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Culture wars: post-revolutionary mobilization in Nepal[1]

By Dan Vesalainen Hirslund

Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of the 2006 peace agreement in Nepal which put an end to 10 years of Maoist insurgency and transformed the erstwhile rural guerilla movement into an urban-based political party, a large number of people signed up to become members of the Communist Party of Nepal – Maoist (CPN-M). Local newspapers carried horrifying stories of the kidnappings and killings of rival party members or rich businessmen who had resisted extortion and it was rumored that the Maoists kept a "torture chamber" in an abandoned industrial area on the outskirts of the capital, Kathmandu. But why would so many young people – estimates hover between 10,000 and 100,000 - sign up to join a political movement with such a poor reputation and, even more curiously, why do so after the revolutionary war had ended? What could possibly drive young men – for they were mostly male – to become engaged in Maoist revolutionary politics when the 'revolution', for all practical purposes, was over, and there seemed to be very few tangible benefits of participating in the machinery of organized party politics?

The initial surprise of this new politicization of young urbanites soon morphed into a much more cynical idea, that the Maoist movement was merely sweeping up poor and uneducated youth to do their dirty work and that the entire political maneuver was merely an exploitation of political labor that due to its capacity for violence undermined a fragile post-war transition to peace. Yet a closer look at the Maoist movement soon reveals two important features of mobilization that make such conclusions hard to sustain: one that members received no particular benefits under the tutelage of the organization and two, that members joined entirely on their own accord rather than as a reaction to social or direct forms of pressure. Members joining in the post-war phase did not receive economic compensation for their work, allowing them to turn it into a paid "job", neither did they get access to the jealously guarded wealth of the party and to the advancements that made such forms of patronage hoarding possible, allowing them to treat membership as a "career".[2] They were also often actively dissuaded from joining, not only from friends and relatives but indeed from movement members as well, who were not interested in opportunistic colleagues. These two observations immediately dispel two prevalent discourses on Maoist post-war mobilization; namely that people were adequately rewarded in material terms or that they were forced. This then raises an important question: why would young people turn to politics and, indeed, to violence in a context of a peace process where violence had in fact lost its legitimacy as a tool for politi-

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[2] This contrasts with the other important Maoist youth organization, the student movement ANNISU-R, populated by educated and mainly high-caste urbanite, and where mobilization is a career path within the party (Snellinger 2009b).

cal negotiation and where the movement itself professed to be on a path to peaceful democratic participation?

In this chapter I offer an explanation of Maoist youth mobilization through an analysis of the new political space that was opened up in the transition from war to peace. I show how mobilization to the Maoist movement was shaped by wider generational dynamics of the political sphere as well as by the revolutionary ethos through which members became integrated. By locating the question of mobilization within the concrete socio-political environment, I argue that young activists were in fact caught up in overlapping movement processes. Although they were not immediately aware of this, these processes circumscribed their participation in, and experiences of, what Ghassan Hage has termed alter-politics; i.e. collective projects that seek to unsettle or escape from historically hegemonic modalities of social and political space (Hage 2014). This analysis should not detract us, of course, from the extortions, kidnappings and street confrontations through which Maoist cadres occupy political space: it has been estimated that Maoist members perpetrated over half of the electoral violence between November 2007 and April 2008 where 50 people were killed, 1,286 wounded and 116 kidnapped Lawoti (2009: 293). Yet, as reported by the International Crisis Group (2008: i), the Maoist's "strong-arm tactics" was only a more successful variant of the tactics employed by other parties and while the CPN-M had been brought into parliamentary politics, dozens of armed groups in the Terai (Southern Nepal) were actively fighting the state and seeking to disrupt the political transition to peace (ICG 2007). The question of violence in the Maoist movement is therefore a complex one that relates to the confrontational nature of political contestation in the post-insurrection years and a proper investigation of its nature and cause would also have to address the institutionalized relationships between overt/invisible and direct/indirect violence in Nepali society at large and the way it maps onto the class landscape of non-political and political culture. While the Maoist revolutionary war can be said to have heightened and popularized forms of power that built on histories of violent opposition to the state, their emergence on the urban scene has largely taken place through a *demilitarization* of the movement's capacity for violence; cadres now carry sticks instead of guns, if anything at all. A narrow focus on Maoist violence risks singling out a phenomenon which is not a remarkable trait of any one particular grouping and, worse, overestimates its explanatory power to the detriment of more important dynamics of transitory political culture in Nepal.

The analysis presented in this chapter addresses mobilization and violence by looking at how questions of legitimate political action are folded into discourses of membership and the consolidation of particular institutional environments. I shall examine the role of generation in Nepali political culture and the new space afforded by 'youth' in an otherwise gerontological party culture, in order to argue that the contradictory movement histories which mobilize members' willing participation risks perpetrating the kind of injustices that are sought eradicated, only in new forms.[3] As described in the introduction to this volume, it is by engaging the wider societal and organizational dynamics of movements that a more nuanced understanding of 'the turn to violence' can be gauged. In line with the editors' conceptualization of

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[3] The data for this article builds on dissertation fieldwork for 12 months from 2009 and onwards. I have conducted in-depth participant-observation with the Young Communist League – the largest youth movement in Nepal – and have continued to explore the transformations of the Maoist movement in the transition from insurrection to parliamentary politics.

'dualist perspectivism', I argue that it is by paying attention to these intertwining processes that we should make sense of the complicated sociopolitical field through which the Maoist movement managed to transform its guerilla popularity into a more sustainable script for party mobilization in a fractured and competitive urban environment. In trying to think about how revolutionary politics, youth mobilization and violence are connected, I will seek to unpack the dialectical relationship between activists and the organization – rather than focusing on the particular activities members are engaged in – as I see this as a crucial dynamic for a nuanced understanding of radical politics. This perspective builds on recent anthropological theories of the 'micro-politics' of state sovereignty and popular mobilization (Hansen and Stepputat 2001; Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2005) and the large body of literature on social movements (Edelman 2001; Nash 2004; Barker et al. 2013) as it seeks to combine the 'micro'-dynamics of membership with the social and political context that authorizes organizations and frames available discourses in the first place. The analysis presented here highlights the variegated processes through which people become allied with radical political projects and the elementary embeddedness of political positions irrespective of the ideology espoused.

The aim of the chapter is to illustrate how *political culture* - the power of *institutions*, of *political space* and the workings of *ideology* - condition mobilization; and thus to bring political culture into the equation when evaluating individual motivations and narratives of joining violent movements. It seeks to bring out the 'social invisibility' of Maoist revolutionaries and to situate their potency as political actors within the gendered and, in particular, generational environments in which they are formed so as to ground mobilization in unique historical circumstances. I shall begin my exploration by building on Raymond Williams' expanded understanding of 'culture' to situate the processes within which the Maoist movement developed its politics and to argue that the trope of an emergent or alternative culture can help us ground revolutionary mobilization in the Nepal context and to enrich the concept of political culture. Repositioning Williams' contribution to work within the context of fierce political competition, I then discuss how new members navigated different livelihood trajectories (captured by the editors' notion of 'tangential futures') and how Maoist recruiters aggressively championed a new identity for political youth. This takes me into a consideration over competing 'cultures' for youth in the national rebuilding efforts after the 2006 peace agreement and the contradictory alliances this 'culture war' landed CPN-M in. In the last two sections, I zoom in on Maoist institutional culture and practices of authority to discuss, and reveal, how youth both became a mobilizing trope and a new blind spot for a movement committed to ideas of permanent social change.

Maoist radicalism and the politics of culture

The highly successful military campaign waged by the CPN-M between 1996 and 2006 has for a long time posed something of a conundrum to researchers who have striven to provide a satisfactory explanation of the all-to easy mobilization of the rural population as the movement advanced from its base in the Western mountains to encompass two-thirds of the country, including targeted attacks in the country's capital, Kathmandu (Hutt 2004a; Lawoti and Pahari 2010; Thapa 2003; Thapa and Bandit 2004; Upreti 2008). While initial explanations sought to apply classical "grievance" and "greed" models from the social movement literature (Eck 2009), statistical analyses could not confirm a strong correlation between poverty and movement success (Bray et al 2003; Bohara et al 2006) and because so little was known of the in-

ternal workings of the movement, the question of what characterized "greed" for a movement with very limited access to economic exploits and which did not seem to abuse its military strength to repay its cadres in kind – in fact self-enrichment was abhorred and punished during the war – continued to puzzle researchers.[4] Later explanations, based on careful observations of the sociopolitical dynamics of rural Nepal, offered a much more multifaceted picture of engrained caste and gender hierarchies, lost generational opportunities and a highly adaptable movement tactic that - combining fear, traditional cultural forms and carefully crafted ideological rhetoric - managed to build a surprisingly loyal cadre-force of rural youth, men as well as women, in just a few years (Shneiderman and Turin 2004; Lecomte-Tilouine 2010b; Zharkevich 2009; de Sales 2008; Mottin 2009).

In this chapter, I build on these insights to suggest that popular insurgencies like the Nepali Maoist movement are highly contingent phenomena, held together by a number of sociopolitical dynamics without which 'radicalism' has a much more limited chance of emerging. To explore the characteristics of this framework, I build on the theories of Raymond Williams and his concept of cultural forms to situate the volume's themes in the Nepali context. Williams, trained at Cambridge in the 1940s, developed a unique perspective on the sociopolitical transformation of England during the post-war years based on a Marxist historical perspective but with a special emphasis on the powerful role of culture to reflect, absorb and diversify prevalent hegemonies. In his influential 'Marxism and Literature' from 1977 William argued, adapting Gramsci to his interest in works of art, that the individual's submission to dominant ideologies took place through the stealthy work of culture and that culture itself, because of its close connection to human experience, worked through 'incorporation' and was always more "than the sum of [society's] institutions" (Williams 1977: 118). To account for this multiplicity and taking seriously Gramsci's assertion that hegemony was a process – thus distancing himself from the French-Althusserian school of Marxism at the time – Williams stressed the work of active social and cultural substance as the key to unlocking the dialectical relationship between hegemonic formations and the unfolding of human life, or what he also referred to as 'specialized practice.'

Williams' concept of culture was formulated in a context of emergent urban modernity and has more in common with the urban sociology school that developed around the University of Chicago in the 1960's than with the anthropological concept of culture, which was still preoccupied with the study of 'primitive' village societies in the third world. Yet, later development of the culture concept, and in particular the strong criticisms against its homogenizing tendencies (see Abu-Lughod 1991) have warned against the slippery identification of groups with particular – and mutually exclusive – cultures; in slipping imperceptibly from the analytical to the descriptive realm, it increasingly came to be seen as a thing and consequently started doing things (Trouillot 2003). Keeping Williams' culture-concept at a skeptical distance, however, it is possible to resurrect the larger point he was trying to address with his work,

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[4] See the different explanations offered, respectively, by the human rights researcher Rita Manchanda highlighting the empowerment of women (Manchanda 2004), anthropologist Tatsuro Fujikura who looked to the power of ideology (Fujikura 2003), and anthropologist Sara Shneiderman who has located the growth of Maoism in histories of opposition to the state and decades of consciousness-raising (Shneiderman 2009). Most researchers on Nepali Maoism have in fact neglected this last important aspect the movement's success.

namely the ways in which configurations of class became expressed through – and hence dis-placed onto – cultural identities. Williams speaks not of culture as a fixed set of individual or group identities – the way in which it has been used for decades in anthropology and rightly criticized – but as the manifestation of relationships between groups with varying power. Hence, it is not 'Culture' as the end object of analysis that interests Williams but cultural *formations* – historical processes of group expressions and identifications that articulate social and political dislocations.

To formalize his framework, Williams suggested a tripartite differentiation between cultural formations; there were formations that were clearly *hegemonic*, in that they reflected the dominant ideology of society; then there were cultures that were rather *residual*, siphon-ing off from the dominant ideology but somehow redundant in the new sociopolitical order and which could, at times, be both allied with the dominant culture and at other times against it. Williams mentions the role of religious cultures to this effect; it was to some extent incorpo-rated into a capitalist state-form – Weber's classical argument in "the protestant ethic" (We-ber 1992) – but might also play a more critical role. Cultural forms could also be directly *oppo-sitional or alternative* to the hegemonic framework, however. This was, in William's analysis, the role the proletariat played in Marx's analysis, as a class which, while activated by the dom-inant ideology, grew conscious of its own peculiarity and could eventually become directly opposed to the dominant culture from which they were born; the well-known "class for itself" argument (Borland 2008: 137).

Williams' analysis opens up for a more complicated narrative on the establishment of oppositional classes than in the kind of Marxist literature that expects the experience of capi-talist oppression to automatically resolve into collective class consciousness. Williams is in-sistent that class emergence is also a cultural emergence, one that is even "pre-emergent" in that these cultural forms may precede the formation of a critical consciousness (ibid.:126). Anthropologists of most hues would readily accept that cultural processes are to some extent both pre-reflective and collective forms through which people express their desires and be-liefs. Williams asks us to take the study of cultural forms seriously, not because they are mono-lithic representations of consciousness – the Geertzian argument (Geertz 1973) – but rather because they *mediate power*; the power of institutions – traditional and political – and the power of imagination.

In this essay, I use Williams framework to enrich our understanding of political pro-cesses and not as a concept for thinking about groups' primary identifications and characteris-tics. Transposed onto a political domain, it becomes possible to speak of political culture in the original sense proposed by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) as a "set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments that give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system". Unlike Almond and Verba, however, for whom political culture was an outcome of a consensus pro-cess and therefore posed in the singular, I use political culture in Williams' hegemonic sense as a relational term indicating the mutual existence of multiple, overlapping and competing cul-tures. In this view, and following on anthropological studies of state formation (Joseph & Nugent 1994), sovereignty (Hansen and Stepputat 2005) and political cosmology (Kapferer 1988), the cultures of politics are shot through with unequal power relations and combine historical moralities and class alliances with what Thomas Blom Hansen calls 'repertoires of authority' that rely on implicit or explicit threats of violence (Hansen 2005). Not merely 'val-

ues', as suggested by Almond and Verba, political culture as I use it here, points to the contested interlocking of thought and action that saturate participation in political domains, yet retains – as highlighted by the Vigh and Jensen in the introduction – the semiotic uncertainty of the spectral and the spectacular since political performances must constantly be read and misread to be consumed.

These complications of political cultures – contested, disjunctural, performative – suggest that they should be studied as processual and relational rather than frozen institutionalizations of privilege. Such a perspective resonates well with Nepal's political history where a centralistic state system based on high-caste, urban, male elites from the country's hilly areas have met with repertoires of resistance ranging from evasion and 'foot-dragging' to outright revolt during its 2-3 centuries of state-formation (Kondos 1994; Gellner 2008). The Maoist ruptures of these engrained features of everyday state sovereignty during the decade-long 'People's War' built on past experiences of opposition but made the cultural component of elite power a primary populist target, turning high-caste Hindu religious practices into a symbolic struggle against upper caste dominance. This was not wholly unwarranted since the symbolic framework of Nepal as a Hindu state, ruled by the enlightened representatives of the God Vishnu, constituted one of the important legitimizations for caste rule (Riaz and Basu 2007). As argued by the French anthropologist Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (2009), the Maoist revolution, alongside its political components of reforming the state and redistributing land ownership, became a cultural revolution targeting ritual prohibitions against the sharing of food and the sacrality of cows, associated with the *Parbatiya* high-caste Hindus and constituting the country's political, economic and social elite. If we try to make sense of Maoist mobilization, both during and after the war, without accounting for this strong cultural component of rule and Maoist attempts at breaking this dominance, we lose a very essential part of the political struggle that the CPN-M has been waging and an important component of why so many people joined its ranks. The Williamian perspective on political cultural formations can thus help us understand the ways in which themes like generation, authorities and futures are grounded in the context of Nepal's post-revolutionary transition.

The surprising historical success of the Maoist movement in Nepal can hardly be adequately analyzed without a detailed understanding of the deep-seated social, economic and political disparities prevalent in the rural areas where incomes are only a fifth of what they are in the capital (Hutt 2004b). After the liberalization in 1990 where Kathmandu quickly modernized, the persistence of engrained hierarchies along caste, ethnic and gender lines constituted a fertile environment for the growth of the Maoists (as predicted by Richard Nickson 1992). However, what remain to be explained is through what idioms this mobilization occurred and how the "crisis of hegemony" identified by others (Shneiderman 2003) became engulfed in new, emergent political cultures with the aim of transcending histories of violent state formation. By looking at how the Maoist identified a hegemonic political cultural form to oppose and the ways in which they mobilized support for their "emergent" perspective, it becomes possible to paint a nuanced picture of how Maoist politics resisted, reinvented as well as reproduced concurrent forms of political culture in their struggle to transform their war-time successes to a post-conflict context.

Generation and the growth of youth politics

Rohit is a 19-year old man from Southern Nepal whose mobilization into the party is illustra-

tive of the new generation of members who had joined the movement after the war. Rohit had grown up in a small Tamang village in the Himalayan foothills together with his four younger siblings.[5] The family survived by growing vegetables and raising animals on the small plots of land surrounding their house, trading and selling surplus food for rice, oil, and other basic household items. There was a small school in the village which Rohit attended between chores at home but at the age of 8, he was invited to join an elder cousin who worked in a carpet factory in Kathmandu. Rohit continued in school for a while but explained that he had "no interest in studying" and he quit school in grade five to pursue kick-boxing with friends. Over the next many years, Rohit roamed around between half-hearted jobs and leisure activities bouncing around between family and friends in Kathmandu, Chitwan, Maharashtra in India, and his home village. He knitted carpets in Kathmandu but found it boring, went to a dancing school at his aunt's house in India but could not understand the language, returned for a spell to work in the city, then, after failing to find money for language studies, took off to work in the construction industry in Agra. In between all this he came back to stay with his family and talk to friends about where to go next. At the age of 16, Rohit felt he had to make a choice. One of his friends, who had been a member of the CPN-M for a while, started telling him about the movement's ideology, in particular their efforts at combating the poverty of which rural ethnic minority youth like himself were at the receiving end. Rohit talked with his friend several times before asking for an interview with one of its leaders and after being briefly queried about his background and reasons for joining, Rohit was invited to stay in the party quarters "on probation". A few days later, he was accepted in and became a full-time member, a *whole-timer*, of the Maoist movement.

When Rohit joined in early 2007, the CPN-M had just officially emerged in the capital's political scene. In November 2006, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the political parties had been signed and by January an Interim Constitution was drafted. This would pave the way for Constituent Assembly Elections later that year and for the newly elected assembly to decide upon whether or not to declare Nepal a republic. CPN-M leaders were in great haste to prepare the ground for elections. While a seasoned guerilla movement with a highly efficient command-structure, the CPN-M had no experience with electoral politics and its presence in the cities was still weak (Lawoti 2009). Just as during the war, the *maobaadi* existed mostly as a rumor (Pettigrew 2013) with an invisible network across the country and with its cadres in plainclothes. The CPN-M was challenged with turning their widespread clandestine movement into a visible institution that would allow it to field candidates and carry out electoral campaigns within the bureaucratic order of the state. "At that time", Rohit had told me, "everyone was talking excitedly about *maobaadi*; it was already popular."

To spearhead its transformation into an urban party, the CPN-M reactivated its youth front which had waxed and waned from its days as an underground movement in the 1980s. Emulating the urbanized European communist movements in the early 20th century, the Maoist announced the Young Communist League (YCL) as the forefront of the party's move into what they saw as competitive "bourgeois" democracy (Hachhethu 2008). The YCL was officially inaugurated in February 2007 under the auspices of the CPN-M Chairman Prachanda and with

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[5] Tamangs are one of Nepal's 102 ethnic and caste groups and constitute approximately 6% (1.2 million) of the population. They speak their own language and practice an animistic form of Buddhism in contrast to the cultural hegemony of Hinduism prevalent in the country.

a party Central Committee member as its political leader, it was reined tightly in under the existing party hierarchy. YCL grew quickly; moving experienced military commanders from the war to lead the new cells that sprouted up in all election areas of the city, the YCL was populated with young people like Rohit in all major cities of the country. Within half a year YCL claimed to have around 100,000 mobilizable members, of which between six and seven thousand worked and lived around the clock in central electoral offices (ICG 2011; Skar 2008). These were the whole-timers that Rohit joined.

The prioritization of YCL for the CPN-M was not just about strengthening a new institutional culture; it was a strategic maneuver to inject youth, as a political force, into the political establishment and to run on a ticket of a party wedded to youth issues. In 2007, there was a provision which forbade people under 45 to occupy certain government positions, and most leaders of other political parties were well into their 70's. By contrast, the Maoist party leadership was relatively young with many of its leaders in their forties and fifties. In YCL, youth was defined as anyone between 16 and 40, an indicator of the gerontological nature of Nepali political culture, and leaders sought to use the YCL as a political statement for a new era in political participation. Writing in a new party magazine, aptly titled "Youth Voices", YCL's new vice-chairman Uma Bhujel explained:

> "Responsible youths are being victimized by feudal capitalism and the harmful culture of imperialism. Because of this they are heading along the wrong path [...] The major and important work of revolution is to destroy the feudalistic, capitalistic and imperialist culture and to replace it by new values and a new culture [...] A beautiful world can only be imagined by carrying out a severe struggle against these hazards. To achieve this in practice, YCL will take a lead in the transformation and make all youths head in the right direction.

The lucid opposition between young people and dominant cultural traits very soon became a mantra for the movement. In public as well as in the party's internal deliberations, the role of YCL as a movement for youth who were actively opposing a decadent culture, socially as well as politically, was clearly pronounced. At party programs, leaders praised the youthful perspective of its cadres since it was "forward-looking" and "progressive" as well as untainted by traditional "superstition". Ordinary members also contributed to this genre in small publicized essays with titles such as "we are the heroes of the new era" or poems that more metaphorically spoke of "the rise of the beautiful morning". In the many private conversations I had with YCL cadres, this theme reverberated throughout the organization and cadres very often spoke of their decision to join as a particular productive way to use their "youth" to fight poverty and get engaged in politics precisely because their perspective was "fresh" and they possessed the energy for "transformation".

Closely connected to the pronouncement of youth politics after 2006 was thus the supportive idea that the post-war compromise was a time of transformation where changes that had until now been impossible and which could only be dreamed about could suddenly be realized. The CPN-M held this banner of a "New Nepal" high and it quickly infected public opinion so that soon everyone spoke of the possibilities of this newness and the possibilities of

realizing Nepal's democratic aspirations.[6] The generational theme was an insurrectional idea with great demographic potential (only 10% of the population was above 55 years old in 2014). In the Maoist vision, good politicians were now suddenly young and full of fervor rather than old, wise and well-connected. Yet, these were clearly positional claims whose power lay as much in their ability to mobilize support with the young newcomers in electoral politics as in their ability to describe Maoist party culture. Indeed, such binary rhetoric seems to be characteristic of Nepali Maoism and its ideological variant: *Prachandapath* (named after its chairman) (see Lecomte-Tilouine 2010a). Within such a conception of oppositional cultural forms, two competing logics for political inclusion could be pronounced, one based on the energetic, transformative nature of youth, and the other on the discredited paternalism of the old elite. While this hardly reflected the nature of political decision-making, whether within the CPN-M or in the other parties, it did allow the Maoists to differentiate themselves from the more seasoned party cultures and to emerge as the party of the young. It was a trope but it was an efficient one. When Rohit had talked of the sudden popularity of the CPN-M, it was this political momentum he alluded to. For many young people, CPN-M, and with it the YCL, came to signal the potentiality of a long-overdue reform of Nepali politics based on the rise of the subaltern classes. This alliance between poor urban youth and the YCL was crucial for its initial post-2006 success.

In addition to its rhetorical effect, CPN-M's youth politics was also an effort at de-professionalizing and democratizing a political culture dominated by Nepal's educated high-castes from the urban areas. Already with the war, where the movement had survived by the cooptation of rural hill societies, the pursuing of a non-dominant alternative political formula had been essential for the movement. But during the war, the focus had largely been on caste and ethnic plurality, captured in the Nepali term *jati*, as well as the equal role for women as fighters (de Sales 2000; Pettigrew 2013). In the post-war context, these other social distinctions were downplayed – leading to a break with one of its crucial ethnic wings in January 2009 – and instead generation moved to the center of CPN-M's efforts at formulating an alternative model of political power. The leadership developed their "1-in-3" policy which assured the representation of one youth for every 2 members above forty years old in all committees and for the upcoming election the party fielded an unprecedented number of candidates in the youth category (below 40) from districts around the country. After assuming power in August 2008, the CPN-M created a youth ministry and until their political marginalization in mid-2009 they continued to prioritize youth as an important policy issue and a source of power.

Nepal's rapidly changing demography in the past decades helped push the youth issue to the forefront of the post-war political agenda; in 2014, more than 50% of the population were below the age of 24. CPN-M efforts at challenging the dominance of other parties by harnessing the demographic force of youth was quickly copied by other parties who in short succession established their own youth fronts. The conservative Nepali Congress formed the Tarun Dal while the more liberal CPN-UML created Youth Force partly in order to stem the flow of youth into the YCL and partly so as to be able to engage the Maoist forces in the

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[6] References for these aspirations go back more than five decades when the first democratic revolution in 1950 unfolded. Between 1960 and 1990, Nepal was ruled by a royal autocratic regime, where parliamentary parties were once more been suspended and only after 1990 was parliamentary power restored.

streets. But, while one struggle of youth took place in the open between rival political youth fronts, the Maoist theorization of youth as a new source of political authority – not merely a weapon – unleashed some very interesting conflicts between different notions of the societal role of youth.

Maoist mid-level leaders aggressively disseminated the new conception of youth as a mobilization device and by the time I arrived in early 2009, recruiters employed the idea of youth as a particular potent social force when talking to new and prospective members. Some, like the senior cadre Marut who had participated in the war, explained how young people to-day were much more conscious than 10 years ago and that this signaled the partial success of their movement. Others were more concrete about the high unemployment among young people and that they were therefore more inclined to fight for redistributive change. This de-termined focus on youth was quickly picked up by young activists themselves who started speaking of their activism as related to periodization of youth. The young cadre Himal, who had grown up in the same village as Rohit but joined much later had been working for two years in a garment factory when he became a member. He explained:

> From time to time, cadres of the YCL would come [to the factory] and talk about the party. It motivated me to also go and serve since it was a party which works for the poor. I asked myself: "why should I not contribute as well? My contribu-tion can surely make a difference." I reasoned that if youth like us don't join, who else is going to join?

Himal's explanation was far from unique and emulated the concerns of movement leaders of appealing to youth as an important driver of mobilization. Another cadre who had come from a poor background as an unskilled child laborer and had initially been reluctant to join, ex-plained that he eventually convinced himself that it was not such a bad idea because, after all, he said "I realized that my youth period must be used for the upliftment of poor people."

These bourgeoning, if programmatic, pronunciations of the political potentiality of youth point to the emergence of a counter-culture, one that is strongly supervised from above but which has succeeded nonetheless in recasting Maoist post-war politics around dynamics of youth and hence as a special kind of democratic insurrection. Youth, in this Maoist conception, has come to stand for the excluded whose sudden participation is something akin to an act of affirmative action. Yet, the authorization of youth as a figure is inseparable from the legitimacy it lends to the Maoist political project and thus shows the imbrication of cultural formations in struggles for power. Furthermore, textures of youth in the CPN-M were weaved into wider concerns about societal transformations and cannot stand alone as an explanation of why young people joined but points to the nurturing of a strong generational sentiment in the new political context. As most newcomers to Maoist politics were carved out of the livelihood envi-ronment of the precariously employed and unskilled urban poor, Maoist youth politics devel-oped in dialogue with this nebulous new class subject. A closer look at this environment is therefore warranted.

Competing youth cultures

An underdeveloped national economy has since many decades pushed able-bodied men abroad to make a living, mostly as seasonal or household laborers in India's growing cities, but

increasingly also to the Middle East and Malaysia (Seddon 2005). The number of migrant la-
borers has continued to rise as has the national economy's dependence on remittances
(Graner and Seddon 2004), which in 2011 accounted to almost 30% of the nation's GDP. In a
context of high youth unemployment, the remittance economy has become an important as-
set of kin subsistence and local household economies, particularly in the rural areas where
access to education has continued to be poor and discriminatory (Sharma and Donini 2012).
This has put a mounting pressure on new generations to contribute to the household economy
through migrant work. Rohit's narrative of his shifting engagements is a good example of the
intricate ways his own search for meaningful futures intersected with obligations towards his
family members to take on an increasing share of its financial burden. Rohit's erratic shift to
his aunt in Maharashtra to learn Indian dance was not just a frivolous exercise, but in fact an
effort at combining his interest in show-business with an employment strategy. Indian "cultur-
al dance," he had told me, had a lot of "scope" because of its growing popularity. Rohit was
well aware that he could not just escape to India to dance for fun; it should contain a potential
for becoming a job as well. It illustrates the constant negotiations between securing different
futures that disenfranchised youth in Nepal are subject to.

In their late teens, many of the new cadres joining the CPN-M were not yet required to
contribute substantially to the household economy of kin but they were expected, however, to
position themselves so as to be able to do so in the near future. It is customary in Nepali
households, and definitely so in the case of the rural Tamangs that populated the YCL office
where I did most of my work, to collectively share the financial burden of the reproduction of
the household. Indeed, male members have a special obligation to finance their sisters' wed-
dings and the building of their own houses prior to their own wedding. This collective burden
is not easily shed and while the young age of new post-war members still shielded them from
the full force of this obligation, it constituted a very prominent moralizing discourse of youth
that was in conflict with the Maoist conception of youth as a time to serve the country, not the
household.[7]

The perseverance of the obligatory kinship economy illustrates the complicated "cul-
tural" scenario in which the Maoist movement was trying to erect an oppositional political
culture. The CPN-M, in effect, had to "steal" young people away from the cultural dominance
of the collective household economy and open up a different collectivized project where youth
carried connotations of liberator within a national framework rather than as a "liberator" of
parents and siblings' localized trajectories. This alliance-shifting from kinship to politics consti-
tuted a horizontal competition if we consider it from a class-perspective; it was the same poor
youth that could either work for kin or party and Rohit's and Himal's most immediate decision
was simply this; to labor for money and build a laborer's career – however precarious – or to
labor for the party and pursue a political career – however elusive. Maoist mobilizers under-
stood this very well and they almost invariably employed the vocabulary of urban precarity
(During 2015) when talking to laborers about life and politics: "look, you work and work for

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[7] Despite movement leaders best efforts, the moral economy of filial obligation constituted a formidable
pressure on Maoist activism and seeped into the fabric of everyday sociality when members spoke with
their family members, ventured outside to meet their friends, or returned to their homes for visits.
Occasionally, parents would also drop by to check on their sons or daughters new line of work and re-
mind them, even if subtly, of the larger kinship network of which the young cadres were part.

this *sahu* (master) but what will you get in return? He will become rich and you will still be poor".

At the same time, the generational problematic of youth and the stagnating Nepalese economy opened up another discourse on youth tied to neoliberal ideas of entrepreneurship and allied with both conservative political forces and the strong international donor-community in the country. This business model of youth, while not as homogeneous as the Maoist version, has been targeted in particular at educated, but unemployed, city youth as a way to stem the rising tides of brain drain and kick start the national economy with the industrious "free-wheeling" potency of the young generation.[8] This nebulous force received its programmatic ascendancy with the businessman Sujeev Shakya's "Unleashing Nepal" (first released in 2009 and re-released in 2014), in which he outlined a vision for a neoliberal "New Nepal" based, like the Maoist vision, on the force of youth, but here completely fractioned into individualized profitable enterprises and value chains. While the entrepreneurial youth culture does not compete directly with Maoist mobilizations as it is directed at the new middle-class, it does however suggest an alternative political solution to the transition to prosperous peace which framed the idea of New Nepal. This contrasts with the remittance economy which is stuck, in a sense, in an "old" model of Nepal's development trajectory and hence exactly the political economy against which the CPN-M poses itself with a vision for an economic self-sufficiency. The neoliberal model shares with the Maoists a disdain for the gerontocratic culture of the old political parties with their entrenched corruption and systematic in-fighting, but it is similarly critical of Nepal's unproductive economy and has sought, like the Maoists, to break with traditional forms of obligation since these are stunting creative and profit-seeking economic practice.

Seen from the perspective of Williams' cultural formation argument, both left and right forces have been seeking to erect an alternative to the hegemonies of entrenched kin-, party-, and generational structures that have stifled the development of the Nepali economy and the reproduction of poor opportunities for young people to build their future in the country. They share enemies. But the two alternative movements have also built different alliances; neoliberal culture emerged through the marketing of consumption for the middle-classes (see Liechty 2010, 2003) and has paid lip service to the finance nexuses between business and political elites, whereas the left posed itself in stark opposition to conservative elites but took a softer approach to the migratory labor economy which was the only avenue of social mobility for the poor classes. This *de facto* class alliance between the political establishment and entrepreneurial youth culture has complicated CPN-M's shuffle for dominance; while, in class terms, the Maoists are trying to fight entrenched privileges for high-caste Hindus, in cultural terms ("youth") they have been engaged in a battle against the materialist consumption and leisure of an educated middle-class ethos that has engulfed the urban environment within which they operate.

Reconfiguring authority

But what were the consequences of these cultural dynamics on the new generation of cadres

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[8] This is one of the areas through which neoliberal ideas of a de-regulated, entrepreneurial economy has influenced state policies during the transition.

who are the actual subjects of these policies? So far, I have looked at Maoist politics within the larger force-field where it has developed and where it must maneuver. But the Maoist party is itself a grand machinery with many different organizational expressions and within this institutional framework the cultural dynamics of youth politics gives rise to yet a different set of contradictions that build upon those already examined but which have other expressions and implications. As highlighted by the volume's editors, a convincing analysis of mobilization dynamics should unfold around the dialectics between organizational modalities and individual involvement. I take this to mean that organizations become actualized through the concrete action of individuals just as the latter are products of their interaction with institutional life. In Williams' vocabulary, it is the site of "specialized practice". The analytical power of this framework is to suggest that mobilization leaves nothing unchanged; these processes result in the emergence of new constellations of institutional culture that are the unfolding product of the meeting between powerful institutional frameworks and the people who are trying to fit into its nebulous cloak, changing it as they go along. There is this constant work of submission paired with a pushing at the boundaries, willed or unwilled, that account for the gradual dismantling of one organizational modality and the slow emergence of new formations.

For the CPN-M the external pressure of moving from war to peace and the growth of its cadre base in the urban areas led to some minor organizational changes but actually these were surprisingly few (ICG 2010; Hachhethu 2008; Adhikari 2010). The rise of the YCL as a substitution for the loss of its army, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), constituted the major institutional change and new members joining the movement became part of an organizational framework and party culture with a proven structure that was sought extended into the post-war framework with as few changes as possible. To accomplish this continuity, the CPN-M used experienced leaders from the war to lead new organizational cells and new cadres joining were therefore supervised by members with a solid history in the movement. The leader of Rohit and Himal, for instance, was a veteran from the PLA, who had already served as a commander in the war and he was backed by another long-time CPN-M member. While data on the ratio between war and post-war members is unfortunately not available for the YCL, I only met leaders who had joined before the peace agreement and who had, for the most part, actively participated in the People's War.

What, then, characterized this organizational framework? CPN-M is built like a classic communist party with a central party committee over-seeing all important decisions and a fine-grained layer of committees below that carry out orders from above (Rawal 2007; Thapa 2003; Gersony 2003; Lawoti and Pahari 2010). To ensure vertical integration, leaders of one committee are at the same time members of the committee above them from where they receive their orders. Keeping with the Leninist principle of 'democratic centralism', the CPN-M encourages bottom-up feedback on all levels but expects cadres to carry out orders without questioning them because only then can complex political adjustments be effectively implemented throughout the entire organization. This structure meant there was very little negotiation over authority and also very limited ambiguity, the goal being transparency and uniformity. In fact, in an organizational culture with a history of secrecy and thus without resort to written records, leaders sought to verbally copy the direction they received from above when relaying messages thus depersonalizing leadership roles as much as possible.

CPN-M's authority-structure was in crucial ways at odds with how authority is traditionally practised in Nepali society and while it may seem bland to Western readers where this

sort of functional hierarchy is well institutionalized, it appeared quite exotic to new members: "Here, we really have to submit ourselves to the leaders," cadres explained, not without some amusement, "and we have to obey their orders; they command and we do." Not used to taking commands very seriously, even if people in contexts outside the party were seeking to impose their authority in similar ways, they suddenly had to learn the art, not of subtle evasion that has been identified with classical forms of resistance in Nepali society (Gellner 2003; Kondos 1994), but of obeying; directly and without flinching. As Talal Asad has also described for medieval monks in Europe (1993), obedience in the CPN-M amounted to a virtue.

What is interesting is how cadres nonetheless experienced that they were treated with respect, despite their junior positions, and even as equals of sorts. A young Tamang woman, Damina, had come from a small village within the Kathmandu valley and had wished to escape the boredom of farm work and the predictable life-path of a low-caste woman from a family of few means. She had found a job at a garment factory on the eastern end of the city where she was engaged for several years and where she built up close relationships to some of the other women working there. One of her 'sisters', as she called her close friends from the factory, had recently joined the YCL and slowly afterwards, she wanted to give it a try too. She soon marveled at the small changes that cadre life in the movement brought her: there seemed to be no distinction between the boys and girls in the kind of assignment they received and while she was clearly aware of her junior position in the party and often strained by the complexity of work compared to her experience from the factory, leaders spoke to her in a much more respectful tone than she had been used to both in the village and the factory. She was spoken to using the formal "You" form (*tapaai*) and only rarely scolded: "we are treated equally to the boys", she explained, "and when I present myself in public, I can say I am a Maoist cadre (*maobaadi kariyakatra*).

These were in many ways small changes but they carried important implications for the subtle shifts in structures of authority that accompanied membership in the CPN-M. There was a widespread sensation throughout the organization that the space of relationships, while vertical in its command structure, was empowering in ways that the young members did not experience in their relationship outside the party; here they were subject to the engrained authority of their elder kin and the abuse of managers in the workplace, as well as in urban space in general where they could not assert themselves with their low-caste background, as poor, and being young at the same time. Within the party, however, a distinction was drawn between traditional forms of authority that were based on experiences of inferiority on the one hand, and party authority on the other hand, that was seen as fair and transparent, even if strict. Even more importantly, this form of authority was dynamic, based on individual experience rather than inflexible status or age categories; authority was not tied to persons, it was tied instead to positions through which members flowed with growing experience. For Damina this meant, for instance, that already after a year in the movement she was given her own small team of newcomers to command – relaying messages obediently from her leaders above – even though she was a woman and some of the new members she commanded were in fact older than herself. Such distributions of authority and gaining of worth contained a contrast to old structure of power and created commitments to the Maoist future. Most importantly, it nurtured cadres with a sense that their mobilization carried potentials for political transformation and were more than empty gestures.

Partial inclusion and youth contradictions

CPN-M members thus became engaged through a dynamic authority structure that allowed for the growth of individual careers without jeopardizing the top-down command structure of the party, at least at the entry-level where there was little room for abuse of power. On this level, it really seemed as if the YCL's slogan of youth empowerment carried some traction and allowed for new experiences of cadreship within a political space that was slowly undergoing transformation towards a new and different patrimonial future. The new cadres who joined the Maoists in the post-war years, however, had other identities than merely those of youth that seeped into the movement and reflected CPN-M's complicated position in the public landscape.

With the levelling of members' sociocultural markers into a generalized category as *maobaadi* – the pride of Damini's new identity – also came a silencing of identities that were traversed by differential privileges. There was a very perceptible distribution of *jaati* (caste and ethnicity) marked bodies across CPN-M's party structure with the central leadership consisting almost entirely of high-caste Hindus and the party's fringes populated, in turn, by marginalized population groups such as Tamangs, Rai and others. During the growth of the movement in the war period, the leadership built alliances with and encouraged the formation of, ethnic fronts fighting for political inclusion in a polity ruled by Brahmins and, to some extent, Chettris (see de Sales 2000; Lecomte-Tilouine 2004). The Maoist leadership itself, having evolved from Kathmandu's intellectual elite, was almost exclusively upper-caste as well. After the war, it came to a split in the movement when its high-caste leaders were unwilling to pursue identity issues in their bid for rule, and this led to the complete silencing of identity within the movement. "Here, we do not speak of *jaat*", was the answer I would get when broaching the subject and sometimes I was offered an expanded version that "we do not judge each other based on caste." This anti-discriminatory stance, while clearly breaking with widespread caste-rules on interaction between differentially positioned groups, thus also had the effect of actively silencing the perpetuation of deep divergences in who had access to the party's central commands. Similar criticism have been levied against the party's gender policy which looks good on paper – and in the everyday interaction between cadres – but which does not translate into women attaining leadership positions (Manchanda 2004; Gautam et al 2003; Gayer 2013).

While these discrepancies of inclusion seem at first hand to be the outcome of an identity-blind policy, there are indicators that these institutional inequalities have a deeper subterranean current revolving around class. Behind the differences of *jaat* and gender lures the question of education, which seems to be dividing members internally in the CPN-M's different organizations and *between* them. While there are more than two handful 'sister organizations' within the umbrella of the CPN-M catering to different occupational sectors, ethnic groups and so on, the CPN-M student union, the ANNISU-R, carries a special status (see Snellinger 2009a; 2007). ANNISU-R organizes the educated middle-class (and usually high-caste) and mobilizes them to career politics, as they go on to become leaders in the CPN-M (though not without problems, see Snellinger 2009b). By contrast, the youth in YCL, most of whom are uneducated and many even illiterate when they enter the party, remain outside the bounds of influential party positions. During the war, the space for participation of lower classes in forming the movement was made possible through the armed wing (Lecomte-Tilouine 2013), but in the context of peace it seemed the CPN-M has developed into a meritocratic principle of differentiation. While this can be broached as a class neutral option in contexts of

a successful education system, in Nepal where caste and class privileges translate directly into a stratification of educational options, such a policy risks simply replacing one kind of divide (gerontological) with another (class). Maoist leaders easily reproduce this institutional regime when they refer to the YCL as "the cadre factory of the party", acknowledging its importance for supplying the power of numbers but failing to offer an option for integrating class-marginalized youth into a party culture stratified according to educational achievement.

The consequence of the structural blindness of class politics within the party registers on the unfolding cultural politics of youth within YCL. In the absence of discourses on caste, gender, ethnicity and class, the cultural formation of youth comes to carry the weight of identifying the aspiration of cadres. As "progressive youth", cadres were given space to participate at the bottom of the institutional hierarchy and in the margin of the political field through a formal hierarchy that was in principle flexible enough to allow the gradual ascendancy of members as their experience grew.

But youth was also tamed, and subsumed, within the larger political economy of Maoist party building. As juniors in the movement, senior members easily slipped into familiar forms of address prevalent in Nepali society, including in the political culture from which the Maoist is seeking to distance itself, of sibling-relations. Junior members, while officially just "comrades" were often addressed as "younger sister" (*bahini*) or "younger brother" (*bai*) and, in turn, youth would call their seniors by the corresponding, and venerable, terms for "elder sister" (*didi*) or "elder brother" (*dai*). These were seemingly innocent expressions of the intimate relationships that developed between cadres who spent most of their time together but it constituted at the same time another slippage away from the politics of equality and indicated the difficulty with which the CPN-M held onto its efforts at building an efficient counter-culture; hegemonic forms of social distinction and political reproduction continuously crept in through the pores of the party and came to constitute a new patrimony.

At the same time, blindness towards the real generators of political exclusion invested the identification of youth with some of the power of misrecognition. While youth politics in the party became a way to hide the lacking inclusion of class discrepancies, this at the same time unleashed its power as a master signifier around which struggles for change revolved. This had curious and unintended consequences for YCL party culture as cadres began to identify youth with a psychological state of mind and started developing a self-disciplining regime around ideas of "proper" and "revolutionary" youth. Cadres took pride in the ethics of frugal living – adopting the first half of a popular CPN-M slogan "simple living, high thinking" – and sought to distance themselves from people, and in particular other youth, who failed to commit to the ethics of simplicity. As if cadres were punishing themselves from being poor, an internal and bizarre competition between cadres was visible during my fieldwork where "lust" for money, untamed desires of consumption and sexual relationships, and strong attachments to family and friends joined in a curious mixture of self-flagellation and cultural criticism. Rohit, for instance, was worried about how to build his body in this image, to look strong but not vain; Himal wrote poetry and trained his ability to express feelings of happiness whereas Damit, on the other hand, returned to her village at some point and was instantly criticized by her closest friend – the 'sister' that had motivated her to join – about her inability to shed with the desire for "luxury" and her filial attachment to the family.

In the process of concretizing the new youth culture that the CPN-M was formulating on a political level, YCL members developed the dynamics of competing cultural formations in

new directions. When we look dialectically at the idea of youth that developed in the YCL, it opens up into two forms: one that carries promises of empowerment and is a force of potentiality, and another which covers up the simultaneous disappearance of ethnic, caste, gender and class markers within the organization. In the meeting of these two moments of youth, one liberating and another suppressed, YCL's distinct development of a cadre culture took form and this gave shape to the larger struggle over cultural formations waged in the political sphere. The curious outcome of this development was that the youth culture through which cadres were mobilized and integrated became transformed and turned into a recipe for a self-disciplining which had very little to do with CPN-M's political struggle but which positioned itself actively with regards to competing urban youth cultures. Thus in the actual practices of cadreship, the content of the struggle between the dominant and the subversive is given form and develops in a different direction than what was envisioned by its leaders.

The confrontation between emergent and dynamic forms has thus not only been between the Maoist and the political establishment but a battle fought within the party over questions of authority. The Maoist elaboration of the role of youth in political culture owes more, in fact, to the patriarchal tradition of caste-divided Nepal with the idea of social service and the necessity of youth to achieve training by seniors before acquiring authority on their own. The youth politics practiced in the CPN-M is in opposition more directly to the consumerist capitalist youth culture even though its political rhetoric focuses on the gerontocratic and elite-based political establishment. This shows that even Williams' vocabulary, in the context of alter-political mobilization, cannot be applied without a concrete dialectical reading of the complex relationship between formations of different political cultures. Maoist formations of youth is "emergent" on the one hand, in relationship to a high-caste, urban and age-based autocratic elite and it is "oppositional" to a market-based middle-class culture but it is also "residual" with regards to the recycling of traditional notions of parental authority. This complicates the notion that Maoist mobilization simply succeeds by offering an alternative prescription for membership, as the evolving dynamic between differently positioned political cultures – Hindu, urban and kin-related – create shifting horizons within which Maoism is located and seeks to navigate.

Conclusion

The CPN-M, and the YCL in particular, was caught in a three-way struggle against both the competing consumerist ideas of youth and the remittance economy. As party members, they were opposing class enemies that they had no relation to, i.e. high-caste elites; as poor youth in a remittance economy, they were seeking to distance themselves from ties of kinship and this, by contrast, involved a very concrete rupture of experience; but then as city youth, they were disciplining an opposition to the, largely, middle-class economy of consumption and leisure and this constituted a 'translation', and displacement, of the neoliberal ideology of market-driven development from an economic to a cultural realm of behavior.

Problematics of mobilization to violent movements continue to haunt the political establishment, particularly in the west where the threat of "terrorism" poses complicated and, also sometimes, uncomfortable questions about the "all-too-familiar" nature of people who find themselves at the forefront of apocalyptic events. In the context of Nepal, the YCL was also deemed too radical for a party that was trying to accede to a liberal political framework, and was effectively ostracized and "left to die". In this chapter, I have tried to think about how

violent political movements mobilize young people through an examination of the formation of new youth cultures that have been able to provide directional force to ideologically un-trained cadres. The analysis of youth presented here has shown that far from being a neutral descriptive category, youth, by contrast, become strong symbolic figures growing out of dis-parate political economic forces. By thinking about the political competitions within which youth gets caught up, and redefined in the process, I have described Maoist post-revolutionary mobilization as a 'culture war' to indicate how the differences, values and collectivities identi-fied with youth became a battlefield, turning the question of cadres' future as well into a bat-tlefield.

As I have argued, the mobilization of the working poor as cadres of the party took place within several competing cultural formations that were peculiar to the historic moment in which Nepali political life found itself in the immediate post-revolution years. The rise of an alternative political youth culture based on new visions of Nepali society and a willingness to fight collectively for this vision resulted in the development of contradictory practices, as the CPN-M and the YCL tried to concretize these ideas in an environment of competitive cultural formations. The ground underneath postwar political culture had shifted to such a degree that CPN-M's youth ideas was but the next clear pronunciation of a widespread (cultural) criticism against degenerative party politics – cleptocratic, corrupt, even ideological blind – that to some extent the emergence of youth politics came to be seen, by some, as a form of relief. The problematic of the relationship between the dominant, residual and the alternative present themselves here in a slightly more complex interlocking than proposed by Williams due to the highly politically charged atmosphere in which CPN-M politics unfolded. Despite the power of established politics, it has slowly been losing its grip on the claim to legitimacy and, by way also of the force of public opinion, the emergent youth culture of politics proposed by the CPN-M seeps into a much wider space than its own institutional boundaries. The hegemonic itself seems to be in decline and a new matrix is opened up where oppositional politico-cultural formations are competing to become the new hegemony.

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