

Volume 23

Number 1 *Himalaya; The Journal of the Association
for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*

Article 6

2003

Living Between the Maoists and the Army in Rural Nepal

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Recommended Citation

Pettigrew, Judith (2003) "Living Between the Maoists and the Army in Rural Nepal," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 23: No. 1, Article 6.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol23/iss1/6>



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LIVING BETWEEN THE MAOISTS AND THE ARMY IN RURAL NEPAL

Using ethnographic data collected in a village in rural Nepal in 2002, this article explores the fear that pervades the lives of the villagers and the survival strategies and creativity that they bring to bear on the extraordinary situations they are forced to encounter. Since the escalation of the conflict at the end of 2001, a 'culture of terror' has engulfed the lives of rural Nepalis. The Maoist insurgents have coerced them into providing food and shelter, which in turn makes the villagers vulnerable to aggression by the security forces who suspect them of collaborating with the enemy. In the context of the ever-present but unpredictable threat from both sides of killings, beatings and torture, and the tensions and insecurities caused by rumour and counter-rumour, this study examines the depth of fear experienced by the villagers and the extent to which this fear has become part of their daily existence. It confirms experiences from other parts of the world where the 'routinisation of fear' has been shown to have long-term effects on people's psychological health. In this study the effects are seen in changed sleeping patterns, chronic illnesses, altered relationships with the land, and new ways of socialising both within the family and in the wider village. But even in the violation of their most intimate spaces—their homes—the villagers have been able to maintain some degree of control and creative resistance over their unwelcome guests through their own social networks and cultural practices.


INTRODUCTION

Despite recent interest in the anthropology of war, relatively little attention has been paid to the analysis of how conflict is lived or represented by the people caught in its midst (Zur 1998: 18). This article—based on fieldwork carried out in rural Nepal in mid and late 2002—contributes to the anthropology of political violence by addressing three issues. First, it examines villagers'¹ interpretations and representations of combatants and villager-combatant relationships in Maurigaun,² a village in what was considered to be a less active³ area of the Maoist insurgency at the time of the research. It considers how the presence of Maoists and army personnel and their activities impinge on villagers' lives and the surrounding landscape of trails, fields and forests. Second, the discussion examines villagers' fears by exploring the 'culture of terror' that has developed in the village. Third, it considers villagers' survival strategies and asks which cultural practices become meaningful in the face of ongoing fear and what creative strategies come into play to resist the vicissitudes of armed violence. This study is thus concerned with how conflict-related violence⁴ dismantles the social world

and how people actively attempt to re-create their world within a context of ongoing war.

One of the main anthropological contributions to the study of political violence has been the development of the concept of 'cultures of terror' (Suárez-Orozco 1987; Taussig 1987, 1992; Green 1995;). Michael Taussig—whose early ideas have been further developed by writers such as Green, Sluka, and Suárez-Orozco—states that where political torture and murder become endemic, 'cultures of terror' flourish. Jeffrey Sluka, editor of the first edited volume on the anthropology of state terror, suggests that: 'When fear becomes a way of life . . . a culture of terror has emerged.' (Sluka 2000: 22).

'Cultures of terror,' Suárez-Orozco states, have their 'own vocabulary and grammar, cultural facts and artefacts.' In Argentina, where he conducted his research, this vocabulary included words such as 'disappeared,' 'torture centres,' 'torture rooms,' and 'electric prods' (1992: 240). A central aim of this article is to elucidate the cultural facts and artefacts of the 'culture of terror'⁵ in Maurigaun, and to draw attention to its vocabulary.



While the mundane experiences of everyday life, such as working in the fields, walking to town, visiting friends, eating or sleeping, continue to dominate most people's daily lives in many parts of rural Nepal, at any moment a familiar routine can be pierced by unexpected terror and violence. Violence, as one of Linda Green's Guatemalan informants explained, is 'like fire, it can flare up suddenly and burn you' (Green 1995: 109).

Green suggests that 'with repetitiveness and familiarity people learn to accommodate themselves to terror and fear.' Fear becomes routinised. Many Nepalis I have spoken to over the last few years claimed they were getting used to their unusual circumstances. Curfews, army check posts, the militarisation of life in Nepal, and even living with the Maoists are all becoming habitual. As Green (1995: 108) notes, the routinisation of terror 'allows people to live in a chronic state of fear with a façade of normalcy at the same time that terror permeates and shreds the social fabric.' Such routinisation does not stop the fear but rather allows people to get on with what they have to do to survive in an extreme situation. Since it is not possible to live in a constant state of alertness, feelings of chaos are diffused throughout the body but surface frequently in dreams and chronic illness. A veneer of normality masks the terror that is never far away. In this article I apply Green's model to Maurigaun and investigate whether fear is becoming routinised in people's lives.⁶

Carolyn Nordstrom (1995, 1997, 1998) draws attention to the interrelationship between creativity and political violence. Violence, she suggests, is 'about the destruction of culture and identity in a bid to control (or crush) political will' (1997: 4). People at the epicentres of violence, however, resist it and 'It is in creativity, in the fashioning of self and world, that people find their most potent weapon against war' (ibid). Her work on the Mozambican civil war highlights the creative resources that people use in times of conflict to survive and 'un-make war':

Self, culture and reality are (re)generative. People ultimately control the production of reality and their place in it. This is an interactive process. They produce themselves, and equally, they are produced within, and by, these cultural processes. As much as terror warfare tries to dismantle the viable person, people fight back. (1998: 110)

A distinction between the terms 'terror' and 'fear' is not usually made in the literature on 'cultures of terror' and frequently the words are used interchangeably. Fear and terror are, however, different. According to Oltmanns and Emery (1995: 198), 'Fear is experienced in the face of real, immediate danger . . . and helps to organize the person's behavioural

responses to threats from the environment.' Terror, according to Rothschild (2000: 61), is the 'most extreme form of fear . . . the result of the (perception of) threat to life.' While villagers in Maurigaun live in fear of their lives, their day-to-day experience is predominantly that of chronic fear interspersed with periods of terror. The discussion below is thus concerned with the impact of long-term fear and periodic terror.

BACKGROUND

When I arrived in Maurigaun in the summer of 2002, it had been two years since I had last visited the village. At the time of my previous visit in 2000, forest-based Maoists were coming into the villages for 'donations' and guns and to give propaganda speeches and run cultural programmes. By 2001 there was a Maoist training camp established in the vicinity of the village, and stories abounded about the comings and goings of the Maoists who operated openly in the area.

In November 2001 a state-wide ceasefire and the accompanying talks between the government and the Maoists broke down when the insurgents withdrew from the talks and launched a series of attacks on military and civilian targets in Dang, Surkhet, Syangja, and other parts of the country. For the first time the guerrillas attacked the Royal Nepalese Army. On 26 November 2001, the Government of Nepal imposed a state of emergency, called out the army and put into place an ordinance granting the State wide powers to arrest people involved in 'terrorist' activities. Under the ordinance (which became an Act in the spring of 2002) the CPN (Maoist) was declared a 'terrorist organisation' and the insurgents labelled as 'terrorists.' With the institution of the state of emergency, some fundamental rights guaranteed in the Nepali constitution, including freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of movement and assembly, and the right to constitutional remedy, were suspended.

The introduction of a state of emergency marked the escalation of the conflict and turned it from a low-intensity conflict to a high-intensity one.⁷ Seddon (2002: 2) estimates that 250 people (Maoists and security personnel) were killed in the days between 23 and 26 November 2001 alone. During the first month and a half of the emergency the Nepali human rights organisation INSEC reported that 687 people were killed by the security forces, with a further 184 killed by Maoists (Informal Sector Service Centre 2002: 65, 67). In the following months, the conflict continued to spiral with the Maoists launching several large-scale attacks on the security forces.

In April 2002, Amnesty International (2002a: 2) stated that according to official sources more than 3,300 people had

been arrested on suspicion of being members or sympathisers of the CPN (Maoist) in the first month after the state of emergency was declared. By the end of February 2002 the number had risen to over 5,000. By August, 9,900 'Maoists' had been arrested, of whom 1,722 remained in custody (Amnesty International 2002b: 2). Many people were being held in army camps without access to their relatives, lawyers, or doctors and with virtually no prospect of their cases being brought to court. Amnesty International has repeatedly appealed to both the government and the Maoists to stop extra-judicial killings and other human rights violations.



PHOTO: LI ONESTO

LIVING WITH THE MAOISTS

I returned to Mauriguan on a hot monsoon afternoon in July 2002. At first glimpse, things looked very much as before: children playing by the buffalo pond, women washing at the tap, a group of people clustered in the teashop. As I approached I was surprised to see so many unfamiliar faces: young men and women whom I had never seen in the village before. This is hardly surprising, I told myself, as I have been away for some time, and being the first teashop in the village this particular place tends to attract visitors. I called out a greeting and the three casually dressed young men standing at the door replied. As I rounded the corner into the main street the usual collection of teenage boys was playing basketball, watched by a group of younger children standing on the sidelines, too little to be allowed to join in. 'You've come,' someone shouted out. 'I have come,' I replied. I continued my journey through the village, stopping briefly for greetings at water taps and across the walls of courtyards. I noticed that Krishna Maya's teashop was boarded up but otherwise things looked much as they did when I first visited twelve years before.

Several hours after arriving in the village I sat on the opposite side of the hearth from a friend. Over a cup of tea I told her that I was thinking of visiting nearby villages to get details of army killings, which I knew from a meeting with a human rights organisation had not been fully documented. Gita looked horrified; she did a quick scan of the veranda and courtyard and told me in a hushed and hurried voice:

You cannot go there, it is terribly dangerous, and you cannot talk about the killings. They are secret things. It is very dangerous to talk about what the army does. Do you not know that the Maoists are here nearly every day? They come and force villagers to feed them, there is no choice. And then the army comes and they blame people because they fed the Maoists. It is a very dangerous time now . . .'⁸

She stopped abruptly and tensed as we heard footsteps outside. 'Stop talking,' she said. 'I don't know who it is.' Gita was notably relieved when she discovered that it was a young neighbour. 'Where are they? How many are there?' She asked him. 'There are five,' he replied. 'Three men and two women—they have forced the women's committee to open the committee house and that is where they are going to sleep tonight.' Gita turned to me and commented:

'They don't all sleep at once; they take turns to sleep and turns to guard. At least one or two of them are always awake. Sometimes a woman from our ethnic group comes, she speaks our language. She is from a far-off village and she is pregnant. We haven't seen her for a while and we wonder if she has been killed in a skirmish as she couldn't run fast enough.'

On the second morning of my stay I visited one of the teashops to have a chat with the proprietor, a young woman originally from a village two days' walk away in a neighbouring district. It was midday and as most people were out in the fields we were alone except for her youngest daughter who was playing on the ground in front of us making a 'teashop' out of stones, sweet wrappings, and match sticks. In hushed tones Durga told me about the visit of the Maoists to her shop last week.

In the early evening a group arrived. They were heavily armed and they wore belts with bullets around their waists. One of the girls was very young—she couldn't have been more than thirteen. It upset me to look at her as she was about the same age as my eldest daughter. I am so glad that I sent Nani to live with my friend in the town so there is no chance that she will be forcibly recruited by the Maoists. The leader of the group told me that they wanted food and to stay the night. I told them that I could feed them but I pleaded with them not to sleep in the house. I said "If you stay here and the

army arrives then all my family will be killed." One of them laughed and replied, "Then we'll die together." I begged them not to stay and they left after they had eaten.

It is such a frightening time, things that we could never have imagined are now happening on a regular basis. Did you know that my one of best friend's relatives was killed by the Maoists? He was a teacher and one day last winter Maoists came to the school where he was the deputy headmaster and dragged him out of the classroom. They called all the villagers together and in front of them they accused my friend's relative of giving the police information about a Maoist who was captured three years ago, they also accused him of refusing to give money and of teaching Sanskrit which they had banned. Then they took him to a tree and attached him to it with his own scarf. They stabbed him in the shoulder and the stomach, and shot him in the head. The villagers were too frightened to help him or tell his family and it was only the next day that his body was removed by the police. Just before he was killed his friend visited him and pleaded with him to leave the village. He wouldn't go because he said that the school would close if he left as the headmaster had already gone. The teachers here are also very worried because this morning the Maoists told them that they have to give two months' salary. They don't know what to do. It is such a lot of money but they know that the Maoists have killed and injured many teachers and so they will probably have to give them it or leave the village.

The following evening, villagers congregated in Gita's courtyard for a dance to raise funds for the repair of village paths. The event was conducted with the usual joking, flirting, and teasing but the numbers in attendance were small. In the past, people from all over the village would have turned up in large noisy groups, guided through the dark streets by flaming pieces of wood held aloft. I was disappointed not to see an old friend but a neighbour explained:

Most nights Maoists come to her house as it is positioned at the top of the village, close to the forest, and has good views of the surrounding area. She would have liked to have come to see you but she had to stay at home and cook as a group arrived just before dark. Her life is difficult nowadays.

"What does she do?" I asked. "She is frightened but she just gets on with her housework and farm work, what else can she do?" replied her neighbour.

When I asked my informants how they felt about the Maoists they stated that they were 'frightened of them.' On several occasions people followed this statement with a non-verbal illustration of how Maoists forced them to do things at gun-

point. Villager-Maoist relationships, however, were complex. Sitting around the fire one evening, a group of middle-aged and elderly women told me some of the things they knew about the groups of Maoists who regularly visited. In a hushed voice an older woman explained, 'Two of the young Maoist women who come to the village are pregnant. Another woman recently gave birth in the forest but the baby died as it didn't have enough food.' When I asked how they knew these things, they replied, 'They tell us. They force us to feed them but they also talk to us and sometimes we ask questions and sometimes they answer us.' When I asked what type of people Maoists are, I was told, 'Some are very violent and like to kill and they do lots of killing but others are not like that. They have different ideas to the government but they don't like killing.'

THE ROYAL NEPALESE ARMY

Maurigaun has never had a police presence⁹ and prior to the emergency villagers could enumerate recent visits by the police or the army. Like many other rural Nepalis the inhabitants of Maurigaun policed themselves. Indeed, it required a serious crime to be committed for the police to enter the village at all. The army, who were seen as remote, rarely visited. The only time I saw an army patrol in Maurigaun prior to November 2001 was on polling day in 1991, and their presence merely elicited a surprised comment from my companions: 'What are they doing here? There is no need for them.'

On the day of my arrival in the village I discovered that the friend I was to stay with was out in the fields. 'Come and have tea at my house!' shouted a neighbour. When the social pleasantries were over I asked Sunita and her husband Kancha about life in the village. 'How are things? Are there Maoists around?' I asked. 'Yes, almost all the time,' replied Sunita. 'There is a group here today. They are sitting at the teashop with their guns beside them. You must have seen them but maybe you didn't notice their guns.' 'Does the army come?' I asked. 'Yes, they come,' replied Sunita and continued,

A couple of months ago Kancha and I were working in the fields below the village. We were alone, just the two of us. Suddenly I saw the helicopters coming, there were two of them. I watched them from the time they were like tiny moving ants in the distance until they landed. As they came closer and closer I nearly fainted with fear and I said to myself, "Maybe this will be the day I die." I was terrified that the soldiers would behave as they have behaved in other villages where they hit and killed people. The soldiers stayed one night and patrolled around the village and the surrounding area. They asked us if the Maoists come and if we feed them and we said that we hadn't seen the Maoists and that we don't feed them.

We had no choice but to lie. We didn't want to be beaten and we didn't want to die. They left, we were lucky.

Terrible things have happened in my friend's village. Some months ago Maoists killed an army officer. Shortly afterwards the army came to search the village and hit everyone with their rifles. They hit old and young alike and they even hit people in the stomach. During the search a helicopter circled overhead and fired into the village and the nearby forest. The firing was aimed at houses where the soldiers thought they saw smoke as this could suggest that people were preparing food for the Maoists. A few days later somebody told the army that Maoists were eating a meal in the next village. By the time the soldiers arrived the Maoists had left and only the family remained. The soldiers came in with their guns firing and killed the newly-married daughter and her husband. She died with her hand full of rice. The Maoists escaped but they were arrested the next day. I heard that when they were caught they were hiding among the children in the school. They were apprehended in the school grounds but they were not killed in front of the children, they were taken a little way into the forest and killed there. The radio said that they were killed during a fight but this wasn't true—they were killed after they were caught. Around the same time, a lato [deaf-mute man with a learning difficulty] was shot dead by the army as he ran away when he saw them. He didn't understand and as he was frightened he ran and they killed him because they thought that he was a Maoist. The army killed a friend of my mother's when she was cutting grass for her buffalo in the forest. They heard something moving and they just shot, they didn't bother to check who it was and so my mother's friend died. Nowadays we are very frightened of going into the forest, we can be killed, looted or raped by either side at any moment and there is nothing that we can do. The Maoists haven't done these things so far, so we mostly fear the army.

Shortly afterwards I left for the house I was to stay in. There the first fifteen minutes were taken up with greeting friends and neighbours. Once the welcomes were over, Gita turned to me and said:

Take that kurta off [Punjabi style dress; kurta is an abbreviation of kurta surwaal] and put on one of your lungis [sarongs]. Don't wear a kurta around the village or when you are walking on the trail. You must always wear a lungi. You

are wearing a kurta, you have no tika [vermillion powder] on your forehead, and you are not wearing glass bangles: you are dressed like a Maoist woman. It is very dangerous to dress like this nowadays. The army checks for three things. First of all they look to see if the woman is wearing a kurta, if she is, then they check for two further things—they look at her forehead to see if she is wearing tika and at her forearms to see if she is wearing glass bangles. They go like this: one for kurta, two for no tika, three for no bangles and four shoot. Many women have died in this way. Go and change into a lungi now, put your kurta in the bottom of your bag and do not bring it out again while you are here.'

The villagers I spoke with are very frightened of the army. Although they personally have not been physically mistreated, neighbours and kin in nearby villages have been. Those I encountered saw the army as distant, terrifying, and unpredictable. The soldiers are marked out by the manner in which they arrive, move around the village and surrounding area, and behave and interact with locals. As they usually visit the village by helicopter they arrive unannounced. Unlike those who walk, there is little opportunity for people to be forewarned of their imminent visit. They bring an intimidating array of military hardware that has never before been seen in the village—he-



PHOTO: LI ONESTO

licopters, automatic and semi-automatic weapons, military radios, and other equipment. They maintain a physical and spatial distance as 'they keep to themselves,' 'eat alone,' and do not engage in conversation. Informants commented, 'It is impossible to converse with them; they only ask questions and give orders.' The movement of army patrols through the forest is seen as particularly frightening because people feel that they shoot randomly. Consequently, individuals working in the forest at that time are at risk of being targeted as Maoists regardless of what they are doing or who they are. As an informant stated, 'They could easily have checked the identity of the lato in my friend's village but they didn't, they just shot him.' While the security forces are in the village people fear that they will learn about their interactions with the Maoists. When the army leaves, villagers worry that the Maoists will interpret their interactions with the army as traitorous. Although no one in Maurigaun has been denounced as a spy, several people in the locality have been punished by the Maoists for alleged spying. Villagers are particularly fearful of the deaths of Maoist leaders because they feel that they will be ac-

cused of betraying the Maoists to the security forces and will be severely punished. What is important is not actual guilt but the perception of culpability. An informant explained, 'It doesn't matter if you are guilty or innocent, what is important is that people believe you are guilty. If a commander was killed around here then terrible things would happen to people in the village and nobody could save us.'

LIVING BETWEEN THE MAOISTS AND THE ARMY

At first glance Maurigaun looks much as it did before and in many ways it is much as before. Each day villagers get up, work in the fields, eat, visit each other's homes, plan weddings and funerals, visit the health post, and walk to town. In the public spaces of the village the talk is of everyday matters: people meet and discuss who has got married, who has got a job overseas, who has died, arrangements are made to work together, the cost of the building of the new nursery school is discussed. The women chatting and washing the mud off their legs at the village tap after a day working in the fields pay no outward attention to the armed Maoists sitting listening to the radio just yards away. The small crowd of villagers sitting at the shop do not stop their conversation when a young Maoist comes to request supplies from the shopkeeper. It would appear that the people of Maurigaun have become used to living with the insurgents.

Yet this show of normality is a façade. There is another side of Maurigaun where fear and terror find expression and where people struggle to use whatever strategies they can to cope with their changed environment. In the private space of the home people talk together in hushed tones. They discuss which part of the village the Maoists are staying in and wonder about the possibility of future visits to their hamlet. They question why certain parts of the village are frequently targeted and others not—which is likely to do with geographical proximity to potential escape routes. Throughout my visits this 'tracking' of the Maoists continued, with villagers quietly passing information on to family, friends, and neighbours about the presence and movements or expected movements of the insurgents.


Several times as I walked around the village, villagers checked which path I intended to take and indicated their approval or disapproval of a particular route without explaining further. To the outsider this would have appeared to be a casual interaction—similar to many others that villagers in this area engage in concerning people's movements—but it was not. While villagers frequently talk about movements in space they do not talk in quite this way. In an attempt to regain a degree of control over their environment, villagers engage in a series of sophisticated communications that mimic their

usual patterns but in reality are different. Such interactions allow information about the presence and movements of their uninvited guests to be safely conveyed in public places. In the privacy of homes and when people feel relatively safe the discussions are more expansive and more direct as they talk about the best way to communicate or negotiate with the Maoists. Stories and experiences from other villages are recalled and comparisons made. The next visit of the army is wondered about, and its movements in the area commented upon. While negotiation is considered an option with the Maoists it is perceived to be less useful with the security forces. At the sound of footsteps in the courtyard, a deadly and tense silence falls over those gathered around the hearth. It is only when it is clear who has arrived that people relax, and there are often a few moments of silence before conversation is resumed.

I could detect the changes best in those to whom I am closest. My friend Gita sat in her place by the side of the hearth and stirred the lentils with her usual deft hand movements, but her quiet and self-assured presence had a different edge to it. She was at times visibly jumpy and some of her movements were jerky. She laughed and joked but sometimes I caught a look that I had never seen on her face before—fear. My self-assured, confident, outspoken friend was deeply fearful. When questioned she did not deny her feelings but rather said, 'Yes, I am very, very frightened,' she then went back to stirring the pot and changed the subject.

I noticed a new alertness in others also. Small bits of information that might have been disregarded in the past are now carefully noted in case they might provide some information about the movements or behaviour of either side. Visits to town and, more importantly, the return journey are carefully planned so that the travellers will be home before nightfall. People are extra careful about what they say and to whom they say it. Silence is an important coping strategy and widely deployed when interacting with both sides. For children who started learning accepted norms of interaction in a different time and who had to re-learn them, it is confusing.

Raju is eight and I have known him all his life. He is a shy, obedient little boy who is rarely punished by his elders. As his mother and I prepared vegetables for the evening meal we talked in vague terms about the recent arrival of two groups of Maoists in the village when suddenly Raju asked, 'Are you talking about the Maoists?' With barely a break in her conversation his mother turned to him and said, 'Do not talk about these things' and then slapped him hard on his leg. Tearful, he retreated into the corner. When I later questioned Sita about her actions she explained to me that Raju had not yet learnt to be silent. 'He must learn not to speak about certain things. It is hard for him but he must learn as it could be a matter of



life or death. Nowadays you cannot be sure of whom you are talking to and so you must know when to be silent.' Raju is becoming socialised to the realities of living in a war zone.

Whether it is on the basis of ethnicity, caste, gender or class, villagers have long categorised people by dress. Nowadays this reading of attire has taken on new meaning with the potential for dire consequences. As stated above, villagers in Maurigaun note that Maoist women wear kurtas, no tika, no glass bangles and Gold Star trainers; therefore it is believed that to dress like this is to place oneself at great risk of being killed by the security forces. At first examination the categorisations appear simplistic: if you are wearing a kurta you could be killed as a Maoist. People, however, have no faith in the army's ability to make distinctions between people or their interest in doing so. If the army cannot or will not differentiate between Sunita's mother's friend—an elderly woman cutting grass for her buffalo in the forest—and armed insurgents, then how can it be trusted to make subtle distinctions based on the idiosyncrasies of dress? In a world of rumour and counter-rumour, anxious villagers try to make some sense of the information with which they are presented. For Gita 'the wearing of a kurta' and 'death as a suspected Maoist' are inextricably interlinked. In a time of horrible and unpredictable uncertainties knowing what combination of clothing to avoid is a concrete piece of information that can be acted upon and passed on to others in an attempt to make them safe. That it might be somewhat outdated—because Maoist women's 'fashions' change, as was subsequently pointed out to me by a colleague—is irrelevant because this information both accurately reflects recent experience and gives villagers a small sense of control over the chaos that surrounds them.¹⁰


For villagers the reading of people's bodies and their apparel is a primary strategy in the process of identification. Maoist men, however, dress like most other Nepali men, so there are endless rumours about how you can identify one. It is said, for example, that they 'carry large packs,' 'wear Gold Star trainers,' and 'look extra alert.' Villagers know that these descriptions apply to a significant proportion of the young male population, so in the end, when a new face appears, people resort to some combination of the above criteria. My research assistant was initially thought by locals to be a Maoist because he was a young, unknown male in casual clothing. It was only after he was seen with me that people realised that he was my new assistant. A shopkeeper who spoke to him after she discovered his identity told him that while she had looked at him as calmly and impassively as she could, she had been worrying to herself about who he was and what he might do.

Villagers know the local Maoist supporters. Several in-

formants mentioned to me that a local leader 'does not give dukha [hardship] to people in this area as he knows them. Instead he gives his dukha elsewhere.' As this individual is not often in the locality the fear is of those leaders who visit and who are 'not local and bring their dukha with them to give out here'. Villagers hope that their pre-existing networks with local Maoists will be protective. However, as everyone is differently positioned in relation to the Maoists and has different inter-relational histories with them, it is not certain whether previous relationships will be protective or destructive. A villager told me that his 'brother had been to school with a local leader,' a fact that he hoped would protect him and his family from Maoist aggression.

Most Maoists who visit the village are not from the vicinity and thus villagers cannot count on pre-existing relationships to protect them. The basis of their interaction with these 'visitors' revolves around the forced provision of food and shelter. Here the interactions are complex as local norms of hospitality demand that guests—depending on their status—be afforded great respect. Guests, while honoured, are also indebted and are expected to behave with propriety and to respect the possessions and spatial arrangements of their hosts' homes. They are also expected to reciprocate and provide hospitality to their hosts at a later date. But what about forced 'guests'? Maoists do not partake in the usual guest-host cycle of reciprocity and they are not welcome visitors.

During a subsequent visit to Maurigaun I had an opportunity to observe villager–Maoist relationships when a group of insurgents suddenly appeared in a house I was visiting. While entry was politely negotiated it was quite clear that the householder had no choice but to host the rebels, and while she was not required to feed them on this occasion she was required to provide tea and accommodation. Interactions between the householder and the Maoists drew on a range of cultural norms including pre-existing Nepali notions of age and seniority whereby the hostess scolded her 'guests' as she would village teenagers.¹¹ For example, shortly after their arrival she said to the leader, 'Move that gun away from my shawl, we villagers don't like guns,' which he subsequently did. On another occasion she scolded him for drinking too much hot water and complained when a young woman placed a stick for cleaning her gun in the fire. Their visit, she muttered to me quietly, was 'like a bazaar, too much noise and too many goings on.' At other times, however, she was wary and after mildly teasing two young men who were drinking tea beside the hearth she commented that they should not take offence as she was 'only joking,' a pattern that repeated itself several times during the day. The explanation of why I was in the village ('visiting during her holidays') was carefully backed up with details of my history of staying in the area



and attention drawn to the fact that there are photographs of me in some village houses. Later in the day, when the Maoists were carrying out small domestic tasks such as sewing on buttons and washing clothes, she and several other female neighbours engaged in mild put-downs. She commented, for example, that the combat dress of a young man was smart but that his shoes 'did not match.' Another woman stated that the Maoist uniform was 'rather thin' compared to the uniform of her relative who is in the British Army. A third woman turned to a young Maoist and forcefully stated, 'You speak our language, don't you? You are just pretending that you don't.' His embarrassed reaction confirmed her suspicion.

It is difficult to ascertain how much support for the Maoists currently exists among villagers. When I asked my closest informants, they were adamant: 'We are not Maoists and we do not support them. They have made life very dangerous and difficult for us. No one in this village has joined them.'¹² It is, however, difficult to judge who has left the village for employment and who has left on the pretext of seeking employment and instead joined the Maoists or was forcibly recruited. Despite their assurances, villagers would not necessarily know who has joined, as Maoists are usually posted to locations outside their home area.¹³ In addition, villagers have good reason to conceal any connection their families may have to the guerrillas.

Many people are very disillusioned with the arena of formal politics, which they see as having little relevance for them. When I asked what the government does for them, people commented, 'They give the village a little bit of money each year and do nothing else.' The disdain in which the government is held is increasing as villagers now have detailed experience of the security forces and are horrified by what they and their neighbours have seen. As is known from other areas, human rights' violations committed by the security forces play a role in increasing support for the Maoists. In Maurigaun the Maoists have not yet physically harmed villagers,¹⁴ but the latter are fully aware of the brutality with which the Maoists have treated people in other areas. Because of the abuses of the army in the area it is possible that support for the Maoists may have increased among certain sectors of society. Without detailed information, however, it is impossible to assess this, and my informants all adamantly denied it.

The presence of the Maoists and the security forces has changed the way people move around the village and the surrounding countryside. In the past women worked alone in nearby fields and sometimes even in more distant ones if they knew that others were in the vicinity. This has now changed. Women stated that they no longer work alone, fearing that if they do they may be raped by either side. When I ques-

tioned them further my informants admitted that while they are frightened of both sides they feel that they are more at risk from the security forces as they have heard stories of the mistreatment of civilian women by the army. People also fear being caught in the crossfire or being mistaken for insurgents while working in the forest. By choice villagers prefer to go into the forest in groups as the jungle has always been seen as a potentially dangerous place. While the fears of the past related mainly to concerns about the presence of malevolent supernatural entities, the fears of the present relate primarily to who else is in the jungle. The local landmarks in the forests—which previously acted as mnemonic cues for people to recall the stories of people and events of the past—are being added to in a new and disturbing way as the narratives of the places where people have been killed are being etched into the landscape.

FEAR, TERROR AND HEALTH

On my last afternoon I went to the health post to visit a friend who works there and to find out if the changed circumstances are having an impact on people's health. The health worker I spoke to confirmed that people are experiencing high levels of fear. 'Everyone is frightened and no one knows what will happen next,' he commented. He is trained in mental health and has some basic medications available. However, he added, 'Most people do not seek treatment for these problems as they don't realise that they can be treated. Instead people come with headaches and stomach aches and some people come because they are having trouble sleeping.'

When I asked villagers if there were new healing rituals for the changed situation people replied that there were not. I talked to a local healer who explained, 'We can do protective rituals for people, for hamlets of the village or even for the whole village but we don't have any special rituals against the Maoists or the army.' I asked him about the effects of the violence on villagers, the surrounding landscape, and the Otherworld:

It is a bad situation now. People are frightened and so they don't feel very well. There are many violent deaths and the souls of people who have died in this way and not had the required rituals are wandering round and can cause problems for the living. Many people who travel through the forests nowadays do not respect the local gods and they do not ask permission to enter their areas and so the gods become angry and give dukha to the living.

On my last afternoon in the village I decided to administer an anxiety questionnaire¹⁵ to a small sample of people. Out of twelve people surveyed, only two had anything like

normal anxiety and even those had scores at the higher end of the normal range. Of particular note were the almost 100 per cent affirmative responses to three questions: those about fearing death, being frightened and fearing the worst.¹⁶ I was particularly struck, as these are new worries. The concerns of the past revolved around obtaining overseas employment for family members, the frequency and size of remittances, securing quality education for the young, obtaining health care, and building a new school. People felt safe in the village in contrast to the town, which they considered to be unsafe and morally degenerate. Ironically, villagers in search of safety must nowadays relocate to the urban centres for security.

When I asked people how they were sleeping some replied that they had no problems but others reported sleep disturbances. Friends and neighbours recounted the fears of the night, of being awakened by voices outside or by footsteps on the village paths. Others spoke of frightening dreams in which themes of violence and death played a prominent role.

There are similarities between the situation in Maurigaun and that described by Green in Guatemala (Green 1995) where fear is a chronic condition to which people have become socialised. According to Green, the routinisation of fear does not imply conformity or acquiescence to the status quo but rather it allows people to live in a chronically fearful state with a veneer of normality. In Maurigaun the ability to maintain the façade of normality is important as it provides a measure of reassurance—if the normal daily activities can be carried out then it cannot be too bad. However, in many cases people have moved so far down the line of adapting themselves to a new way of living that they no longer notice the endless small accommodations that they make on a daily basis. It was only when I drew her attention to it that Sita consciously acknowledged that she was teaching Raju a new way of communicating (or not communicating)—one that he may have to use one day in order to live. The tension that pervaded my friend's body when someone entered the courtyard had become normal to her. I noticed it because I had not seen it before. She had become so used to it that it was simply the way she was. The dance that is held in the village every year, and which always attracts very large crowds, was not performed this year. When I questioned people about this I was told that no one had vol-

unteered to dance in it. What was not said was that it would have been difficult in the present climate to hold such a large public event.¹⁷

Fear has changed residence patterns. Two years ago my friend Gita lived alone, although most nights a relative and her daughter joined her. Now the upstairs of her house is inhabited by a group of young men who are there explicitly to provide a measure of protection, or at the very least a sense of solidarity. In other parts of the village boarded-up houses stand empty, as their inhabitants have relocated to the town. The migration of young people in search of employment has increased as young men and women leave in fear of being accused by the security forces of being Maoists or of being forcibly recruited by the insurgents.¹⁸



PHOTO: GARY GOLDEN

The impact of chronic fear on consciousness and culture in rural Nepal is profound and requires further attention. Researchers must explore the mechanisms through which long-term fear operates. They need to take into account the specific socio-cultural context within which fear develops and is experienced, as well as to consider its local interpretations and representations. The analysis also needs to incor-

porate perspectives from comparative research conducted on communities in other countries, as well as insights from the literature on the psychology and physiology of fear and terror.

CONCLUSION: CREATIVITY AND THE VIOLATION OF INTIMATE SPACE

Despite the outward appearance of mundanity in Maurigaun, fear is widespread. People go to work, visit neighbours and kin, occasionally sing and dance, marry, have children, plan for the future, leave or decide to stay. Surface normality is maintained but at a deeper level the cracks reveal themselves in the embodied manifestations of chronic fear, the ever present vigilance, the disturbed sleep patterns, the violence-themed dreams, the adapted work patterns and in the emergence of new approaches to child socialisation. 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. Violent acts are inscribed in the land, and the souls of those who have died bad deaths roam the valleys

and forests scattering sorrow in their wake and bringing more dukha to those already unfortunate enough to live between the Maoists and the army.

The 'culture of terror'¹⁹ that has developed in Maurigaun can be characterised primarily as a violation of intimate space. Neither the security forces nor the Maoists respect village distinctions between public spaces (paths, water taps, meeting places) and the private space which intersects public space but which is marked by ever decreasing circles of intimacy from courtyard to veranda to house interior.²⁰ Public spaces are frequently seen as dangerous and polluting and so harmful influences must be stopped at the door. Demarcations, barriers, thresholds, and spaces impede free movement and also symbolically transform people during their transition from one social sphere to another (Robben 1989, 2000, van Gennepe 1960). According to Antonius Robben (2000: 75–6), in the context of forced entry in Argentina, socio-spatial divisions reinforce the ego differentiation between inside and outside. A forced entry is thus experienced as an attack on the ego and violates the emotional, physical and cultural protection offered by the house.

While the security forces visit relatively rarely, their intrusion into intimate space is often deeply violating. They commit symbolic assaults by searching houses, going through possessions and entering sacred space by searching areas that contain shrines. As witnessed in nearby villages, they hit people, shoot at their houses from helicopters, and turn their homes into battlefields. Maoists, on the other hand, visit Maurigaun frequently seeking food and shelter, and while they do not conduct searches or go through possessions, their penetration into intimate space is also deeply violating. While their entrée to a household may be conducted with courtesy, within minutes of their arrival they transform the household into a military camp. Guns are stacked alongside household and agricultural implements and bomb-making materials are placed next to weaving equipment. The courtyard, which only minutes earlier contained women weaving and children playing, is transformed into a gun-cleaning and bomb-making space. The veranda on which invited guests are welcomed and offered seats is turned into a place in which to transcribe revolutionary songs and sew revolutionary flags.²¹ The most intimate space of house interior and hearth is also violated as insurgents warm themselves by the fire, drink tea, place gun-cleaning equipment in the hearth, and ignore village caste rules which dictate that those who are considered to be of low caste should not enter the homes of those considered to be of a higher caste. The Maoist assault thus extends into the most intimate core of the house and by extension is a symbolic assault on its inhabitants. The assault is exacerbated by the fact that the unwelcome guests position the house at the centre of

a potential battlefield for the duration of their stay.

Villagers, however, not only endure but also creatively respond to the fear in their midst. One of the greatest resources that villagers draw on is local information. Local people 'track' the movement and numbers of Maoists in the village and convey this information to others. When Maoists arrived in the village during one of my visits, under the guise of making a visit to a shop a neighbour and her young son did a reconnaissance to estimate the numbers and possible destinations of the insurgents so that she and their neighbours could be prepared. Another woman went on a supposed errand to a different part of the village to acquire information about the movement of the insurgents there. These women could not prevent the visits to their homes but by anticipating them they acquired a measure of control over their immediate destiny. Once the Maoists have arrived in a house the owners can take small steps to enhance their security, such as checking that sentries have been posted or—as in the case of the shop keeper who pleaded with them not to stay the night—negotiate the duration of their visit. Villagers also engage with Maoists on the basis of commensality, and by sharing conversations and jokes—albeit warily—they attempt to gain protection against insurgent-perpetrated violence. Through the process of social interaction villagers try to thwart the potential violence that Maoists bring into their homes. They attempt, in other words, to take the violence out of the insurgents. By drawing on cultural models such as the indebtedness of a guest and the right of an older person to maintain authority over a younger one, villagers challenge Maoist hegemony. By forcing themselves into people's homes, Maoists transgress and violate the intimate realm of courtyard, veranda and house and commit a deeply symbolic assault on its residents, but by appealing to the cultural boundaries of hierarchy and indebtedness, villagers can symbolically 'dis-arm' their youthful invaders. Fear remains a way of life but agency provides a possibility for creative resistance.

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ENDNOTES

An earlier version of this article was published in Hutt, M. (ed.) (2004) *Himalayan 'People's War': Nepal's Maoist Rebellion*. For comments on earlier drafts I am grateful to Sandra Rouse, Sara Schneiderman, Chetana Lokshum, Sharon Hepburn, Anne Dunbar, and John Metz. I am especially indebted to my informants and to those who assisted me in conducting the research on which this piece is based. A British Academy Small Grant provided financial support.

¹ My closest informants are middle-aged women from middle-income households and the perspectives contained within this piece are primarily those of members of this group.

² Maurigaun is a pseudonym, as are all other names. Certain ethnographic details have been disguised in this article in an attempt to protect the identity of my informants.

³ Maurigaun is, however, close to an area that was badly affected by the conflict in 2002.

⁴ Violence has a long history in Nepal, which includes, for example, the violence of exclusion on the basis of caste, gender, class, or ethnicity, and state-perpetrated violence such as the use of torture. What is new is community-wide conflict-related violence, which 'un-makes' the social world in a particular way.

⁵ I am wary of using the term 'culture of terror' because I consider

it to be too imprecise (for a critical review see Margold 1999). However, despite my reservations, I retain the term as it provides a useful framework within which to consider my work.

⁶ This exploration is preliminary and further research is required before more conclusive statements can be made about the routinisation of fear in Nepal.

⁷ 'Low intensity armed conflict: at least 25 battle-related deaths per year and fewer than 1,000 battle-related deaths during the course of the conflict. Medium intensity armed conflict: at least 25 battle-related deaths per year and an accumulated total of at least 1,000 deaths, but fewer than 1000 deaths per year. High intensity armed conflict: at least 1,000 battle-related deaths per year' (DFID 2002: 11, based on a definition from Wallensteen and Sollenberg 2000).

⁸ While based primarily on fieldwork undertaken in the summer of 2002, this article also incorporates material from a second period conducted at the end of the year. During the first period, Maoists were coming into the village on a regular basis but in relatively small groups of between five and fifty. At the time of the second period, large groups of Maoists totalling between 300 and 450 were regularly entering the village.

⁹ Although Maurigaun has not had a police presence, many other areas have had extensive contact with the police. There is a long history of police-perpetrated violence in Nepal and it is clear that excessive police violence has often prompted people to join the Maoists.

¹⁰ It is widely believed that female members of the Maoist People's Liberation Army wear either kurta surwaal or combat dress. During the second half of 2002 I was told that because the kurta surwaal had become identified as Maoist female dress, some Maoist women who formerly dressed like this when not on active combat duty, had begun wearing saris, tika and bangles to distract attention from themselves.

¹¹ With one exception the members of the group billeted in this house were teenagers.

¹² During a subsequent visit I met Maoists from nearby hamlets.

¹³ See Pettigrew (2003) for a discussion concerning the attraction of the Maoists for youth in this area and their involvement in the movement.

¹⁴ Villagers did, however, report that three young men from a distant district who were working in the area were badly beaten by Maoists who wrongly accused them of being thieves.

¹⁵ The Beck Anxiety Inventory, which has been validated for use in Nepal (see Kohrt et al. n.d.)

¹⁶ 'Anxiety' in contrast to 'fear' is defined by Oltmanns and Emery (1995: 198) as 'a more general or diffuse emotional reaction—beyond simple fear—that is out of proportion to threats from the environment.' Although I administered an anxiety inventory because I had it to hand, what it identified, particularly in relation to the three stated questions, was fear rather than anxiety. I do not consider the responses that I obtained to be 'out of proportion to threats from the environment.' People in Maurigaun are frightened rather than anxious.

¹⁷ In 2004 villagers admitted that lack of security is one of the primary reasons the dance is no longer performed. They anticipate that Maoists would propagandize which would increase the likelihood of patrols by the security forces.

¹⁸ Out-migration of young people, especially men, from this area has a long history. Recent events are merely exacerbating a long-established pattern which predates the insurgency.

¹⁹ Due to limitations of space, it is not possible to adequately address the vocabulary of fear and terror here. A preliminary review suggests that the following words and phrases, which I have translated into English from the local language, should be included: 'frightened', 'terrified', 'forced to provide food', 'forced to give money', 'patrols', 'helicopters' and 'random firing.'

²⁰ Space is an important concept in shaping local culture in an area like Maurigaun (see Bickel and Gaenzle 1999). The violation of space has extensive ramifications that warrant further investigation.

²¹ While the presence of the Maoist cadre in the village can be seen as invasive, at the same time it held its attractions. Although my informants stated categorically that they are not Maoist supporters, many of them have attended and enjoyed Maoist cultural performances. Most of these performances took place in the village but some villagers also attended dancing and singing programmes in a nearby training camp that is now disbanded. People told me that they considered the performances to be 'good' and more impressive than the performances of local youth groups.