valorization of war through its identification with a heroic kind of masculinity depends on the feminized, devalued notion of peace seen as unattainable and unrealistic” (2001, 49). The dichotomy of masculinity and femininity produces dichotomic values where peace is not compatible with heroism, patriotism, masculinity or militarism. The point is militarism relies on a specific forms of masculinity based on a male/female dichotomy of gender relations.

The militancy embodied by women in the PLA cannot be looked at outside the historical notions and gendered mediations between militancy and militarism. In Nepal’s case, women may face their common fate in terms of leadership roles once the crisis is more or less under control. The way in which the leadership has handled matters since Jana Andolan II suggests this. Women’s representation at the key peace talks was nil despite the Maoists’ commitment to having 40% women in their militia and the PLA.²⁶³ Although Maoists see that their militancy is different from the “old State” militarism, they have yet to realize their militaristic tendency toward women within their own party. It is yet to be seen whether the Maoist vision of militancy is different from the State militarism they have been vocal about dismantling. The “call to arms” to women by the Maoists and the Nepal Army needs to be studied within the historical light of opportunistic exploitation of women in war and their subsequent marginalization from political representation.

²⁶³ Yet, in January of 2007, when the Maoists entered mainstream politics, 40% of their representatives to the Parliament were women, and one minister of the Maoists’ six in the interim cabinet is a woman. Thus, it is still too early to make definite predictions about the situation of women as the crisis is still very volatile and the political process is still evolving.

Growth of Ideology of Militarism: Maoist Views

The Maoists argue that “war is merely a continuation of politics” or “policy by other means,” as Clausewitz phrased it.²⁶⁴ There are contradictory views about what Clausewitz meant, and people have often used these expressions out of context or with a meaning he might not have approved of²⁶⁵ (Bassford 1994). However, the Maoists’ use of the sentiment is fairly simple: the People’s War they started is a political war, an “absolute war” (another Clausewitzian term) to topple the old structure of society through a crisis. This means that the militancy and militarization that the Maoists have embodied does not in fact counter the already existing structure of violence, but follows the logic of “iron cuts iron,” albeit in a different manner, by turning war into “politics by other means.” When the Maoists talk of their use of violence, they claim it is “politics” or revolutionary militancy, not violence or militarism.

Until the People’s Liberation Army started to recruit women, female combatants were not a familiar thing to the Nepalese, except for in the mythological and religious stories of warrior goddesses bearing arms. Since the Maoists started the practice, the Royal Nepal Army also opened a women’s battalion, preparing women for combat activities previously excluded for them. Now the British Army has announced its desire to have Nepali women join the British brigade of the Gurkhas from Nepal, which was

²⁶⁴ Baburam Bhattarai, the second in command of the Maoist Party, often uses these Clausewitzian sayings in his write-ups and speeches to justify the People’s War. Carl Von Clausewitz (1780-1831) was a Prussian soldier and an intellectual who fought against the armies of Revolutionary France. He wrote a book called *On War* (1832), which many take as the most influential book on military philosophy, warfare strategies, and politics in war. For more, see Christopher Bassford *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America 1815-1945* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²⁶⁵ Yet, as Jean Bethke Elshtain (1987) notes, although “the Clausewitzian dictum” was that the “Political ends must be dominant over military means . . . In the discourse of Clausewitz, we enter the world of war as politics, politics as war that helped to feed the most bellicist of all centuries, the nineteenth” (77). Although I am not sure the nineteenth century was the “most bellicist” of all, what Elshtain points out about the effect of Clausewitz’s theory of war on the idealists and revolutionaries alike of the 19th century is worth pondering. The Clausewitzian discourse on war influenced Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao.

open only to men from specific castes and ethnic communities.²⁶⁶ The Maoists have time and again voiced their discontent over the recruitment of Nepali men into foreign armies, mainly the Indian army and the British, stating that the migration of the young labor power means an obstruction to the development of national capitalism in Nepal.

Baburam Bhattarai (2003b, 128), the key ideologue of the Maoist party, argues that the underdevelopment of Nepal is responsible not only for the semi-feudal Nepali state, but also for expansionist Indian politics, which has followed in the footsteps of the imperialist and colonial forces who ruled them:

Another form of exploitation and oppression by Indian expansionism is the recruitment of innocent, diligent, and militant young men of the hills of Nepal into the Indian army, perpetuating a long ‘tradition’ of British colonialism and imperialism, and ensuring the continuing reproduction of Nepal’s semi-feudal agricultural economy. This ‘foreign’ exploitation of cheap Nepali labour through temporary and ‘relay’ migration (i.e. the son following the father’s footsteps), which started immediately after the Sugauli Treaty, has had a disastrous effect on the historical development of the industrial proletariat and of indigenous capitalism in Nepal. Finally, the common market and the open border maintained by the treaty of 1923 and the ‘peace and friendship treaty’ of 1950 has made Nepal’s financial and monetary system totally dependent on the Indian financial and monetary system, and this has had adverse effects on the development of national capital and industrialization in Nepal.

In the 40-point demands to the government put forward by the Maoists, under the stipulation related to nationalism, one demand was in regard to foreign recruitment of young Nepali men: “Gorkha recruiting centers should be closed and decent jobs should be arranged for the would-be recruits” (Karki and Seddon 2003, 184). Yet, as the Maoists started their own drive by recruiting the young and even minors into their own army and militia, the militarization of youth in Nepal only escalated. Although the

²⁶⁶ This news first came out in November of 2006. See “Advance of the girl Gurkhas” in The Sunday Times – Times Online. <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2089-2471864,00.html>> Confirmation of the news was publicized on March 8, 2007 on International Women’s Day through several news channels, including the BBC. See “Women Allowed Joining British Gurkhas” (March, 9, 2009) in <www.Nepalnews.com>

Maoists may have diverted some young men who would have otherwise joined the Indian or the British army into their own force, the crisis has only exacerbated the situation of militarization in one form or another. While the Maoists at times forcibly recruited young people into the PLA, ex-Gurkha soldiers have left Nepal to work in different capacities in other conflict-ridden places. Many retired Gurkha soldiers have taken work in different parts of the world through global mercenary companies that seek people who are not afraid to work in war zones or are compelled to take jobs for economic reasons.²⁶⁷ Despite the Maoists' distaste for the mercenary soldiering of Nepali men, with very limited employment opportunities in Nepal, Nepali young men themselves see the British Army as an opportunity to make something out of their lives. Young men covet a job in the British army and prepare themselves for several years. There is fierce competition among ex-Gurkha families to recruit their own members during recruitment drives.²⁶⁸ The family legacy of being in the British army continues.

Comrade Prachanda, the Chairman of the Communist Party(Maoist) and supreme leader of the People's War, says, "The Party has been striving to develop the people's army according to the universal principles of Marx-Lenin-Mao: 'Without a People's Army, the people have nothing' -- 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,' and the 'armed sea of masses' which are requirements for the revolution" (Karki and Seddon, 2003, 263). Echoing the words of Mao, Prachanda here also states that the war they are fighting is indeed a "politics by other means," and the creation of the People's Army is a

²⁶⁷ I write of the plight of mercenary soldiers in more detail in another chapter. In April of 2007, four Nepali men working as security guards for the UN were killed in Kandahar Province in Afghanistan, and some of these were retired army personnels. See "Wife distraught at Kandahar Death" (April 19, 2007) in Kantipuronline.com.

²⁶⁸ There are training institutes where young men pay a good sum of money to prepare for the recruitment competition, which involves a show of different martial skills. It is also rumored that sometimes bribes are involved in the selection process. This is based on my conversation with a woman friend who ran one such training institute herself in Pokhara, Nepal.

necessity if this politics is to become reality. Although communist doctrines emphasize the power of the masses and collectivity, communists transform the individual through ideological struggle. The individual's gendered experiences and corporeality are not of importance. The individual militancy the martyrs exhibit becomes exemplary to enact and instill revolutionary agency into others and incite more people to ideological war, which usually means physical violence as well. Women as individuals are called to take up arms, for the Hegelian politics of recognition and existence state that "...it is solely by risking life [in a life and death struggle] that freedom is obtained" (Hegel 1967, 233). This Hegelian notion of "mortal combat" does not recognize the corporeal risk that females take by giving birth and reproducing, which Simone de Beauvoir pointed out half a century ago: "For it is not in giving life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal; that is why the superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth life but that which kills" (De Beauvoir 1974, 72). Here, the militarist ideology is clearly at the root of subject constitution, wherein the female corporeal risk as reproducers of life is made insignificant, if not entirely written off or annihilates. Many male philosophers give it a place by marking it as a low-level production process happening at the level of the animal body in opposition to the primary consciousness or reason bestowed upon Man. As feminist philosophers like Irigaray have noted, this "enlightened" way to measure humanness effaces the feminine and female corporeality at the level of anatomy based on physical difference, which ultimately renders the female sex an "inferior copy" of the original, which is Man, made in the image of God *himself* (Irigaray 1985, 13-129). There is violence in the very construction of the patriarchal conception of the feminine and the female. As Elizabeth Grosz (2003, 137) points out in

her reading of Derrida, the latter argues that the “structure of violence is itself marked by the very structure of the trace or writing.” For Derrida, the arche-writing is a violent constituting force behind the origin of law, right, reason and the production of knowledge. As she further explicates, “This violence is the containment and ordering of the thing to give up its thingness and to submit itself to the leveling of representation, a mythical and impossible leveling that assumes a self-identity the thing itself never possessed” (Grosz 2003, 137). With these insights from Grosz, Derrida, and, above all, Irigaray, it seems that the construction of woman as an incomplete copy of Man, the original being, was the primordial moment of violence achieved through representation. Following this were other iterations, reparations, and inscriptions of violence onto the female, feminine, women and the other. As Grosz (2003, 137) explains, “Primordial inscription, the ontological equivocation of *difference*, is the rendering of an originary self-presence as impossible: it is the ‘production’ of presence through the structure of the trace, the binding up the real in writing or marking.” As Grosz’s critique explicates, under the Hegelian conception of being, women cannot be; their self-presence is impossible unless they follow the path of “mortal combat.”

Why must women seek mortal combat? Is it for recognition as humans or in order to transcend, liberate, or change their social condition? Are they mutually constitutive? Although masking equality in logic, the laws of “mortal combat” for seeking equality and recognition have an ontology of violence embedded in them. Should women follow that path? Here the competing selves collide to kill the other, to be the Self, the chosen one, not to work in mutual cooperation with others or be equal in difference. Likewise, although Marxists and their like have criticized the Hegelian master/slave paradigm, this

tendency remains in illustrations, critiques, and developments of revolutionary philosophies and practices, from Marx to Mao and even Fanon. As such, we have lost, as Irigaray would argue, the architecture, the voice, the materiality of the female self and the feminine in the politics of representation and of becoming. The process of becoming equal as different is thwarted by the dominant masculine economy, under which patriarchal rules of laws symbolically govern the process of production (Irigaray 1985).

It is indeed difficult, if not impossible, to assess women's agency and empowerment in the embodiment of militancy under the law of the father, imperial and local. Thus, despite women's empowerment in revolutionary wars as guerilla soldiers, as the history shows, the effect seems only temporary. Likewise, in the Maoist "People's War," the notion of "combat" played a central role in transforming so-called "weak females" into masculine, brave "soldiers" for nation building or social transformation. Women are told that if they do not want to struggle hard enough physically and shy away from combat, they will not receive their liberation. The message is to sacrifice the so called "feminine self" first in the "class war" in order to eliminate class inequality, and only later gender inequality. In fact, they are told that gender inequality will just vanish once the class differences are eliminated. Women are told that they are weak and scared: "Women seem to want protection . . . they seem to hold a *pichhalaggu manashikata* (mentality of a follower, not a leader). We need to struggle *physically* to have power." A female Maoist commissar, Asmita, uttered this while talking about women's situation in Nepal. In many respects, Asmita's assessment may seem right, especially when applied to middle class women's situation. But to state that women are behind men because they do not risk enough like men does not explain the structure of unequal gender relations

that is already in place, the structure of violence that representation is embedded in from the beginning. What about the historical oppression of women, which has helped to inculcate their “follower mentality”? What are the forces -- economic, cultural, ideological, and geo-political -- that create “constrained spaces” for women to express themselves and embody power? Is agency only in the embodiment of militancy, militaristic violence, and risk-taking?

As Cynthia Enloe (1983, 16-17) explicates, wishing women to have equality through “access to power and privilege that flow from weapons industry jobs and combat experience” might seem logical at first when one sees women being degraded and marginalized by the military complex as the “followers”. “Yet such well-meaning efforts may only reinforce the military as an institution and militarism as an ideology” necessary to preserve the social order (Enloe 1983, 16-17). The extension of the boundary that has operated as the privilege of the gender “man” thus far may seem like a benevolent *gift* at first, but it might be that the boundary space is controlled and constructed in such a way that whoever enters that space does so to the benefit of the military complex and its ideology. In times of economic global restructuring, this *gift* of equality needs to be examined even further as the rhetoric of equality held out to women by giving them weapons will not effect positive and long lasting change in their society. Instead, it will only contribute to the cycle of violence already in place.

It needs to be understood that women’s entrance into the already defective institution may not change women’s lives for better. It, of course, may change some women’s economic situations and even make them feel empowered in some contexts and places, but it may not change the system and masculine domination within it. A case in

point is the way in which American female soldiers contributed to the dehumanizing torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib in Iraq.²⁶⁹ My argument is not that militant subjectivity should be killed in women or that women should all be passive beings without passion or determination. Women are not born pacifists. There is no biological, nor historical proof to substantiate women's pacifism, though some psychoanalytic feminists have tried to give a social constructionist argument for women's nurturing and peaceful qualities as related to reproduction and the socialization of children (Chodorow 1978, Gilligan 1982). Anti-war feminists see war as an evil and any appropriation of militarism by women as a wrong-headed and naïve endeavour that is not in the nature of peaceful females. On the other hand, social constructionists have challenged these views about women as essentialist myths about women and the feminine. However, critical feminist perspectives on the issue of militarization make more sense while looking at the ever expanding militarization of people -- men and women -- and places (Chenoy 1998; D'Amico 1998; Kaufman-Osborn 2005). While feminist views are diverse in their analysis of women who take the path of militancy or militarism, my concern here is to see how militancy gets subsumed and co-opted by the hegemonic in times of increasing militarization of nations. In this instance, one may want to question and analyze not only women's entrance into the traditional military but also militancy of the revolutionary kind in light of the symptoms of our times or the mode of production within neo-liberal globalization. There is a tendency to co-opt every space of agency for the production of value or capital.

²⁶⁹ See Seymour Hersh, "Annals of National Security: Torture at Abu Ghraib" in *The New Yorker* (May 10, 2004). The dehumanizing torture of the prisoners at Abu Ghraib occurred under the stewardship of Janis Karpinski, who was the only female commander in the war zone in Iraq. At least three army women were involved in the torture of the prisoners.

Gender and Power: Masculinity, Femininity, and Something Else?

Seldom in history and in very few places, like Israel and some Scandinavian countries, have women been accepted as regular soldiers and recruited in a national army. Yet stories of “women warriors” (Davis-Kimball 2002) are prevalent in most nations and cultures, and women have fought in wars and battles for nations and nationalism. Their participation in revolutionary wars is especially great and is something to think about. Scholarly studies have shown that women’s performance of militancy and militarism in revolutionary wars and wars of liberation is significant (Chinese Revolution, Vietnam War, Shining Path). In the aftermath of revolutionary wars, women also vanish from places of representation and power as they get hustled back into the domestic spaces (Stree Shakti Sangathana 1989).

As research in recent decades has shown, taking women’s experience of war to look at things considered mundane or trivial will unfold the intricacies of how power flows within the construction of gender, ethnicity, and nationalism. In her book *The Curious Feminist*, Cynthia Enloe explores the dynamics of masculinity and femininity and their relationship to nationalism, ethnicity, and war. Taking the example of rape during the Bosnian war, Enloe argues that the dynamics of gender and nationalism are embedded in the politics of masculinity and femininity and the further reproduction of them. During war times, we often see that the female body bears the physical mark of war in ways that the male body does not (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). A female body becomes a vessel, an object to mark the power flows of politics, national and ethnic identity, and the exhibition of such through corporal violence.

Thus, as Enloe argues, there is something more at work than the dichotomy of victim/oppressor or combatant/enemy in war. For Enloe, patriarchy preserves the social construction of gender through the mobilization of masculinity and femininity in the

battlefield as it does in other places. Agreeing with Enloe, I would add that while patriarchy is operative in the production of gendered violence specific to women, in many places women themselves are complicit in the violence that patriarchy administers upon other vulnerable men and women. It is important to recognize the complicity of women who inhabit the “first world” geo-political axis in the production of violence even as we recognize that they are not directly involved or may not even approve of such modes of production that benefit them indirectly.

Although in crisis and war times the processes of the social construction of gender are halted or disrupted, gender is operational at all times. In fact, gender is a key organizing factor during crisis and war, despite its volatility. It is precisely so because during crisis, general networks of production are disrupted to produce new, competing networks. Especially in conflict, as people live in heightened uncertainty and chaos, they are ready to accept anything that brings respite to their immediate conditions. The economic influences over the social construction of gender cannot be undermined even during times of crisis. Capitalism is at work during war times even more aggressively as the weapons industry spews out bombs, fighter planes, and guns, making billions of dollars. Wars and conflicts are money making opportunities for some -- the weapons industries, prison complexes, and private corporations that mediate wars -- while for others it is a time of annihilation, violence etched on their minds and bodies, and long term after effects (Nordstrom 2004). The economic ramifications for those affected by war last a long time. Wars create generations of stagnation and loss of hope. People resort to the methods of organization they are familiar with, which means change is hard to come by when the focus is on establishing a sense of normalcy. Therefore, the question of agency and empowerment through the reconstruction of gender dynamics may seem naïve at a time when the individual is forced to negotiate his or her labor

power in the free market according to the dictates of corporations that decide on the value of that labor power. The military as a profession has become a double-edged choice for many people in poor countries or for the poor in rich countries. The vast majority of people, men and women, who join the military do it for economic reasons. Even in revolutionary wars, the economy draws people to arm themselves. Although it is debatable how much personal agency is involved and how much coercion by the dominant market economy in the choices people make to go into combat, economy plays a significant part.

Militant Agency in Women: Where is it Going?

Besides class ideology, which brought people to join the People's War, there are other heterogeneous but interrelated factors of caste, gender, and ethnicity producing different dynamics of power and knowledge, propelling some groups more than others to support the war. Women make up one such constituency. Although ideologies may affect people to some extent, and ideological state apparatuses in the form of institutions, army, schools, and law do discipline and shape people to a certain mode of being, doing, and acting, their effects upon subjects are not always determinate (Althusser 1971). Despite a dominant or hegemonic power operating within the structure, as Raymond Williams (1979, 252) says,

However dominant a social system may be, the very meaning of its domination involves a limitation or selection of the activities it covers, so that by definition it cannot exhaust all social experiences, which therefore always potentially contains space for alternative acts and alternative intentions which are not yet articulated as a social institution or even project.²⁷⁰

Thus, while it seems that Communist ideology has played a great part in moving the masses of people to revolutionary ideals, the People's War in Nepal cannot just be

²⁷⁰ Cited from Edward Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power," *Foucault A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 154.

understood as a class war, but needs to be taken as a resistance movement carrying disparate agendas of diverse communities of people who are not necessarily communist. There is a productive power and agency produced in counteraction and in resistance to the work of the state apparatuses and its oppressive power over the centuries. Whether or not people are able actively to orient their agency toward maximizing their own well being at all times, they do have agency. However, this agency should not be understood as “free will” or in terms of a resistance/acceptance dichotomy, as Laura Ahearn warns us through her study of a Magar village in Nepal and the influence of literacy in courtship practices among young people in that village (Ahearn 2004, 2001). Along with practice theorists like Anthony Giddens and Sherry Ortner, Ahearn states that “actions are always already socially, culturally, and linguistically constrained. Agency is emergent in sociocultural and linguistic practices” and is always context-dependent (Ahearn 2004, 55). Ahearn (2001, 112) provisionally defines agency as “socioculturally mediated capacity to act.”

Likewise, as women’s agency has always been interpreted in the dichotomy of a victimization/resistance model, this view usually undercuts the complexity of agency in general and women’s agency in particular. Yet, at a macro-level, it is very hard to see individuals enacting agency, as agency might also be a product of constraints giving rise to the act an individual performs. However, this is not to say that people never have agency to act without constraints. At least in the case of women in the military, it is not an either/or situation. I agree with Elowe MacLeod, who says that “Power relations should be viewed as an ongoing relationship of a struggle complicated by women’s own

contradictory subjectivity and ambiguous purposes” (Ahern 2004, 55).²⁷¹ However, I would add that outside constraints often play a part in how women’s subjectivity is informed or formed. MacLeod also states that “Women, even as subordinate players, always play an active part that goes beyond the dichotomy of victimization/acceptance, a dichotomy that flattens out a complex and ambiguous agency in which women accept, accommodate, ignore, resist, or protest -- sometimes all at the same time” (Ahern 2004, 55). While I concur with MacLeod’s desire to see an active embodiment of agency in women, all this agency that a woman enacts depends on her location and position of class, nationality, gender orientation, and so on. Not all women are able to enact agency in the same way. In other words, despite having agency, women in the “third world” are constrained not only by local forces but also by global powers which continually mediate the agency of the “third world” people. A woman who enters the military industrial complex may actually have little power to enact her agency even if she feels empowered by her personal choice to join. The institution mobilizes and exploits her act, and the structure produces the military woman, not the other way around. While women or men can shape their individual acts along their personal agency, on a macro level it is hard to enact agency for the marginalized and for those who are lower on the food chain of capitalism.

Conclusion:

Women’s agency is a complex issue when it comes to talking about women in the military or women’s right to join the military complex, which has been theorized and researched by many (Goldman 1982; Enloe 1983). Yet, as D’Amico (1998) argues, while some women may benefit from military service, expanded military participation of

²⁷¹ The excerpt is from Arlene Elowe MacLeod’s study of Egyptian women cited in Ahern (2004).

women is not necessarily evidence of social transformation or women's achievement of equality. The institution itself remains fundamentally gendered and is "coercive, hierarchical, and patriarchal" (D'Amico 1998, 131). On another note, furthering women's inclusion in the military complex is not necessarily a step forward to peace, unless we swallow the argument that peace can be brought about only through war. As Tickner says, "The valorization of war through its identification with a heroic kind of masculinity depends on a feminized, devalued notion of peace seen as unattainable and unrealistic" (2001, 57). If we heed South Asian feminist Anuradha Chenoy's (1998, 108) articulation that "Militarism is a part of the wider web of social relations [and] is compatible with and has interacted with patriarchy, capitalism, fundamentalism, communalism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, regionalism and other chauvinisms and sub-nationalisms," we must rethink the kind of empowerment gained from entrance into such an institution. The ways in which militarization within globalization work under the mask of economic empowerment are indeed worth further investigation.

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned an announcement in the Nepali and British press that there will be "female Gurkhas" in the British Gurkha army. The most interesting and unbelievable piece of news -- especially given the position of the Maoist party on foreign recruitment of Nepali citizenry -- was that most of the women hoping to join the British army were "hardened members of the Maoist Party."²⁷² Once again, with time, the revolutionary impetus that women show gets claimed by those who are already established as hegemonic military powers globally. Displaced revolutionary and militant energy is up for grabs by those who call the shots in the market place of constrained economies.

²⁷² See "Females to be recruited in British Gurkha" in Nepalnews.com, June 24, 2007.

Likewise, while the process of militarization is at a heightened level within the national space, militarization by superpowers like America and Britain does not end at home but extends to other countries in the form of “Policies on the siting of bases, arms trade, joint exercises, national security doctrines that define ‘allies’ and ‘enemies’, multi-national bank and corporate lending and investment policies, counter-insurgency programs” (Enloe 1983, 220). Though Enloe speaks of women and militarization, men have been equally pulled into the vortex of militarization or brought to consent through different technologies of the military.

Worldwide, as oppressed communities or subaltern subjects are forced to carry arms and may even feel momentarily empowered and liberated through the power of guns, we also see them get pulled into the vortex of violence created by the dominant networks of power, knowledge, and hegemony. Those who use guns do not have the technology to make even a needle. Yet, the ideology of militarism perpetuates the belief that social order can be maintained only through force and the violence unleashed by arms. Ironically, the use of violent means for liberation from one kind of oppressive structure may lead to another form of enslavement where power comes only from the barrels of guns. Militarization and autocratic governments have often been the end result of crisis and war. The sad fact is that an AK47 costs as little as a chicken in some countries, reports the UN. The USA, Russia, China, Canada, the European Union, Brazil, and Israel are some of the biggest manufacturers of small arms and big arms. Seventy-five percent of small arms are produced by the USA alone.²⁷³ Almost 90% of the people who die in civil wars, genocides, and coup d'états are victims of small arms manufactured in rich countries. Small arms manufacturing is a lucrative industry, and the black market

²⁷³ See the International action network on small arms <[www://http.iansa.org](http://www.iansa.org)>. Information on this website is derived primarily from the Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, Oxford University Press.

in many countries makes it hard to control the proliferation of weapons, small and big. Where there is no food, there are AK47s and M16s in the hands of children. The key issue here is that we cannot overlook the global culture of violence forwarded by the weapons industry while looking at revolutionary movements that utilize such weapons with the ideology of counteracting the structural violence locally and globally. Whether it is women fighting for gender equality or the poor fighting for basic rights to life, if the war is fought through modern weapons, one needs to look beyond the local and to the global culture of violence, which can easily turn a legitimate war against oppression into perpetual war and create conflict to forward the interests of those who benefit by selling weapons or mediating peace. One cannot overlook capitalism's role in creating armed conflict and furthering the production of capital for some at the expense of others. As I will argue in the next chapter, in many countries the increasing civil wars, ethnic conflicts, and failed developments stem from the neo-geo-bio-politics of subsumption of Western values of development and progress. The diverse cultures of the world are vulnerable to extraction and expropriation by the big and the powerful.

Chapter Six

Gendered Displacement in Crisis: Migrants and Mobility in Globalization

After 14 hours of flying, it's trying to stand in a waiting area. The Qatar Airways flight between Doha and Kathmandu is always packed with Nepalis, and many of my fellow Nepalis crowded the waiting space of the airport (this was my first time flying with Qatar Airways). With no space on the floor, I sat down on my bag. Scores of unassuming eyes looked at us. My White-American husband, daughter, and I were not inconspicuous among the Nepali faces surrounding us. From Madesh to Pahad to Himal, the room was full of Nepali sounds.

I was looking for an opportunity to talk to some women in the room, so I turned to some sitting close to me and asked several questions about the job situation and the condition of the workers there. The women I spoke to thought I was alone, but as soon as I told them I was with my husband, they turned away and stopped talking to me -- I was quite surprised, as until then they had been quite friendly. A thin, young man dressed up neatly volunteered to take my questions. Others looked and listened to my conversation with this young man. He painted a fairly rosy picture of the situation but added that it's not a place where women should work -- there had been many cases of violence against them. "It's really bad for women here," he said, and I thought of Kani Sherpa, whose employer abused and murdered her, and the many reports of sexual abuse of women. I also thought of a recently lifted ban (placed in 1998) against Nepali women working in the Gulf region. Women opted for illegal channels to get out of Nepal, often becoming prey to traffickers, who sold them to brothels or made them work for less than arranged.

The young man kept praising someone who had done a great job of helping Nepalis in Doha by getting them work permits -- the name was Arabic. I thought of all those stranded people in Bombay a year before, amounting to over thirty thousand, living in slums with illnesses like jaundice and diarrhoea...and I also thought of those twelve Nepali men who were shipped to Iraq without knowing they would be working there and ended up murdered by a terrorist group. The young man spoke as if I should know this person, as if everyone did. I realized the young man was part of the man-power business and probably worked as an agent to bring people to Dubai or elsewhere. All this time, I was conscious of a pair of nervous eyes a few feet away from me, looking at me and trying to tell me something. The boy seemed like a teenager. I was actually scared to ask him anything, sensing the emotion of the situation and my inability to help him. But I felt a strong need to respond to his look, so asked him in a very casual way if he was going home on vacation. With tears in his eyes and a choked up throat, he said, "No, I am going for good. The work was too difficult and demanded long hours (twelve to sixteen per day) for not much pay. I just couldn't handle it. I am not coming back." I did not dare ask him anything more, but I was left thinking about the conditions at his home, how much money he must have borrowed to come, and, now that he was going back only after a few months, how his family was going to pay it back. I did not know whether he even had a home to go back to in a place where people like him were leaving every day by the hundreds. There are so many contradictions, so many paradoxes.

One of the most visible effects of the People's War was the enormous spatial movement of people within the country and outside of it. As I explicated in Chapter Two, there was a tremendous displacement of people from rural areas to urban areas and to India, amounting to more than a hundred thousand people displaced from their homes to other parts of the country.²⁷⁴ While not all IDPs sought jobs outside the country, which is not affordable for many people, with the struggles inside Nepal, many IDPs did. Therefore, the number of people seeking foreign employment rose as never before during the decade of the People's War, resulting in further displacement outside Nepali borders (Bhattarai and Karki 2003, 74).²⁷⁵ At one point in 2005, the number of people leaving Nepal for foreign employment reached 500 a day, *excluding* those going to India.²⁷⁶ It is estimated that more than a million Nepalis toil in the Gulf countries and take on jobs the natives do not want.²⁷⁷ Women have also entered the foreign employment sector as never before. Despite the restrictions imposed in 1998 against Nepali women working in the Arabian Gulf countries,²⁷⁸ one source affirms there are more than 50,000 of them just in Saudi Arabia working as domestics; many of these women must have entered the country

²⁷⁴ A report called "Internally Displaced People of Nepal" tallies the number of the displaced at 150,000. Some NGOs estimate it to be anywhere from 300,000 to 500,000. INSEC has the registered number of 38,191 (data from 2004). For more detail on internally displaced people, please see Chapter 2.

²⁷⁵ According to the Department of Labor, before the insurgency began and until 1994/95 the figure of the Nepalis working abroad was 3,605. By 2003 the official figure had reached 221,498, and this number did not account for people working in India or who went overseas from there.

²⁷⁶ Rupak Sharma, "500 Nepalis a Day head Abroad for Jobs" March, 29 2006. *Kantipuronline.com*. According to a recent report by Surendra Phuyal of the *Kathmandu Post* (9/26/2006), India supposedly contains Nepalis amounting to half the size of Nepal's population, meaning there are almost 13 million Nepalis there. However, we cannot confirm this data. It is also unclear who these people are – whether they are Indians of Nepali origin who moved there during the colonial era as British subjects, recent migrants after the post-independence era, or people driven there by insurgency in Nepal.

²⁷⁷ The number of people going for migrant work to other countries has not lessened but increased in 2006-2007 from the year before by 21%, reports the Department of Commerce, Labor and Foreign Employment. According to the statistics of labor department, the number who left for foreign employment for 2006-2007 is about 199,119 (*Nepal National Weekly*, August 6, 2007). Note that almost two hundred thousand people have left since the peace process started in April 2006.

²⁷⁸ Arabian Gulf countries where Nepali workers work include Saudia Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman. Besides these countries, Malaysia is another popular destination for Nepalis.

through illegal channels.²⁷⁹ Despite the news of abuse, hardships, and hurdles to finding foreign employment,²⁸⁰ Nepali men and women continue to leave in great numbers.²⁸¹ Some languish in jail while others are deported for raising their voices at not getting paid as promised. Lack of fair treatment after being injured at work, or even killed, is common news in the Nepali media.²⁸² However, revenue from foreign employment has been a big source of income for many families, just like foreign military service in India

²⁷⁹ See “50,000 Nepali women working in Saudi Arabia, more workers sought” in Nepalnews.com (10/14/04). The ban ceased in January 2003 after much pressure from local women’s organizations and international women’s organizations like UNIFEM, but women were allowed to take jobs only in the formal sector, like supermarkets, factories, and specific industries. The ban against domestic work remains. 50,000 Nepali women in Saudi Arabia sounds exaggerated, though the figure came from a labor minister in Nepal. According to Lok Bahadur Thapa, the first secretary at the Nepalese Embassy in Riyadh, Nepali women working in Saudi Arabia number about 10,000. In my conversations with Nepalis at Qatar airport, they said the whole Arabian Gulf may have about 50,000 Nepali women, but Saudi Arabia alone could not have that many. It is difficult to estimate when there is no formal research. Also, because of the illegality of human trafficking to these countries, there is no official record of the number who actually work there.

²⁸⁰ In 1998, Kani Sherpa allegedly committed suicide -- although many report it as murder -- by jumping out the window of her Qatari employer’s house after he sexually abused her. While there are many other stories of violence against women, including publicized diaries of a woman named Kamala Rai in *Time Magazine*, the number of women seeking work in the Gulf and elsewhere did not decline during the ban. Through illegal channels and by paying heavy interest rates to creditors, women still sought work outside. According to one report, there could easily be one hundred thousand women working in foreign countries besides India, which itself contains almost 300,000 Nepali women. See “Why Can’t ‘Manpower’ Agencies Find Jobs for Women?” by Hemlata Rai from <http://www.nepalnews.com.np/ntimes/issue127/nation.htm> and Meenakshi Ganguly, “Kamala’s Tears,” *Time South Asia Pacific*, no. 30 (27 July 1998).

²⁸¹ The national and cultural sentiments on women migrant workers are conflicting, so one hears sensational news about women, often of their suffering in the form of sexual abuse in a foreign country. While families may benefit from women’s work, the society may not see it in a positive light. Michel Gamburd’s *Kitchen Spoon’s Handle* provides an insightful study of women domestics from Sri Lanka to Arab-Gulf countries and the social sentiments towards these women back home. Nepal’s situation is not very different in terms of women’s sexuality and mobility. Gamburd’s study touches upon economy, transnationalism, family life, and issues of representation associated with women domestic workers in Gulf countries, which apply to many South Asian women migrant workers. Also see “Female Asian Migrants: A Growing but Increasingly vulnerable Workforce” published by International Labor Organization (5 Feb 1996). <<http://www.ilo.org/publib/english/235press/pr/96-I.htm>>

²⁸² As of July 30, 2007, hundreds of Nepali workers still languish in jail in Qatar for protesting pay lower than they were promised. A Nepali student in the U.S.A. narrates his experience of being treated as a criminal because he dared to speak out about the ways in which airport staff in Qatar treated deported Nepali workers. See Tulsi Bhandari, “Nepali’s Nightmare in the Gulf,” in *The Kathmandu Post*, July 28, 2007. A large number of Nepali men in the Gulf work for construction companies. Anyone traveling in Qatar can see them working in the mid-day desert sun. Since the Gulf region was opened to migrant workers in Nepal, reports like “Domestic workers abroad need protection,” “Migrant women fall prey to Traffickers,” “The Plight of Nepali women in Hong Kong,” “Nepali workers denied their rights in Malaysia,” and “Nepali workers languishing in Prison abroad,” are staple news. For perspective on the news of Gulf workers from “Third world” countries, see archived material under “Migration News” at <http://migration.ucdavis.edu/Archive/>. There are also websites like <http://www.qatarsucks.com/> that publish negative news from Qatar. Most of the news posted on the website relates to the exploitation of guest workers and housemaids from Asian countries.

or the United Kingdom has been for many ethnic communities of Nepal. According to Nepal Rastra Bank, Nepal's largest financial institution, more than one billion dollars in remittances enter Nepal every year.²⁸³ Women contribute 10% of this revenue. This is an official figure, which does not account for capital brought in other forms, such as cash or gold. However, while this toil helps the dwindling economy of Nepal and many of its families, thus far the Nepali state has not been effective in safeguarding the security and interests of its citizens in other countries. Nor have development efforts by numerous organizations and agencies in Nepal for the last 30-40 years created better employment opportunities or good governance within Nepal. As some analysts foresaw long ago (Baikie and Seddon 1980), a crisis was impending in Nepal for reasons known (underdevelopment, semi-feudal and semi-colonial social structure) and unknown (regional interests, changing power balance in the geo-political system).

Nevertheless, as I explored in Chapter Two, to some extent the crisis has been productive in empowering marginalized people and women, raising their consciousness at the local level. There have no doubt been some changes in gender dynamics as crisis often shifts the temporality of the modes of production and social reproduction. Along with the displacement of people physically from their homes and environments, there are displacements at the bodily and social level as women embody gender roles formerly proscribed to them. People who were formerly powerless and marginalized, like the Dalits and lower caste groups, are raising their voices to some extent. Yet, will these changes at the local level endure? Will they impact the structural inequality and

²⁸³ In an interview taken with the governor of the Rastriya Bank in 2003, the remittances sent to Nepal were already about to reach \$ 1 billion dollar by the end of the year 2004. The World Bank report (2003) also stated that the remittances from the foreign workers had outgrown the receipts gotten from the merchandise export from Nepal (Bhattarai and Karki 2003, 75).

gendered labor system at the global or transnational level? Or is the scenario like that of a little fish that is glad to get away from the local toad but is unaware of the shark?

Women's situation is especially complicated in the migrant labor system as, on the one hand, they have the opportunity to be mobile and economically independent, but on the other hand, they are caught in the web of the gendered, transnational division of labor. So what does women's mobility actually mean?

By looking at men and women migrant workers in Gulf countries and women's outward mobility as migrant workers during the conflict, I examine differently gendered lives of Nepali women and men in the global economy and how they negotiate the layered structures of violence and labor in places that range from war zones to family homes. While one may break the rules of gender at home, can one survive the imposition of the transnational division of labor, which capitalizes on the gendered, classed, and raced division of labor to create profit? First, let us look at the relationship between the Maoist war and economic development in Nepal.

Crisis in Development: Uneven Development and the Maoist War

One of the Maoists' key frustrations was the ineffectiveness of development and donor agencies and foreign development initiatives in Nepal (Bhattarai 2003b). Many argue that donor aided development practices have only sustained "failed development" and have actually made the Nepali state and Nepali people more dependent on what they call "imperialist-capitalist economies," which only exacerbates the existing inequality between the rich and the poor (Shrestha 1997; Bhattarai 2003b). Interestingly, the most affected area during the People's War was the *Rapti Zone* in Western Nepal, a region where the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) poured over

\$50 million in a fifteen-year period for the Rapti Integrated Rural Development Project under its Integrated Rural Development Project campaign (IRDP).²⁸⁴ When local analysts pointed out there was a relationship between the USAID project and the rise of the Maoists in the area, their assessments were termed baseless.²⁸⁵ USAID brought its own analyst to examine the situation, and the report prepared by Robert Gersony of the non-governmental organization *Mercy Corps International* implies that the USAID project could not have impacted the Maoist People's War.²⁸⁶ Rather, Gersony argues, blame lies in the socio-cultural situation and the neglect of basic development needs by the democratic government after the 1990s. According to Gersony, the lack of a basic general infrastructure, including roads, along with decreasing traditional and local sources of income -- like hashish production, trade, and sheep farming -- might have made the local people frustrated with the government and fueled the rebellion.

Gersony's report certainly sheds light on the bleak performance of the Kathmandu-centric government, which not only ignored the socio-economic conditions in this remote part of Nepal, but perpetrated violence on the local people through a police campaign called "Operation Romeo" in November of 1995 to search for radical communists in the region. There were reports of police brutality, killing, torture, and rape of ethnic Magar women, which apparently incited more people, especially women, to join the Maoists. The mistrust of mainstream political party leaders, who had mostly

²⁸⁴The project took off in the early 80s and ran until the Maoists took up arms in the mid 90s.

²⁸⁵ One Mohan Mainali speculates that there is a direct link between development and conflict and that the donor agency implemented programs could have fueled the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. See "'Development' vs The Maobadis" in *Understanding the Maoist Movement in Nepal*, ed. Deepak Thapa (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2003).

²⁸⁶ See Gersony, "Sowing the Wind: History and the Dynamics of the Maoist Revolt in Nepal's Rapti Hills" (2003). Gersony's research was funded by USAID. Many critics and analysts have pointed out that donor agencies are disconnected from rural people and their needs at the local level as they operate from urban places and deal with the urban elite, who largely mediate development programs in the rural areas.

moved to Kathmandu, also became stronger among the locals.²⁸⁷ Yet, despite much truth in Gersony's report about the government's poor performance in the *Rapti zone*, he provides no clear assessment of how the integrated development project was implemented in the region, and why it might have fueled local resentment towards the donor agency. He does point out that the Maoists are virtually absent where the project was more successful, and the uprising is more strong in areas where the project was not implemented or was less successful. Was there resentment against the project managers, who did not want to make roads to the difficult terrain? How did the local elites handle the development projects? Was there bias in terms of which region got preference? Were some people left out because they did not have the power to influence the project managers to develop their area? Did USAID not consider local sentiments? When some development came to the region, people might have become more conscious of their rights and wanted more attention from the government. These are all possible reasons. To some extent, Gersony's report implies the impact of uneven development on local people and proves there was some correlation between the USAID implemented project and the Maoist uprising in the region. There are, of course, other unanswered questions regarding how a development effort of more than 15 years with over 50 million U.S. dollars, which is a great amount of money in Nepal, failed to produce more integrated development for the whole region. Ironically, the *Rapti Zone* ended up being the political and geographic base of the Maoists.

²⁸⁷ According to Gersony, the reports of police involvement in "mass killings, rape, or property destruction" in the Rolpa District, which is in the Rapti Zone, are not true as he could not find "documented cases of death in connection with the operation and human rights resources described the incidents of police rape as a series of criminal acts rather than an attempt to systematically degrade the Magar race." See "The History and Dynamics of Nepal's Maoist Revolt" in *International Resources Group*, No 15, March 2004. However, in an interview with the *The Independent*, Babu Ram Bhattarai (1995, 2003)) cites numbers of atrocities committed by the police in the Kham-Magar country in the Rapti region.

Scholars have shown a relationship between Western-capitalist development practices and economic crisis and civil war in developing countries (Esmon and Herring 2001; Danaher 2001).²⁸⁸ One such scholars, Marianne Marchand, notes that the neoliberal economic agenda of deregulation, privatization and trade liberalization heavily affected the domestic economies of sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, which were in a developmental state (.²⁸⁹ “[T]he introduction of structural adjustment policies as well as ongoing reform policies since the early 1980s . . . led to a severe crisis of the state and, under certain conditions, has even indirectly contributed to outbreaks of civil war” (Marchand 108)²⁹⁰ The correlation found by researchers between modern development efforts led by the World Bank and other global financial institutions and the rise of violent conflict and civil war are not too far fetched if one only cares to look around in the world.

While the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) of the World Bank and the IMF started in the 80s with the pretext of helping poor countries out of debt-crisis left many third world countries more vulnerable to debt accumulation and increased their dependency on foreign capital, the new “global restructuring” processes of GATT and WTO have furthered more unprecedented events and outcomes in these countries (Marchand).²⁹¹ Developing countries are reduced to borrowing money even to run their

²⁸⁸ See *Carrots, Sticks, and Ethnic Conflict: Rethinking Development Assistance*, eds. Milton J. Esmon and Ronald J. Herring (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2001). *Democratizing the Global Economy: The Battle Against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund*, ed. Kevin Danaher (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 2001).

²⁸⁹ Marianne H. Marchand, “Engendering Globalization in an Era of Transnational Capital,” in *Feminist Post Development Thought*, 108.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Marianne Marchand uses the phrase “global restructuring” in opposition to globalization to refer to “the complex set of processes and transformations which are multidimensional, occur at differing speeds and involve a rearticulation of boundaries: public-private, global-local, national-international, as well as state-market-civil society” (107). She argues that global restructuring covers wide ranging areas like “trade liberalization; the emergence of a global financial system; changes in the process of production; a rapid

local governments, and the presence of the foreign donors and international financial institutions have become inevitable. Nepal is one such developing countries where numerous foreign development agencies have been experimenting with different development programs over the last 30-40 years. However, modern development efforts in Nepal have not only been unsuccessful, but they have created a culture of dependency on the outside (Shrestha 1997). Overall, modern development efforts and results in Nepal have been erratic. Despite some gains in education and health and the placement of some modern development infrastructure like hospitals, roads, and schools, Nepal has not been able to generate much GDP, and its place in the world development list of countries keeps only going down. Ironically, after the end of Rana rule in Nepal and British rule in India around the same time, Nepal's dependency on the outside world increased more, and whatever economic power Rana ruled Nepal exerted in cooperation with the British in the region was lost to the industrializing nations of India and China. This is not to say that Nepal was better off with the Ranas than now, but comparatively speaking, in terms of trade and export Nepal enjoyed fairly good standing in the region. Just in 1965, Nepal was the fifth largest rice exporter in the world (Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon 1980, 18).

Contemporary Nepal is largely dependent on aid and foreign loans. Rampant corruption, debt accumulation for future generations, economic crisis, broken local systems of production and consumption, the depletion of ecological and natural resources, and an impending environmental crisis are some of the manifestations of

diffusion of products, technologies, information and consumption patterns; and a growing tendency toward individualism and individualized lifestyles in certain parts of the world" (107). For perspectives from the third world or the South as it is usually called, see Sarah Anderson (2000), Yash Tandon and Megan Allardice (2004); Martin Kohr (2001). Also see David C. Korten (2001), *When Corporations Rule the World*, for the effects of corporate globalization on nations, governments and the environment in the world.

modern development efforts thus far (Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon 1980).²⁹² The People's War has been the most telling one. However, despite political and economic crisis, Nepal is increasingly immersed in the neo-liberal free market economy. The absence of economic opportunities, institutional development, and a stable political climate is pushing Nepalis to look elsewhere.

Nepali Bodies in the Economy of Free Trade:

Nepal became the 147th member of the World Trade Organization²⁹³ (WTO) and signed GATT (General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade) in April of 2004 under King Gyanendra's cabinet rule, when the country was reeling from armed conflict and there seemed to be no sign of peace on the horizon. With the signing of the WTO treaty, Nepal has officially committed to the rules of the corporate world of neo-liberalization and privatization, which already trickled into Nepal in the 1970s and 80s. As it was, the World Bank implemented Structural Adjustment Programs in 1986 to help Nepal manage debt crisis and further institutional development, which the bank thought Nepal lacked.²⁹⁴ Eventually, when Nepal became a multiparty democracy in 1990, the new democratic

²⁹² Blaikie, Cameron and Seddon in their book *Nepal in Crisis: Growth and Stagnation at the Periphery* were already predicting in 1980 that Nepal was heading towards crisis because of its geographical situation and the social/economic modes of production that needed vast reform. Being landlocked country sandwiched between two giant nations like India and China, Nepal historically walked a tightrope in its international relations.

²⁹³ After several rounds of talks that started with the Bretton Wood Conference in 1942, the World Trade Organization (WTO) came to be established after the Uruguay Round in 1995 and adopted GATT (General Agreements on Tariffs and Trade). The push for free trade started in the post World War II era with the creation of GATT in 1947 as a provisional treaty on the basis of 1946 Havana Charter which held a vision of multilateral trade liberalization. For more on the history of WTO and GATT see *Paved with Good Intentions: Background to the GATT, Uruguay Round and WTO* edited by Yash Tandon and Megan Allardice and John Audley's *Green Politics and Global Trade* (1997).

²⁹⁴ The World Bank entered in Nepal in 1965, lending money to improve financial and physical infrastructure, like improving agriculture with fertilizer use. However, as the Independent Evaluation Group states, it did not pay much attention to environmental degradation and soil erosion as it was not the bank's policy at the time. By 1976, the bank emerged as a major donor that affected policy building and management of resources at the state level. The report from the Independent Evaluation Group also states that, despite having strong policies on "safeguarding the environment" and combating poverty, in Nepal's case the bank did not emphasize these issues except at an "individual project level."

government opted for financial liberalization, which opened up the country slowly toward deregulated international capital flows. Slowly, this change influenced almost all sectors of development and management -- foreign investment, banking, industry, technology, agriculture, and the service sector. Privatization was making its mark, but not without problems. Despite serious problems in the management and delivery of basic utilities like water and electricity to the public, the system of management had not changed. However, this may also change since the crisis riddled Nepali government fails to manage one sector after another. But would transferring management to a foreign private company yield real benefits for Nepalis of all classes? It is a debatable question. The privatization of a basic living necessity like water could make it a precious commodity for the poor in the water-rich country of Nepal.²⁹⁵ As Bhola Dhungana of the *Nepal Policy Institute* notes, "There have been influential role [sic] of International Institutions since the very beginning of liberalization process. They have been pushing not only the aid but also policy prescription and condition, irrespective of whether it fits in the local context. The service sector has also been affected by this paradox. . . . For many developing countries, sending people to work temporarily is seen as the most promising export interest in services."²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵See Bhola Dhungana, "Liberalization of Trade and Services in Nepal" in *Asia-Pacific Research Network*, vol 14, June 2006 in <www.aprnet.org>. There has been talk about giving the management and supply of water in the capital city to a global private company, like Seven Trent Water of the UK, under the debt provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). When the contractor takes over, the tariff on water will automatically rise, affecting the most vulnerable people in the valley, who so far have enjoyed free water, at least for drinking. Although the water supply may improve, the beneficiary of the improvement might just be middle and upper class people and hoteliers, not the common people, who see water as a basic need and not a commodity to be bought and sold. Also, the privatization of water and electricity in Nepal means that Nepal's only recognized national resource in the form of hydropower will be in the hands of corporations seeking profit maximization. See Bikash Sangraula's "New Water Tariff: Hard on poor, easy on rich" ([http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?\\$nid+95392](http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?$nid+95392)) for the complexities involved in the privatization of water in the Kathmandu valley.

²⁹⁶ See Bhola Dhungana, "Liberalization of Trade and Services in Nepal" in *Asia-Pacific Research Network*, vol 14, June 2006. <www.aprnet.org>

While the state machinery does not seem to be able to function well without the support of outside resources, such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and experts suggested by these donor and lending agencies, Nepali labor power is being outsourced. As economic experts come to Nepal to give their expert help in managing state affairs, banks, and natural resources, Nepalis themselves leave to find low skilled work elsewhere. Under the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), the General Agreement on Trade in Services, known as “GATS Mode 4,” especially has opened up new spaces and avenues for the mobility of people to different countries to sell their labor services.²⁹⁷ Thus, experts from rich countries come to poor countries to give their services, while people from poor countries go to rich countries to provide their labor. However, the Mode 4 provision has many limitations and curtails the mobility of workers from poor countries, who usually are defined as unskilled or low skilled and are hired through independent contractors from countries that supply labor power. The Mode 4 provision only allows a “temporary movement of natural persons (workers) across borders to provide services,” as in guest workers, so these persons do not have direct access to the local labor market and must be represented through a contractor or a foreign firm.²⁹⁸ The workers’ mobility and labor value both are mediated by third parties, which are independent employment agencies or agents representing different countries. Although it may seem the GATS provision of selling labor to other countries applies equally to every country that signs the treaty, the third parties exploit the unskilled or low skilled workers.

²⁹⁷ See <<http://www.afsc.org/trade-matters/issues/GATS-Mode-4-Fact-Sheet.htm>>

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

In Nepal's case, there have been many stories of deception and exploitation of workers by the third party, the so-called "manpower" agencies, which are foreign employment agencies that mediate between the foreign employers and the workers in Nepal.²⁹⁹ Although they are private firms that have direct contact with labor-seeking businesses in foreign countries, sometimes they also work as contractors for the labor department of governments. Sometimes the labor-sending country's government directly deals with the labor-hosting country, but most often private contractor firms mediate the recruitment of workers. Some firms are notorious for cashing in on the misery and desperation of workers seeking jobs and better opportunities overseas. One hears many stories of people being cheated by manpower agencies inside Nepal as well as by agents in a foreign country.³⁰⁰ The employment agencies are notorious for charging exorbitant sums from the job seekers, so much so that many spend months working to pay off the contractors before they can send any money home or spend it on themselves.³⁰¹ Women especially have suffered at the hands of con-artists who lure them with lucrative jobs in foreign countries and sell them to brothels. In many instances, the line between illegal trafficking and proper foreign employment is blurred, for many people are trafficked for

²⁹⁹ There are over 400 manpower agencies in Nepal besides the local brokers and the unpublished ones. The published ones are unionized and advertise their products, Nepali workers, to the global labor market. Nepali workers are "cost effective, cheaper, hardworking, adjustable, loyal, and peace loving," and the recruiting a Nepali worker is simple and painless for the foreign country. For more, see http://www.nepalmanpower.com/why_nepalese.html/. Some agencies, like Moondrops Overseas Services, Global Overseas Services, Paradise International, and Sahara International, have come under scrutiny as exploitative. Moondrops was connected to the deaths of the twelve Nepali workers in Iraq.

³⁰⁰ I have personally heard many stories of the middle-men cheating people in Nepal. One much publicized story of migrant Nepali workers was when more than 10,000 (some say over 30,000) people from Nepal were stranded in Bombay in dilapidated conditions as agents ran away with their money. Source: NepaliTimes, Issue 211, August 2004. <www.nepalitimes.com>

³⁰¹ The coordinator of Hong Kong based Far-East Overseas Nepali Association (FEONA) reports that workers must sign a legally binding contract committing six months' salary to the employment agencies before they start their jobs. See "Maid to Order" in *Nepali Times* 178 (9-15 Jan 2004). Agents also take large sums of advance money from people looking for work. The person seeking work may wait for years before he/she gets back the money. In many cases, the agents abscond.

legal yet unethical work in slave conditions without prior knowledge.³⁰² The GATT provision may have eased the work of human traffickers, as they can smuggle people under the pretense of labor contracts from one country to another.

The free trade in labor has certainly made it easier to bring workers from poor countries to war zones through subcontractors, while big contractors like Haliburton at the global level and small contractors like the employment agencies make a large amount of money. In contemporary wars, it does not matter which countries are in conflict; other countries directly and indirectly become party to war through economic policies and networks. Likewise, war and crisis become opportunities to make money for private corporations in developed nations that supply military equipment, weapons, logistics, and expendable human labor. Once the war subsides, they manage the country's economy, development, and reconstruction through the WTO, IMF, or ADB. In all this, the state of the semi-skilled or unskilled workers from "third world" countries is deplorable. In regard to working conditions in war zones like Iraq, David Pinney of CorpWatch writes:

Third Country Nationals (TCNs) frequently sleep in crowded trailers and wait outside in line in 100-degree-plus heat to eat 'slop'. Many are said to lack adequate medical care and put in hard labor seven days a week, 10 hours or more a day, for little or no overtime pay. Few receive proper workplace safety equipment or adequate protection from incoming mortars and rockets. When frequent gunfire, rockets, and mortal shells from ongoing conflict hit the sprawling military camps, American contractors slip on helmets and bulletproof vests, but TCNs are frequently shielded only by the shirts on their backs and the flimsy trailers they sleep in.³⁰³

³⁰² The BBC reported (May, 2005) that 300 Filipino workers protested against the working conditions at U.S. military bases in Iraq and were joined by workers from India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. The working conditions are like "concentration camps," says David Pinney, an independent journalist who with the help of Pratap Chatterjee has written on the plight of the Asian workers in Iraq. For a detailed report, see Pinney, "Using Asia's Poor to Build U.S. Bases in Iraq" in AlterNet <<http://www.alterent.org/story/2660/>>.

³⁰³ See David Pinney, "Using Asia's Poor to Build U.S. Bases in Iraq." <<http://www.alterent.org/module/printversion/26660>>

Many Nepalis are working in war zones for the sake of a few dollars. The kidnapping and murder in August 2004 of twelve Nepali workers in Iraq by the terrorist group *Ansar Al-Sunna* makes evident how much agency these workers have once they are outside of Nepal and their documents in the hands of the contractors. In this case, these workers had no idea about their destination or the kind of work they would be doing.³⁰⁴ The video footage sent by the kidnappers to Nepal's Foreign Ministry revealed that these men were deceived by the employment agency in Nepal and the brokers in Amman, Jordan, who created a situation where the workers had no recourse but to follow where the agents brought them. When the men realized they were going to Iraq, many of them desperately called home and told of their worries. Video footage was made public of some men asking for help, but the government could not do much.³⁰⁵ Eight out of twelve workers directly blamed the agencies for putting them in such danger.

In a country where the per capita income is less than \$300 but economic practices are greatly influenced by the global consumerism opened up by modernization, the idea of getting paid in dollars can be attractive.³⁰⁶ As the motivating factors increase in times of crisis and war, many Nepali people fall in the category of desperate job seekers. Despite grave dangers, known and unknown, people are still flooding the Gulf and East Asia for work. However, without skills and training, most of these workers acquire work

³⁰⁴ Peter Symonds of the World Socialist Web Site reports the Nepali men were brought to "Western Iraq from Jordan to work as cooks and cleaners and labourers for a Jordanian-based contractor, Morning Star." The Nepali workers were killed to teach a lesson to all who leave their homeland to serve the "crusader American forces and to support it in its war against Islam and holy warriors." According to Symonds, despite a formal government ban, 17,000 Nepalis, not counting the ex-Gurkha soldiers, may work in Iraq, some lured by high pay and others tricked by unscrupulous agents who offer them jobs in Kuwait or Jordan and bring them to Iraq. See <<http://www.wsws.org/articles/2004/sep2004/iraq-s02.shtml>>

³⁰⁵ The video footage was posted on the web, the kidnapped giving messages to their families before they were executed. The executions were widely disseminated on the internet, inspiring a riot in Nepal. The manpower agencies were vandalized, at least seven people died, Mosques in Kathmandu were attacked, the Koran was burnt, some Muslims were beaten up, and there were several days of strike and unrest.

³⁰⁶ According to the World Bank statistics, Nepal's GNI per capita income is US \$270 (2005), Source: <<http://devdata.worldbank.org/>>

through independent contractors or subcontractors, who place them in low tier jobs that are “3D” work: dirty, degrading and dangerous. In industrialized and developed countries, the new immigrant population and “temporary workers” or “guest workers,” whose presence GATS Mode 4 facilitates, take on such jobs. Either way, while third world nations might gain some revenue by the export of human labor, and the worker may bring in some capital to build a house or support his/her family, there is no guarantee of that. However, the Gulf attracts those who are desperate to find work and escape war, despite news of workers losing limbs, being jailed, dying every week in road accidents, and falling prey to sexual abuse. Anyone passing through Qatar airport witnesses the miserable conditions under which laborers toil outside in the heat of the sun, covered from head to toe -- many of these workers are South Asians, among whom many are Nepali. Most of those at home do not know the conditions under which people work. One often hears of how so and so made so much money, is buying a new house, land, or property. Locals who are desperately looking for jobs listen to only the “success stories.” They forget that “third world” nationals must dig deeper and work harder and longer to translate their labor into capital-value in the international division of labor, where the few already enjoy the surplus value gathered since the time of colonialism and imperialism.

It is also questionable if developing countries gain much in the long run as free trade in labor services between countries encourages more skilled workers to move to more developed countries, exacerbating the “brain-drain.” The developing countries lose their skilled human resources and pay higher costs to get the skilled services from foreign companies. A small example of this is in the education sector in Nepal, which is increasingly oriented toward the skills sought by the global market. In the last ten years,

the changing high school curriculum and the privatization of primary college education, termed the +2 system, produced a young population whose main goal is to prepare for the global job market and get out of Nepal. While there is no data to back such claims, there is overwhelming pressure among middle-class young people to leave the country if they want to make something out of their lives. Many middle-class parents invest heavily in their children's education even when they cannot afford it. Some individuals study in the USA after their parents sold their only home or family land to raise money. In the meantime, the public education system remains heavily politicized and ineffective.

For Nepal, a landlocked country still heavily dependent on agriculture, export in labor services in the transnational market may seem like a good option to increase revenue.³⁰⁷ Yet the human cost of the global trafficking of Nepali bodies under GATS is something to think of. Nepalis work abroad without proper laws to protect them, especially in the Asia-Pacific and Gulf regions, and this must not go on unaddressed by the Nepali government. Many studies provide evidence that WTO regulations favor economically dominant or developed countries, and that elites and those in political power in developing countries do not always pay attention to workers' rights as long as they themselves benefit (Tandon and Allardice 2004; Anderson 2000). The International Labor Organization (ILO) has laws and provisions for migrant and immigrant workers and their rights, but not all countries honor those laws, and often the WTO and GATT rules override countries' rules or the ILO.

³⁰⁷ Modernization in agriculture with developed seeds, planting of cash crops, and farming for export has not necessarily helped third world people. It has increased the burden of production on already exhausted lands, dried out water resources, and devastated farmers' livelihoods because of debt crisis. See Vandana Shiva's "War Against Nature and the People of the South" in Anderson (2001).

It is not possible here to tease out every aspect of globalization and economic liberalization, nor is that my purpose. Yet Nepali people's displacement during the war cannot be looked at without at least a brief study of the global political economy and its impact on the conflict. This contextualization is also necessary to understand the role of a nation-state or of nations in the new networks of imperialism, imaginary global citizenship, and the concepts like "glocalization" (Robertson 1995). Although post-modernity gives the illusion of falling borders and boundaries, free choice, and individual agency, the ever expanding globalization of capitalism through financial liberalization has led to a hardening of the division of labor between the sexes, genders, classes, and nations. Ironically, national identities and citizenship issues are not becoming less significant for those who are from the so-called third world, constrained as they are by development needs and under valuation of their labor. With globalization, borders and boundaries are etched more microscopically and arbitrarily over bodies and lives as biopolitics works as a force of differentiation to create value. It encroaches violently upon people's ways of life, social constructions of bodies, discriminations over genders, races, cultures, and politics, and the environment. In contemporary times, two forms of biopolitics have been crucial in affecting people's lives in the non-Western world: Western notions of economic development (entrance into the neo-liberal free market economy) and political development (distribution of democracy, the American kind). However, these practices come in many masked forms -- development, aid, experiment -- and sometimes they are directly imposed upon nations and peoples through war, terror, and violence. In the next section, I will trace the complex ways in which Nepali women

affected by the armed conflict are situated in the transnational division of labor and national cultural construction of gender and femininity.

Moving Beyond Local Spaces of Violence:

Although Nepali women worked in Asia Pacific countries in the early 90s, the number of women migrant workers in foreign countries increased tremendously after the outbreak of crisis in 1996. Until the advent of multiparty democracy in 1990, obtaining a passport was the prerogative only of upper and upper middle-class people or government officials and national scholars, mostly men, going abroad for education. Women especially faced a very difficult time getting outside the country, whether it was for work, recreation, or education. Whether single or married, women needed their male guardian's permission and also the signature of a government officer for obtaining a passport. The passport alone by no means guaranteed mobility outside the country -- women needed to be accompanied by a male guardian so fewer questions were asked at the airport or at a checkpoint. However, those stringent laws made little difference in the trafficking of poor, uneducated women across the open border to India.

In September of 2006, several newspapers reported how a Nepali woman minister witnessed a suspicious sight at New Delhi's airport as she returned with her delegation from Pakistan. She intervened and rescued a group of women, including a nursing mother, who were abandoned by a trafficker. They were supposedly being brought to Kuwait to work as domestics.³⁰⁸ Although this episode was highlighted because the minister happened to intervene, thousands of women slip by. It is likely these women would have ended up in one of the red-light districts of Mumbai or Calcutta, had the

³⁰⁸ "Minister Saves Trafficking Victims in Nick of Time." *Gulf Times Newspaper* (17 September 2006). <http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/articles.asp?>

minister not been there. Despite several NGOs, such as ABC Nepal, Maiti Nepal, and WOREC, working to curtail the sexual trafficking of women, the Nepali state has not controlled the trend or punished the culprits.³⁰⁹ This is not to say that more stringent laws written largely by men against women's mobility are what is needed. Women activists noted the male dominated government bureaucracy often blurred the differences between sexual trafficking of women and migrant work. This conflation produced laws against women's mobility, which adversely affected women in different ways. Although the government claimed to protect women, it created more problems for those entering the work force. It is interesting that Nepali men also died and suffered abuse in foreign countries, but the government made no laws to "protect" them. Instead of working with the labor demanding country for laws to protect the workers, whether male or female, the Nepali government acted with the traditional approach to women, which is curtailing their movement. On the basis of media frenzy over a woman's death due to sexual abuse, the government restricted all women from work in Gulf countries.

According to some, Kani Sherpa's employer murdered her and threw her out of the window of his house in Qatar. She was reportedly sexually abused before the murder, or suicide, as some called it. The employer made no statement, nor did the Nepali government demand any formal documentation of her death. Whatever happened to Kani Sherpa, the truth died with her. While Nepali workers in Qatar and the Nepali media called it murder, the Nepali government brought no charge against the employer, and his own country did not investigate. However, after this incident in 1998, His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMGN) extended the Foreign Employment Act 1985 to bar women totally from seeking work in the Arabian Gulf countries. As it was, the Foreign

³⁰⁹ There are more than a dozen NGOS who focus on stopping the trafficking of women and girls.

Employment Act 1985 was already discriminatory against women as it made prerequisite the permission of a guardian (a father, husband, or brother) for any woman to seek foreign employment.³¹⁰ Other stories of sexual abuse of Nepali women working in the Gulf region circulated.³¹¹ Yet women did not stop going to those countries. Through illegal channels, Nepali women continued to flood the Gulf region. The restriction period (1998-2003) only made their lives harder as they had to risk traffickers and go through extra hoops to get out. The manpower agencies charged them more because they opted for illegal ways to find work. Getting a passport was not a smooth process for a woman since the traveler had to state her destination. Many resorted to bribing passport officials. Besides the passport, the government also required women to show a male guardian's permission letter to go abroad. In many cases, it must have been hard to get permission from the male guardian or procure money to pay the agents. Women also paid higher interest rates to borrow money for the agents.³¹² While women faced such hardships to get outside, it was easier for shady manpower agents to traffic them for sex.

One of the ironies of the government-imposed ban on women working in the Gulf was its stated aim to protect women while sexual violence happened right at home and just across the border in India, where thousands of Nepali women languish in the flesh market every day.³¹³ According to the reporter Surendra Phuyal, sexual trafficking happens despite international laws, including South Asian Regional Cooperation

³¹⁰ See the report, *Discriminatory Laws in Nepal and Their Impact on Women*, published by the Forum for Women, Law and Development (August 2000).

³¹¹ See "Kamala's Tears" in Asia Section *TIME Magazine*, No 30 (27 July 1998). In "Kamala's Tears," Meenakshi Ganguly reports the story of a traumatized Nepali woman who worked as a housemaid in Saudi Arabia. She came back "tied to a stretcher," incoherent and needing psychological help, but kept a diary which revealed her desperate psychological condition.

³¹² Based on a conversation with a woman who works in Hong Kong as a domestic.

³¹³ See "Insurgency Fueling Flesh Trade" (Kathmandu Post, March 28, 2006), Surendra Phuyal, "Hard Bond to Break" (Kathmandu Post, December 6, 2005).

agreements, because of the large demand and, of course, the enormous profits from the system of slavery and bonded sexual labor.³¹⁴ While laws and conventions are made and remade, trafficking of girls and women, and even boys these days, remains unhindered as long as there is demand in India. As migrant workers travel to different destinations, the Nepali government has not adequately addressed the problems they face getting due protection of their rights as workers.³¹⁵

What happened to Kani Sherpa remains a mystery, but the restrictions against women seeking foreign employment were lifted in 2003 after much demand from women activists in Nepal and pressure from international women's organizations, like UNIFEM. At the same time, violence against women in the Gulf has not decreased, and neither have women from Nepal stopped going there for work. In the aftermath of the 1996 Maoist rebellion, women sought migrant work as far as Lebanon and Israel, while they remained in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia in great numbers through the British Gurkha army. Thus, the relationship between old military history and colonialism continued in regard to the destinations Nepali workers chose.

The restrictive law on foreign employment made women's lives harder and opened up new spaces to take advantage of them. This brings into question what the government should have done and what it could not do as a failed or failing nation-state. With transnational trade in services under the GATS law, individual countries negotiate agreements with each other beyond the rules of the WTO. Even as globalization is the main force behind the trade of human labor and trafficking, it is up to individual nation-states to protect their citizens. Although the WTO paved the way for free service, it does

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ See "Domestic Workers Abroad Need Protection-Activists" in IRIN Asia. <<http://www.irinnews.org>>

not meddle with the so-called freedoms of the “service pulling” country or the “service selling” country. However, a nation-state’s economic and political strength, and thus its bargaining power in the international community, makes a lot of difference in the lives of its migrant workers and travelers. And in the era of xenophobia and the “War on Terror,” constitutional rights increasingly diminish. It is left to nation-states to protect their migrant workers in the global market of exploitation. Despite the transnational movement of capital and global movements of people, there is no real “global citizenship,” though scholars often speculate about it. It matters what kind of nation-state the migrant workers belong to, and what axis of geo-political power they fall into. Nation-states are not ceasing to exist with the increasing encroachment of cultural and economic globalization; they are only emerging in more fundamentalist ways. As long as the mode of production favors differentiation and unequal systems of value production for different people and different places, there will always be borders and boundaries separating one lot from another, poor from the rich, North from the South, and men from women. I will illustrate what I mean with examples of the plight of Nepali women, particularly in Hong Kong and in the Middle East.

Among almost 40,000 Nepalis in Hong Kong -- some of whom are former British Gurkha families or their dependents -- there are over 1,500 working as domestics. The number of domestics is likely to grow as “Hong Kong agencies see Nepal as a viable recruiting centre,” writes a reporter investigating the situation of workers in Hong Kong (Limbu 2004). Nepali workers are “simple” and unlikely to cause union troubles, like workers from the Philippines or Indonesia, who make up the largest portion of the 240,000 live-in domestic workers among a population of 6.8 million people in Hong

Kong (Limbu 2004). As is the trend of economic restructuring, the labor market is always on the lookout for new and easy prey. Nepalis seeking to get out of a country in crisis are easier to seduce, manage, and exploit in a flexible labor system with less pay, virtually no benefits, and long working hours. Many young Nepali women, including women with infants at home, are huddled into this flexible labor system in Hong Kong, Malaysia, and the Gulf countries. Some young women leave college to come to Hong Kong, while others leave nursing babies back in Nepal. One woman who left behind a four-year old daughter and a five-month old son says, “Only two of the girls I know say they have employers who treat them well. The rest are not happy and will probably return to Nepal after saving some money and their two-year contract ends” (Limbu 2004). When I talked about these issues with a friend’s sister, who worked in Hong Kong for more than 8 years but came back to Nepal due to health problems in the summer of 2006, she stated that it is difficult to return and find work that pays even when women want to. Although they do not like working in other people’s houses, there are few alternatives back in Nepal. So many women remain in Hong Kong, postponing their return in the hope of making a little more money.

Economic need pushes women to work as domestics despite the tremendous struggle in a foreign culture, problems with language, mistreatment at work, and having to pay six months salary to the employment agency and be bound by a contract. As Ramyata Limbu (2004) reports, despite the illegality of the practice, the employment agencies “make applicants sign a [false] paper saying that they have taken a six-month loan from the agency . . . Once they sign the contract, the worker needs to pay.” Of course, Nepali workers are not devoid of agency and know what they are getting into, but

as long as they can save some money and send it back home, they endure exploitation and alienation. But does this mean that the exploitation should continue? “I know at least 20 domestics who come to visit me on their days off, when we chat about home, prepare Nepali meals, go for barbeques and just talk about life and our kids. They often don’t have money since they’ve committed their first six months’ salary to the agency. They call when they are in trouble. Outside of the homes they work in, they don’t really know anyone, they’re alienated,” says a woman who has lived in Hong Kong since 1996 (Limbu 2004). The same woman laments not being able to bring her children, despite being a legal resident of Hong Kong since her husband has a legal ID to live and work in Hong Kong. “Ideally, we’d love to [bring our children] to Hong Kong. My parents love my daughter but they can’t give her the help she needs with her school work, but nurseries and kindergartens in Hong Kong are expensive. And we’re often busy at work” (Limbu 2004). This is not only Rita’s story; many domestic workers and migrants must leave their children behind. They cannot give the protection and time the children require, nor do their employers have any provision for the children of their domestics. The global restructuring of labor means that the wealthy not only feast on the labor of “third world” women, but also take parents away from a generation of kids. As migrant labor increases, there will be a generation of children raised by grandparents or relatives. In the past, absent fathers were more or less common in many communities, especially the Lahure; now children grow without mothers too. The ways in which children must grow up parentless under the constrictions of the transnational division of labor in gendered and classed ways and across different axes of power and wealth certainly warrants examination.

Crisis propels the displacement of people from their local places to regional and transnational spaces. In Nepal's case, the war heightened the entrance of Nepali workers into countries seeking cheaper labor. Thus, the crisis worked as a mode of production to facilitate cheap labor for the transnational labor market. And last but not least, the crisis brought Nepali women into the transnational labor market. However, this is not only Nepal's story. Many other countries going through economic crisis and civil war travel the same road; migration and displacement or being a refugee is their most viable course to normalcy and existence (Indra 1999; Richmond 1994). Of course, the crisis did more than produce laborers for the transnational market. But this effect is salient because Nepali women, who were virtually immobile in the international migrant labor system, are entering it in increasing numbers.

Thus, further questions emerge: how can the crisis-related displacement of people, and Nepali women in particular, be read and understood locally in terms of women's mobility in a patriarchal society alongside the gendered global division of labor? If the crisis indeed opens up productive spaces, who is harnessing the productive energy of the people living through it? How do the local constructions of gender translate into a productive mode of capitalization in the transnational and global economic market?

Global Mode of Production and Feminist Interventions:

The gendered situation of women in sundry cultures has always been exploited to create war, colonization, and imperialism, and the "War on Terror" after 9/11 is no exception (Hunt and Rygiel 2006, 1-24). The politics of the "War on Terror" in the 21st century have produced a discourse on violence and oppression that is not only regionalized or spatialized but made cultural and gendered. Its enactors have made

women part of its agenda in the undertaking of war against civilians and women themselves. At the same time, the focus on violence against women in outside spaces and the urgency to protect their rights diverts attention from violence in the home space. The Nepali State's barring of women from Gulf countries plays on the same script of violence about Islam and Islamic men that is common in the West. Forbidding women to work in the Gulf countries was based on violence a Muslim employer perpetrated against a Nepali woman, making the whole Islamic Gulf area a potential threat to Nepali women. This is not to say that women do not suffer sexual abuse in Gulf countries or in any other country they work in. They do, just as they do in Nepal. Women inside Nepal were raped, tortured, and killed by the military and the police during the crisis, and many remain unaccounted for. There are thousands trafficked to India as sex-slaves. Domestic violence against Nepali women living in developed places like the USA or Europe is not uncommon either.³¹⁶ In the so-called developed countries, violence against women often becomes invisible in the glittering prosperity and notions of freedom and human rights that supposedly exist there. Violence exists in subtle ways amidst wealth. For example, research on domestic workers, agricultural workers, and service workers in developed countries shows a grim picture of how immigrants, migrants, and domestic workers are treated (Palmer 1989; Romero 1992; Bhattacharjee 2002). The excessive focus on local and specifically cultural or religious violence may hide a larger structure of violence.

As Vandana Shiva and others note, economic globalization pushes privatization of local resources, whereby corporations gain control. This negatively affects the lives of earth bound, indigenous people and those directly dependent on agriculture and local

³¹⁶ A Nepali scholar researching domestic violence in the Nepali population in the New Jersey/New York area found that almost 70% of her subjects encountered domestic violence. [Note: This information is based on her presentation at the Association of Nepalis in America convention, July 3, 2005, Dallas Texas.]

resources.³¹⁷ Women and children make up a large part of this population. Violence operates beneath the apparent production of what David Korten (2001, 48) aptly calls “growth illusion,” which is a “rich man’s game.” Being part of the World Trade Organization means surrendering indigenous ways of life and local economy into the hands of the corporate world and flexible accumulation. Most importantly, local/national governments are made weaker every day in their decision making powers -- economic and political -- and can do less for those who prefer alternatives to modernization and economic liberalization. Today you are told to grow rice, tomorrow to farm shrimp, and next year to produce cotton or coffee. Once a country signs the treaty, WTO policies override local practices, and the constitution of a country itself could be challenged by a foreign corporation if the latter is dissatisfied with trade activities.³¹⁸ One of the ways in which global corporations affected local labor and economic practices was to force countries to produce cash value products instead of use value products for themselves. People plant rubber plants, coffee, cocoa, or Eucalyptus because they have “market value.” A monoculture replaces diversity of produce, while people lose in ways not

³¹⁷ See “Impact of Trade Liberalization under the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) of the World Trade Organization: A Case Study of Rice” by Rural Reconstruction and Friends Alumni in *Asia Pacific Journal* December 2002. While much research shows how the WTO affected different countries, Vandana Shiva’s extensive work in South Asia provides an example of the plight of the poor due to WTO policies. See Shiva (2001), *Stolen Harvest: Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*, and “Ecological Balance in the Era of Globalization” in *Global Ethics and Environment* (1999)

³¹⁸ A small example from Vandana Shiva, who did pioneer work in looking at the effects of the Structural Adjustment Policy of the World Bank and WTO on the local economies and livelihoods of small farmers and entrepreneurs in India, conveys what I mean. “In March 1998 the World Trade Organization announced the initiation of a dispute by the European Union (EU) against India’s restriction on the export of raw hides and fur. The EU argues that preventing the free export of furs and raw hides contravenes Article XI of GATT, any restriction on imports and exports is illegal, even though such restrictions might be necessary for cultural, ecological, and economic reasons. Exporting raw hides and furs would threaten India’s cattle wealth as well as the livelihoods of craftspeople, shoemakers, cobblers, farmers and other small producers. In 1993, when India was forced to remove restrictions on cotton, 2 million weavers lost their livelihoods” (Shiva 2002, 193).

visible in the short term (Shiva 1993).³¹⁹ Since everything is about making money, people who would produce rice in their fields instead produce rubber for tire corporations in the United States or elsewhere. As there is no subsidy for producing rice for the farmers, they are forced to produce cash crops for export. In turn, rice comes from Korea or China or India, and locals who grow rice cannot sell their product as the rice from other places is cheaper, although of low quality.³²⁰ While the mobility of goods and services rises, local people suffer the whims of global corporations, which are only interested in short term profit and move on to new areas where labor is cheaper or taxes more easily evaded. Most importantly, the “export economy” culture produces structured ways of gendered labor, whereby young women and children are hired to do jobs efficiently because of their body structures and “submissiveness”.³²¹ Thus, in many developing countries, young women and children end up working in “export factories” doing structured labor that demands nimble fingers, a docile and unquestioning nature, and a lot of energy. Women from “third world” countries end up in domestic service, sex work, and temporary or part-time jobs in a flexible labor market, and now second world (former Soviet countries) workers also go through “economic restructuring processes” (Peterson and Runyan 1999).

³¹⁹ Liberalization policies on agriculture are showing their adverse effects. See Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind*, for an insightful study on what happens to soil, the environment, nature, and nutritional food habits of people when monocultures take over to create profit.

³²⁰ I often lovingly joke with my mother in Nepal about why our family grows tasteless rice on the farm when they used to grow rice with a delicious scent one could smell far away. They must grow what they can sell on the market while dealing with inflation brought about by cheap rice from other countries. Still, most of the rice grown in the Terai (plains) of Nepal is exported to India, as that is where farmers can make a few pennies. Farming is the least profitable business in Nepal, as in many places in the world now.

³²¹ Carpet factories in Nepal were notorious for employing child labor. Only recently has child labor been questioned in Nepal as well as in many other countries in the South. But poverty pushes children into the labor market, where unethical trans-national corporations do not think twice about the profit they make from the sweat of such children.

Feminist scholars argue that economic globalization has caused a “feminization of labour” and the rising culture of “flexible accumulation” within advanced capitalism.³²² Drawing from theories on globalization and “flexible accumulation.”³²³ Aihwa Ong states, “Since the 1973 world recession, new patterns of ‘flexible accumulation’ have come into play as corporations struggle in an increasingly competitive global arena. Flexible labor regimes, based on female and minority workers, are now common in the third world, as well as in poor regions of metropolitan countries” (Ong 1997, 61).³²⁴ According to Ong, unregulated and informal economic activities are common during economic recession or crisis in advanced capitalist countries, activities commonly associated with developing or poor countries. Interestingly, in these informal economies in advanced countries, “Women, minorities and immigrants furnish [...] low-wage labor” to keep the surplus steady.³²⁵ Following David Harvey, Ong points out that the unregulated economic activity informs the condition of ‘postmodern’ forms of profit maximization. “Thus, flexibilization strategies disregard the traditional boundaries of the global ‘core-periphery,’ operating anywhere a peculiar mix of labor and service conditions favors profit maximization. Such radical reorganization of production forms and spaces is sometimes referred to as ‘postmodern.’”³²⁶ Ong and other scholars have made it clear that as the production process changes, the laboring bodies and wage value also change. With the implementation of GATT (General Agreement on Tariff and Trade), many countries opened up their economic markets to outside investors and

³²² See Sassen 1998, 2000; Ong 1997; Enloe 1989; Fernandez-Kelly 1983.

³²³ Lipietz 1990; Sassen-Koob 1984; Fujita 1988.

³²⁴ See Aihwa Ong’s “Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity” in *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 61.

³²⁵ Ibid., 61.

³²⁶ Ibid., 88.

entrepreneurs, and thus agreed to accept the rules and regulations of the WTO over their own constitutions. But at what cost and at whose expense?

An emerging group of scholars argues that we need to resist dichotomic and binary ways of thinking, i.e. oppressors and resisters, which automatically bestow victim status to “third world” people and women as we analyze globalization. Such authors argue that globalization’s effects are not unilateral or uniform; it has produced uneven modes of production, consumption, identities, subjectivities, and subjects.³²⁷ In the “introduction” to the anthology *Trans-Status Subjects*, Niyogi De and Sonita Sarkar (2002, 2) argue that

Negotiations enacted through the mobilities in globalization produce unconcluded dialectics of power and resistance, bringing old and new oppressions yet also opportunities to challenge them through informal as well as formalized claims to citizenship. These dialectics produce women and men who reclaim and redefine (re-mark) the territories assigned to regional, national, and individual identities, thereby producing new histories with diverse agendas.

They rightly see agency where many *only* see desperation, interpellation, and the violence of global restructuring. Influenced by Michel Foucault’s theorizing on power/knowledge, Niyogi De and Sarkar (2002, 2) state that “Overlapping centers and peripheries produce diverse agents of power (in gender, race/ethnicity, class) . . . [and] resistance and social change arise only from an entanglement with regimes of dominant knowledge/power, not outside them.” If we follow Sarkar and Niyogi De’s assessment in South and South-East Asia, we cannot read the operation of gender and mobility of women in a linear fashion of victim/oppressor, mobile/static, or agents/oppressed. We have to see the “trans” spaces, the in-between spaces, in the network of power and resistance in the global restructuring, but GATT and the WTO do not give rise to it. The agency lies with people

³²⁷ See Hall 1997; Sarkar and Niyogi De 2002; Lowe and Lloyd 1997; Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004.

who struggle and resist the disciplinary methods of GATT and the WTO. Therefore, when we talk of multiple subjectivities emerging from global restructuring processes, the emphasis needs to be on the acting subjects, not only the processes. As it is, it is difficult to measure and map agency and subjectivity and make a specific analysis about how globalization has affected women and gender dynamics; the views are obviously divergent. Much depends on who speaks from what location and position. The optimists argue it is too early to predict the positive and negative forces of globalization in its entirety. Perhaps the analysis is also in a trans-space.

Though multiple, the effects of rapid globalization in the last three decades have been mostly debilitating for the poor in the world. Its most dominant forms are economic and political, although the cultural should not be ignored. While the economic is strengthening the power of global financial institutions and transnational corporations, the political is in crisis. Political globalization is happening in the form of exporting “liberal democracy” of the American kind around the globe. Amy Chua (2002) in her article “A World on the Edge” provides a convincing study of the effects of introducing liberal democracy along with a free market economy at once in developing countries. Ethnic cleansing, civil wars, and armed conflict rage across the globe.³²⁸ While it may be premature to give a final verdict on globalization, economic crisis is the catalyst for the growing spatial movement of people, civil wars, armed conflict, global warming, and other environmental destruction in many places.

³²⁸ Chua’s investigation leads her to state that globalization only assists rich nations to become richer while it creates havoc in local cultures and economies. She argues that globalization has facilitated the rise of a market-dominant minority who control a vast amount of wealth, while native populations are hurled into ethnic war and political conflict. For more, see her book *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (2003).

As we have seen, modern development efforts have had uneven and unintended consequences. Economic globalization has affected women and gender roles in complex ways in different places, but the gendered division of labor along lines of class and classed nationalities is not going away. Despite programs like WID, WAD, and GAD, women in developing countries are pushed from one gendered structure of inequality and crisis to other modes of oppression facilitated by the free market economy (Marchand 2000, Sassen 1998, 2002, Fernandez-Kelly and Nash 1983). Due to the imposition of globalized capitalist modes of production, local modes of production and consumption are going through complex changes. People are forced to produce for “export” and “cash income” rather than for sustainability of their livelihoods in local spaces.³²⁹

Transnational capitalism took an interesting turn in the last decade since the establishment of the WTO in 1995 and the institutionalization of free trade as the mark of development and progress in the third world. People are on the move, not only the goods they produce. This movement of men and women occurs inside the gendered and political economy of race, class, sex, and the international division of labor (Spivak 1988a, Escobar 1995, Mohanty 2003). What Gayatri Spivak (1988a, 167) pointed out two decades ago about the fate of working class women in the third world as the “worst victims” in the international division of labor holds true even as some third world countries have marched ahead in the game of economic development. Whether it is the international division of labor or transnational division of labor, working class third world women “are the surplus army of labor in the current conjuncture” (Spivak 1988a,

³²⁹ The capitalist approach to development focuses on large scale production of crops, textiles, and goods in a short period of time to produce capital without considering the long term consequences for local modes of production and the environment. As the emphasis is on large scale and highly mechanized production systems, many local needs go overlooked. There might be overproduction in some areas and no production in others. Overproduction decreases the value of a product in the market and creates inflation, while people are forced to buy imported products with a high price tag.

167). Although women from “third world” spaces have moved from the private, local realm to the public, industrialized economy and international networks of production, the heightened economic differences between the global South and the global North have exacerbated the burden of gendered and nationalized labor system. Women enter the arena of gendered and classed labor at the global level as domestic workers, factory workers, seamstresses, agricultural workers, nurses, and sex workers; some describe this process as a feminization of labor.³³⁰ However, under transnational capitalism, workers in general are positioned in such antagonistic ways in terms of nationality, race, sexuality and gender, and cultural-religious differences that they fail to emerge as a univocal proletarian class/subject (Lloyd and Lowe 1997). As Lloyd and Lowe (1997, 23) put it in their introduction to the anthology *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*,

Transnational capitalism has configured the mode of production in ways that are parasitic on the nation-state and its institutions, but rely on a disempowered citizenry; it continues to exploit labor, but redefines and differentiates who that labor is in terms of gender, race, and nation, and thus seeks to preclude the formation of a univocal international proletariat subject.

Conclusion:

This chapter explores ways in which modern economic and development paradigms as employed in Nepal may have contributed to economic crisis, leading to the armed conflict started by the Maoists. This exploration provides further speculation on how Western development discourses and practices directly and indirectly helped to engender a communist rebellion in Nepal. Likewise, I look at ways in which gender

³³⁰For an astute analysis of how race and gender are part of the “social reproduction” of labor, see Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor” (1992). Although Glenn’s analysis is based on interlocking systems of race, class and gender in the organization of reproductive labor in the United States, it serves as a pattern for the transnational scene of service work. For a few examples of feminization and “third worlding” of labor, see Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001); Rachel Salazar Parrenas (2001); Cynthia Enloe 1990); Saskia Sassen (1998); and L. Gray, A. Bohlen, and M.P. Fernandez-Kelly produced film: *The Global Assembly Line*.

operates in the development discourse in Nepal, and how third world women are constituted in the network of flexible capital accumulation made efficient by the free market economy. In this instance, it is important to note how, despite volatile gender dynamics and empowerment of women to some extent at the local level, traditional gender roles relocate in global spaces. Women may not work as housewives in their own homes, but they become housekeepers or domestics within the transnational division of labor. Likewise, labor in the private or domestic arena at the transnational and trans-familial level should not be looked upon as merely migrant work for money. It is a gendered arena of labor that mostly “third world” nationals enter globally. Migrant workers and immigrants to Western and wealthy countries take on many blue collar jobs in the geo-political transnational division of labor. Thus, despite empowerment brought about by crisis at the local level, Nepali women still get caught in the network of “gendered labor” in the marketplace of labor. This reveals something about the power of the global upon the local spaces and the ways in which global paradigms influence local constructions of gender.

Chapter Seven

New Beginnings: Communities in Crisis and a “Nepali Diaspora” in the Making

One can proudly claim that the otherwise small obscure archaic monarchical state of Nepal, which hardly existed in the political map of the world, has today become a focus of attention not only in this region but across the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Today officials of the United Nations frequently visit Nepal.³³¹

The Nepali crisis abounds with paradoxes of invisibility and visibility, while Nepali politics, for better or for worse, has indeed been internationalized. Since the Maoist People’s War started in 1996, visitors to Nepal include not only U.N. officials, but also U.S. and Indian military officers as well as politicians and diplomats from many regions. Across the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans and across the Indian Ocean in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan, we hear about the plight of the Nepalis. While some toil in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Lebanon, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Japan, those who can afford it leave for Europe and North America. As I argued earlier, the increased labor migration among Nepali men that started in the early 1990s reached a new height after the “People’s War”³³² began in 1996, when both men and women started leaving Nepal in great numbers. There is no denying the crisis brought about critical situations of displacement, leading to new trajectories in political, cultural, gender, and economic processes in Nepal and outside Nepal. As many political party activists, journalists, and diplomats left Nepal in the last decade, their sundry political parties opened up sister organizations outside Nepal.³³³ Most importantly, in the last decade, Nepalis living

³³¹ These are the words of the only other senior woman Maoist leader, who goes by the name Com. Parvati (2005).

³³² I am using this term as the Communist Party Nepal (Maoist) uses it to define the rebellion and insurgency. There are critiques as to whether the Maoist Party’s claim to represent the armed conflict as a “people’s war” is valid. See Hutt (2004) edited anthology for a diversity of opinions.

³³³ Now there are Nepali Congress organizations in the U.S. (Nepali Jana Samparka Samiti, for example) and Europe, and you may find UML and CPN(M) organizations in Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, and Europe. Often, Nepalis abroad invite political guests from Nepal. There are also numerous non-governmental

outside of Nepal (some willingly and some because of constraints) have utilized the term diaspora to organize and address the political crisis and armed conflict back in Nepal. As the number of Nepalis abroad has continued to increase, the appropriation of the term diaspora by Nepalis to represent Nepalis abroad makes an important case study. Also important is the evolution of the concept of a “Nepali diaspora” amidst a structure of violence that is local and global, historical and contemporary, and hitherto untheorized in the Nepali context, and how it may possibly work as a catalyst to effect political and social transformation in Nepal. Likewise, the urgency with which the term “Nepali diaspora” is being appropriated warrants speculation on the appropriateness of its usages in light of critical approaches to diaspora itself (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997; Sheffer 2003). Before I venture into explicating and theorizing the Nepali condition of diaspora, a brief discussion of different thoughts on diaspora is in order.

Diaspora: A Term with Many Meanings

Having its linguistic roots in Greek, *diaspora* means “to scatter” and “to sow,” a double process of dispersion and sprouting, displacement and re-placement.³³⁴

Historically, the term “Diaspora” referred to the exceptional condition of a particular people who lost their homeland, namely the Jewish people.³³⁵ By the late 20th century,

organizations run by diasporic Nepalis related to democracy, development and health, human rights and women’s rights in Nepal, and Nepali culture and literature. Some of these organizations hold meetings routinely and showcase cultural programs from Nepal. The Association of Nepalis in America (ANA) is a large umbrella organization that organizes annual conventions in venues in the United States. Their activities are posted online: <http://www.anaonline.org/>

³³⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1994. Gabriel Sheffer (2003) notes that the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* did not mention “Diaspora” until the late 1960s, and dictionary entries on “diaspora” cited the scattering of Jews among the “Gentile nations.” In 1993, the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* added another meaning of diaspora: “the situation of people living outside their traditional homeland” (9). This definition substantiates the fact that many appropriated the term diaspora to connote their condition of displacement, which spurred academic discussion on the constitution of diaspora.

³³⁵ There are debates surrounding the use of the term diaspora (Sheffer 1986, 2003; Safran 1991; Clifford 1994, 1997; Tötölyan 1991; Gilroy 1993; Grosz 1993; Cohen 1997; Brah 1996; Bradotti 1994; Boyarin 2002; Butler 2001). Especially see William Safran’s “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland

the usages and approaches to diaspora were multiple. The term expanded beyond its exclusive reference to the dispersion of Jews. However, a trace of exceptionality, albeit of a different kind, persists: diaspora is an embodied term, signifying a specific historical experience of a particular group of people and their displacement and dispersal. The concept of exceptionality that some communities and theorists (Sheffer 1986, 2003; Safran 1991) attribute to diaspora informs their understanding of themselves as having unique experiences as communities of people in history. Yet, it has become an arduous task to keep the historical exceptionalities alive in the context of globalization and “deterritorialization,”³³⁶ movements that increasingly change our concepts of place, space, time, identity and belonging.

The notion of diaspora requires some form of genealogy of common history, movement, displacement, and collective memory of such struggle. It cannot be imagined without community, relationality, and interconnectedness to something beyond oneself. It is an identity category to express one’s spatial and temporal location and position in

and Return” in *Diasporas: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, Vol.1, no. 1, Spring 1991 [83-99]. In this influential essay, Safran provides a defining model for diaspora by saying there are classical or organic diasporas alongside communities that hold “diaspora consciousness.” Although Safran does not discount the possibility of other diasporas, he implies the exceptional condition of some diasporas over others: “we may legitimately speak of the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and perhaps Chinese diasporas at present and of the Polish diasporas of the past, although none of them fully conform to the ‘ideal type’ of the Jewish Diaspora” (84). Robin Cohen (1997) critically modifies and unsettles Safran’s take on diaspora, especially the Jewish condition (1-29), and offers different typologies for diaspora, such as “victim, labour, trade, imperial and cultural” (x). Safran (1999) takes on Cohen’s critique of his work and the latter’s liberal expansion, or Safran might call it “abstraction” of diaspora, in “Comparing Diasporas and Conceptions of Diasporas.” Anthropologist James Clifford (1994, 308), who brings together different approaches to diaspora, states that diaspora discourses utilize both “roots *and* routes” to build a community of difference. He argues for a more nuanced concept of diaspora where the term is a “signifier, not just of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local, as a distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement” (Clifford 1994, 308).

³³⁶ There are different uses of the concept of deterritorialization (i.e. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari 1983 and Hardt and Negri 2000). More than a philosophical or psychoanalytical understanding of the term, my use here refers to an anthropological and post-colonial understanding of place, space, culture, economy, and diaspora and national identity constructions under globalization and decolonization. See the works of Appadurai (1997); Basch, Schiller and Blanc (1994); Brah (1996); Ashcroft (2001); Dorrian and Rose (2003); and Papastergiadis (2000).

history as well as a psychological state of mind. In my view, even in times of deterritorialization, it is a longing for connection, a search for identification with something more than one's immediate location and existence, that makes possible the concept of diaspora. Such longing could be desire for a *proper home* or even disdain for a *secure home*, where one feels confined and paralyzed. Homi Bhabha (1997, 445-456) delineates such dread for home as "unhomeliness." According to Bhabha, "The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world . . . The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (1997, 445-448).³³⁷

However, as Safran argues, ideality, more than materiality, defines and keeps alive the specificity of "old diasporas," for the place of containment is a temporary place, a "passing" place, a place of journey, but not the final destination, not a *proper home*.³³⁸ Despite arguments of essentialism or exceptionalism, keeping alive the notions of "old diasporas" may actually provide templates for articulating differences and similarities within new diasporas, and between the old and the new. We do not need to erase old

³³⁷ Bhabha's notion of the "disjunctions of political existence" pertains to understandings of modern conditions of subject formation in displacement. Although Bhabha's analysis comes from his reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, his examination of unhomeliness as reflected in literature is insightful in showing the relationship between the notion of home and the world (usually understood as the outside). Although home and the world exist as exclusive categories denying each other, they cannot exist without each other. Home cannot be perceived without its other constituent part, as expressed in the dichotomic forms of private/public, native/immigrant, insider/outsider identities that define and constitute it and what is known as its opposition, the world.

³³⁸ Phenomenological (Tilley 1994; Deleuze and Guattari 1987) as well as post-colonial (Blunt and Rose, 1994; Bill Ashcroft 2001; Rushdie 1991) approaches offer many concepts of place and space, and thus of diasporas. Perhaps theosophical aspects of "body" and the notion of "transcendence" or "nirvana" of the body/self to the Brahman, or return to God, influence the idealist aspects to diaspora. According to Barbara Bender (2001, 7), "the contemporary anthropological focus on 'migration,' 'diaspora,' 'nomadology,' and 'borderlands' needs to not only be set within longer histories of movement and displacement ... but also grounded, to take on board an embodied, phenomenological approach." In the present context, social and anthropological approaches might be more productive in understanding the nature of the Nepali diaspora.

concepts of diaspora to seek legitimacy for the new ones. They exist in relationality to make diaspora a live and useful category.

The new formations of diasporas seem to occur at multiple levels within material, economic, affective, discursive and technological networks of power/knowledge. Modern diasporic subjects may be influenced by narratives of older diasporas and draw from them to make sense of their own existence in displaced conditions. We live in “global postmodern” (Hall 1997, 182) moments of which not much can be said yet in conclusive terms, except that globalization facilitates vast movements of people to different trajectories, as agents and as victims, and sometimes as both at the same time: there are contradictory productions within globalization. We cannot imagine a “systematic prognosis” (Appadurai 2003, 45), but must imagine chaos and uncertainty as the various flows that determine the global economy today are disjunctive, contingent, and contextual. However, with Stuart Hall’s insight into how new subjects are constantly born at the crossroads of globalization and modernization, we can hope that within new global postmodern moments there are global postmodern subjects evolving and utilizing the notion of diaspora in an agentic way to scribe their narratives of displacement in postcolonial moments.³³⁹ These new subjects are utilizing the concept of diaspora at a different level, and by doing that they are also changing the constricted notions of identity, home, nation, and belonging. Hopefully, this is a transformative counter-effect to the paralyzing effects of globalization and is evidence that there are contradictions at

³³⁹ Take, for example, some notable writers and scholars of the Indian diaspora, such as Salman Rushdie, Homi Bhabha, Meena Alexander, and Gayatri Spivak. It should also be noted that these individuals belonged to the educated middle-class.

the heart of unitary and uniform processes like globalization, colonialism, and imperialism.³⁴⁰

Since colonization and technologization started, there are overlapping networks of agency, power, and hybridity alongside processes of homogenization and Westernization through modern missions of development and progress, creating uneven and deterritorialized identities.³⁴¹ For example, there are global and transnational subjects alongside people termed native or indigenous; but economic, political, and cultural forces mean they cannot remain unaffected by changes in each other's locations, whether or not they are willing to mix, merge, or rely on each other. Identity categories like native or indigenous are self-proclaimed as well as constructed and imposed by the outside. There is no question of choice in all circumstances as categories have a way of becoming reified over time. As Appadurai (2003, 30) states, "One man's imagined community is another man's political prison." Often, outside discourses of subject construction impose identity categories on people, things, and places. For some, places are deterritorialized spaces constantly changing according to market value, which multinational capital controls. For others, places hold cultural, religious, and historical significance, as for many Jews with Israel, or practicing Muslims, who turn toward Mecca when they pray.

³⁴⁰ Some Marxist theorists, like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, seem optimistic about the future even with globalization. In their book *Multitude*, they present an interesting concept of globalization and how it functions under empire. In their theory, even the empire is a network of power points distributed throughout the world rather than a constitutive, sovereign power point, whence imperialist forces operated in the past. Under the new Empire, there are two faces of globalization: "on one face, Empire spreads globally its networks of hierarchies and divisions that maintain order through new mechanisms of control and constant conflict. Globalization, however, is also the creation of new circuits of cooperation and collaboration that stretch across nations and continents and allow unlimited encounters" (xiv). The idea is that the alternative appropriation of globalization could provide a common platform to work toward resistance to empire, which is oppressive and relies on perpetual war to keep global order. The multitude can be that force to destabilize the Empire.

³⁴¹ I use the term deterritorialized identity to refer to an identity that is not locationally specific or does not claim to be rooted in any particular place or ethno-nationalism.

Clearly, the definition of diaspora has changed as movements and displacements increase and people manage their identities with changing histories, times and locations (Cohen 1997; Braziel and Mannur 2003). In this instance, diaspora as an identity category embodies both corporal and conceptual experiences of loss and recovery, history and memory, home and belonging within and across the border.³⁴² How can we make productive use of “diaspora” without eliding the historical materiality embodied in the term for groups that believe their experiences to be exceptional in history, and at the same time re-think diasporas within contemporary incarnations of borders and boundaries imposed by armed conflicts, natural catastrophes, and migrations due to neo-geo-bio-politics?³⁴³ This is a complex but pertinent question. The Nepali crisis provides a perfect case study to observe the development of new forms of diaspora in deterritorialized spaces. Thus, my aim is to look at how the decade-long armed conflict deterritorialized the borders and boundaries of the Nepali nation-state and in effect changed Nepali political, national, and cultural identity. I focus on ways in which the notion of diaspora has facilitated people’s existence as political subjects in displacement in the aftermath of the crisis. This is not to say that diaspora and displacement are new and anomalous experiences in Nepali peoples’ history. On the contrary, as I explicate in the next section, Nepali diasporic consciousness has a long history in British colonialism and militarization. In the aftermath of the People’s War, how and why the Nepali community appropriates the concept of diaspora becomes critical. On the other hand, how does this

³⁴² Here the border functions as a productive force and a liminal boundary space; it exists as a boundary line to separate cultures, genders, sexualities, religions, and almost everything that has an identity or a name. As Homi Bhabha (1994) argues in *The Location of Culture*, although seen as markers of difference, borders are not rigid places where movement is fixed but are productive places of heterogeneity, hybridity, and newness.

³⁴³ A not so recent estimate suggests that “25 million people have been forced to leave their country; 25 million people have been internally displaced; and another 75 million are on the move because of economic or environmental circumstances” (Bender and Winer 2001). Such numbers have since increased.

move by migrated or temporarily displaced Nepalis affect the concept of a Nepali nation and Nepali cultural and political identity inside and outside Nepal? Speaking of the uses of diaspora, do we need to impose one form of diaspora onto another, past onto present, or should we look at ways in which old diasporas inform new ones?

History and Present: “Nepali Diaspora,” What Does it Mean?

Although many in Nepali communities do not realize what the historical “Diaspora” connotes, the word is gaining more and more currency in cultural and political organizing inside and outside Nepal.³⁴⁴ In academic writing about Nepal, the term first described the regional displacement of Nepali ethnic groups in the context of Nepali identity and Nepali nationalism in South Asia.³⁴⁵ In contemporary writing, it is common to see popular headlines like “Nepali Diaspora’s Appeal,” “Nepali Diaspora Speaks,” “The Voices of the Nepali Diaspora,” and “Political Organizing in Nepali Diaspora” in major newspapers in Nepal as well as in online networks, blogs, and online discussion forums utilized by non-resident Nepalis worldwide.

“Diasporas come in many forms. There are diasporas by design and diasporas by accident” (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1989, i). The Nepali diaspora exemplifies both and more at this juncture in history. A more historical scenario of diaspora emerges from the militarization of certain ethnic groups in Nepal during Pritivi Narayan Shah’s

³⁴⁴ From my interactions with people in the Nepali community, my sense is the term diaspora is used basically to mean “living outside the home country”; very few people are aware of the history of the old diasporas. The term resonated with the intellectuals and educated class living outside Nepal and slowly became part of the larger public imagination. This reveals that the new diasporas are less concerned with being historically correct; they simply exist as temporal formations and affective processes.

³⁴⁵ Michael Hutt’s “Being Nepali without Nepal: Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora” is one of the earlier works that attempt to understand “Nepali national identity” in conjunction with “Nepali Diasporic identity” amidst ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity in relation to historical emigration from Nepal to India and Bhutan. As Hutt (1997) mentions, there are equivalent terms to diaspora, like *basai*, *pardesh*, *parbas*, *lahur/e*, and *sukumbasi*, but to my mind, *basai* comes closest to representing the double process of displacement and placement connoted by diaspora. Lila B. Chetri’s novel titled *Basai* may be the first work of its kind to capture the local and regional condition of the Nepali diaspora.

unification drive in the mid 18th century. After the so-called unification of Nepal in 1769 CE, the Gurkhali Empire fought many wars with neighboring kingdoms, and at one point the House of Shah's rule extended from "the Tista River (Sikkim in India) in the east to the Satlaj River (Pakistan) in the West" (Shaha 1990, 110). Later, when the British East India Company fought against Nepal to retaliate for Gurkhali imperial pursuits, a truce called the *Sugauli-sandhi* ended the war of 1814-16 and included a provision that Gurkha soldiers be recruited to form battalions in the British East India Company.³⁴⁶ Even before that, as the British expanded their power in northern India, Nepali men started going to Lahore to fight for Sikh kings, like Hari Singh, against the British East India Company.³⁴⁷ However, the recruitment of Gurkhas in the British East India Company in the 19th century is the defining moment in the formal institutionalization of the mercenary tradition among young men in Nepal, mostly those from ethnic groups like the Magars, Gurungs, and Rais.³⁴⁸ The tradition of soldiering for the British continued even after the independence of India and Pakistan from the British Raj in 1947 as the peace treaty between Nepal and India included the stipulation that "Gurkha Soldiers" continue to be recruited in the Indian army as well as the British.³⁴⁹ The legacy of colonialism, which involved making an army wherever the British went, was fulfilled in the production of

³⁴⁶ According to Shaha (1990), the British pursued the recruitment of Gurkhali soldiers into their army even before the decisive war was over between the British East India Company and the Gurkhali army.

³⁴⁷ See Des Chene (1991), "Relics of Empire: A Cultural History of the Gurkhas 1815-1987," for an astute analysis of the making of the Gurkhas during British colonialism in India vis a vis the former Gurkhali empire of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

³⁴⁸ The term mercenary should be understood in the historical context of Nepal, where certain ethnic groups were mobilized to embody this tradition of working "independently" to improve their lives. Although I use the term mercenary, I do not suggest these people are loyal only to money, which is not the case. When the British created the British Gurkha Army, they fashioned an ideology of bravery, courage, and loyalty to attract these men. This ideology became the key interpellating factor to serving in the British army besides the economic incentive.

³⁴⁹ For a detailed political analysis of the Gurkha tradition in the British army, see Husain (1970). For Gurkha recruitment in the Indian army, see the chapter "Gurkha Recruitment and the Government of India" in Husain (1990).

Gurkhas for use by Britain and by India when the British left. Thus, Nepalis continue to serve these countries in their wars. Earlier, the British took Gurkha soldiers to aid their expansionist schemes and protect their territories. Now, they send them to “fight terrorism” and “ensure democracy” in those now free nations. Gurkhas fought for the British from Waziristan (Afghanistan) to Malaya, from Gallipoli to Tobruk, and in the Falkland Islands in the 80s. Today, Gurkhas in the Indian army fight to secure the Indian border in Kashmir, or for the British army in Iraq or Afghanistan.³⁵⁰ There are diverse opinions regarding Gurkha recruitment for other nations, but this is an issue not in the scope of this chapter. It suffices to say that Gurkha recruitment has been a contentious issue since the Sugauli treaty in 1816 CE. In the 1990s, nationalists and liberals alike made it their policy card to fight over in their political and ideological battles.³⁵¹

Disregarding the value judgment and equation of benefit or loss, the historical roots or routes to the global diaspora of Nepalis come first and foremost from the British colonial militarization of Nepali men from the beginning of the 19th century until today. The story of contemporary times may seem different but is essentially a product of what Foucault (1978, 141) calls the technology of bio-politics. This started as early as the seventeenth century and since then has taken different incarnations to expand bio-power in the service of a particular group of people while also effecting the “factors of segregation and social hierarchization . . . guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony” worldwide (Foucault 1978, 141). As Foucault implicates, while

³⁵⁰ See *Gurkhas at War In Their Own Words: The Gurkha Experience 1939 to the Present* by J. P. Cross and Buddhiman Gurung for the war stories of those soldiers who have fought all over the world since WWII.

³⁵¹ The left in Nepal opposes the recruitment of Nepali men in the British and Indian army, stating it is not nationalist. The civil society also more or less opposes the recruitment of Nepalis in foreign armies. At the same time, there are liberals who think people should have the right to seek foreign employment, whether military or otherwise. The ethnic groups most involved in soldiering hold differing opinions.

bio-power brought knowledge to Western man about his own existence as a living being/species with a body among other life forces in the world, this knowledge also revealed human existence as not just biological but political (Foucault 1978, 142). This meant the proliferation of biological-turned-political techniques over life-species to categorize, investigate, hierarchize, discipline, and control, which we see in the colonial and imperial history of the Western world until today. Within the technology of bio-politics, one does not fight for a sovereign of a nation but for a cause, for the “‘right’ to life, to one’s body, to health, to happiness, to the satisfaction of needs, and beyond all the oppressions or ‘alienations,’ the ‘right’ to rediscover what one is and all that one can be....” (Foucault 1978, 145).

As the bio-politics over life dominated by the Western world continues, the U.S. led “Global War against Terror” has claimed Nepali men on the battlefield in different ways -- sometimes as mercenary soldiers and other times as cooks, drivers, or cleaners. A new kind of gender-restructuring is on the rise at the global level. In August of 2004, an Islamic terrorist group in Iraq took twelve Nepali men hostage and killed them in the most merciless manner possible. Yet, this horrible act did not discourage people from flooding the Middle East for work, as I discuss in another chapter. It is, of course, ironic that war-weary migrant Nepalis work in war-ravaged places like Iraq or Afghanistan. People pushed outside home by war are pulled into war-torn places to build, secure, and protect. Reports claim that more than 30,000 Nepalis have entered Iraq via Kuwait for work, and many more are waiting to go there. One report quoted a young man as saying, “I want a decent salary . . . and I’m ready to go to hell for it” (Phuyal 2004). It is not that Nepalis do not understand war economics or that economics almost always motivates

wars. Mary Des Chene (1991) quotes a Gurkha *Lahure*'s views on the British war over the Falkland Islands in the 80s.³⁵² This *Lahure* speculates on the "political economy" of the fight for the Falkland Islands in relation to the Gurkhas.

The British will have to find a new place to put us when they leave Hong Kong. They won't keep us all in England because that's too expensive, and they like us because we are cheap. Cyprus is a possibility, but UN troops are already there, so it might be difficult. So where will they put us? It's a problem. Now the Falklands are cold and it's not good land, I hear. All you can do there is herd sheep, and we know you don't get rich herding sheep! So what do they want the Falklands for that they make war? That's where they will station us when they have to leave Hong Kong. It's cheap, and we can stand the climate. Doesn't everyone know? What did your newspapers say? (Des Chene 1991, 323)

Another *Lahure* who fought in Malaya and Borneo in the 1950s and 60s offers an astute analysis:

Look now, *bahini* [sister], wars are about economics. Isn't that right? Those who are rich want to stay that way. Those who are poor want more. Malaya is full of good timber, the jungles are huge. The British had it all arranged there, they got wood for their houses and furniture, and rubber for their cars. Now why would they give that up without a fight? And we go and fight for their advantage (*phaidā*) because of economics too. We need money so our families can eat, so we go and fight. It doesn't matter about ideas, people fight for food, and after that for radios and pretty *lungis* [long skirts worn by women] on our side, and car tires and other things on their [the British] side. (Des Chene 1991, 324)

The Nepali *Lahure*'s conjectures are not far from the truth.³⁵³ What he says about "war economics" and the economics of place, land, and resources is eerily familiar if one looks at historical and contemporary wars fought for wealth and resources. The recent U.S. war in Iraq is a stark example of such economics.

When ex-Gurkhas and other Nepalis work in war-torn places like Iraq or Afghanistan, they are not devoid of agency, but necessity or desire to better their lives

³⁵² *Lahure* is a Nepali term for a Gurkha soldier who serves in the British or the Indian army.

³⁵³ As Des Chene (1991, 325) illustrates, the Gurkha soldiers' theories of war are based more on pragmatism and realities of human nature than on idealism. In other words, Gurkha soldiers understand that wars are about "power and economics, not ideas."

pulls them into places that some can afford not to venture into. The paradoxical opportunity war creates for some to make money cannot be examined outside the context of other war torn places that people leave. Seen in this light, Nepalis in the British or Indian army do not necessarily join out of coercion; but existential necessities and lack of opportunities and work in their own country push them outside their land and place. Stories of adventure, travel, and excitement expressed by former *Lahures* within the family or community also help to interpellate young men into following their forefathers' routes. Colonial history has put such structures in place for many Nepalis that the military profession seems hereditary and naturalized.

To summarize, the Nepali condition of diaspora is ensconced within local and global conditions of inequality, imperialism, and colonialism of old, and is furthered today by the bio-politics over life and labor. It is conditioned by design as well as by accidental events. On the one hand, there are the historico-political factors of war, internal political conflicts over national sovereignty, and the semi-colonial situation of Nepali people under British India. The colonial and imperial factors perpetuated the notion of "martial races" and divided different ethnic groups inside Nepal along hierarchically-racialized gendered constructions. The construction of martiality among certain communities led to a seemingly voluntary, but in reality designed, material and social construction that left little choice not to serve in an army, native or foreign. As the genealogy of martiality was adopted, the displacement and migrations of different Nepali ethnicities from the hills of Nepal to the plains of South Asia and elsewhere resulted.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴ Though Britain never ruled directly over Nepal, its recruitment of Gurkhas and use of Nepali soldiers against the Indian resistance, including the Sepoy mutiny of 1857, indicates a degree of control. The recruitment in the British Army of Nepali men, primarily from particular ethnic groups, not only began the Nepali diaspora, but also gave rise to a gendered culture of "left behind" women waiting for their "Lahure"

On the other hand, more recently, the forces of economic globalization interpellated Nepali subjects to participate willingly in the making of a diaspora. Of course, there are those who choose dislocation and diaspora in an attempt to break the boundaries laid out by social constructions of gender, sex, race, religion, and more. There are always excesses and agencies at work, but what is made to seem “normal” about contemporary displacement is not really such if one looks more deeply into the matter. Clearly, the Nepali diaspora is not a monolithic construction, and my inability to focus here on those many other aspects, especially the local histories of displacement under the Gurkhali Empire and unification, does not discount their existence.³⁵⁵

As I explicated above, the Nepali diaspora is rooted in colonization and imperialism, although more recently, economic globalization and political crisis have played instrumental roles in creating such conditions. Thus, my immediate concern is to look at the ways in which the Maoist People’s War effected a Nepali diaspora and made it a political tool to assuage the pain of conflict related violence. One particular notion I want to highlight is how political power is constituted in and through the use of diaspora as a concept when the “homeland” is in crisis, and how diasporic subjects wield and shape politics at home. Or can they? By looking at the reactions and the roles played by the diasporic community in the United States, an influential group, I briefly highlight the deterritorialized nature of Nepali politics at a time when local “identity politics” in Nepal has increased. In order to explicate my premise that the political conflict in Nepal has enhanced and made necessary the appropriation of concepts like diaspora as a political

husbands: this is another important issue for further research and investigation. For more on the construction of “Gurkha identity” see Des Chene (1991) and Pratyoush Onta (1996).

³⁵⁵ The construction of martiality and the interpellation of ethnic groups into it may have started long before the British ventured into Nepal; perhaps, even before the Gurkhali kings started the unification process of Nepal. The only difference is that the British were more effective in its implementation and institutionalization for their colonial advantage.

tool, I turn to my study of Nepalis in the United States and North America. My assertions are based on participant observation of Nepali organizations and my own interactions as a Nepali with other Nepalis living in the United States.

Nepali Diasporics in the U.S.: Political Activism during the Crisis

The Diversity Visa Program and the increased number of foreign students have changed the demographics of the Nepali population in the U.S. Some speculate that more than 100,000 people of Nepali origin live in the States. Since the conflict began, the U.S. admitted tens of thousands of Nepalis, and the Nepali population in the U.S. quadrupled in the last decade or so. According to the U.S. Census, more people have come to the U.S. from Nepal since the year 1996 than ever before. This happened exactly when Nepal was going through a fierce communist insurgency and counterinsurgency by the perpetually changing government (for a period, the Nepali government changed almost every six months).

There is no classified census of the Nepali population in the U.S. until the year 1989. Perhaps because of the negligent number of Nepali immigrants until 1988, they fell under the “Other Asians” category.³⁵⁶ Legal Nepali “immigrants” to the U.S. according to country of birth from 1989 to 2005 are estimated at 14,165, of which 12,635 came since 1996. The remaining 1,530 are “the number of Legal Permanent Residents admitted by country of birth” from 1989 to 1995. These data do not reflect the number of students or other kinds of non-immigrant visa status residents in the U.S.³⁵⁷ According to the data on “Non-Immigrant Visas” issued by the U.S. embassy in Nepal, from the years

³⁵⁶ According to the U.S. Census, 75 Nepali immigrants were admitted in 1984. Reported in “Nepali-Americans” by Olivia Miller. <http://www.everyculture.com/multi/Le-Pa/Nepalese-American.html>.

³⁵⁷ According to the U.S. Census in the year 2000, the number of the “Nepal born” population is 11,715, among which Asian Race is 10,204. The rest are designated as White, African, or mixed.

1996 to 2005, the number of visas issued is 57,080. While this does not mean that all the Visas issued were for Nepalis, it is safe to say the vast majority were for Nepali citizens.

The census and the immigrant data both show that the registered number of Nepalis as “legal immigrants” until 2005 is not above 15,000, which is very low compared to the actual number of Nepalis speculated to be in the U.S. The tri-state area of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania alone may have between 20,000 to 30,000 Nepalis. One Nepali resident of Queens, New York who has been living there since 1996 speculates there may be 30,000 Nepalis right in New York City.³⁵⁸ These are conjectures, but it would not be an exaggeration to say, taking into consideration the number of students, H-1 visa holders, and others who are part of the 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S., there might easily be 50,000 to 100,000 Nepalis in the U.S.

Compared to the number of migrant Nepalis in Asian countries like Malaysia, the U.A.E., and Hong Kong, the U.S. diasporic Nepali population is small. However, the influence it exerts is quite significant by virtue of its affiliation with one of the most powerful nations of the world. Given the strong political influence exerted by the North American Nepali diaspora during the conflict years and considering the visits of U.S. officials to Nepal and the visits of Nepali politicians, journalists, and activists to the U.S., a couple of questions arise.³⁵⁹ Has the North American Nepali diaspora³⁶⁰ been able to

³⁵⁸ Based on a personal conversation.

³⁵⁹ The flow of dignitaries from the U.S. visiting Nepal and Nepali politicians, human rights activists, and civil society members visiting the United States indicates Nepali politics has indeed been deterritorialized. In the last five years alone, Nepal has welcomed many U.S. state and military officials: Colin Powell (June 2002), Christina Rocca (2005), Donald Camp (June 2006), Tom Daschle (July 2005), Richard Boucher (May 2006), Admiral William Fallon (February 06), Edwin Smith (2006) and Tom Reiser, an aid to Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, are some. Among Nepali dignitaries, the visits of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in 2002 (after TADO had been promulgated) to garner support from the Bush

affect or change the U.S. foreign policy toward Nepal and the Maoists? While Nepali men and women have migrated to the United States in great numbers and the U.S. has been more open to taking in Nepalis since 1996, has Nepali politics been deterritorialized in the aftermath of the Maoist insurgency and state counterinsurgency?

First, it is important to contextualize the involvement the U.S. had with the Nepali crisis. After the Maoist war broke out, the U.S. government gave over \$30 million in military assistance to Nepal's government, most of which came as military and security aid.³⁶¹ While the U.S. time and again reiterated its stand against a military solution to the conflict in Nepal, it sent mixed signals by supporting the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) with weapons and technical and logistical training in Nepal as well as in the United States. A look at diasporic publications shows the majority of the diasporic population condemned the arms support from the U.S., India, and Europe -- most Nepalis did not support their fellows being killed, whether they were Maoists or not. A study of the statements and activities of James Moriarty, the U.S. ambassador to Nepal, shows the U.S. favored a two-pillar policy that divided governance of the country between the monarchy and the constitutional political parties, excluding the Maoists as "terrorist forces." Many political analysts in Nepal and elsewhere criticized the U.S. policy towards the Maoists as a "Cold War" perspective. However, the United States as well as India, the most involved

Administration in combating the "Maoist Terrorists" and Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey after the royal coup in 2005 were most notable.

³⁶⁰ The North American diaspora covers Canada as well, and this term is gaining currency.

³⁶¹ This figure does not include other kinds of development funding and directly relates to curbing the Maoist insurgency. After the King seized all executive powers in February of 2005, the United States was compelled to back out of forcing the political parties to make a truce with the King. Between 1996 and 2000, the U.S. gave about \$5.6 million in different forms of military and security aid. After 9/11, the amount increased tremendously, making it over 30 million US dollars. The United States supplied 20,000 M16 automatic assault rifles to Nepali security forces, along with over \$29 million in military funding since 2001, reports Amnesty International (June 14, 2005). Other major countries supplying arms to Nepal included India, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and South Africa. Also reported on <http://www.cdi.org>.

international powers, stood firm on the two-pillar theory for Nepal. Ironically, key Maoist communist leaders like Pushpa Kamal Dahal (alias Prachanda), Dr. Baburam Bhattarai, and others conducted underground politics from India. India's views towards the Maoists were as diverse as one might expect of a country so large. As far as the U.S. government was concerned, it softened its policy towards the Maoists only a bit very late in the game.³⁶² The U.S. policy altered after King Gyanendra in a coup d'état seized the reins of government on February 1, 2005.³⁶³ While the King was busy consolidating his power in the palace surrounded by his father's old coterie, Nepalis in diaspora seemed hopeful they could influence U.S. foreign policy toward Nepal for the better through pro-peace rallies in front of the White House or the United Nations. They also lobbied members of Congress on Capital Hill to pay attention to Nepal's situation.

The events following Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's visit to the United States in spring of 2002 were noteworthy. Mr. Deuba came to the United States to seek President Bush's help in curbing "Maoist terrorism" in Nepal. While the "fight against terror" was in full force back home, Deuba traveled around the United States visiting the Nepali diasporic communities to garner their support for the government counterinsurgency against the Maoists. The King and the Deuba government had sought to abolish the "Maoist-terrorists" through violence and a perpetual state of emergency, during which only those with guns had power. They promulgated the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (control and punishment) Ordinance Act (TADO) in November of

³⁶² For some Indian perspectives on the Maoist conflict in Nepal, see S.D. Muni, *Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: The Challenge and the Response* (India: Rupa Publications, 2004), Prakash A. Raj, *Maoists in the Land of Buddha: An Analytical Study of the Maoists Insurgency in Nepal* (India: Nirala Publications, 2004).

³⁶³ The United States has still not taken the terrorist tag off the Maoists of Nepal. Since the April Revolution of 2006, the reinstated House of Parliament has been the executive body of governance as the King gave up his power. The Maoists and the seven political parties have engaged in negotiations for the peace process. The question of the monarchy is unresolved, though the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) have agreed to make it an issue at the constituent assembly.

2001; anything that remotely resembled Maoist activity was barred. Nepal suffered a nation-wide state of emergency for months, and the Royal Nepal Army undertook a full search operation to gain control over the insurgent movement and wipe out the Maoists.

Although it was not easy to convince the Nepali diaspora to agree to support what the state had been up to, it was not hard to convince the U.S. government in the post 9/11 environment.³⁶⁴ The Bush government promised a security package of almost \$30 million. The U.S. branded the Maoists “terrorists,” as had the Royal Nepal government, despite continual rejection by the Maoists of such a tag. Following these events, King Gyanendra took over state affairs, the state of emergency was repeated almost every three months, and people lived under this “emergency” for more than three quarters of the year. Under TADO, thousands were arrested, and torture and human rights abuses became the government’s daily practice.³⁶⁵ It was as if Nepal was no longer party to any international human rights laws or United Nations conventions. Vigilante groups formed in some rural areas to deal with the Maoists, adding another dimension of fear for the already terrorized and victimized civilians.³⁶⁶ Habeas corpus disappeared -- the security forces could arrest almost anyone at anytime without notice, the victim’s whereabouts unknown forever, while King Gyanendra’s direct rule enforced TADO. Most of the disappearances happened during the first year after TADO, and, according to Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, Nepal topped the list for disappeared people.

³⁶⁴ I attended an event organized by Nepali organizations in New York at La Guardia Community College. Mr. Deuba had security there as a representative of a state. Nepali diasporics had critical questions for him about the human rights abuses and disappearances, and the Prime Minister was defensive about the security operation. When one audience member asked why they were not releasing her brother, who had been held as a Maoist for more than a month and whose whereabouts were unknown, the general (who is the Commander of the Nepal Army now) accompanying Deuba replied, “How can we know that your brother is not a Maoist?”

³⁶⁵ See *Nepal: A Spiraling Human Rights Crisis*, 4 April 2002. <www.amnesty.org>

³⁶⁶ See the Human Rights Reports from INSEC. <www.inseconline.org>

North American Nepali Diaspora: Political Activism from Afar

As outlined above, the increase in the Nepali population in the U.S. coincided with the People's War in Nepal. During this time, the term "Nepali diaspora" circulated more and more, taking over the more formal designation "Non Resident Nepalis," or NRNs. When TADO enabled the arrests of not only journalists and human rights activists, but also shopkeepers, farmers, and students, petition letters and phone calls poured out from members of the academic community, Nepali organizations, and friends of Nepal, who lobbied Congressmen in Washington D.C. Organizations like Nepal Public Affairs Council, the Alliance for Democracy and Human Rights in Nepal (2001), the Nepalese Democratic Youth Council, and others initiated the formal lobbying of U.S. Congressmen.³⁶⁷ Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont often spoke in Washington of the Nepali crisis and nudged the U.S. government, which staunchly opposed giving any room to the Maoists until they disarmed, to change its foreign policy towards Nepal.³⁶⁸ More informally, discussion groups like NepalWatch-Yahoo group, among others, provided an important forum to disseminate messages of arrests and human rights violations in Nepal by the security forces as well as the Maoists. Amidst petitions and appeals, good news came once in awhile of people being released or their whereabouts becoming known.³⁶⁹

However, many prominent people in the U.S. Nepali diaspora were publicly silent on the issue of the monarchy until the royal takeover threatened to erase the democratic People's Revolution of 1990. Laws came through royal proclamations, and King Gyanendra brought back die-hard royalists from his father's old regime to rule the country. This frightened even the liberal, middle ground community in the North

³⁶⁷ All these organizations can be found on the World Wide Web.

³⁶⁸ Senator Patrick Leahy's statements on Nepal are on: <http://leahy.senate.gov/press/200511/111805c.html>

³⁶⁹ NepalWatch group is open to registered members, and one can see their activism in their archives.

American diaspora, which otherwise advocated a ceremonial monarchy, as instituted by the 1990 constitution of Nepal. The “liberal middle ground” view espoused by some academics and Nepali intellectuals in the United States went this way:

The Nepali diaspora in North America is deeply concerned with the deteriorating political and economic situation in our home country, as well as with the worsening condition of security and human rights. After February 1, members of the diaspora spent two months in intense debate trying to understand the factors leading to the present crisis. The discussion attempted to identify and conceptualize a productive terrain where contending political forces might meet, and work together to help usher in a new era of democracy in Nepal. Nepali scholars from Kathmandu contributed significantly to the discussion. A central theme that emerged from this collective endeavor is that a solution is possible only if the parties in conflict -- the King, the Maoists, and the parliamentary parties -- choose to move to a middle ground.³⁷⁰

This group of intellectuals used the term diaspora to speak on the political upheaval in Nepal. Although the above perspective tries to be inclusive of the North American diaspora, this middle ground view does not necessarily represent the diversity -- in terms of political ideology, class, ethnicity, and gender -- of Nepalis in North America. The “Perspective from the North American Diaspora” is undersigned by largely upper caste Brahmin and Chetri men, with one woman from an economically influential caste group. This “middle ground” approach came after King Gyanendra’s coup d’état on February 1, 2005. During the coup d’état, all communication with the outside world ceased for a few days, and security forces arrested thousands of people, including civil society members, human rights activists, students, journalists, political activists and virtually anyone in their way. Almost all SPA leaders were arrested, with some under house arrest for

³⁷⁰ See “Democratic Middle Ground in Nepal: A Perspective from the North American Diaspora.” *Liberal Democracy Nepal Bulletin, Vol 1, no 1* (April 2005): 3, published by Nepal Study Center at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

several months.³⁷¹ King Gyanendra's autocratic rule prompted many diasporics to become politically active, including the diasporic middle ground.³⁷²

The April Jana-Andolan-06 in Nepal included the emergence of a vastly deterritorialized revolution and showed how a diasporic population can be an important part of political struggle. The North American diaspora organized protest programs in Washington D.C., at the U.N. headquarters in New York City, and in many other cities in the U.S. and Canada throughout Gyanendra's autocratic reign. Nepali e-newspapers transmitted news from Nepal incessantly, minute by minute. Discussion boards on global forums, such as Sajha.com, NepalWatch group, INSN, and Samudaya.org, conveyed happenings in Nepal to every corner of the globe.³⁷³ There were ongoing debates about "what next" for Nepal in the Nepali diasporic community. Though the diaspora had been organizing protests in Europe, America, Hong Kong, and the Gulf countries since the crisis got out of hand in Nepal, the decisive movement for the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) and the Maoists brought a new kind of synergy between the homeland and the migrants and diasporic population abroad.

The April-Jana-Andolan 2006 could be called a largely transnational and deterritorialized political movement. People in cyber forums wrote as if they were present on the streets of Nepal, and the response from the other side was the same. Activists, friends, and relatives in Nepal wrote about the next course of action for the diasporic population, which put out press releases and made appeals to the U.N., the U.S.,

³⁷¹ A detailed report of the political and human rights history can be found in the *The Human Rights Yearbook 2006*, published by the Informal Service Sector (INSEC) in Kathmandu, Nepal.

³⁷² Although it is hard to calculate how active people in diaspora became during this time, there were many protests and demonstrations worldwide against the royal takeover, and the online discussion groups became far more vocal and active in discussing politics in Nepal.

³⁷³ The happenings of these times were widely documented in the online networks, most of which can be accessed on the World Wide Web.

and the World Bank. They raised money for people hurt in the demonstrations or for families of those who had fallen at the hands of the security forces.

This diasporic political uprising for Nepal showed the changing nature of people's relationship with their homeland. The connection was more material than just the ideal state of "imagining home" to assess one's roots. What Robin Cohen (1997, 26) says about the deterritorialized formation of diaspora comes alive in the political activism shown by Nepalis all over the world: "[T]ransnational bonds no longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive territorial claims. In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artifacts and through a shared imagination." While the Nepali diaspora did come alive through cyberspace, it connected to material happenings in the real world -- there were actual people marching on the streets in Nepal enduring sticks, tear-gas, and bullets. Furthermore, analytically speaking, it might be more useful to designate this moment as the creation of "diasporic consciousness" rather than the formation of a diasporic community per say. Those who were *physically mobile* in the streets in Nepal held the imagination of the diasporics spread all over the globe.

Historically, though, the outside often has affected Nepali revolutionary movements, such as the revolution of the 1950s when the Ranas lost power, the 1990 return of multi-party Democracy, and the recent Maoist People's War. Most of the Maoists' central commanding members operated from India. The key twelve-point agreement between the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) in November 2005 was also signed in India. Although Nepal had many visits from the United Nations and the U.S., Sitaram Yechuri of the Marxist Communist Party of India took a central part in

the truce during the April Jana-Andolan-06. It is the perception of the general public that India always plays a key role in the restructuring of the Nepali state.³⁷⁴ The Nepali diasporic population inside India, which is one of the largest (it is speculated there are more than 10 million Nepalis in India) is also a force that has a huge impact on the political and cultural affairs of Nepal.

From the end of the Rana regime to the current Jana-Andolan 2006, the “outside” has influenced Nepali politics. This “outside” has grown in the last decade or two and given rise to a transnational Nepali diaspora that is at once politically astute and vulnerable to influences from dominant international political forces. What Safran (1999, 258) says in regard to the unique political location inhabited by diasporic communities is worth thinking about:

Members of diaspora communities are subject to the tensions accompanying diverse self-identifications and activities that are often in conflict. Diasporic activities depend not only on pressures from the homeland but also on the policies and pressures put upon diasporans by the hostland. Conversely, just as homelands may use their diasporans for their own political purposes, so a hostland may use its diaspora communities to promote *its* foreign policy agendas – by generating resentments against homeland governments (e.g., U.S. attempts to ‘crank up’ anti-Soviet attitudes among Poles, Latvians, and other Eastern Europeans, and anti-Castro sentiments among Cubans in the United States).

Likewise, some members of the Nepali diaspora are eager to surface as mediators, consultants, or negotiators between the international community and the homeland. In many instances, a diasporic community does the work of bridging or clarifying the host country’s policies towards the diasporics’ homeland and the homeland’s conceptions

³⁷⁴ See Saubhagya Shah, “A Himalayan Red Herring?” in Michael Hutt’s *Himalayan People’s War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004). 192-224. In his article, Shah argues that an assessment of the Maoist insurgency requires an analysis of other geo-political “processes and forces that are at work,” and not only the economic and social grievances of marginalized people (193). While Shah deems Maoist politics an “oppositional politics” to capture the “whole or a part of state power”(195), for him, the Maoist movement in Nepal is also affected by external elements, particularly the regional politics dominated by the legacy of the British Raj in South Asia. Thus, India, according to Shah, plays a significant role in churning up complicated and often violent politics in Nepal.

about the host country. Because of the flow of remittances to Nepal and the internationalizing of the Nepali political situation, there are signs of influence, not least through the networking of people who are affiliated with parties or interest groups. The economic aspect of diaspora has been particularly influential in changing the political upheaval in Nepal. As I mentioned earlier, there are organizations in place related to different ideological and political backgrounds in transnational spaces. There are complexities in the ways in which diaspora politics works and is created by the transnational economy and transnational politics. While Maoists collected most of their revenue as a “revolutionary tax” at home, they also collected from the diaspora in India, Hong Kong, and Europe. The ideological politics even of nationalists like the Maoists is not circumscribed by land or national boundaries. A tiny but active Maoist cell raised money from Nepali businessmen among the 20,000 diasporic Nepalis in Hong Kong.³⁷⁵ Other political party members traveled the world garnering support from their affiliate members. It seems there is no recourse to politicization in diaspora, as the globalization of capitalism and its contradictions in the form of information technology keep the diasporics in the loop of events. Of late, some diasporic Nepalis are contemplating the possibility of “flexible citizenship.” One of the most interesting threads in a Nepali discussion group after the April Jana-Andolan went like this: “What’s in it for the diaspora ... time to think out of the box.” The individual proposed that the new constitution should have provisions for representing the Nepali diaspora’s voices at the House of Parliament in Nepal. This very interesting proposal even allocated seats on a

³⁷⁵ Bertil Lintner, “Maoist Moneybags” (Oct. 24, 2002). <<http://www.feer.com/articles/2002/>>

regional/global basis: 5 seats were allocated to South Asia, 3 to North America, 2 to Europe, 1 to Asia Pacific, and 1 to the Gulf region. The message went like this³⁷⁶:

We knew what we had to do against oppressors in Nepal..., Petition, Protest and Participate? Diaspora in fact were the vanguard from B.S. 2007 (1951 AD, overthrow of the autocratic Rana regime) to 1990 to present... But as soon as the national desired outcomes was achieved we were quietly marginalized and became simply welcoming agents to corrupt visiting dignitaries who for the most part wasted our time . . . In the age of globalization, diaspora can be a single defining factor, if given proper opportunity and channel to invest and share their experiences of abroad... Here I am even reminded of reverse immigration of Indian and Chinese population from the U.S. Aren't all revolutions fought to determine who is going to be representing their voice. Nepalese in Nepal exactly did that. But what about me and us? Who will represent our voices in Nepal? It took 10 years and big ass kissing just to have a passport duration extend from 5 to 10 years or other cursory changes... This is going to cost the Nepalese society pretty much nothing but for the long term political stability of Nepal this would be visionary step, one that can be replicated by other nations as well. ...Besides granting suffrage to the diaspora in itself is rewarding for the nation and what better way to say thank you than to allow your own representative!

Why does the quest for political representation in the nation-state emerge even when the population seems largely deterritorialized and the nation-state seems failed? How should we take this aspiration for long distance citizenship? Is a global “new historical block” in the Gramscian sense of a political formation in the process of forming? Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004) articulate that, under globalization and imperialism, there is a new force called the “multitude” in the making. It is a network of people and informatics, a potential force for wielding new forms of global democracy.³⁷⁷ Does the concern shown by Nepali diasporics reflect aspirations to live in a global democracy? If

³⁷⁶ I am keeping the identity of the writer and the discussion group anonymous since this is not a published group. The NRN community has long raised calls for dual citizenship.

³⁷⁷ The term “multitude” is a conceptual entity that differs from the concept of “the people,” “the masses” or the “working class,” which signify commonality in a way that reduces their differences and diversity, state Hardt and Negri. Unlike these very Marxist terms, Hardt and Negri argue that multitude means “many” and is “composed of innumerable internal differences that can never be reduced to a unity or a single identity -- different cultures, races, ethnicities, gendered, and sexual orientations; different forms of labor; different ways of living; different views of the world; and different desires. The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences” (xiv). The key argument is that the multitude offers the possibility of “global democracy” since the multitude is globally dispersed.

observed closely, this claim to a say in the Nepali state comes from the growing constituency of Nepali diasporics and their concerns over the failed politics, sluggish development, and rampant corruption in the homeland. The cry for recognition of the diaspora as a legitimate Nepali constituency with the right of suffrage comes from the crucial fact that almost 10% of the national population lives outside Nepal. It also comes from the reality that Nepali migrants and diasporics send more than \$1 billion to Nepal every year. And this pattern is only growing.

There are significant reasons why Nepalis in diaspora want to retain their relationship with their home country and also some kind of political affiliation there. The first is the cultural, linguistic, and familial affiliations that are hard to leave in one generation. Secondly, the concept of the nation-state still functions as a powerful metaphor and a constituent force, just like the notion of “home” does for diasporics. For the migrant workers, it holds even more significance because the state works as the mediating agency in the sale and purchase of labor in most “third world” countries. And in many countries where third world nationals work, like in the Gulf, the migrant workers have very limited rights and no way to obtain citizenship. It seems that although Nepali diasporics may aspire to live in a global democracy, they cannot leave the politics of place and their national identity even if they want to as they are defined and confined by those identities in the diasporic spaces. Without the relational identity, the concept of diaspora does not work either. As the troubled home-space haunts their consciences wherever they dwell, there are no excuses of distance or being out of sight. The distanced homeland still calls for their support and sacrifices in different ways.

Nepali Appropriation of Diaspora and Community Building:

Though a quick look at the Nepali diaspora makes it seem like a “constructionist” or “instrumentalist” (Sheffer 2003) process, and a nascent one, it cannot be just that.³⁷⁸ If one looks at the regional history of displacement due to war, exile, and political/cultural/religious persecutions in South Asia, there are ample stories of Nepali diaspora.³⁷⁹ In addition, while the concept of diaspora has become an effective political praxis in collecting the dispersed ethno-national groups under a pan-Nepali identity, ethnic identities have not vanished in foreign places, but have emerged more strongly. Interestingly, in Nepal’s case, ethnic identity politics is a nascent concept that is strengthening in diasporic spaces. Diverse communities, like the Neyshang Samaj (Mustangi people), Tamu Samaj (Gurung), Langhali Magar Samaj, Sherpa Samaj, Tamang or Thami Samaj, and Nepa Pasa Pucha (Newar Samaj), make strategic choices to manage ethnic and linguistic identity in the pan-Nepali diaspora.³⁸⁰ In my observations

³⁷⁸ Gabriel Sheffer postulates four different approaches to understanding the processes of diaspora: mainly primordial, instrumentalist, psychological, and ethno-symbolic or mythical. The last two approaches broach the polarities the former two approaches imply. According to Scheffer, instrumentalist diasporas exhibit the fact that “affiliation into ethnic groups, including diasporas, and maintenance of that collective identity are useful for acting practical individual and group goals” (18). The instrumentalist approach seems helpful in understanding contemporary creations of diasporas as it is not rooted in a mythical and primordial understanding of group identity or place affiliation, which traditional notions of diaspora hold as key. In my view, the “Nepali diaspora” is more of a political construction than something rooted in territorial or ethno-national identity politics.

³⁷⁹ Some of the best diaspora literature in Nepali comes out of the so-called “Gurkha land” of Darjeeling and Sikkim (a sovereign state until the 1975 annexation by India), where Nepalis are a dominant cultural and linguistic community. The British brought Nepalis to this area as Gurkha soldiers to subdue indigenous uprisings and later to work in the tea gardens and do other manual labor. Later, others moved due to family ties and new economic opportunities. However, new research shows other modes of diasporic formations of Nepalis in this region. According to recent research on the Kirat community of Nepal, there was a lot of ethnic conflict in the Himalayan region during the 18th and the 19th centuries, which made many Limbus, an ethnic tribe, leave and return to Nepal time and again. The word “sukumbasi” (landless/homeless) came from this context of perpetual displacement of Limbus, who had no claim to land because of continual strife between the Gurkhali Empire, the British, and the Tibetan Buddhist cultural imposition upon the indigenous Kirats. For more, see Ramesh Dhungel’s “The Long-ago Fight for Kirat Identity” in *Himal South Asian Magazine*, Vol 19, No. 7 (October 2006).

³⁸⁰ My use of the term “managing identity” means that a group chooses to highlight a different identity in a different social situation to maximize its group interests. For example, ethnic groups like the Sherpa, who are a minority in Nepal, may choose to emphasize their ethnic or linguistic differences to highlight their minority status, but outside Nepal may choose to call themselves Nepali, for the latter may suffice as the political identity of a minority group.

and research in the United States among the Nepali community, I have found different groups use their ethnic or national identity strategically. Sometimes they claim to be Nepali first and an ethnic-national second, but other times they highlight their ethnic identity as primary and exhibit antagonism toward Nepali national identity as imposed upon them. Yet, the demand for national identity papers in host countries forces minority groups to emphasize being a Nepali national despite their antagonistic feelings toward that identity. Even then, the notion of diaspora provides them some respite from total assimilation with the host culture in foreign countries as well as the imposed hegemonic Nepali national identity. The appropriation of the concept of diaspora provides a dual, or even multiple, identity space for minority communities outside Nepal, so it becomes a strategic choice.

Thus, the embodiment of diaspora is a praxis of “negotiation” for minority communities; it is neither a politics of total identification nor of total resistance, but is mostly about keeping difference alive through negotiation. The politics of disidentification and resistance against the politics of assimilation and multiculturalism in Nepal as well as outside Nepal comes into play at a time when Nepali national identity itself is volatile. With the violent crisis at home, Nepalis of all ethnicities may feel a need to save the national home-space first and legitimize the “homes” of their imagination that they identify with more closely second because their national identity papers are at stake. At the same time, these various complications of identity politics and national identity debates are not played out unilaterally. For some people, *giving legitimacy to the condition of in-betweeness -- not being in the national home, where one does not feel “at home” -- may be where diaspora comes in as political agency to*

redefine their new politics of identity. Whatever the complexities are of identity politics in diaspora, the diaspora has become an imaginary space for a “locus communitās” (place of fellowship) with various Nepalis and other minority communities, where one can identify with the common experiences of loss, change, and growth and also find common ground (locus communis) to organize around as a political power when forces of assimilation to the dominant grow stronger.

Nepali Diaspora, Nationalism and Flexible Citizenship

As Clifford (1994, 307-308) suggests, nationalist aspirations may not always exist in diaspora, but diaspora activities are not always anti-nationalist or apolitical. For new diasporics, the question of nationalism seems even more imperative if the forces of “assimilation with difference” are knocking at their door all the time. Even in a multicultural society, there are always dominant groups that shape the social, political, and ideological structures. They dictate the norms of assimilation, multiculturalism, and difference. In such a situation, new diasporics who are a minority in most cases are inclined to retain their nationality or affiliation with their former nation-states. While nation, ethnicity, and cultural ideology figure prominently in historical diasporas, new diasporas are not only transnational or trans-state in nature, but they work for the national cause or political parties by extending party networks in diaspora, as shown by global organizations connected to Nepali political parties. In this instance, it is logical to ask, as Sheffer (2003, 254) does, “Do those trilateral and sometimes four-and five-party networks tend to create trans-state political systems that will exist alongside of and well complement established trans-national organizations, such as regional trading blocks, international defense organizations, and so on? . . . What is the precise relationship

between the gradual weakening of the nation-states and diasporas' increasing room for political maneuvering?"

In terms of space for political maneuvering created by diaspora, it can go many different ways depending on the political interests of the host country as well as the homeland. For diasporas that are trans-national or trans-state, the relationship with the home country is not only imaginary; economics, politics, and culture bind the two populations. There is a real flow of people, goods, and culture from one place to another. Unlike goods, people are embodied beings that carry habits, value systems, languages, and worldviews. Instead of being anachronistic imagined communities, trans-national diasporas act more like a reproduction of the existent community and are more or less synchronic in their developments. Information technology, modernization, and globalization keep the circuits of reproduction alive over long distances. One often hears people say, "There is a little Nepal right here in New York," or in Dallas, or in Los Angeles. Thus, as "Nepali places" are produced and reproduced inside "other" territories and other local spaces, they are bound to be affected and reworked within these new spaces. Why does this claim of copy with originality exist in new diasporic imaginations? This claim has such a strong pull that some diasporics express fear of losing or diluting their culture in the host country. Such a fear is articulated more and more these days in diasporic contributions to major newspapers in Nepal and discussion forums, where preservation of Nepali identity and culture is a common topic. In any case, because of the trans-state nature of the Nepali diaspora, identity is very much tied to the notion of being a Nepali. "What next" in terms of citizenship practices thus becomes a crucial question for Nepalis living in *prabas* (outside home) or in diaspora.

Therefore, instead of romanticizing falling borders and boundaries between the local and the global, there is a need to study the borders and boundaries erected at multiple levels both within the nation-state and between “countries” so that the circuit of the geo-political axis still operates in a two-dimensional way: the capital flows to one direction while labor flows from the other. There are “trans-spaces” where borders intersect and things get caught for a time, but they do not account for the multiplicity of blockages that clog the pores of local economies, agriculture systems, and cultures to the extent of making them unhealthy or non-existent. Some countries have become factories for human labor production. All they have left to sell is their bodies. While countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, or Pakistan send their labor abroad, countries like India, Mexico, and China sell workers inside their borders to global corporations. Global powers pressure the governments of countries that sell their services to global corporations to adjust to their specific needs, not to the needs and health of the people giving their services. Although extremely necessary and a laudable concept, it is difficult to imagine Hardt and Negri’s (2004) “global democracy” through the power of the “multitude,” at least at this historical juncture. The migrants, whether they are selling their brains or brawn, have agency only to the extent that they are able to negotiate with the constituent power of the state, of which the value and power depend on its ability to negotiate with the empire or the World Trade Organization. Of course, the labor-sending country’s power to negotiate also depends on its economic power and its past relationship with the labor-buying country, either in the form of colonialism or partnership in big wars. Interestingly, the colonial relationship turns into a neo-colonial business network.

The dominant constituency controls jurisprudence over world affairs, and its centralized power system emanates from a particular space on the map. As Adrienne Rich says, “a place on a map is also a place in history” (Rich 1984). This place is protected, bordered, and closed to those who do not fall within particular categories of race, class, development, and citizenship. The hegemony of empire cannot exist without the consent of local states that participate in the imperial network. The masters who exercise and regulate those networks at the local level and the global level often share a historical legacy of domination and control and a racial and geographical line of descent. Lenin’s prediction of economic globalization and “Third World” countries supplying human labor and services for the industrialized “First World” does not seem too far off the mark in the 21st century (Young 2005).

Diaspora: Agential Praxis or Epistemology of Survival in the New World

The appropriation of the term “diaspora” works as an affective process that lets the migrant or non-resident Nepali identify with the sense of loss and change back home as the Nepali society goes through crisis and chaos. It also functions as a “locus communis” instrument for organizing and legitimizing the diasporics’ existence in displacement. In other words, the appropriation of diasporic identity is a consciously political and agential practice for keeping cultural difference alive and for resisting assimilation and exploitation, at least in theory. A diaspora framework provides a constituent power for Nepalis to legitimize their existence in foreign places while maintaining continuity with “home,” especially as the violence erases spaces that are sacred in their memory and history and people move from one place to another in search of security and livelihoods. For dominated groups especially within Nepali communities,

it has become a place of political empowerment and activism. A case in point is the growing number of Nepali Dalits voicing themselves in academic literature, talk programs, and conferences in venues in the United States and elsewhere.³⁸¹

There is no specific or originary story of displacement in time and space marking or defining a Nepali diaspora. The appropriation of diaspora to describe the Nepali condition of displacement is thus open for debate, as the term itself is haunted by Judeo-Christian narratives of catastrophes, loss, violent dislocation, temporary (re)placement, and eventual return to the origin or “homeland.” Historically speaking, diaspora signifies a locatable notion of time and place, which has its own purpose and utility. However, in an increasingly deterritorialized world, bodies, labor, ideas, and subjects continually traverse and interchange places/spaces, sometimes self-propelled and other times induced by geo-bio-political maneuvers and contingencies (Hardt and Negri 2000). Whether one likes it or not, people have appropriated the concept of diaspora, and diaspora consciousness is part of many communities, albeit not always identified and named as diaspora.³⁸² Thus, new diasporas must be looked at as emerging at the intersection of both ideological and deterritorialized concepts of spaces and places. What I see is the intertwining of old and new diasporas -- one is defined by the other, and the new diasporas cannot exist without traces of the old ones. In this light, modern diasporas are not only created by violent displacements of people from a particular land and place, but are also *created by the voluntary and agential enactment of subjectivities or subject*

³⁸¹ Nowadays there is a conscious effort to represent Dalit voices in Nepal related programs, at least in political and academic discussions. However, one often hears that exclusionary practices against the Dalits take place even among Nepalis in the United States. One Dalit gentleman expressed his experience and concerns at the talk program “Nepal Today: Challenges to Inclusive Democracy,” organized by the India-China Institute, The New School, May 19, 2007, New York.

³⁸² Perhaps the difficulty of translation does not help to explain why people appropriate terms such as diaspora to express their experiences and histories. People latch onto dominant terms that have currency in the market of ideas and expression. This might be happening with the term diaspora as well.

constitution. It is an epistemology of survival, a way of becoming. Along these lines, I see the Nepali diaspora as created through a historical trajectory of imperialism and colonialism and the gyre of modernity, which is locatable and comprehensible, but one also needs to recognize that there is agential investment in diasporic identity production and mobilization of such for turning the gyre in different directions.

As I have argued, diaspora is a borrowed conceptual framework to describe the dispersed condition of the pan-Nepali population, and the ethno-national conditions of diaspora are yet to be theorized or claimed. This is not to say that conditions similar to diaspora did not or do not exist in Nepal or that the “diasporic consciousness” was not realized by different communities in Nepal.³⁸³ But the current appropriation of the term diaspora by the Nepal-born population at this historical juncture comes alive in the mimetic political acts of the dispersed Nepalis outside Nepal first and foremost. The “Nepali diaspora,” therefore, can be described as having a “diasporic consciousness” that is “positively produced,” allowing the various Nepali communities scattered abroad to feel a “sense of being a part of an ongoing transnational network that includes the homeland, not as something simply left behind, but as a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity” (Clifford 1994, 311). Likewise, diasporic consciousness among many Nepali ethnic groups, like the Tibetans, and even dominant caste groups like the Brahmins, who initially were migrants from the Indian subcontinent, cannot be ruled out; further investigation in this regard is necessary. As for new subjects on the move,

³⁸³ Theorists of diaspora have often used terms such as “diaspora consciousness” (Safran 1991) and “diasporic consciousness” (Clifford 1994). For Safran, “diaspora consciousness is an intellectualization of an existential condition” (1991, 87). James Clifford argues that “diasporic consciousness” may be shared by a community that is not strictly identified as diasporic or one that does not call itself a diasporic community (1994).

diaspora provides a hinge to mobilize their political agency in deterritorialized spaces, especially as Nepal as a nation-state is in transition.

Interestingly, building a community outside of the home-space draws from narratives of old diasporas, despite utilizing the notion of deterritorialized place and space. In fact, some Nepali diasporics do not mind a deterritorialized sense of place. They seem to believe that Nepal could be invented right in America or elsewhere, but to invent that imagined Nepali community they rely on traditional narratives of home, culture, and community, which ultimately homogenizes the diverse realities existing in Nepal. The exclusive Nepali identity signified by Nepali language, food habits, and cultural/religious practices is invoked against the so-called “American culture,” which mostly carries a counter-cultural connotation. In other words, the “American culture” becomes the other against which “Nepali culture” is imagined and given precedence. This is not to say that Nepalis despise American culture or that they do not themselves emulate many parts of it. They do. But the practices of inclusion and exclusion are constantly at play, and depending upon who the actors are, the dynamics continually change. At any rate, the *embodiment* of diaspora as the diasporic Nepalis see it has been more or less an enabling concept for Nepalis living in displacement outside of Nepal, especially in terms of mobilizing political agency to affect political change in the “homeland.”

As the war and crisis back home push more people out, Nepali politics and identity become increasingly decentred, plural, and non-hegemonic at the local as well as global level. Politically, this moment may lead to the creation of a “new historical block,” a new counter-hegemonic democratic power that operates in-between the inside

and the outside of a Nepali national space to bring about constructive changes in the lives of people suffering from war and crisis in Nepal. However, it may turn into a hegemonic power that controls politics in the homeland with new networks of power and knowledge from the outside, more like the globalized capital that passes through different economic spaces to collect surplus without worrying about the woes of the local merchant who loses his business. Thus far, the appropriation of diaspora as a mimetic political tool has encouraged a constructive transformation in the interest of political stability in Nepal. It has also helped to produce a constituent group of a globally dispersed Nepalis to come together and challenge the culture of violence and the atrocities of autocracy and dictatorship evidenced in the last decade. Although diverse in ethnicity and cultures, a political network of power is in the making in places of displacement and diaspora. We must hope it will effect further transformative change in the status quo politics and culture of the “old Nepal” and contribute to the rise of a “new Nepal” through wise diplomacy and non-violence.

Conclusion

I have argued that the Maoist People's War in Nepal brought about situations that are at once debilitating and empowering, constricting and volatile, and gendered and transcending. The crisis has indeed opened up new "interconstitutive spaces" in spite of violence, chaos, and uncertainty. However, how these processes and events constitute new spaces and affect the future political, social, and economic developments in Nepal depends both upon global and local networks of power and knowledge and the subjects who traverse through these networks. One can only speculate on what will happen to women and the situation of gender in the post-conflict period in Nepal.

What can be said with some certainty, though, is that we cannot look at women's agency, the ideology of revolutionary thinking, and narratives of progress and progressive history only within the grand scheme of narratives. Whether women have become militant warriors, migrant workers, or development professionals, their location, position, and agency are not outside the global networks of power and subjection. We need to pay attention to both historical and present processes of bio-politics in the New World Order in order to understand how bio-power, the productive force within life and people, is exploited in myriad and complex ways in the times of modernity.

Women's participation in the Maoist People's War is not devoid of contradictions and complexities. My analysis of the effects of the armed conflict in the forms of violence, displacement, militarization, and crisis in the human rights situation shows the debilitating side of war on the whole of society. There are definitely acts of empowerment shown by women. However, women's suffering under insurgency and militarization, coupled with the stalled economic and development processes, speaks of a

differently gendered and sexed situation of many Nepali women, locally and globally. The gendered situation of “third world” nationals in the transnational division of labor, whether they are men or women, is also debilitating for the most part. Yet, I have argued that not all women are universally a product of the same articulations of gender or sexuality, or of culture and nationality. Neither are they in Nepal. From the review of Nepal’s modern history, polity, economy, and culture in Chapter One, the point is sufficiently made clear that women in Nepal are not a monolithic group and are not subject to the same kind of oppression cross-culturally.

Several factors beyond class prompted women’s involvement in the People’s War. On the political level, women may share many similarities and may be equally vulnerable, but in terms of cultural, economic, and sexual dispensation, their agency and access to these factors may differ. For example, an ethnic woman from Mustang, a remote area in northern Nepal, might be wealthy and have the cultural right to take more than one husband or have a child outside of marriage. But if she comes to Kathmandu, the capital city, she might feel a sense of cultural alienation in a different setting.³⁸⁴ In a diverse, multicultural, and caste based society, there are hundreds of examples of how specific economic, social, and political arrangements oppress women differently.

In other words, oppression cannot be measured quantitatively in a country like Nepal, although development agencies keep producing data to measure it. While some

³⁸⁴ In a place called Uppallo Mustang (upper Mustang) in Nepal, men and women are allowed to have sex outside of marriage, which the dominant community in the rest of Nepal frowns upon. However, although the Mustangi society is more generous with sexual freedom, the onus of the sexual freedom falls on women in that community. Fathers have little obligation to look after and provide for children born out of wedlock, except for giving them their name if they want. Most importantly, both parents sometimes disown the children, especially if the woman happens to marry a man other than the father. See Sanjeeb Thapa, “Kumari Amaharuko Katha” (Stories of Unwed Mothers) in *Nepal National Weekly* (April 2, 2007). <<http://kantipuronline.com/Nepal/pratha.php>>. Also see Sydney Ruth Schuler (1987), *The Other Side of Polyandry: Property, Stratification, and Nonmarriage in the Nepal Himalayas*, for a more analytical perspective on women in the Mustangi society in the high Himalayas of Nepal.

women feel culturally oppressed by communities outside of their own, others experience patriarchal and religious oppression within their own family and community. Due to their class/caste privilege, these women may also participate in the oppression of other men and women who are not the dominant powers. Yet, women of the oppressed groups may be more advanced in some respects due to more egalitarian gender norms. One example would be the Sherpas of the Himalayan region, where women are comparatively more enterprising, mobile, and strong despite having very little or no access to formal modern education.³⁸⁵ Thus, women's experience of domination and oppression in Nepal, as in any other multicultural society, must be looked at in a historical and cultural light as their different locations and positions in the social network do not always intersect exactly at the same axis to create a unified Nepali women's experience of oppression. Rather, it is in the uneven experiences of women's embodiment of gender, sexuality, community, and nation that we must understand the epistemology of women's oppression and their methods for liberation.

Women's overwhelming participation in the People's War in Nepal cannot be understood by examining only the local structures of inequality and oppression when global networks affect their production. The armed conflict has indeed forced more women to be mobile -- politically, socially, economically, and spatially -- within and

³⁸⁵ Of course, now the situation is changing, and Sherpa villages in the Himalayan region might be some of the most developed in contemporary times. Many claim that Sherpas are the most transnational and global Nepali migrants because of their relationship with Westerners, their association with climbing Sagarmatha (Everest), the highest peak in the world, and their esoteric spirituality, a topic of research for many anthropologists. A group comparable to Sherpas is the Gurungs, who are also a global phenomenon due to their association with the British Gurkha Army. However, my view of Sherpa women as strong comes from my own experience and observations since childhood. Sherpa women came year after year to sell their Himalayan goods to the people in the valley of Kathmandu and to the flat land of Nepal, the Terai, which borders India. This mobility was something rarely seen among other women in Nepal. There are many studies on Sherpas in Nepal. See the works of Vincent Adams, *Tigers of the Snow and Other Virtual Sherpas* (1996), Sherry Ortner, *Sherpas Through their Rituals* (1978), Barbara Nimri Aziz's *Tibetan Frontier Families* (1978) and James Fisher's *Trans-Himalayan Traders: Economy, Society, and Culture in Northwest Nepal* (Berkeley: UCP, 1986), among others.

outside of Nepal. However, this mobility alone is neither totally positive or negative in how it affects women's lives and their social situations. As I explored in Chapter Two, the internal displacement during the period of insurgency was tragic for women as it exacerbated gendered and sexualized labor further, while the increasing emigration of women for work hurled them into a paid labor system. Within the international sexual division of labor, women entered the same domestic and private structures of labor, only it was monetized and supported the capitalist system.

It has been theorized that the exchange of women in local-familial spaces facilitated the production of a material, transactional culture, which is at the root of the production of value (Levi-Strauss 1969; Rubin 1997). As Rubin states, the sex/gender system was not a given, but a symbolic mode of production that facilitated the transaction of value in so-called "primitive" societies. It is almost as if the sex/gender system was a precondition for the mode of material production to be fully realized and "sexual difference" to be imagined, according to Rubin's "Traffic in Women." In this case, Rubin takes a cue from Levi-Strauss, who in the *Elementary Structures of Kinship* establishes a hypothesis that in primitive societies, women functioned as signs and played the role of language. The displacement of women from their family, clan, and locale and placement of them in a different family, clan, and locale was the originary condition of value production. This in turn rendered women a sign, alienated from their own production. What kinds of "gendered displacements" have become necessary in the trans/inter-national modes of production of value (capital) in contemporary times? Who are the alienated masses of the New World Order? Who have become "at once a sign and a value"? (Rubin 1997, 53).

In Chapters Four and Five, I explore the ways in which women become “at once a sign and value” in the Maoist politics of representation and the State’s attempt to militarize women during the conflict. Both groups utilize the categories of gender and women on their own terms -- masculine economic terms to be precise -- to produce the nation-state and its citizen-soldiers. Likewise, my analysis of the Nepali migrants in Chapter Six shows how “third world” nationals become “at once a sign and value” in the transnational division of labor. Within the transnational division of labor, the value of labor depends on the negotiating power based not on the laboring individual, but on the national, cultural and gender location inhabited by that individual. In other words, labor and services are not only gendered but are also spatialized in regional or national axes.

As I argued in Chapters Three and Six the trafficking of women into sex work did not decrease during the People’s War, but increased due to internal displacement and militarization. At the same time, the barring of women from foreign employment threatened women’s individual rights to mobility and work, despite the complexity in the “rights discourse” and its operation in the transnational division of labor. Even though the prohibition against women working in Gulf countries in 1998 was enacted on the basis of sexual abuse of Nepali women by foreigners, the Nepali State’s measure of protection was excessive and ultimately harmful since women kept going through illegal means. At the same time, other articulations of protection of women within the nation-state have gone ignored, like the 33% quota for women in every sector of governance, which was approved in May 2006 by the reinstated House of Parliament after Jana Andolan II. Thus far, the 33% quota is mere rhetoric, and there seems to be no intention of enacting it. While “protection” from abuse and sexual violence decreases their mobility, women still

lack a meaningful representation in politics and polity within the nation-state. The ideological displacement of women's mobility within the political sector is observed in the deafening silence regarding any concern raised by women, including the ones carrying guns, the Maoists. Not a single woman representative took a visible part in the negotiation process between the Seven Party Alliance and the Maoist Party of Nepal, including the "great peace deal" signed on November 26, 2006.

Nepali politics remains volatile and complicated. Since the ceasefire in May 2006, the Maoists have been more or less a part of the government, but the tug of war continues, and violence in the Terai region has begun due to ethnic and cultural conflict. The coalition government has not been very effective in addressing the issues of the people in the Terai, even as new armed groups emerge and violence flares up. The long awaited Constituent Assembly Elections, one of the key demands of the Maoists, is postponed perpetually, while the Maoists themselves are stating that a Republic is their key demand now, and the Constituent Assembly does not really matter if they are not going to win. Notably, there is not much talk of "gender restructuring" in the political parties, including the Maoist Party. The social, political, and gender issues raised by the Maoists in regard to women in the initial days of the People's War have been put aside for the moment, if not totally vanished. The politics of grabbing power has become central for the Maoists, as it has always been for other political parties and their leaders.

It seems the public is supposed to understand that women from the Maoists and the political parties somehow speak through their male leaders at the peace negotiations. Anyone observing the last ten years of crisis and the peace process on television and in

newspapers rarely saw a woman's face in the room, not to mention the front seats.³⁸⁶

This continues today if one looks at the daily news: almost every picture will have rows of middle-aged men seated in the front or around a table. During the propaganda period, women were represented sufficiently as the victims of crisis, rape, and sexual abuse, but not as strong political leaders. One also saw a lot of militaristic representation of women in the Maoist movement, but so far one does not see them in the decision making processes. At the crucial time of peace-making, women in the Maoist party remain in the background, waiting gender restructuring after the class war is over. They have been called to make sacrifices, but made to wait to take part in decisions that will affect them in future. As many other revolutionary movements have shown, women are told to rise above their gender and think in terms of class, nationalism, and culture.

Women, like men, are told to prove themselves as "citizen-soldiers" by embodying gender roles formerly proscribed for them. It is no wonder the Maoist Party advocates that women embody the "citizen-soldier" role and demands the sacrifice of sisters, daughters, and wives in the battlefield, for only the physical exhibition of masculine bravery alongside men will bestow the right to citizenship and loyalty to the nation. Marxist philosophy as practiced by the revolutionaries is overburdened by the classic Hegelian dictum of the war between the self and other, the haves and the have-nots. This war produces losers and winners, as does every war. There is no exception to this. The Maoist People's War in Nepal was violent and destructive from the outset on several levels: psychological, physical and material. Women in the Maoist party advocate militancy and militarism as the only viable pathway to subjecthood and

³⁸⁶ Observation of the archived material in the newspapers since May of 2006 reveals what I write of. See NepalNews.com or Kantipuronline.com.

liberation, as they are told by the leaders.³⁸⁷ Thus, women in the Maoist movement state they need to stage themselves on the “frontline” as men do in order to claim equality in society, to be treated as subjects in their own right. Above all, women need to leave their “follower mentality,” they argue, and they must make sacrifices for the sake of the country and the cause of the proletariat. Yet, class war is also always gendered, and no revolutionary war has produced lasting equality of genders before. Let us hope that women are not duped this time around, and that their sacrifices will mean positive changes in Nepal.

³⁸⁷ The write-ups of women members of the Maoist Party, which appear in the column “Adha Aakash” (The Half Sky) in *Janadesh*, a News magazine of the Maoist Party, reveal this point.

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