

## HIMALAYAN 'PEOPLE'S WAR'

MICHAEL HUTT

*editor*

# Himalayan 'People's War'

*Nepal's Maoist Rebellion*

Nepal: Districts and Key Settlements

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THE CONTRIBUTORS

KRISHNA HACHHETHU is Reader in Political Science at the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University. His publications include *Party Building in Nepal: Organization, Leadership and People* and *Leadership in Nepal* (co-authored with Lok Raj Baval and Hari Sharma, 2001). He is currently working on a book entitled *Nepal: Democracy, Pluralism and the State*.

MICHAEL HUTT is Reader in Nepali and Himalayan Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. His publications on the subject of modern Nepali language and literature include: *Himalayan Voices: An Introduction to Modern Nepali Literature* (1991), *Modern Literary Nepali: An Introductory Reader* (1994), *Teach Yourself Nepali* (2000), *Devkota's Muna-Madan: Translation and Analysis* (1996). He has edited a book on Nepali political culture: *Nepal in the Nineties: Versions of the Past, Visions of the Future* (1994). *Nepal: A Guide to the Art and Architecture of the Kathmandu Valley* (1994) reflects his interest in art and architecture. He is also the author of numerous articles in a range of academic journals. His most recent publication is *Unbecoming Citizens: Culture, Nationhood, and the Flight of Refugees from Bhutan* (2003).

MARIE LECOMTE-TILOUINE is a social anthropologist attached to the CNRS (Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique). Her most recent publications in English include 'The Enigmatic Pig' (*Studies in Nepali History and Society* 5, 1, 2000), 'The History of the Messianic and Rebel King Lakhan Thapa' in *Resistance and the State: Nepalese Experiences*, edited by David N. Gellner (2003) and *Ethnic Revival and Religious Turmoil: Identities and Representations in the Himalayas* (ed. with Pascale Dollfus, 2003). She is currently heading a programme on the history and culture of the Khas of the Western Himalaya.

PRATYOUSH ONTA is a historian. He is the convenor of the Centre for Social Research and Development in Kathmandu. He was also

the convenor of Martin Chautari from 1996 to 2003. Among other books, he has co-edited *Sthaniya radio* (Local Radio) (2002) and *Mediako antarvastu* (Media Contents) (2002) and edited *Ksetriya media* (Regional Media) (2002), all of which analyse and document media activity in Nepal. He is currently working on a study of radio in Nepal.

JUDITH PETTIGREW is a senior lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire and a research associate at the University of Cambridge. Her most recent publications include 'Guns, Kinship and Fear: Maoists among the Tamu-mai (Gurungs)' in *Resistance and the State: Nepalese Experiences*, edited by David N. Gellner (2003) and 'Healing Here, There and In-Between: A Tamu Shaman's Experiences of International Landscapes' (with Y. Tamu) in *New Approaches to Medical Archaeology and Medical Anthropology*, edited by G. Carr and P. Baker (2002). She is presently writing a book on the impact of the Maoist insurgency on rural civilians.

JOANNA PFAFF-CZARNECKA is Professor in Social Anthropology at the University of Bielefeld, Germany. From 1996 until 1998 she was president of the Swiss Society of Social Anthropology. Her recent publications include the co-edited volumes *Ethnic Futures: The State and Identity Politics in Asia* (1999) and *Rituale heute. Theorien, Kontroversen, Entwürfe* (Rituals Today: Theories, Controversies, Designs) (1999). She is currently working on the democratisation process at the sub-national level in Nepal and on the incorporation of religious minorities in Central Europe.

DINESH PRASAIN has an MA in Sociology from Tribhuvan University. He is volunteering as the President of the national peace network, Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP).

PHILIPPE RAMIREZ is a researcher at the CNRS (Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique). His works have dealt mainly with the political anthropology of rural Nepal. His publications include *De la disparition des chefs. une anthropologie politique népalaise* (On the Disappearance of Headmen: A Nepalese Anthropology) (2000) and *Resunga, the Mountain of the Horned Sage* (2000).

HARI ROKA, a left activist, has completed an MPhil dissertation in political economy at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, and

is working towards a PhD. He contributes articles of political analysis on a regular basis to Nepali journals, notably *Himal Khabarpatrika*.

SAUBHAGYA SHAH is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology/Anthropology, Tribhuvan University. His most recent publications include 'From Evil State to Civil Society' in *State of Nepal*, edited by Kanak Mani Dixit and Ramachandran Shastri (2002) and 'Service to Servitude: Domestication of Household Labor in Nepal' in *Home and Hegemony: Identity Politics in Asian Domestic Service*, edited by Kathleen Adams and Sara Dickey (2000). He is currently working on his PhD dissertation on state, social movements and international development at the Department of Anthropology, Harvard University.

MANDIRA SHARMA holds an L.L.M in International Human Rights law and has been working as a human rights defender for the last ten years. As Executive Director of Advocacy Forum, a national NGO, she has been visiting different places in Nepal to document cases of human rights violations and to offer legal aid to victims. She is also researching the incidence of illegal detention and torture in Nepali police custody.

SUDHEER SHARMA is a leading journalist in Nepal who has contributed many pioneering articles on the Maoist movement to journals such as *Himal Khabarpatrika* and *Mulyankan*. These articles are based on extensive travels to Maoist-dominated areas, and in-depth interviews. He is currently the Assistant Editor of the fortnightly news magazine *Nepal*.

SARA SHNEIDERMAN is conducting PhD research in Anthropology at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, under a National Science Foundation Fellowship. Her dissertation focuses on ethnic, religious, and political identity among the Thangmi, a largely undocumented ethnic community resident in the Himalayan borderlands of Nepal, Tibet and India. Her publications include 'Embodied Ancestors: Territory and the Body in Thangmi Death Rituals' in *Territory and Identity in Tibet and the Himalayas*, edited by K. Buffetrille and K. Diemberger (2001) and a forthcoming article in the *Himalayan Research Bulletin* entitled 'Violent Histories and Political Consciousness: Reflections on Nepal's Maoist movement from Piskar Village'.

DEEPAK THAPA is a freelance journalist and book editor based in Kathmandu. Besides having authored two in-depth articles on the Maoist movement in *Himal South Asian*, a monthly journal, he is the editor of *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal* and author of *A Kingdom Under Siege: Nepal's Maoist Insurgency, 1996 to 2003* (both published in 2003).

MARK TURIN divides his time between the Anthropology Departments at Cambridge and Cornell. He runs the Digital Himalaya Project ([www.digitalthimalaya.com](http://www.digitalthimalaya.com)) and is a regular contributor to the *Nepali Times* and *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*. He recently co-edited *Themes in Himalayan Languages and Linguistics*, which is jointly published by the South Asia Institute of Heidelberg and Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. He continues to work on ethno-linguistic issues in the Himalayan region.

## Part II. The Maoists and the People

### THE PATH TO *JAN SARKAR* IN DOLAKHA DISTRICT

TOWARDS AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF  
THE MAOIST MOVEMENT\*

*Sara Shneiderman and Mark Turin*

#### CONTEXT: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A JAN SARKAR

On 23 July 2001 (8 Saun 2058), the same day that Sher Bahadur Deuba was sworn in as prime minister, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) proclaimed the formation of its *jan sarkar*, or people's government, in Dolakha district of central-eastern Nepal. The announcement was made during a mass meeting in the village of Rankedanda in Sailungeshwor Village Development Committee (VDC), near the well-known pilgrimage site of Sailung. Between 10,000 and 15,000 people are reported to have attended the ceremony (Popham 2001, Anon. 2001b).

We suggest that this meeting and the resulting proclamation are mileposts by which the development of the Maoist movement in Dolakha may be measured, and that alongside their immediate practical consequences, these events possessed powerful symbolic value. By providing an ethnographic approach that complements the predominantly political and historical analyses of the movement that

\* We thank all of the participants of the November 2001 conference at SOAS on the Maoist movement, in particular Michael Hutt and Ben Campbell. George van Driem, David Holmberg, Alan Macfarlane, and the participants in the Himalayan Studies seminar at Cornell University in the fall of 2001 provided valuable comments and helpful criticism.

have been advanced to date, we examine how the Maoist activities that led up to the ultimate proclamation of the *jan sarkar* in Dolakha were portrayed in the press and understood at the village level. Our primary objective is to focus on issues of motivation by exploring how and why Dolakha villagers became involved with, and formulated opinions about, the Maoist movement at this juncture in its historical development. Further, by looking closely at the situation in Dolakha, a more recent front in the people's war, we shed light on the development and maturation of Maoist rhetoric as the movement travelled east. Finally, we hope that the questions we pose will serve as a starting point for a more complete ethnography of the Maoist movement in Nepal that is both attentive to local particularities and firmly grounded in the emerging anthropological discourse on political violence.

Several features of the Dolakha proclamation are worth noting at the outset. First, while Dolakha was the eighth district in Nepal in which a Maoist *jan sarkar* was established, it was the first district outside the Maoists' western stronghold to provide sufficient support for the Maoists to proclaim their own government with confidence. Second, the ethnic composition of the seventeen-member committee of the people's government of Dolakha, which included at least one member from every ethnic group found in the district, highlighted the Maoists' appeal to and acknowledgement of ethnic diversity (Anon. 2001b). Third, the large number of villagers reported to have attended the meeting confirms our observations regarding the extensive grassroots support which Maoist units enjoyed at the time in many areas of Dolakha, a fact frequently ignored by the local and national government, as well as the media. Finally, in Nepali press reports on the proclamation of the Dolakha *jan sarkar*, much was made of the fact that a foreign journalist and photographer had been invited to attend the meeting at Rankedanda. Their presence resulted in a full-colour feature in the *Sunday Review* section of the well-respected British broadsheet newspaper the *Independent* on 12 August 2001. Entitled 'Mao's Children', the article brought the Dolakha proclamation into the international limelight (Popham 2001). We suggest that the presence of a western news team at such a politically and symbolically significant event offers a glimpse into the Maoists' position vis-à-vis foreigners and the outside world at the time.

However, the establishment of the people's government was only one in a continuum of important events in the region, and was soon overshadowed by the State of Emergency declared by Sher Bahadur Deuba's government on 26 November 2001. The deployment of Royal Nepalese Army troops soon after the declaration of the emergency radically altered the local and national situation. Most notably for our purposes, the emergency reportedly prompted at least 263 Maoist supporters in Dolakha, including members of the *jan sarkar* discussed here, to surrender.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons, our discussion here is consciously presented as a period piece constructed within the framework of local assumptions that were current up to September 2001. With the exception of a few essential notes, we do not address more recent developments in Dolakha, nor have we revised our argument to reflect them. We have chosen to let this piece stand as a historical document of a certain phase of the movement, the particulars of which, as manifested in Dolakha, offer an insight into the larger workings of the Maoist movement.

#### OUTLINE AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter contains three interconnected narratives, each of which presents a different perspective on the development of the Maoist movement in Dolakha. We first offer a chronology of Maoist activities in the district up to September 2001 as they were reported in print media, both Nepali and Western. In the detailed list of 'news-worthy' incidents from the region, a rough outline of events emerges. A bottom-up local narrative follows, pieced together from informal discussions and more structured interviews conducted between 1998 and 2001 with villagers living in areas of Maoist activity throughout the valleys of Dolakha. At certain points, this narrative corroborates the events described in the press, but at times it also contradicts and challenges them.

Interspersed with extracts from interviews, we offer our own perspective on and analysis of events during the time that we were resident in the Dolakha region between 1998 and 2001. By the summer

<sup>1</sup> *Kathmandu Post*, 7 December 2001. Due to the restrictions imposed on the press by the Terrorist and Destructive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance (TADO) of 26 November 2001, newspaper articles after that date must be treated with a greater degree of scepticism than before. We ask readers to bear in mind that the accuracy of this report may be questionable.

of 2000, we had a good vantage point from which to observe the movements of Maoist activists, their ever-widening sphere of influence, and the growth of village-level support for their actions. Our privileged position in this unlikely arena had two causes: the geographical location of our field site, and the type of work in which we were engaged. The village in which we were living happened to be situated along a 'final frontier' of sorts, both for the Maoist units active in the area and for the police and local administration.<sup>2</sup> While the Maoists had concentrated their earlier efforts in the more inaccessible (and often poorer) valleys of Dolakha, by mid-2000 they were moving their 'propaganda' and 'education' campaigns to villages closer to the bazaar town of Dolakha and the neighbouring district headquarters, Charikot, both of which were less than a day's walk from our location. On the other hand, the Charikot-based district administration had by this point withdrawn from playing an active role in all but the nearest villages. We were living and working in one of a number of villages through which the battle lines were drawn: the government was still in control but the Maoists were closing in. It is in this context that we gained an unusual view of the practical and ideological conflicts that affected many aspects of local life.

The second factor, which facilitated our residence in an otherwise tense area, was our line of work. Unlike many of the other foreigners (both Western and Asian) who were active in the area, we were neither managing an NGO development project nor engaged in a business enterprise. We were conducting anthropological and linguistic research with the Thangmi ethnic community, many of whom were either overt Maoist supporters or implicitly sympathetic to their cause. While other foreigners were asked to leave, some more forcefully than others, we received a steady stream of signs that we were welcome to stay and could continue working as before.

In short, the coincidence of two factors, geographical and professional, created an environment which permitted us to continue with our research projects with the tacit support of both authorities: the local government and the Maoist commanders. In retrospect, and after discussions with a number of colleagues, we realised that we had witnessed an important moment in the unfolding history of both the Dolakha region and the Maoist movement.

<sup>2</sup> For reasons of confidentiality and security, we have chosen not to cite the name of the village in which we resided or the names of individuals with whom we worked.

#### ETHNOGRAPHIES OF VIOLENCE

We did not explicitly set out to document the Maoist movement. Rather, it became an inescapable presence within our 'normal' work, requiring increased attention as a feature of the social world we were researching. In this way, we differ from ethnographers who intentionally work in conflict zones around the world. Such researchers consider the challenge of accurately representing the social causes and effects of violence to be a central feature of their work (Nordstrom and Martin 1992, Nordstrom and Robben 1995, Sluka 2000). Yet many of the insights resulting from their work are relevant to the Nepali situation we describe. Following Carolyn Nordstrom and Antonius Robben's general call for an even-handed, particularising ethnographic approach which examines the everyday aspects of local conflict situations (1995), we emphasise the need for a full ethnography of political violence in Nepal. This is by no means an unproblematic proposition:

Researching and writing about violence will never be a simple endeavor. The subject is fraught with assumptions, presuppositions, and contradictions. Like power, violence is essentially contested: everyone knows it exists, but no one agrees on what actually constitutes the phenomenon. Vested interests, personal history, ideological loyalties, propaganda, and a dearth of firsthand information ensure that many 'definitions' of violence are powerful fictions and negotiated half-truths (Nordstrom and Robben 1995: 5).

Despite, or perhaps even because of, its complexity, we must acknowledge violence as a valid category of analysis, whose contradictions demand careful attention rather than condemnation and dismissal. Maintaining this analytical focus is challenging, but remains essential if we wish to identify the deeper causes of violence and understand its effects on local lives.

In Nepal, we are confronted by the additional difficulty of our 'regional ethnography traditions' (Fardon 1990), which have largely focused on the more traditional anthropological domains of 'religion' and 'culture' rather than on government, civil society and political change.<sup>3</sup> Historically, the prevailing tendency of ethnography in Nepal

<sup>3</sup> 'At its simplest then, the regional tradition influences the entry of the "working" ethnographer into a "field" imaginatively charted by others' (Fardon 1990: 24-5).

has been to describe small-scale village-based communities at the expense of examining state structures. This may preclude us from easily understanding the roots of the current situation, and may lead us to believe that ethnographies of conflict do not fit legitimately within Nepal's established anthropological persona. However, as Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka argues elsewhere in this volume, we need to expand our field of research to new domains in order to grasp the particularities of the situation more thoroughly.

We are, however, just at the beginning. To use a term coined by Frank Pieke to refer to his own unexpected study of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing, our own account of the Maoist movement in Dolakha is a sort of 'accidental anthropology' (Pieke 1995). Our local relationships and the site of our work were pre-determined by our previous residence in the area, and our perspective on the unfolding political situation was shaped by our ongoing fieldwork there. Given our existing allegiances and interests, we can present only one aspect of a multi-faceted story, echoing Pieke's assertion: 'I cannot but write from the perspective of the people with whom I experienced it. I simply do not have the ethnographic experience and empathy to do equal justice to the perspectives of, for instance, the communist party leadership or the student activists' (Pieke 1995: 78). In our case, we cannot do justice to the perspectives of government officials, police and diverse groups of villagers with whom we did not have close relationships. Rather than misrepresenting such groups with inadequate information, we have chosen to present only the perspectives of those with whom we did closely experience this uncertain time. We hope that this chapter may open the way for further studies, which build on as well as challenge what we present here.

#### A CHRONOLOGY OF PRINT MEDIA REPORTS ON MAOIST ACTIVITY IN DOLAKHA

Journalists covering Dolakha district are situated comparatively close to the capital, and the examples cited here demonstrate that

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Fardon argues that specific modes of ethnographic practice have been developed as normative in each world region, and that the structures of academic life make it difficult to break out of such patterns.

Dolakha is anything but remote. It should therefore come as no surprise that a fair amount of local news from Dolakha makes it back to the national dailies printed and circulated in Kathmandu. With a few key exceptions, we have focused on the English-language press. This choice was motivated by reasons of accessibility and space, and a thorough analysis of Nepali-language sources would add much to the preliminary conclusions reached here.

The full list of news clippings is presented in a tabular form to facilitate comparison, and can be found in the appendix to this chapter. However, we do not regard these clippings as a foolproof technique for collecting factual information on Maoist activities. In most cases, the reports are several stages removed from the incidents that they describe. There are plenty of opportunities for withholding or embellishing information, starting with villagers who report an incident to the authorities, who in turn release the information to the press and are likely to have a vested interest in portraying their own involvement in a positive light, to the journalist filing the report, and finally to the editorial desk of the paper, the latter not being free of political affiliation. Thus, actual events on the ground are likely to have been quite different to the short reports on them that reach the papers. In addition, the list is not a complete collection of news reports about Maoist activities in Dolakha during this period, but rather a representative sample shaped by the dates of our own travels and access to print media. However, the reports are of interest in that they show how the rising conflict was reported to the rest of the country. Referring the reader to the appendix for the full list of news clippings, we note only a few general issues here.

First, a range of terminology is used to refer to the Maoists in the articles cited. The earliest reports labelled Maoists as 'terrorists' and 'insurgents', while in later articles these highly pejorative terms give way to somewhat less negative labels such as 'rebels', 'guerrillas', and 'activists', implying that these were people fighting for a cause. Since the emergency declaration of 26 November 2001, however, the Maoists have been officially declared 'terrorists', and this has become the only acceptable term. On a related note, government forces were first referred to as 'security personnel' and only more recently as 'police'. The choice of the former term, both vague and euphemistic, may have been motivated by a desire to avoid presenting the police, and thus the government whom they represented, as engaged in physical

combat with a little known and poorly understood adversary. We have come a long way from the early descriptions of ‘security personnel [who] fired in self defense’ (19 June 1998) when we read about ‘shell-shocked villagers...still trying to come to terms with the police atrocity’ and ‘recent indiscriminate police firing’ (13 March 2000). Again, such reports disappeared after the emergency was declared.

Another intriguing element is the access of foreign reporters to Maoist camps in Dolakha and Sindhupalchok. Reporters returned from their sojourns with Maoists bearing glossy colour photos and first-hand accounts of consciousness-raising activities. In 2000, foreign journalists with a brief to cover the Maoist movement in Nepal began to be guided towards Dolakha and Sindhupalchok rather than to western Nepal. One simple explanation for this is the accessibility of these central districts, but another factor may have been the Maoist leadership’s desire to present Dolakha as a successful arena of operations, a model Maoist stronghold.

After the activities surrounding the anniversary of the people’s war in February 2000, which included the looting of a bus full of Polish tourists and the burning down of a cargo helicopter in Jiri, the press took a greater interest. We may surmise that the media interest paralleled a growing realisation in Kathmandu that the movement was no longer contained in the so-called remote western regions, but that Dolakha and other central eastern districts had become active fronts in the people’s war. It took just three months from the killing of a policeman (3 December 1999), described as the ‘first such incident in the central hill district since the insurgency began nearly four years ago’ for Dolakha to be declared ‘a Maoist hotbed’ by the *Kathmandu Post* on 13 March 2000. Unfortunately for the government, this realisation came too late for it to catch up with the reality on the ground: just over a year later, Dolakha had been transformed from a ‘hotbed’ to a region with a fledgling Maoist government.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE VILLAGE PERSPECTIVE

The following narrative is based on a combination of informal discussions and more structured interviews held between 1998 and 2001

<sup>4</sup> Indicating a further stage in Dolakha’s development as a central site of the movement, a post-emergency article stated that ‘Dolakha is a major Maoist hub in the central region’ (*Kathmandu Post*, 7 December 2001).

with a young man from a village in Dolakha. Some interviews were also conducted in group environments, so details were contributed from multiple sources. Although this is not a representative sample of Dolakha’s population, we have only included statements which we heard frequently enough from different people for us to consider them to be generally-held sentiments in the communities in which we worked, rather than individual predilections and grievances. It should be noted that the views represented are those of relatively impoverished members of the Thangmi ethnic community,<sup>5</sup> and may differ from those held by members of other ethnic, caste, or class backgrounds. The Thangmi were one of the primary groups targeted by the Maoists in Dolakha as a potential source of support and recruits, and were well-represented in the *jan sarkar* (two members out of seventeen belonged to this ethnic group, which was a disproportionately large number considering their relatively small population).<sup>6</sup> As discussed earlier, an in-depth ethnographic study of the movement’s causes and effects which represents multiple viewpoints from various social backgrounds is sorely needed, and we hope that such a study may be possible in the future. These interview extracts have been minimally edited for purposes of confidentiality and clarity. We offer analysis and supplementary information from our own experiences after each short citation, in the understanding that we provide a commentary on the sentiments felt by a substantial group of individuals in the village, not an endorsement thereof.

#### *The Origin and Objectives of the Maoist Movement*

‘In Nepal, democracy has only come to people in the towns and district headquarters and then only to those with loud voices. In the villages and remote

<sup>5</sup> The Nepali name for this ethnic group and their language is ‘Thami’, a Sanskritised term which the Thangmi themselves are eager to shake off. Culturally-active members of the Thangmi community request that they be referred to as ‘Thangmi’ rather than ‘Thami’.

<sup>6</sup> The Thangmi have a history of resistance to landowners and the state that long predates the advent of the current movement, and have suffered state-perpetrated violence in return. The so-called ‘Piskar Massacre’ of 1984 is the most notable example of this: tenant farmers in the Thangmi village of Piskar, Sindhupalchok, protested against their work conditions and were shot by police, an action which produced two well-known Thangmi ‘martyrs’. This history may have both piqued the Maoists’ interest in the Thangmi and also influenced the positive predisposition of certain Thangmi individuals towards the movement. Shneiderman (2003) discusses the relationship between the Piskar Massacre and the Maoist movement in depth.

areas, people have no idea what democracy is or how it should feel. How can they know? But the villagers do know one thing for certain: at present there is a real problem all over the country—the Maoists. The people from the towns probably don't even know exactly what the Maoists are, or what they believe in. Even though it eventually reached the villages, the people's movement<sup>7</sup> was something that started in Kathmandu and spread outwards. But the Maoist movement is exactly the opposite: it started in the villages. The villagers now know what the democracy movement must have felt like, since we are seeing and living another such movement in our villages and inside our own homes. There is a Nepali proverb: "*gaun nabanikana desh banna sakdaina*" (without building the village, the country cannot be built). All politicians make use of this saying, but none have acted upon it. In contrast, the Maoists have worked according to this rule.<sup>7</sup>

The citation outlines two central beliefs which we heard reiterated by villagers throughout Dolakha: first, that the people's movement of 1990 passed them by and had little noticeable effect at the village level; and, second, that the Maoist movement was the precise inverse of this. Within the Maoist movement, according to local rhetoric at the time, villagers felt that they were empowered agents shaping and creating their country's destiny, not passive spectators watching from the political sidelines (which is how they felt in 1990). These villagers viewed their participation in the movement—whether explicit or implicit—as their contribution to the body politic, and as a cause for some pride on their part. In turn, this had a positive impact on their self-image as people who possessed the ability to play a role on the national stage. There was also a clear feeling that the Maoist uprising was a natural conclusion of, and development from, the earlier democratic movement.

These common perceptions in Dolakha contrast with the relationship of Kham Magar villagers to the Maoist movement, as described by Anne de Sales, who frames her discussion around a series of questions, including: 'How have rural people reacted to the campaigns of politicization originating in the towns? How is it that they have found themselves involved in, and how have they allowed themselves to be dragged into, fatal combat?' (de Sales 2000: 41). Although it is important to note that de Sales describes an earlier stage of the uprising, not to mention a different locale, the situation in Dolakha requires a different understanding of villagers' *perceived* agency within the

<sup>7</sup> The *jan andolan* or people's movement of 1990 is also often referred to in English as the 'movement for the restoration of democracy'.

movement. Whether or not the people's war was in reality a movement from periphery to centre, and whether or not villagers were genuinely empowered, the Maoists succeeded in portraying their movement as village-based. In our understanding, many of those who joined the Maoists in Dolakha did so out of an active desire to be involved in a struggle they saw as their own, rather than out of a passive willingness to be dragged into a struggle that originated externally. The shift in motivation from the situation described by de Sales may well be due to the fact that Dolakha villagers were joining at a later historical stage: by the time the Maoist movement expanded into Dolakha, it was a nationally-known entity. As we shall see below, the villagers were already familiar with the Maoists' activities elsewhere in the country when they arrived in the Dolakha region, and had many reasons to believe that the Maoist agenda in some ways matched their own pragmatic one.

'In 2053 v.s. [1996/7], we heard that Maoists were starting to break into the houses of wealthy people, tax collectors and moneylenders, stealing their money and property and distributing it to the poor. What amazing news, we had never heard anything like that before! I was also happy when I heard this rumour, but I was afraid that this struggle would end badly. But I put those thoughts aside when I heard the wonderful news about sharing out the wealth of the rich landowners. The Maoists had even burnt all the papers and accounts kept in some banks... We heard that the Maoists were breaking the arms and legs of moneylenders and tax collectors in the west of the country and were taking control of villages. How amazing!'

The above paragraph may be best understood in the context of the exploitation which Thangmi, Tamang, and other groups in central and eastern districts such as Dolakha have long faced (see Holmberg, March and Tamang 1999). Historically a Newar-ruled kingdom that served as an important entrepôt for the Kathmandu-Lhasa trade, Dolakha was incorporated into the nascent Nepali state by Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1754. Over the next 250 years, the area was settled by favourites of first the Shah dynasty, and then the Ranas. Many families in the area still view the actions of high-caste Hindu immigrants who engaged in questionable practices of moneylending and land appropriation as essential parts of a local history of oppression. Interest rates of up to sixty per cent per annum on private monetary loans remain common in the Dolakha area today for those who do not have collateral for bank loans. A deep-seated sense of injustice

and anger has resulted from these practices. That the Maoists were said to be attacking the well-established vested interest of usury, and then distributing the spoils to poor villagers seemed, from a local perspective, quite literally unbelievable and wonderful. The enthusiasm felt for the incineration of written records is best understood in the context of the moneylending practices described above: loan documents and tax records epitomise the historical exploitation of illiterate and poor villagers whose naïve thumb-prints on such documents often had consequences beyond their control. It is important to note that this sense of excitement was not an anarchic celebration of the end of state control, but rather an expression of satisfaction at the symbolic destruction of unchecked local corruption, the victims of which were the illiterate poor. As Holmberg et al. state, ‘...contemporary movements are intentional social action in direct continuity with the past of the nation-state which for groups like the Tamang is a past of exploitation and denial...’ (1999: 61). Such grievances existed long before the arrival of the Maoists, but with their promises of a Robin Hood-style redistribution of wealth the Maoists were in a strong position to gain support by taking advantage of existing frustrations.

### *From Demons to Humans*

‘In 2052–3 v.s. [1995/7], when we heard about the Maoists on the radio or read about them in the newspaper, we were terribly afraid of them. There were stories about people wearing headbands with a star, about guns, and of shooting people. We thought they were perhaps monsters, totally different people with wild hair and strange habits.’

The above sentiment echoes a widely-held pre-contact fear about the form and shape of the Maoists. In some cases, they were described as powerful local spirits with magical powers to blend into the jungle and become invisible (see Pettigrew 2003). Against the background of widespread condemnation and even demonisation of the Maoists by the national press and local political leaders, it comes as little surprise that in the village imagination they were conceived of as political demons, neither fully human nor animal. One individual even described them as ‘political *ban manche*’ (forest-dwelling wild men). This impression would slowly change when villagers in Dolakha came into contact with Maoists active in their district.

‘Then we heard that Maoists were in the general region, and could be recognised by the red star on their caps. They were walking through villages and coming to schools, giving out orders and directions for how things should be run. They prohibited the singing of national school songs that praised the king. These young men and women, wearing caps with red stars...came to schools and told teachers to stop teaching useless subjects, and to teach new disciplines of everlasting use. The Maoists told schoolteachers to reduce the monthly fees, and to stop teaching Sanskrit. We were very happy to hear about all this.’

The above description illustrates the important first step in the humanisation of the Maoists. Coming from kin and close friends in other villages, the information received about Maoist activities was accepted as trusted hearsay. In this way, feelings of fear and trepidation were gradually replaced by cautious expectation.

‘After hearing about Maoists elsewhere in the region for so long, about two years ago, in early 2056 v.s. [mid-1999], they began arriving in our village. At first only a few people came, in civil dress, but then ten to twelve people would come, and finally forty-five people came in full guerrilla dress, sometime in 2057 v.s. [2000/1]. Only then did we realise that the Maoists were just normal people. Perhaps they had more motivation or spirit, but physically they were just like us.’

The final stage in the humanisation of the Maoists came when villagers actually met them face-to-face, and realised that—apart from their heightened motivation and devotion to a cause—there was little that separated them from other villagers. We should not underestimate the importance of this process for engendering support at the village level: the Maoists had transformed from unknown and dangerous beings far from Dolakha to motivated and powerful humans meeting villagers in their own homes. Many villagers spoke of their sense of incredulity that such brave and powerful individuals should come to speak with them, ask them for their opinions on weighty issues, and address them with respect. This last element of the equation is crucial: villagers expected to be frightened into submission when the Maoists finally came, but instead they were addressed humanely and respectfully by people who seemed to understand the predicament of their lives. A logical extension of such experiences is a sense of empowerment. As one man put it, ‘If the Maoists are like us, does that also mean that we are like them?’

### *Motivations for Joining the Maoists*

‘Slowly the villagers began to accept the Maoists, and lost their initial fear. Then people began to join. In the village, there are three categories of people who join the Maoists. The first are those who understand the ideology and join because they genuinely agree with the cause. The second are those who don’t fully understand the ideology, but join because a brother or friend has joined and they don’t want to be left out. The third are those who join out of fear, regardless of their ideological beliefs.’

A noticeable absence in the above account of possible motivations for joining the Maoists is any reference to the resolution of existing intra-village conflicts, a motivation which previous studies have identified as central in village level support for the movement. Both de Sales (2000) and Pettigrew (2003) describe how Maoists either became ‘intermediaries’ for existing clan disputes, or manipulated ancestral conflicts and the logic of kinship and identity to gain support. Although these may have been contributing factors in the Dolakha situation, we believe that Maoist tactics and village reactions both underwent a shift in this newer theatre of the people’s war. Gaining the upper hand in pre-existing disputes did not seem to be a primary motivation for joining the Maoists in Dolakha. Individuals did, however, join the Maoists in reaction to conflicts that had arisen since the movement began, and in particular to seek revenge for police violence. The Maoists’ earlier willingness to be used as intermediaries in existing local conflicts may have been a pragmatic strategy to gain support at an earlier stage in the struggle, but by the time they reached Dolakha such tactics were no longer necessary. Most villagers in Dolakha had heard about Maoist policies of agrarian reform and economic reorganisation, were aware of their successes in other areas of the country, and joined because the revolutionary ideas in some way spoke to their own experience of exploitation. Although the desire to be treated with respect (and even fear) by others, the yearning for a purpose beyond the limited horizons of village life, and the desire for personal power all remain part of the complex web of motivation, these personal desires must be understood within the framework of the practical ideology that was successfully promoted by the Maoists at the village level.

The issue remains of those who joined in imitation of others, or out of fear. According to villagers, some recruits did not understand

the issues themselves, and simply followed those who had joined for ideological reasons. Concerning those who joined out of fear, it is not clear whether they were afraid of what the Maoists would do to them if they did not join or what the police would do to them if they did. Or were they afraid of what might happen if they were caught in between? All of these are possibilities, but the fact that such individuals often chose to join the Maoists rather than simply maintaining the status quo suggests that joining was a strategic choice which anticipated positive results.

‘About two years ago, at the beginning of all this, a Bahun was run out of his house in a nearby village. The Maoists took all of his stored grain and belongings and distributed them to others. The man was known to have exploited others in the Panchayat era. After this event, he abandoned his house and fled. Around the same time, there was an Indian Christian missionary in another village, and the same thing happened to him. One of our family friends actually received a plate from the Maoists which came from the looted house.’

Here it may be useful to differentiate between the theoretical ideology advanced by the Maoist leadership at a national level, and the practical ideology employed at the village level. Although villagers may have remained unaware of the political complexities of the movement’s national goals, let alone its international and historical context, they were attracted by events such as the ones described above. Grassroots redistribution of wealth lent credence to the Maoists’ more abstract promises of political power for those who had previously remained excluded. In our experience, while many villagers had never heard of Mao Zedong or the results of Maoism in China, when they were asked what the Maoists stood for they immediately answered ‘reclaiming our land’ or ‘bringing the exploiters to justice’. These objectives were explicitly articulated at the local level in a way that may not have been the case at earlier stages of the movement (see de Sales 2000: 65). Many villagers were willing to accept this practical ideology at face value, feeling that they had little to lose. Moreover, they found the Maoists more convincing than any other political party, and were willing to give them a chance.

### *On the Police*

‘The strangest thing is that the Maoists are fighting with the police. The police are also just commoners, and the Maoists’ real fight is with the

government. But I also remember the bad things the police did after democracy. If they were called to break up a fight, they would support the side of whoever gave them more *raksi* [home-brewed alcohol], meat and money. Attacking those thieving police is one thing, but attacking young innocent policemen, who were just children then, is another. But you know, those young men should know better than to join the police at a time like this. When the Maoists first began killing large numbers of police, people were shocked. But this is how the Maoists' numbers grew: when the police killed one Maoist, five more people from among his family and friends would join, then they would kill more police. And in that way, their numbers multiplied quickly. People are not scared if they hear that many police have been killed. They have become numb to the numbers. They used to feel frightened if two or five people were killed, but then they became used to that. Then they heard about ten or twenty people being killed, and became used to that. Now even if forty or fifty are killed, no one thinks much of it. This is because it is largely police who are killed and villagers don't have much sympathy for them anymore. If villagers were being killed it might feel different.'

This articulates the well-attested antipathy towards the police in rural areas (see Thapa 2001). Although villagers felt sorry for young men who joined the police before the Maoist movement took off and who unwittingly became targets, they had little sympathy for those who had joined more recently, or for the police as a defined group. Few people viewed the police as a security force working to protect them, seeing them instead as a symbol of corruption and exploitation. As shown above, the Maoists managed to manipulate police violence in their favour by providing an easy mode of revenge for the family members of those villagers who lost their lives at the hands of the police.

#### THE MYTH OF THE MAOIST COMMANDER

'If people inform the police of Maoist activities, the Maoists then kill those informants. There was an example of this in Dolakha just after the Maoists arrived, in 2054 v.s. [1997/8]. Maoists went to a Tamang house and asked for snacks. The Tamang man went out secretly to call the police, who then came and arrested two Maoists. One of these was a commander named Rit Bahadur Khadka, who was not from Dolakha. The other was a local Thangmi, who was terribly beaten by the police at their office in Charikot. Khadka was already famous as a Maoist commander, so he was treated more leniently. He was brought to Kathmandu for sentencing, but he escaped from jail. The rumour is that he was taken to Bir Hospital for treatment while in jail, and he went to the toilet and escaped out the window. In the meantime, the Tamang man who had informed on them had got a job as a security guard at a

hydropower project. There was some suspicion that he had received this job through police connections. After Khadka escaped from jail, either he or his followers killed the Tamang man. After hearing about this example, others were afraid to inform.'

The incidents described here match up with those reported on 21 January 1998 and 12 September 1999 in the media chronology of events. That these incidents were reported in roughly the same manner by both the newspapers and the villagers suggests that they were indeed important moments in the development of the Maoist movement in Dolakha. From the villagers' account, it becomes clear that the events described above were crucial in developing the local myth of Rit Bahadur Khadka. Until his death in an 'encounter' with security forces in the summer of 2002, Khadka remained the chief commander of the Maoist forces in Dolakha, and was responsible for announcing the formation of the Dolakha *jan sarkar*. Khadka was viewed with a mixture of awe and fear, and was a focal point for discussions of what a Maoist government would really be like. Villagers cited his return to Dolakha after his imprisonment as evidence of his genuine devotion to, and concern for, the people of the district.

However, it was not clear why there was so little fear of Maoist intimidation, even after the Maoists' violent practices and taste for retribution became common knowledge. Perhaps ongoing police brutality together with the history of oppression in Dolakha during the Rana and Panchayat eras caused villagers to expect violence as an inevitable feature of political change. Although the Maoists were indeed dangerous, they were often perceived as the more conscientious aggressor: the villagers saw their violence as motivated by a supposedly positive ideology for political change. The police, on the other hand, were seen to be using violence to defend an unequal status quo. It was precisely this dynamic which secured the Maoists a large part of their support as the violence increased. Despite the Maoists' brutality, and the potential for far worse, as has been historically demonstrated in China and Cambodia, villagers already felt that they were suffering from more subtle, yet equally deadly, state-sanctioned violence. This may explain in part why villagers inured themselves to Maoist violence and accepted it as an inevitable part of the move towards a better political future.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Nordstrom and Martin provide a useful analysis of this type of 'structural violence' and the difficulties inherent in studying it: 'expanded definitions of violence have been

### *A Turning Point*

‘At Mainapokhari just a few months ago [April 2001], five police and three Maoists were killed. One of the Maoists was a Thangmi from Sindhu-palchok. The police brought the corpses to Charikot for a post-mortem, and also made them available for public viewing. This was perhaps to frighten the villagers. The police buried the Maoists a little way out of Charikot. They didn’t give them a proper funeral or call their families. Villagers found this upsetting.’

This description corresponds to the event reported in the newspapers on 3 April 2001. The confrontation was part of a larger nationwide offensive in which thirty policemen were killed at Rukumkot on the same day. Since the numbers of dead in Rukumkot were much higher than those in Dolakha, most media attention focused on what was dubbed the ‘Rukumkot massacre’, and the Dolakha events were relegated to the end of reports. While from the national perspective ‘...meanwhile in Dolakha...’ (*Kathmandu Post*, 3 April 2001) was an apt way to describe these events, in Dolakha itself the confrontation was seminal in the transformation of the region from ‘Maoist hot-bed’ to *jan sarkar*.

The confrontation at Mainapokhari was the first time that Dolakha saw multiple police deaths in the style that had previously been limited to western regions. Many residents of the area cited this as the moment they realised that the Maoists were in *de facto* control of most of the district. Furthermore, many people who had previously sat on the sidelines now felt compelled to join the Maoist forces or make sympathetic gestures towards them. This was for two primary reasons. First, the Mainapokhari incident indicated to villagers that the Maoists were gaining in confidence and strength, and those who had been wondering whether it might be prudent to join had their question answered. Second, many villagers viewed the police handling of the event with distaste and resentment. Although the intention was to scare potential Maoist recruits by publicly displaying dead bodies, this move had the opposite effect. Particularly because one of the dead was a member of their own ethnic group, Thangmi villagers felt indignation that the deceased Maoists were not accorded the

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useful in giving a voice to systems of violence no less powerful by virtue of their intangibility. They clearly demonstrate that violence enacted is but a small part of violence lived’ (1992: 8).

dignity of a funeral ritual, and that their families were not notified. The insensitivity of the police in this incident worked to weaken earlier reservations about joining the Maoists or offering them support.

### *Cultural Forms of Maoist Activity*

‘Last year in Magh 2057 v.s. [January–February 2001], the Maoists staged a fake wedding procession through the hills. Starting somewhere near their northern stronghold of Lapilang, an entire procession was put together including the bridegroom, musicians and porters to carry the bridegroom’s sedan chair. In full Bahun style, the wedding procession approached the police post in Charikot. There were perhaps thirty participants altogether. The police had no idea that they were Maoists, and complimented them on their dancing and music! The procession continued to Phasku, out of Charikot on the way to Sailung. Once they reached Phasku, they gave up the wedding disguise and changed into their guerrilla uniforms. In Phasku, another group was waiting to meet them, who had come with guns and other necessary equipment. Then a large mass meeting was held in Phasku. The purpose was to make fun of the police and show us how witty they [the Maoists] were, as well as how brazen they could be.’

If this account is true—and we have reason to believe that the basic storyline is factual—it shows how the Maoists appropriated cultural symbols to their own ends. These were not necessarily ethnic symbols alone, although that was part of their strategy, but overarching cultural forms such as a Hindu wedding procession. By using this familiar cover as their camouflage, the Maoists were able to travel directly through the district headquarters, taunt the police, and move on to their mass meeting without arousing suspicion. When villagers described this event, they underscored how it demonstrated the Maoists’ respect for local traditions and sense of humour, in stark contrast to the inhumane actions of the police. Villagers were also impressed by the strength and confidence implicit in such a display of subterfuge.

Furthermore, this is a fitting example of the Maoists’ strategic use of local practices to generate goodwill. Although the theoretical disjunction between Maoist ideology and the rhetoric of cultural and religious identity is well-documented (see Ramirez 1997, de Sales 2000), within the framework of the practical ideology implemented locally, neither the Maoists nor the villagers appeared to be concerned about this possible contradiction. As seen in the photographs accompanying the news reports about the announcement of the

Dolakha *jan sarkar*, which show dance troupes in ‘traditional’ dress wearing Maoist headbands, ‘cultural’ performances at mass meetings played an important role in maintaining the Maoists’ populist façade. We were present at Thangmi festivals organised by local cultural committees at which Maoists donned their headbands half-way through the event to make their allegiance known. They did not, however, make speeches or promote their cause in any other obvious way. Their actions were perceived as tacit support for indigenous culture. This manner of action—supporting local events without explicitly taking advantage of them for their own purposes—added to the Maoists’ popularity.

### *Maoists at School*

‘Sometime last year, the Maoists stopped the schools from collecting a monthly fee. The villagers were happy with this change. This year [2000/1], the schools were closed down by the Maoists, because the teachers had not done as the Maoists had asked. The schools were closed for a week. Although I had liked the Maoists’ earlier demands and ideas, I could not support this action. I didn’t mind when they closed all of those boarding schools, which were sprouting like mushrooms. Only the children of wealthy people study in those schools. But while the closure of the government schools might have been good for the Maoist plan, it most certainly didn’t help the villagers.’

As reported on 11 February 2000, the Maoists had on a number of occasions closed schools throughout the district for days or weeks at a time. Villagers who were otherwise largely sympathetic to the Maoists did not support this policy. Education was seen as the main opportunity for children to escape a life of poverty, and villagers did not accept that closing schools was a necessary feature of the movement. Although there was a general distrust of boarding schools due to their perceived exacerbation of inequalities between rich and poor, and villagers were supportive when these were shut down by the Maoists, the closure of government schools was seen as an attack on the very same impoverished people for whom the Maoists claimed to be fighting. Villagers did not easily appreciate the Maoist drive for ‘re-education’, and failed to see why government education and support for the Maoists were incompatible.

This account also highlights the Maoists’ use of schools as a primary forum for the dissemination of their ideology among young

people, and as a recruiting centre for new members. From the early days of the Maoist presence in Dolakha, school grounds were used as preferred locations for meetings.<sup>9</sup> Many villagers saw a large group of armed Maoists for the first time in late 1999, when the activists called a meeting at the local secondary school, and one member from each household was required to attend. At the close of the meeting, a Maoist flag was planted in the schoolyard, and threats were given to anybody who dared take it down. One of the primary Maoist operatives in the area was a young Thangmi man from a Maoist stronghold elsewhere in the district who claimed to be taking tuition for his School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exam at the secondary school in the village. He was a very affable individual, and after he had gained the confidence of many students he proceeded to promote Maoist ideology among them. The reaction to his proselytising was mixed. He introduced Maoist songs into the school curriculum, a move that the teachers apparently felt compelled to support, and soon village children were singing ‘I used to carry books with these hands, but now I carry a gun. What good is education when we can fight the people’s war?’ While some parents were noticeably upset by these developments, others were in awe of their children, who had the privilege of being in close contact with the Maoists, yet were not perceived to be in direct danger due to the relative security of their status as schoolchildren. In this manner, children became a crucial source of information on the movement for their parents. Overall, Maoist directives and related news were filtered through the school, either via the operative mentioned above, or by groups of Maoists in ‘civil dress’ who routinely visited the school in attempts to garner support among the students.

### *Preliminary Forms of Government*

‘In each village development committee, the Maoists are now establishing what they call an *adhar ilaka*, which is their local government. There they organise everything from land deeds to the mediation of disputes. They have also instructed locals not to pay government taxes. They tried to establish an

<sup>9</sup> This fits the well-attested model of schools as sites of resistance in Nepal, as described by Skinner and Holland. In their analysis, ‘school participants—teachers and students—were often struggling to turn the schools from a site of state control to a site of opposition not only to the state, but also to systems of caste and gender privilege hegemonic in the society’ (Skinner and Holland 1996: 273).

*adhar ilaka* in our VDC a year ago, and put up a signboard announcing that it had been established, but the police found out and forty policemen came to take the board down. Now, they have begun to establish one in the adjacent VDC. Last year, the Maoists also announced that they would build four gates to mark their *adhar ilaka* within Dolakha: in Lapilang, Gumu Khola, Kalinchok, and Phasku, but these have not yet been constructed.'

*Adhar ilaka* can be translated as 'base area'. This form of Maoist administration was established in a number of areas before the district-wide *jan sarkar* was announced, and gave villagers the first flavour of what a Maoist government might be like. For the most part, villagers from nearby *adhar ilakas* seemed to treat them as a valid form of local government, and reported that they functioned more successfully in local interests than the national government had in recent memory. Now, rather than having to travel to Charikot or even Kathmandu, a dispute could be mediated at the local level through the so-called *jan adalat*, or people's court.

#### *Attitudes Towards Development and Foreigners*

'In VDCs where they have established *adhar ilakas*, the Maoists have stated that development offices with foreign connections cannot stay. This is not because they are explicitly against development, but rather because they have seen how corrupt most of these organisations are. Usually only fifty per cent or less of their money actually goes towards development, the rest goes into people's pockets. The Maoists say that if they saw one hundred per cent of the funds going directly to local development, they would consider letting the offices stay.'

The Maoist attitude towards development expressed above is corroborated by our observations of Maoist behaviour towards us and other foreigners. As mentioned earlier, several groups of non-Nepalis, both Western and Asian, were engaged in development work when the Maoists first established themselves in the region. Most of these groups were eventually forced to leave, on the basis of the rhetoric described above. Although we have no evidence that any of these outfits was as corrupt as the Maoists assumed most foreign-funded projects to be, the development-oriented objectives of these projects were enough to incriminate them in the eyes of the Maoists. We were told by villagers that another reason behind their expulsion was that the Maoists were averse to other forms of social action,

which they feared might interfere with their plan for social revolution. However, some locally based Nepali NGOs were allowed to continue working in the area, and reports from other parts of the country also suggest that the merits of such projects were evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Organisations that genuinely appeared to be working for the welfare of the poor were given special dispensation to remain active in the area.

In addition to development workers, foreign residents and researchers, we began to see a new kind of foreigner implicated in the Maoist movement in 2001—journalists. The Maoists invited foreign journalists from mainstream publications to cover the movement. They were carefully escorted into Maoist-controlled areas, usually in Sindhupalchok or Dolakha, and invited to take photos and speak with cadres. This seemed to herald a new phase in the development of Maoist attitudes towards the outside world, an opportunistic *modus operandi*: foreigners who threatened the cause were expelled, while those who might prove helpful were welcomed. This may explain, in part, why we were allowed to stay; we may have unwittingly aided the Maoist agenda by working within a largely poor, disenfranchised ethnic community and documenting unwritten histories of exploitation. Although we were not aware of it at the time, such activities may well have played into the rhetorical strategies of Maoist practical ideology.

'Last week, on 8 Saun 2058 v.s. [23 July 2001], the Maoists declared their government. They named Rit Bahadur Khadka as their leader, the same man who escaped from the hospital some time ago.<sup>10</sup> One of our hopes is that if the Maoists come to power, development will start originating in the villages instead of having to be brought in from outside. If the new Maoist government succeeds, this could be one benefit. The people have already lost faith in all of the political parties: each one has made promises and failed. People are willing to give the Maoist government a chance. They are the only ones who have not yet let us down.'

#### CONCLUSIONS

Let us return for a moment to the proclamation of the *jan sarkar* with which we began. Having reviewed reports of events that occurred in Dolakha, and analysed the village perspective on them, we can now

<sup>10</sup> As mentioned above, Rit Bahadur Khadka was killed in a summer 2002 'encounter' with the security forces.

consider some of the conditions that made Dolakha a logical choice for the Maoists' first publicly-declared eastern base.

When reviewing the Maoists' manipulation of ethnic and caste/class concerns, one might argue that Dolakha's ethnic composition was a key factor in its choice as a Maoist base. Unlike other areas where one ethnic group predominates, such as the Tamu-mai (Gurung) in Lamjung or the Sherpa in Solu-Khumbu, Dolakha is a patchwork of many ethnic communities and caste groups—Tamang, Newar, Thangmi, Sherpa, Jirel, Magar, Sunuwar and Gurung (listed in order of declining population size)—concentrated in disparate locales. No other ethnic community has a population density comparable to the approximately 80,000-strong Bahun-Chetris. However, when taken together, the various minority ethnic and low-caste groups of Dolakha comprise an almost equivalent population totalling over 75,000.<sup>11</sup> This may have been the ideal demographic situation for the Maoist movement to gain local support: a number of susceptible communities, none of which was sufficiently networked with other communities to resist Maoist influence, yet which, if converted to the cause, could together form a substantial bedrock of support. The Thangmi and Tamang populations of Dolakha in particular occupy a similar position to the Kham Magar described by de Sales: they have suffered exploitation at the hands of high-caste Hindu landowners, yet lack a solid cultural and political organisation of their own. They were consequently strong candidates for joining the Maoist cause. It is revealing that the two Maoist strongholds within Dolakha district emerged in the predominantly Thangmi and Tamang areas of Lapilang and Sailung respectively, indicating that the Maoists did indeed succeed in targeting and receiving support from these two ethnic populations.<sup>12</sup>

In examining the situation closely, however, more subtle distinctions must be drawn between the Maoists' selective appropriation of ethnic symbols on the one hand and their use of caste/class distinctions

<sup>11</sup> These statistics are compiled from the 1991 National Census (Central Bureau of Statistics 1999).

<sup>12</sup> The large Newar population of Dolakha has not featured prominently in the movement to date. Concentrated in the semi-urban areas around Dolakha bazaar and Charikot, the Newars remain largely outside the rural sphere of Maoist influence. Furthermore, their strong community and ethnic organisations make them less drawn to Maoist ideology, and they are, for the most part, in a higher economic stratum than either the Thangmi or Tamang.

on the other. While the Maoists were quick to adopt cultural forms ranging from the traditional wedding procession to the contemporary 'cultural programme', they did not promise ethnic autonomy to any group in Dolakha in the manner that de Sales describes for the Kham Magar. Rather, the Maoists promised full participation in a multi-ethnic republic to those who were previously disenfranchised, with the expectation that those who joined would eventually put aside their ethnic claims in the interest of the overarching class struggle. This shift in strategy may have been due to the increased drawing power of Maoist ideology itself, which was refined and recast in local terms while it was being established in Dolakha. The practical ideology which appealed to so many villagers was based on a rhetoric of agrarian reform, land redistribution and economic empowerment, and not of ethnic struggle. However, those who have been disenfranchised in rural Nepal are in many instances ethnic minorities, so the two objectives are often conflated. In other words, although the Maoists made use of ethnic symbols for their own ends in their initial campaign to gain support, this appears to have been a pragmatic move employed during an earlier phase of the struggle. The long-term strategy appeared to be moving beyond ethnicity as an organising paradigm in order to achieve the ideological goal of a Maoist republic.

The large number of attendees reported at the Rankedanda mass meeting demonstrates the widespread appeal of the Maoist movement in Dolakha in July 2001. Even if we opt for the lower estimate of 10,000 people present, as reported in the *Independent*, the figure represents approximately five per cent of the total population of the district. While fear and intimidation are known to be Maoist tools, it is unlikely that upwards of 10,000 people would walk for hours and gather purely out of fear. We argue that the practical ideology advanced by the Maoists at the village level compelled local people to join what they perceived to be a social movement which promised concrete improvements in their own living conditions. The initial enthusiasm for the movement in Dolakha was based on an expectation of positive social change. It remains to be seen whether villagers will at a later date feel that they have been let down, once again, by empty political promises. If and when this happens, the dynamics of the movement may change substantially.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The curtailment of civil liberties under the TADO and the shift in power dynamics after the army deployment may have precipitated this process of disillusionment.

Finally, we return to the symbolic importance of the Western journalist's presence at the Rankedanda meeting. As he reported, 'despite the presence of 20 Nepalese journalists, no reports appeared in Kathmandu's English language newspapers' (Popham 2001: 18). Yet his own report publicised the event to a far wider audience than the *Kathmandu Post* could ever reach. Perhaps by accident, perhaps by design, Dolakha became a microcosm representing pre-emergency Maoist Nepal to the outside world. It is our hope that this discussion has shed some light on the complex set of events that made it so.

## APPENDIX

## NEWS CLIPPINGS ABOUT DOLAKHA 1998–2001

Each clipping begins with details of the date of publication, the source of information and the village or area under discussion. Irregularities in spelling, grammar and punctuation have been retained, and apart from cuts indicated by ellipses, the articles are presented as printed.

21 January 1998 US State Department website Bhimeswor municipality, Dolakha

'Residents of Bhimeswor Municipality-4 have handed over to the police two armed Maoists who were quarrelling with the fish sellers over the purchase of fish. The two alleged Maoists, Rit Bahadur Khadka of Dolakha and Bhuval Dhami of Sindhupalchok, had suddenly brandished their weapons to threaten the people selling fish on the bank of the Tama Koshi. Villagers gathered immediately, nabbed the two and handed them over to the police. According to Deputy Superintendent of Police Jit Bahadur Pun, both were active participants of Maoist movement. Police have seized grenades, a six-round revolver, cartridges, gunpowder, fuse wire, binocular, explosives and Maoist books from them.'

19–20 June 1998 US State Department website Namdu VDC, Dolakha

'On June 19–20, a Maoist activist was killed in encounters with security personnel in the Namdu VDC of Dolakha district.'

19 June 1998 US State Department website Namdu VDC, Dolakha

'One terrorist was killed when security personnel fired in self defense after they came under sudden attack of a gang of about 12 terrorists armed with muzzle loaders and country made pistols in Namdu VDC on June 19. According to the spokesman of the Home Ministry, one policeman was injured in the incident. Security personnel have recovered one muzzle loader, one country made pistol, one khukuri and some explosives from the site.'

27 October, 1998 US State Department website Charikot, Dolakha

'One person was seriously injured when explosives contained in his bag that he was carrying exploded at Tikhtal, about a kilometer from the district headquarters of Charikot. Kumar Pandey, 22, has been sent to Kathmandu for medical treatment after preliminary check-ups at the Gaurishankar General Hospital. Pandey told the Kathmandu Post that the bag had been given to him by one Himal, believed to be a Maoist activist from Sindhupalchowk, who was supposed to see him, a few kilometers ahead on the route.'

22 November 1998 US State Department website Dolakha

'Two Maoist insurgents have been shot dead in an encounter with police on the banks of the Tamakoshi river in Dolakha district. Police said, the encounter took place on the night of November 22 when suspected Maoists fired shots at a police patrol. Two Maoists died on the spot when police returned fire. The bodies have not yet been found. Police said, they recovered a small cache of weapons and propaganda material from the site of the incident.'

16 January 1999 Kathmandu Post Phasku VDC, Dolakha

'Maoists hack one to death In another incident in Dolakha, a group of Maoists hacked Chakra Bahadur Budathoki aka Bharat at his house in Phasku VDC. He was attacked from the back on his neck with a khukuri by the insurgents after they brought him to the ground floor of the house.'

2 February 1999 Kathmandu Post Mailapokhari bazaar, Dolakha

'ICIMOD office vandalised Armed Maoist insurgents set alight office furniture, equipments and motorbike belonging to the ICIMOD

field office near Mailapokhari bazaar here Tuesday night, causing loss of property worth about Rs 2 million, police sources said. A group of about 18 insurgents, wielding pistols and khukuris entered the ICIMOD field office around 10 in the night threatening the only junior staff with his life if he cried for help. Then they took out all the articles from the office including a computer and documents and set them alight. The verandah of the office building was partially destroyed by fire. The insurgents could not set the building on fire as the police reached the spot and resorted to blank firing, causing the insurgents to flee the area.'

29 April 1999 Kathmandu Post Dolakha

'UML workers attack NC activist Former District Development Committee president of Dolakha Uddhav Raj Kafle who was elected from the Nepali Congress (NC) has been hospitalized following an attack which he alleged was spearheaded by the CPN (UML) district committee chief...'

12 September 1999 US State Department website Pawari VDC, Dolakha

'Maoist rebels on September 12 killed a man who had helped police arrest a rebel commander about two years back, police said. Mitra Bahadur Tamang's body was recovered on September 12 in the Thulopokhar jungle, at Pawari VDC, according to the district police office. Tamang's hands were tied and his body left hung to a tree.'

22 September 1999 US State Department website Charikot, Dolakha

'Two pipe bombs planted by the Maoist insurgents went off at 8:45 on the night of September 22 near the Charikot police office in Dolakha. The bombs were planted 200 metres away from the police office.'

3 December 1999 Kathmandu Post Mehul, Dolakha

'Maoists, cop killed in bank raid Three persons—one police personnel and two Maoists—were killed when a group of Maoist insurgents clashed with police in Mehul, Dolakha on Wednesday night, in what has been described as first such incident in the central hill district since the insurgency began nearly four years ago...a group of armed insurgents attacked...with bullets, pipe and grenade bombs, while beleaguering the police post and the bank from all sides...'

7 February 2000 Kathmandu Post Khare VDC, Dolakha

(Front-page photo) caption: 'A house used by a foreigner in the remote village of Khare, Dolakha district, after it was set on fire by the NCP-Maoist activists last month.'

9 February 2000 Rising Nepal Mali VDC, Dolakha

'Armed group loots goods from trekkers An armed group of about 15 looted a video camera and some still cameras from Polish trekkers and Rs. 10,000 from the Nepalese accompanying them at Mali VDC in Dolakha district on Feb. 7, according to the district police office. The Polish nationals, who were 15 in number, were together with five Nepalese fellow trekkers leaving for Panchpokhari of Ramechhap from Jiri Bazaar. Police suspect that the looters were Maoists.'

11 February 2000 Kathmandu Post Dolakha

'SLC test exams in Dolakha deferred Authorities here have been forced to postpone the district level School Leaving Certificate (SLC) test examinations following warnings from the underground Maoist rebels to close all educational institutions to mark the fifth anniversary of people's war...According to school teachers here, Maoist activists have sent letters to the schools appealing them to "support for our cause by closing down your institutions on the War's anniversary day".'

12 February 2000 Kathmandu Post Jiri, Dolakha

'Helicopter damaged in arson attack A private airline-operated cargo helicopter was completely destroyed in an arson attack here during the early hours today, police officials said...About 10 armed arsonists first held the four people guarding the helicopter at gun point, sprayed kerosene and set it on fire...Police suspect Maoist rebels operating in the hills of Jiri to be responsible for the attack.'

21 February 2000 Kathmandu Post Jyaku VDC, Dolakha

'Maoist killed in clash with police One Maoist was killed and the next one wounded when Dolakha district police patrol and the so-called Maoist gang exchanged fire near Jyaku VDC in Dolakha district on Friday. According to the district police, police found two revolvers, two pipe bombs, four grenades and revolver parts, some bags and documents after the incident...'

13 March 2000 Kathmandu Post Jiri, Dolakha

*'Villagers shell-shocked* Days after police fired randomly at a school building in Shyama VDC, two hours away from here, shell-shocked villagers are still trying to come to terms with the police atrocity. Police suspect that the teachers of Garjung Dhunga Higher Secondary School had given shelter to Maoist insurgents. Dolakha is a Maoist hotbed. Some 30 policemen entered the teachers' quarter Tuesday afternoon and opened fire...Fortunately for the teachers, they managed to hide themselves under the cot amid the volley of bullets.'

17 March 2000 Kathmandu Post Dolakha

*'Teachers against police fire in Dolakha* Local teachers have called on all the school authorities here to close their institutions on March 29 to protest recent indiscriminate police firing in Garjandhunga secondary school...The teachers, caught in cross fire between the Maoists and the police forces, have voiced concern for their safety stating that the dangerous climate has made it difficult for them to do their job.'

8 April 2000 Kathmandu Post Namdu VDC, Dolakha

*'Maoist related incidents reported* Police today detonated the ambush laid by Maoist rebels in Namdu VDC of Jiri-Kathmandu highway. Police had narrowly escaped last month in a similar ambush laid by the insurgents in the same area. Police suspect that the ambush was laid for the bandh yesterday but was unsuccessful because of the strict vigilance.'

20 May 2000 Kathmandu Post Gumu Khola, Dolakha

*'...Meanwhile, in Dolakha* a team of police battled with Maoist rebels for two hours in a remote village today. They hauled a large quantity of ammunition after the rebels fled the scene, Central Regional Police Office Hetauda, said...It all started with the rebels firing indiscriminately at the police team from their jungle hide-outs at around 4:30 pm Friday...'

22 May 2000 Kathmandu Post Charikot, Dolakha

*'VDCs sans Secretaries* Seventeen Village Development Committees (VDCs) out of the total 51 VDCs in Dolakha district do not have the VDC Secretary at present. The posts of the VDC Secretaries had

fallen vacant after those posted earlier have been transferred and the concerned ministry has not filled up those vacancies yet.'

1 August 2000 Kathmandu Post Chhetrapa VDC, Dolakha

*'A group of armed Maoists* looted official documents from Chhetrapa VDC office near Mainapokhari bazar, 33 km away from the district headquarters yesterday. The group of 24 Maoist insurgents, who were carrying guns and pistols, stormed into the office and took away all official documents including stacks of land tax receipts...'

2 October 2000 Nepalnews.com Jiri, Dolakha

*'Maoists rob bank in Jiri* Maoist insurgents robbed a commercial bank in a broad day light in Jiri, about 200 kilometers east of Kathmandu, and fled with 300 thousands rupees on Monday. According to police, a group of rebels entered into the branch office of Nepal Bank Ltd in Jiri, Dolkha at about 11:30 am Monday and fled with all cash and kind. The bank had kept minimum amount of cash due to the fear of the Maoist attack. Insurgents also took away arms and ammunition from the security guards of the bank.'

3 April 2001 Kathmandu Post Mainapokhari, Dolakha

*'Rebel hits kill 35 policemen, Two dozen more abducted...* five policemen and three Maoist rebels have been killed in Mainapokhari village in Dolkha district 154 km east of Kathmandu. Around 20 policemen have been wounded in the assault...In the Mainapokhari attack in Dolakha, our correspondent Ishwari Neupane reported that rebels started attacking the local police post at around 3 o'clock in the morning. The rebels surrounded the police post, 34 kilometers from the district headquarters Charikot, from three sides and started firing and throwing socket and pipe bombs. The assault lasted for two and half-hours till 5:30 am.'

8 April 2001 Observer Chautara

*Maoists lay siege to Nepal* article about Maoists in Sindhupalcok, with colour photo of 'Maoist guerrillas' near Chautara.

15 April 2001 Kathmandu Post Sundrawati, Dolakha

*'Solve Maoist problem through talks: Nepal* CPN-UML general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal inaugurated the new building of Kalika

Secondary School Sundrawati today...The CPN-UML leader spoke of the need to resolve the Maoist problem through talks, adding that army mobilization is not a solution to the problem.'

16 April 2001 Kathmandu Post Singri, Dolakha

'Yet another report from Dolakha says that the Maoists burned down the police building at Singri bazar, which the policemen had deserted five days earlier due to fear of a Maoist attack.'

18 June 2001 Newsweek Piskar, Dolakha

*Nepal's Maoist Threat* 2-page spread in the international news magazine, with details and photographs from the predominantly Thangmi (Thami) VDC of Piskar in Sindhupalchok, located close to the Dolakha border.

19 July 2001 Kathmandu Post Charikot, Dolakha

'*Dolakha festival in the offing* Dolakha festival is to be organised on October 1, 2 and 3 under the joint auspices of the Nepal Tourism Board and Dolakha Tourism and Cultural Promotion Committee. The objective of the festival is to bring to light the natural, religious and cultural aspects of Dolakha district and attract domestic and foreign tourists.'

24 July 2001 *Jana Bhavana National Daily* Rankedanda, Dolakha

'*Yasari ghoshana gariyo jilla jan sarkar*' Nepali language article detailing the announcement of the *jan sarkar*, and including excerpts from the speeches given by local commanders Rit Bahadur Khadka and Comrade Kanchan. The presence of a foreign journalist is also mentioned.

25 July 2001 *Space Time Dainik* Dolakha

'*Asthako asha, chuvachut ta hatnaiparcha*' Nepali language article discussing the role of female rebels in the movement in general, and in the proceedings of the announcement of the Dolakha *jan sarkar* in particular. Once again, the foreign journalist is mentioned.

26 July 2001 Kathmandu Post Rankedanda, Dolakha

'*A glimpse of a cultural program organized by CPN (Maoist) in Ranke Danda, Dolakha, Sunday. The underground rebels had organized the*

*program to mark the start of the "People's Government".*' Caption accompanies colour photo of Maoist dancers in 'traditional' dress.

12 August 2001 *Independent Sunday Review* Sailungeshwor, Dolakha

'*Mao's Children: Nepal Year Zero* First it endured the massacre of its royal family; now Nepal faces the prospect of a Maoist revolution. As the rebels seized control of yet another province, they invited one Western journalist to meet their leaders.'

19 September 2001 Kathmandu Post Dolakha

'*UML to launch counter Maoist move in Dolakha* The district council meeting of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) CPN-UML has decided to launch an ideological campaign in the district against the Maoist extortion and atrocities. "The Maoists themselves will be responsible for the activities which contradict with the people's expectations. We request them to immediately stop such anti-people move," stated a press statement issued after the conclusion of the council's two-day meet on Tuesday. The meeting of the council also asked the underground party to open offices of the various Village Development Committees and allow the elected representatives to carry out their daily administration. Out of the total 51 VDCs in the district, Maoists have forcibly closed down the offices of 41 VDC offices...The council meet also condemned the Maoists for forcibly closing down all private schools and disrupting the education activities of public schools.'

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