

INTRODUCTION



The Maoist Victory Rally

Two white jeeps appear on the horizon. As they slowly approach the city along the dusty road, two figures standing on their decks become visible, recognizable as the popular local UCPN Maoist politicians Rulpa Chaudhary and Saikdheja Chaudhary, both young women belonging to the Tharu ethnic group. They are followed by thousands of Maoist sympathizers, supporters and party cadres. While walking, cheering and dancing along, many hold aloft their Maoist flags and sing victory songs. The cavalcade moves along at a walking pace, stopping repeatedly as supporters reach out to shake the hands of the two politicians. The scene has the feeling of a heady celebration.

It is mid April 2008, four days after the historic Constituent Assembly (CA) elections, and we are in Tikapur, an unremarkable town in Kailali district, in the western lowland region of Nepal. The election represented a major milestone in the political history of the country. After a decade-long civil war from 1996 to 2006 and two subsequent failed attempts to hold elections, this one was decisive. It would ultimately determine Nepal's future constitution.

Before the victorious candidates arrived in Tikapur, a large group of Maoist supporters gathered next to a square in the city centre. Among those waiting was Gunaraj Lohani, who led the Maoist All-Nepal Teacher's Organization. The Maoist supporters cheered in eager anticipation of the arrival of the victors and threw red vermilion powder onto Lohani to bless him. Within the crowd were other familiar faces, leaders of the local slum-like settlements of Ramnagar and Ganeshnagar, which were inhabited by *Mukta Kamaiya* (freed bonded labourers).

This book focuses on these individuals, who, until the Nepali government put an end to the practice in 2000, served as *Kamaiya* (debt-bonded labourers). The decision to abolish this system came after

a decade of agitation by a host of nongovernmental organizations that together constituted the Kamaiya liberation movement. After the government resolved to end bonded labour in the western Terai region and threatened to fine landlords who retained such workers, many of the latter became free men and women overnight. They came to form a landless proletariat, a section of which would go on to organize a Kamaiya-led movement, the Mukta Kamaiya Samaj (Freed Bonded Labourers Society). Throughout the second half of the 'people's war' between Maoists and the state, this movement captured public land in urban areas and in rural community forests in the western Terai (lowland) region. In Tikapur, a local airport, parts of the university campus and a high school compound were occupied and six settlements for ex-Kamaiyas, known locally as *bastis* (slums), were established.

The freed Kamaiya had come to join the victory rally of the Maoists, though none of their leaders were members of the Maoist Party. All of them had been sympathetic to the Maoist cause, however, and particularly to the Maoist politician Rulpa Chaudhary's idea to distribute five khatta (1,690 m²) of land to each freed Kamaiya household in the region. It was no surprise then that they had joined the victory rally and supported the Maoists. A few days before, following the elections, a freed Kamaiya had told me, '[e]ven though openly we [the freed Kamaiya] have no candidates, we all secretly support the Maobaadi (Maoist) Party'. I was eager to document this historic event by taking pictures of the Maoist caravan entering the city. Passing the heavily fortified outpost of the local armed police, a large crowd of a few thousand Maoist supporters entered the town. They cheered enthusiastically when they saw me, a foreigner, documenting their historic victory. The rally moved slowly in a circle through the town, passing the shopkeepers in the bazaars and the local municipality building. Alongside were many silent and curious inhabitants of Tikapur, observing the parade from outside their homes.

The three local leaders of the Mukta Kamaiya, Jagdish, Daniram and Bishnu Chaudhary, were standing on the roadside waiting to greet the Maoist politicians. Upon the procession's arrival, 'Jagdish Sir', as supporters in his settlement used to call him, walked over to the jeep and gave flower garlands and tikka to the two successful candidates. Rulpa and Saikdheja were from different social backgrounds. Mrs Rulpa Chaudhary, the local Maoist direct candidate, came from a so-called martyr family; her brother and father had been killed during the conflict by government security forces. Moreover, Rulpa's husband was a senior PLA (People's Liberation Army) com-

mander at a camp about 15 km from the town. Saikdheja, meanwhile, had worked as a domestic child servant during her youth, and prior to her entry into the Maoist Party had served as an active member of the Mukta Kamaiya Samaj.

The purpose of the UCPN (Maoist) rally was not only to celebrate their landslide victory in the election, but to also give a clear demonstration of their power in the local area. In this historic event, the former guerrilla-turned-electoral party demonstrated its ability to draw together a vast crowd of supporters, thereby flexing its political muscles in front of the urban middle classes.

This book builds upon this observation and examines how political mobilizations and labour relationships are reshaped by armed revolutionary conflict, and how a feudal system of bonded labour is transformed into new forms of labour relations that involve neo-bondage. At the first level, the book is intended as a descriptive analysis of how the changing political context following Nepal's Maoist revolution has affected political mobilizations and labour relations among former debt-bonded labourers (Kamaiya) in the urban municipality Tikapur in Kailali district in the far-western Terai region of the country. The first part of the book is concerned primarily with exploring how the Maoist attempt to capture state power at the local and the national levels altered forms of political expression and experience among former bonded labourers. The second part considers the new forms of labour regimes that have emerged out of the period of revolutionary change. The 'red threat' that runs through both parts of the book is a discussion of the everyday, indirect and in some ways invisible transformations that have been brought about by Maoist politics and presence in the rural lowlands of western Nepal.¹

At a second level of analysis, this book is also the first major study of the end of a feudal system of bonded labour, the role of a revolutionary movement in that process and the transformation of that system into new forms of labour relations that involve neo-bondage. It focuses on how this transformation from bonded to new forms of labour relations is embedded in the wider revolutionary context. This is because the Maoist rebellion has helped to produce a young, mobile and urbanizing working class that feels increasingly secure in claiming new social spaces for its emerging pleasures, pastimes and practices vis-à-vis existing hierarchies and customs.

In the following pages I begin by exploring how the Maoist attempt to capture state power has altered forms of political expression and the experiences of former bonded labourers and assess the

new forms of labour regimes that have emerged out of the period of revolutionary change. The book's main contention is that the Maoist attempt to capture state power has allowed former bonded labourers to experience greater inclusion in Nepal's polity at the local and national levels and to mediate the new forms of unfree labour that have emerged during the reconstruction of the economy after the conflict. This is argued from two different ethnographic angles. The first part of the book provides an ethnographic description of different aspects of the political life of freed bonded labourers: their exposure to a new urban setting and the patronage of their former masters; the politics of community formation and local development in the neighbourhood; the contentious politics of the freed bonded labourers' movement; and their engagement with local trade unions. The second part of this study explores the everyday politics of labour that freed Kamaiya are subjected to in a brick kiln on the town's periphery. Here, I suggest that the contemporary post-conflict situation limits the brick kiln managers' attempts to bind labour and structures the everyday politics of work in the brick factory.

One of the central aims of what follows surrounds the question: 'Did the Maoist revolution work?' To what extent did the Maoist attempt to capture state power actually succeed in empowering the poor and working classes of Nepal's society? One of the main contentions of this work is that the Maoist attempt to capture state power contributed significantly to the elimination of some of the worst evils of the old regime and continues to profoundly influence the lives of freed bonded labourers, albeit in unintended ways. The story told in this book is partly an upbeat one, partly a jeremiad. From a worm's eye view in Kailali the Maoist revolution remains a partial revolution. But before elaborating on this argument in more detail, the next sections will introduce the more general context of Nepal's Maoist revolution and the ways in which anthropologists have approached it so far.

A Brief History of the Nepali Maoist Revolution

By launching its *jana yudha* (people's war) on 13 February 1996, the Nepal Maoist movement entered a violent armed conflict with the state's security forces that lasted nearly a decade.² Their principal revolutionary goal had been to overthrow the old state power and construct a new state (CPN 2004: 154). According to their long-term vision, this *naya Nepal* (new Nepal) would eventually lead to the for-

mation of a *naulo janbad* (new people's democracy), one that would be based, in the words of its party chairman, Pushba Kamal Dahal (aka Prachanda), on a 'true multiparty democracy' (Hoftun, Raeper and Whelpton 1999; International Crisis Group (ICG) 2005: 2).

Exploiting power vacuums mainly in the western highland districts of Rolpa and Rukhum, the movement began to establish itself as a revolutionary force through attacks on local police stations and the extrajudicial killing of enemies. As Ogura (2007: 336) reports for both districts, the 'strategy of attacking police stations in the villages ... was successful since almost all the police posts except that in the district headquarters had been evacuated by the middle of 2002. In the absence of any state authority, the Maoists were easily able to establish their rule over the people'.

This centring of their activities in the western highland areas led many commentators to initially dismiss the movement as a minor communist splinter group capable of little more than spreading unrest in remote mountainous areas (see ICG 2005). In fact, the Nepali state tended to downplay the movement as a 'law and order problem' (Shah and Pettigrew 2009), which certainly facilitated its rapid expansion across the country. In addition, their targeting of exploitative money lenders and landlords, their attempts to curb domestic violence and their introduction of campaigns against alcohol abuse helped the movement gain popularity (ICG 2005: 15). These early efforts were soon complemented by other campaigns; the Maoists began to draw heavily on caste and ethnic issues to garner support and even lobbied against the high tuition fees in private schools to gain the backing of the middle classes. This strategy proved successful, as reports from the ICG suggest that at the end of the conflict, the Maoists had an astonishing support base of around fourteen thousand political workers and one hundred thousand supporters (ICG 2005).

In military terms, the movement first drew on Mao's concept of a 'protracted People's War', achieved by encircling towns from the rural areas (ICG 2005: 21). This meant that the movement fought its battles mainly in the villages and the countryside and only occasionally came into the towns. The strategy worked for a while, mainly because the Maoists were initially fighting against a poorly equipped local police force. However, after their second national convention in February 2001, the movement changed tactics. The revolutionaries announced they would follow the new 'Prachanda Path', which essentially meant that they decided to come into power and also embrace capitalist development. The new ideology required the complementing of rural revolution with a 'people's rebellion' in the city,

as well as the development of nonviolent forces ‘to make continuous interventions in national politics, to use fraternal organisations to carry out strikes and street demonstrations, to foment revolt within the RNA and to seek to polarise sympathetic and opposed political forces’ (ICG 2005: 14).

As many human rights organizations have documented, after the first ceasefire ended in November 2001, the Maoists began to confront the Royal Nepali Army and claimed to have reached a stage of ‘strategic balance’ in their revolutionary process. According to their estimations this meant that the state’s influence had been significantly weakened and their own regime had turned into a viable alternative. Multiple and simultaneous attacks followed, including assaults on army barracks. The fighting increased significantly and peaked when the state reacted by declaring a state of emergency. In 2004 the Maoists released a press statement declaring that they had successfully established ‘base areas’ that, according to reports, included the western highland districts of Rukkum, Rolpa, Salyan, Jajarkot, Kalikot and Phutan. Though Prachanda declared in a press interview that ‘all rural Nepal had become a Yenan’, my ethnographic material will suggest that Kailali was less a base area than a ‘guerrilla area’ ‘where Maoists and the State are in constant flux’ (ibid.: 25).

After the second ceasefire collapsed, the conflict escalated further. With support in the form of weapons and military training from the US, India, the UK and Belgium, the state began to crack down heavily on Maoist guerrilla squads, while the Maoists retaliated with heavy attacks on the district headquarters of Bhojpur and Beni in March and April 2004.³ On 31 August the Maoists entered into their ‘third’ and final stage of the revolution: ‘the strategic offensive’. Heavy fighting continued, but the conflict ended only in November 2006, when the Maoists and the Nepali state signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. This essentially meant the end of the insurgency period that had resulted in the deaths of more than 13,000 people, the widespread use of torture, the displacement of approximately 200,000 people, the conscription of about 4,500 child soldiers⁴ and the disappearance of 1,619 ordinary citizens whose fate remains largely unknown to this day (Human Rights Watch 2007; OHCHR 2012; Pettigrew 2013: 13).

After the conflict officially ended in 2006, the Maoist guerrilla movement turned into a political party. Their armed wing, the People’s Liberation Army, was confined in central cantonments (each with three satellite camps) in seven districts of the country, and their weapons were monitored by United Missions in Nepal (UNMIN). Out of the 30,000 self-declared PLA soldiers who entered the UN-

controlled cantonments, 19,602 were subsequently verified as fighters by the United Nations (Pettigrew 2013: 15). In popular media the Maoists were criticized for doubling the number of PLA soldiers before entering the camps and also charged for removing PLA leaders to strengthen their paramilitary-like youth organization, the Young Communist League (YCL) (ibid.: 15).

In the following elections for the Constituent Assembly held in April 2008, the Maoists managed to secure 220 out of 601 seats and formed the largest political party in the Assembly. One of their first actions in this new political arena was to press for the end of monarchy and in May 2008 the country became a Federal Republic. In August 2008, the Maoist leader Prachanda formed a new coalition government and became the new Prime Minister of Nepal. He resigned, however, only eight months later after a dispute with the president of the Constituent Assembly over the rejection of the cabinet's decision to sack the chief of the army.

After Prachanda's resignation the government became unstable. First, a UML (United Marxist Leninist) leader became Prime Minister but resigned in June 2010. Then the country was without a Prime Minister for seven months until Jhala Nath Kanal was elected. He resigned in August 2011 and UCPN-Maoist vice chairman Baburam Bhattarai took over. Throughout Bhattarai's period as prime minister, the PLA army was dissolved and only a small fraction of former PLA soldiers were later integrated into the Nepalese Army in September 2012, due to ineligibility, reversed decisions and disenchantment (Pettigrew 2013: 17). The debate around the dissolving of the PLA army also contributed to a split in the Maoist movement into two parties. On 19 June 2012, a dissident group around UCPN-M vice president Mohan Baidya (alias Kiran) announced the formation of a new Maoist party, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M). The latter accused the leadership of the UCPN-Maoist as opportunistic and corrupt, and therefore decided to form a new Maoist movement. However, despite the CPN-M's efforts to block the second CA elections, in November 2014 new elections for the Constituent Assembly were finally held in which the UCPN-Maoists only came in third, and the former old political class – embodied by members of the Nepali Congress (NC) and the UML-Party – once again took power in the country.

Writing about the Maoist revolution in the face of constant political transformation is challenging. Hence, this monography focuses largely on the period between January 2008 and July 2009, when field-work was conducted.

The Nepali Maoist Revolution through the Anthropologist's Eye

For some time now, anthropologists have analysed various facets of Nepal's Maoist revolution, though a serious engagement with the phenomenon has been a long time in coming. In the early 1990s, as David Gellner has pointed out (2003: 18–20), surprisingly few anthropologists were aware of the coming rebellion.⁵ In fact, only two anthropological publications of this period succeeded in drawing attention to the potential revolt (see Nickson 1992; Mikesell 1993). The reason for this oversight remains largely unexplored, but it may be related to the academic reluctance to engage in speculative predictions about potential armed revolutions, or even to anthropology's tradition interest in exploring cultural and religious issues rather than focusing on issues of inequality, exploitation and power politics (Pfaff-Czernecka 2005). With the revolution unfolding from 1996 onwards, the conduct of fieldwork within Maoist operational areas came to be seen as increasingly dangerous. Few anthropologists dared to venture out of the comfort zone of the country's capital to observe the relationship between the Maoist movement and local society first-hand. However, most of this handful of researchers were actually working in those remote areas prior to the revolution and witnessed the revolution arrive on their doorstep (De Sales 2002; Fujikura 2003; LeComte-Tilouine 2004; Pettigrew 2004; Shneiderman and Turin 2004: 84). Only since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the UCPN (Maoist) and the state in November 2006 has access to field sites become easier, and we have witnessed a surge in anthropological literature on the Nepali Maoist revolution, with several edited volumes and anthropological monographies on Nepal's Maoist conflict being produced (Lawoti and Pahari 2009; Shah and Pettigrew 2009; Lecomte-Tilouine 2013; Pettigrew 2013). Next to this body of anthropological work sits a wide range of other literature on the Maoist revolution across the social sciences (Karki and Seddon 2003; Hachhethu 2004; Sharma 2004; Pyakurel 2007; Upreti 2008; Adhikari 2014).

Generally speaking, the emerging body of literature related to Nepali Maoism can be divided between accounts that examine the revolution itself and narratives that focus on its wider effects. Among the former, anthropologists have begun to engage seriously with the politics (Gellner 2007; Lawoti and Pahari 2009), history (Ogura 2004, 2007), gender relations (Manchanda 2004; Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004) and revolutionary governance (Ogura 2008; LeComte-

Tilouine 2010) of the Maoist movement. These narratives tell us much about the emergence, organization and subsequent transformations of the movement at different stages of revolution; such accounts make it clear that the Nepali Maoist movement has been essentially intellectually driven since its inception, led by middle-class activists and dominated by Brahmin leaders.⁶ However, these authors' explicit focus on the movement itself replicates the more general idea that a revolution is simply the outcome of a revolutionary political force, rather than a transformation of an entire social structure.

Within the second group of literature, which is more concerned with the effects of the revolution than with the uprising *per se*, the emphasis has primarily been on political violence (Shneiderman 2009; Thapa, Ogura and Pettigrew 2009), conflict-related fear (Pettigrew 2009) and a 'climate of terror' (LeComte-Tilouine 2009), and thus seems concerned chiefly with the 'iron fist' of the revolution. For instance, Judith Pettigrew (2013) and those coming in her wake (Lecomte-Tilouine 2013) argue that rural villagers became suspicious of outsiders in general, and remained careful to not associate themselves with either members of the Maoist movement or with outsiders throughout the insurgency. The insurgency told the rural villagers not only with whom and when to speak, but also when to remain silent. Everyday relations among villagers thus evidently profoundly changed and the mistrust level among villagers could only decline in the aftermath of the conflict.

In line with this intellectual legacy, one of the central aims of this book is to engage with this literature by providing further observations on how Maoism affects the lives of 'ordinary' people. It contrasts with the aforementioned existing scholarship on Nepal's Maoist revolution in at least three distinct ways. First, unlike the body of literature cited, my ethnography is based on an urban municipality. It provides a detailed ethnography of the social, political and economic transformations that are taking place in the wake of the Maoist revolution in Nepal. Thus the book provides valuable insights into a sociopolitical context that is in a high state of flux and change, and therefore offers an invaluable snapshot of the immediate after-effects of a major Maoist revolution in a small city.

Second, rather than focusing on the already researched themes of violence, fear and intimidation,⁷ this book takes the politics, institutions and labour regimes in an urban municipality and its rural hinterland as its starting point. By focusing on the everyday politics of a group of freed bonded labourers, the book provides an understanding of the ways in which ordinary, but poor and marginalized,

citizens are affected by Maoist politics and what gains and losses the revolution has brought them.

Third, the book aims at making a valuable contribution to the anthropological study of contemporary labour relations and labour regimes in Nepal, and in particular to the study of unfree labour and debt bondage under capitalist production. The second part of the book traces both the disappearance of an older Kamaiya system of rural bonded labour and the continuation of bonded labour – albeit in a much different form – in contemporary brick kilns on the margins of Tikapur. Here the book not only spells out how bonded labour is changing in practice, but also how its current forms are shaped by the wider politics of the Maoist movement.

Beyond Nepal, this book also questions Eric Wolf's (1969) and James Scott's (1977) claim that in revolutionary-like situations it is the 'middle-peasant' (village-dwellers with landed property) who is most liable to be caught up in revolutionary activity. Comparing the roots and realities behind six cases of revolution – Mexico, China, Russia, Vietnam, Algeria and Cuba – Wolf (1969) argued that middle peasants were the transmitters of social unrest, as they neither held any vested interest in maintaining the status quo that benefited rich peasants, nor suffered from the political impotence that characterized subsistence farmers. Similarly, Scott (1977) identifies the middle peasant as the one most prone to become a revolutionary, as he views the lower classes as lacking in the cultural and social-organizational autonomy to resist elite hegemony. The ethnographic material foregrounded in this book, however, is less positive about such a theory of revolution that casts property-less peasants and wage-labourers as impotent, helpless agents swept along in the wake of revolutions. This is because one of the core arguments of this book is that revolutions can challenge the balance of power and allow former serfs to act militantly and assertively. This becomes most evident in Chapter 2, which shows how formerly bonded labourers have occupied highly symbolic spaces in urban terrain throughout the revolutionary period. Moreover, while Skocpol (1979) views revolutions as overtly structural, this book emphasizes the complexities of political organization and stresses the key role of political ideology within a revolutionary-like situation. Accordingly, one of the key insights of the book is that the Maoist movement – seen through the narrow lens of my field site Tikapur – seemed primarily concerned with the eradication of practices and symbolism associated with feudalism while only secondarily working on behalf of the working classes.

Revolutionary State Capture

Recent anthropological scholarship on ‘the state’ has focused on the ‘everyday state’ (e.g. Joseph and Nugent (1994) in Mexico; Fuller and Harriss (2001) in India; Krohn-Hansen and Nustad (2005) more generally). For example, Fuller and Harris’s seminal work focused on what the state actually means and represents for a given group of people, and how ordinary people often imagine the state as at once an idea and a system (Fuller and Harriss 2001: 2–5). While this kind of research emphasizes the everyday interactions and ‘ordinariness’ of the state and politics, it does not explicitly focus on the fact that certain groups within society also aim to appropriate and alter the state (as both an idea and a system), a phenomenon that political scientists have described as ‘state capture’ (see Hellman, Jones and Kaufman 2000). The discourse of state capture, then, is something that is perhaps not adequately described within frameworks of the ‘everyday state’.

Akin to this observation, it should be highlighted that conflict zones are frequently divided into armed rebel/revolutionary actors and state actors. However, in the case study foregrounded in this book (which focuses largely on the period between January 2008 and July 2009), it is difficult to maintain such a clear-cut dichotomy for a very obvious reason: while up until the end of the ceasefire the Maoists were an armed group with a strong revolutionary outlook, in its aftermath part of the political wing of the wider Maoist movement became part of the state, while other parts (e.g. the PLA and paramilitary-like Young Communist League) remained outside of it. It is therefore difficult to place the Maoist movement at either end of such a dichotomy.

Similarly, following a broad range of scholars (e.g. Gellner 2002; Shah 2008), the Nepali Maoist revolution has commonly been understood as a form of armed resistance against the state, rather than as an attempt to capture state power at both local and national levels through the use of a variety of revolutionary tactics and practices. As a consequence, the peace agreement between Maoists and the state is often equated with the end of the revolution, instead of being viewed as a transitional phase leading to a continuation of the revolution through different means, as in the Maoists’ self-description.

In this book I adopt the latter perspective, suggesting that the Maoists’ attempt to capture state power at both the local and national levels has changed the regional balances of power, and that this, in

turn, has had various unintended consequences for local politics and labour regimes. My use of the term ‘revolutionary state capture’ connotes two different levels. First, the elections of April 2008 became a means for Maoists to capture state power. As mentioned previously, they managed to secure the majority of the available seats, thereby expanding the party’s political representation within the state. Second, revolutionary state capture works by exerting influence over existing state institutions according to one’s own interests. In Chapter 4, for instance, I describe how the Maoists mobilized freed Kamaiya and *Sukhumbasi* (landless people) in town in order to put political pressure on a local police officer to submit to their will. In so doing, they were attempting to reform an existing state institution, the local police, according to their own interests.

I suggest, therefore, that the Maoist attempt to capture state power is qualitatively different to the attempts of any other political elite to influence existing political institutions to their own advantage. This is due to the fact that for the period considered, as a recent report by the Crisis Group notes, the Nepali Maoist movement continued to regard itself as a revolutionary party; it retained a strong belief in the usefulness of political violence and armed struggle and maintained an armed military unit to give weight to their demands (ICG 2010: 7). In short, despite the Maoists’ stunning election victory, it regarded itself as an antagonist to the state whose aim was to ‘capture state power’.

The book thus highlights how the unique revolutionary-like configuration of two groups (i.e. state and Maoists) competing for power forced ordinary citizens to position themselves somewhere between these power centres. In the literature this phenomenon of siding with either the Maoists or the state is well documented. During the revolutionary period, as the work of anthropologist Judith Pettigrew (2004) demonstrates, ordinary people often became trapped between these two poles of power, and the boundaries between Maoists, state agents and ordinary people were frequently blurred. Similarly, a report by the Crisis Group suggests that during the post-insurgency period citizens had to side with political parties in order to seek protection (Crisis Group 2010: 20). In several chapters of this book, I also illustrate how freed bonded labourers appropriated the changing balances of power by directing their own politics towards these two poles. It is only against this backdrop that we can explain how, for example, a group of disempowered former debt-bonded labourers were able to capture such highly symbolic sites as an airport, a university campus and a high school compound.

In this sense, I conceptualize the Maoist revolutionary movement as an important structural and symbolic reference point for ordinary citizens. This is a central theme throughout the book. For instance, in Chapter 3 I explore the contentious politics of the FKS (Freed Kamaiya Society) and argue that freed bonded labourers had partially adopted Maoist rhetoric in order to advance their own agenda. Strategizing upon the presence of the Maoist movement was not limited to the poor. The rich elite also had to deal with this unique new power configuration. In Chapter 1 I show how powerful businessmen and landlords organized popular festivals in order to portray themselves as benevolent patrons of the town. Similarly, Chapter 6 describes how brick kiln managers and owners were careful to limit their attempts to re-bond labour due to their fear of the Maoist presence.

This principal scenario is not unique to Nepal; rather, it represents a model that is applicable to, and perhaps characteristic of, different revolutionary-like contexts around the globe. The way in which one acts, communicates and strategizes to achieve one's own ends depends heavily upon local power dynamics. Given this, the presence of a revolutionary force in a locality will foster certain modes of behaviour, a phenomenon that I have termed the 'invisible hand of Mao Tse-tung'. Recognizing the importance of the political context, the notion of the 'invisible hand of Mao Tse-tung' represented an attempt to grapple with this continuous revolution-like situation and its side effects. The inference is that the larger political context of the Maoist movement limits the possibilities of other actors; the choice of the term 'invisible hand' is intended to convey the more obscure qualities of the Maoist movement rather than the violent spectacles that it perpetrated in the past, and in which it continued to engage sporadically at the time of fieldwork (for statistics and discussion of Maoist violence, see INSEC Yearbook 2007, 2008). In several chapters of this book I will demonstrate that it is both the size and muscle power of the Maoist movement, as well as the rumours regarding its strictly hierarchical, highly organized and well-informed network of party cadres and supporters, that underpinned its political clout in town and limited the decision-making of other actors.

To unravel these conflict-related socialites is a difficult task for the ethnographer. It requires a sound knowledge of local power structures. But as Gellner has succinctly stated, a 'crucial point that emerges from ethnographic study is of course that its [Maoist revolution's] impact is different in different places. National political movements always work through, and are understood locally in terms of, pre-existing social relationships' (Gellner 2003: 18). The new forms

of sociality thus entail structural continuities with the past. In other words, it would be reductive to claim that all social relationships in a locality are dependent on and shaped by a change in the balance of power. But much of it also depended on Maoist politics, as I demonstrate in the next section.

The Maoist Politics of Bonded Labour

From its inception, the UCPN Maoist Party was in support of the liberation of the Kamaiya. However, the Kamaiya were not initially a distinct focus of Maoist demands. When Maoist Baburam Bhattarai handed over a forty-point list of demands to the Nepali government, led by Sher Bahadur Dheuba, prior to the onset of the insurgency in 1996, point twenty-seven declared that '[t]hose who cultivate the land should own it. (The tiller should have the right to the soil he/she tills.) The land of rich landlords should be confiscated and distributed to the homeless and others who have no land' (ICG 2005: 41).⁸

Only later, in the form of two press statements issued during the insurgency period, did the underground movement articulate its support more clearly. First, in 2003 the UCPN Maoist stated in their 'Negotiating Agenda' under Section III that '[a]ll types of bonded labour system, including Kamaiya, Harwa, Charwa, etc., should be abolished with a guarantee of employment and settlement. All homeless persons should be provided with proper housing' (ICG 2005: 44). This suggests that for Nepal's Maoists, bonded labourers like the Kamaiya qualified as a distinct category of people.⁹

Second, in 2004 the Maoist Party claimed in the 'Revolutionary Worker', that '[s]ince the People's War reached the Terai (lowlands), it has greatly inspired the masses of the people, especially the dispossessed and the downtrodden, who rose up to reclaim their ancestral land' (Revolutionary Worker 2004: 1). They argued for 'land to the tillers' and 'land to the landless', both necessary steps for the establishment of Maoist socialism. Importantly, the party claimed to empower Kamaiya: 'In 2002, the parliament under the king declared the Tharu people free from the Kamaiya system even as these people had already rebelled and had begun to retake their property – with many of the landlords already in full flight – under the impetus of the Maoist advances in the southwestern region' (Revolutionary Worker 2004: 2).

The implications of this Maoist politics of bonded labour are far from clear, however, and have received little in-depth ethnographic

scrutiny. In this book I explore how the Maoist attempt to capture state power alters forms of political expression and experience among former bonded labourers and reflect on the new forms of labour regime that have emerged out of the period of revolutionary change. I will examine, for instance, the capture of urban terrain by freed Kamaiya under shifting dynamics of power (Chapter 2), the ways in which the Maoist movement gave political leverage to a freed Kamaiya organization (Chapter 3) and how the symbiotic relationship between the Maoists and local trade unions allowed freed Kamaiya to engage in trade unionism (Chapter 4).

The central analytical concern of the book is to open up a grounded scholarly discussion on the unintended consequences of the Maoist attempt to capture state power. I want to move the debate beyond stereotypical positions, such as the assertion that the Maoists did little or nothing for freed Kamaiya. Instead, I argue that Nepal's Maoists are agents of modernization who have contributed significantly to the creation of structural and symbolic conditions for the disruption of traditional local hierarchies and forms of power. As a result of this action, traditional local allegiances were replaced by new broker-client relationships that continue to be influenced by the presence of the Maoist movement to this day.

Much of this regulation, as the book suggests, depends on Maoist ideology. For example, while the Maoists tolerate capitalist production in brick factories, their presence also limits the managers' attempts to restore older forms of bonded labour. This prompts the hypothesis that the Maoist movement acts according to the party's general understanding of the political economy of Nepal. It seems primarily concerned with the eradication of practices and symbolism associated with feudalism, while only secondarily working on behalf of the working classes. This, I propose, is related to the iconic nature of bonded labour in the region, which epitomized the old feudal order. To this end, the next section revisits the forms and practices of the Kamaiya system in the region.

The Kamaiya System of Bonded Labour Revisited

Several NGO-sponsored reports (e.g. INSEC 1992; Robertson and Mishra 1997; Sharma and Thakurathi 1998) and a handful of ethnographies (e.g. Gurung 1992; Krauskopff 1999; Rankin 1999; Karki 2002; Guneratne 2002; Fujikura 2007) have documented the forms and practices of the Kamaiya system of bonded labour that was widespread

in the western Terai region (including the districts of Kanchanpur, Kailali, Bardiya, Banke and Dhang) until its abolition in 2000.

What all of these accounts share is the fact that the Kamaiya system emerged when high-caste Pahadi (hill dwellers) outsiders began to migrate in large numbers to the lowland Terai region causing the local Tharu community to experience land loss and displacement. As Kunwar, for example, explains:

[T]he *pahadi* used to come down to the Terai every winter season. During the whole winter, they used to live there. While staying in the Terai, they, but not all, established ritual friendship, *mit*, with the Tharus. These *miteri* relations made it easier for the hill people to take shelter in the Tharus' house. While staying with the Tharus, they worked, gambled and drank together. Due to the indulgence in gambling and drinking, the Tharu male members were constrained to take loans either from the Tharu landlords or *pahadi mit* or other hill migrants. The prevailing proverb, *jahan Tharu wohan daru* (where there is Tharu, there is alcohol), also highlights the above mentioned scenario. (Kunwar 2000: 40)

Through losing their own small pieces of land for cultivation and taking out loans from their Pahadi landlords, many Tharu became Kamaiya. According to Kunwar, 'in a survey completed in 1995, the government recorded more than 85,000 from 16,000 Kamaiya families, whereas surveys conducted by NGOs (BASE¹⁰ and INSEC¹¹) estimated the number of Kamaiya population to 200,000 from 40,000 families' (Kunwar 2000: 42).

Though the numbers of the total population of the Kamaiya community vary vastly according to different sources, most reports cite Kailali as the district with the highest share of the total Kamaiya population and the highest absolute number of resident Kamaiya. The NGO Base, for example, reported that 44,944 persons worked as Kamaiya in Kailali district in 1995. However, for the same year, as Karki has pointed out, official government sources estimated the size of the Kamaiya population around 30,463 (Karki 2002: 76). Given that in 1992 the Nepali census counted an estimated total population of 417,891 (GON 2011: 13), approximately 7.3 per cent to 10.8 per cent of the overall population most likely worked as Kamaiya in Kailali district.

These figures implicitly point to the fact that not all Tharu were bonded labourers. Indeed, my fieldwork data suggests that some of the masters of the Kamaiya were Tharu themselves, a fact that is often understated within the regional literature. Yet, my fieldwork data also suggests that none of the larger farms in Kailali district were owned by Tharu, and that owners of large numbers of Kamaiya are said to have mainly originated from the hills.

Most generally, the Kamaiya system of bonded labour functioned as follows. It began with an agreement to work as a Kamaiya for a landlord based on an oral and renewable contract that lasted a minimum period of one year, usually forged at the popular Maghe Sankranti that takes place annually around January. Here Tharus negotiated with their landlords over a period of days whether to continue their work or shift to another landlord who would then compensate their first master. Often, however, landlords would not only negotiate with the Kamaiya about their contracts, but with each other as well. According to popular understanding, landlords in the region traded Kamaiya similar to cattle, buying and selling according to the estimated yearly demand of farm work.

After the festival, the landlord would pay out an advance in quintals of rice to the Kamaiya. The owner of the Kamaiya noted the amount of this *saunki* (debt) and calculated the value in monetary terms, most frequently causing the relationship between master and Kamaiya to turn into one of debt dependency. Undoubtedly, while these debt dependencies varied according to individual experience, many Kamaiya at my field site reported a variety of unfair practices that increased their debt. For example, one ex-Kamaiya reported to me that an equivalent of one daily wage was added to his *saunki* when he did not show up for a working day.

Rankin, based on her fieldwork in Kanchanpur and Kailali in the 1990s, highlights the important diversity of Kamaiya practices and labour arrangements that existed, thereby refuting the popular understanding of the Kamaiya system as one uniform set of relations (Rankin 1999: 28). Her work indicates that those Kamaiya working as labourers for *kisans* (petty farmers who are commonly subsistence producers) were living in better conditions than those working for *jamindars* (agricultural entrepreneurs). This was mainly because 'the combination of profit motive and unchallenged power have given jamindars completely free reign to control and enslave Kamaiya labour through overtly as well as symbolically violent means' (Rankin 1999: 38). In fact, jamindars used 'threats of being framed for theft, murder or rape' (Rankin 1999: 37) to obtain the lands of small Tharu landowners, only to enslave them as Kamaiya, and sometimes to even 'exercise rights to the wives and daughters of their Kamaiyas' (Rankin 1999: 37).

While Rankin's account perhaps gives too much weight to the relationship between class differences and coercive power, it is certainly a fact that many Kamaiya suffered from physical exploitation and psychological abuse by their landlords. Kamaiya were not only

hassled to pay fines when falling sick but also compelled to perform unpaid *corvée* labour, such as house construction, or work on village roads and bridges, in addition to their agricultural work. Sometimes they were even seriously maltreated by their employers. Guneratne, for instance, notes the following: 'While interviewing people in half a dozen different villages in western Dang, I recorded three instances of suicide by Tharu servants following maltreatment at the hands of their landlords; according to statistics kept by BASE, there had been eighty-three such suicides in the area in 1989 and 1990' (Guneratne 2002: 98).

Many of the former Kamaiyas living in the Tikapur area, whom I discuss below, knew of such incidents and often distinguished between *ramro* (good) and *kharab* (bad) landlords. The good ones offered some sort of benign patronage such as food, clothing and shelter; the *kharab* were those that imposed hefty fines in case of absence or tried to sexually abuse Kamaiya women and girls. Whether working for a good or bad landlord, what seemed to bother nearly all former bonded labourers was the pressure they had been under on the farms. Even outside the peak agricultural season, the Kamaiya were required to work on other jobs for up to eighteen hours a day, a fact that was mentioned frequently by those with whom I spoke.

It comes as little surprise that under such exploitative conditions the term Kamaiya changed its meaning rapidly and led to resistance. As Fujikura (2007) has highlighted, since the arrival of NGOs in the region from the early 1990s onwards, the term Kamaiya – which in Tharu language simply means 'hard workers' – has become increasingly associated with bonded labour. Despite many efforts by the various NGOs to abolish the Kamaiya system, all attempts to organize the labourers remained unfruitful.¹² The turning point came on 1 May 2000, when nineteen Kamaiya decided to file a court case against their landlord, Mr Shiva Raj Pant, in Geta VDC (Village Development Committee), Kailali district.¹³ The event signified the beginning of the end for the Kamaiya system and represented the first ever successful use of existing legal provisions against a powerful local landlord.

This incident and local reactions to it have been described at length by various scholars (Guneratne 2002; Fujikura 2007; Lakier 2007) as well as in NGO reports (See Action Aid 2005), and thus it is sufficient here to offer only a brief summary of the complex chain of events. The nineteen Kamaiya working on Shiva Raj Pant's farm undoubtedly experienced brutal forms of physical exploitation that fuelled their motivation to challenge their landlord.¹⁴ When the nineteen Kamaiya

finally confronted their landlord, they received little sympathy from the local bureaucrats and politicians. Lakier succinctly summarizes:

The CDO, Tana Gautam, 'insulted the Kamaiyas and supporting organisations'. In response the Kamaiyas 'immediately began a sit-in in front of the CDO office, on May 12. Two days later the sit-in had grown to encompass thousands – according to BASE sources, it numbered as many as 7,000 to 8,000. (INSEC 2000 in Fujikura 2007: 350)

The sit-in was supplemented by demonstrations throughout the bazaar. Demonstrators marched with black cloths tied around their mouths to signify the government's refusal to listen, while bearing lanterns to symbolize their search for justice. '[on] other days the demonstrators beat drums, pots and pans proclaiming that they were trying to wake up the conscience of the government officials ... after twelve days of sit-in, the landlord, Shiva Raj Pant, gave in' (Lakier 2007: 258).

In the aftermath of their liberation the Nepali government promised to compensate the Kamaiya community through a rehabilitation and resettlement scheme. Everyone who had previously worked as a Kamaiya was promised a small sum of money and a parcel of land in the Bonded Labour (Abolishment) Act of 2001. The main issue of contestation, however, had been that the government neither conducted a survey to count how many people worked as Kamaiya in the western Terai region, nor took the rehabilitation and resettlement agenda particularly seriously. Many Kamaiya settled on unregistered pieces of land and, as I describe in subsequent sections (Chapters 3 and 4), soon began occupying parts of urban municipalities.

The description of the Kamaiya system as it operated in the region suggests that bonded labour had become an important and iconic cultural marker in the local landscape, one that, I argue, the Maoists had to recognize. Moreover, this section suggests that the book also covers some familiar sociological terrain, namely the transformative process from bonded to free wage labour. I hope to show how freed Kamaiya experienced and conceptualized this process and to demonstrate how its outcomes had been forged by the specific political context.

Kailali and its History

Kailali district is situated in the far-western Terai region of Nepal. It covers a total of 3,235 sq. km and borders the Indian State of Uttar Pradesh (UP) as well as the Nepali administrative districts of Kan-

chanpur, Bardiya, Dhoti and Surkhet. The area is divided into the steep and arid slopes of the Sikwali Mountains to the north and flat and fertile lowlands to the south. The main crops here are paddy, wheat and vegetables, though their cultivation is not without risk; during the monsoon period (between June and September), Kailali often witnesses heavy rainfall and severe flooding¹⁵ that can destroy crops and lead to food shortages.

The climate in the district varies between the cold and frost of the winter months from November to February and the hot season from May to September. In 2005 a local weather station recorded the lowest winter temperature as 6.4 °C, while the summer temperature peaked at 40 °C. Rainfall is relatively rare outside the wet season. In 2005, for example, there was between 0 and 87.3 mm of rain in the winter and hot seasons, whereas the rainy season saw between 90.9 and 414.2 mm.

For administrative purposes, Kailali district is divided into forty-two VDCs and two nagar palikas (municipalities). The latter include the administrative headquarters of Dhangadhi to the west of the district and Tikapur in the southeast, close to the Karnali River to the east and the border town of Tikunia to the south.

The district's population is almost exclusively Hindu, though Christians, Muslims (around Dhangadhi and Tikapur) and Buddhists are also present. There were a total of 616,697 inhabitants at the 2001 census (rising to a projected 805,542 in 2008), which far exceeds the total populations found in neighbouring districts. Over the past two decades the population in Kailali has been steadily rising,¹⁶ with an almost three-fold increase between 1981 and 2001. In the same period the population density in the area has nearly tripled from 79.7 people per sq. km to an estimated 249 per sq. km in 2008, due largely to high birth rates, decline in death rates and in-migration. However, these figures are still much lower than for the neighbouring Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, where the population density is approximately 792 people per sq. km.

For most of its recent history, Kailali district had been an isolated jungle area filled with wild animals, such as elephants, tigers and leopards, and remote in relation to Nepal's political centre, Kathmandu. Indeed, before the establishment of the Chichapani Suspension Bridge,¹⁷ which spans the Karnali River in the eastern part of the district, in 1996, Kailali remained cut off from Kathmandu throughout the rainy season due to flooding. Older residents of the district often remember how inhabitants needed up to three days to reach Kathmandu, often having to travel by train through India before re-entering Nepal and catching a bus to the capital.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many people today adhere to the view that Nepal's Kathmandu-based political class historically 'dominated' the region by neglecting to invest in its development. This belief is supported by historical evidence. Initially the government of Nepal had little interest in the region. In 1817, Nepal's government gifted Kailali to the Indian Nawab of Oudh,¹⁸ along with the present-day districts of Kanchanpur, Bardiya and Banke (Whelpton 2005: 43). Only after the assistance of Nepal in the Indian mutiny of 1857–58 were the districts returned to the Kingdom as a gesture of gratitude. This was, as Gellner (2007: 1824) suggests, because 'the British colonialists had allowed the Nepalese state to retain this strip of territory in order to ensure that Nepal was economically viable'. However, as he goes on to explain, 'the Ranas in the nineteenth-century were concerned only with expanding the revenue base, and were not at all interested in what language their tenants spoke. They encouraged settlers to move in from further south with five and ten year tax breaks' (ibid.: 1824).

At first, few settlers were willing to engage in such initiatives, being understandably reluctant to enter an area where malaria was prevalent for much of the year. Only a few Rana Tharu to the west and Kshatriya Tharus to the east lived in the area, working as shifting cultivators or semi-pastoralists in the thick jungles. Being ancient sons of the soil, the Tharus were said to have developed a resistance to malaria and were used to the extreme heat of the hot season between March and October (Fujikura 2007). The deadly malaria kept them isolated in the summer months, while in the winter highland landlords (mainly related to the ruling Rana families) roamed the area.

With the government eradicating malaria in the 1960s, this frontier region of Nepal was opened up to new settlers. There were two distinct streams of colonization. The first wave of immigrants, arriving in the 1960s from Dhang district, were the so-called 'Dhanghaura Tharu'. These were mainly Tharus who fled from the Pahadi influx (McDonaugh 1997) in the hope of finding unregistered and unclaimed pieces of land in the area (Fujikura 2007: 327). However, their dreams of escaping Pahadi domination did not last long; a second wave of immigration (from the adjacent Pahadi districts of Acham and Dhote in Kailali) occurred almost simultaneously. Thus, Fujikura's observation for Dhang applies equally to Kailali:

The rate of immigration by hill people into the Terai accelerated rapidly after the Malaria eradication programme of 1960s. Most of the pahadi migrants were able to obtain and register land in the Terai, and many of the Tharus lost their land. Many contemporary residents of the Terai, both pahadi and Tharu, speak of cheating and coercion involved in this process – as many pahadis use

their literacy and close connections with government officers to their advantage. (Fujikura 2007: 327)

From the 1980s onwards, migration numbers increased, placing significant pressure on the little 80 km wide strip of largely fertile lowland in Kailali district. The region became attractive for new arrivals from all over Nepal, who began to buy land on the basis of property speculation. As a result of the increased influx of immigrants, urbanization processes accelerated, transforming the landscape of the far-western Terai and turning many of the small VDCs along the East-West Highway into semi-urban towns.

Having established the general context of this study, the next section looks at how, over the past two decades, the balance of power in the region has changed. As I demonstrate, this is largely a result of the emergence of the Maoist movement in the area. The Maoists had established themselves in both the villages and towns of the district and began to challenge state power, bringing with them an alternative worldview and an agenda to empower the poor.

Challenging the Balances of Power in Kailali

As part of their nationwide campaign to consolidate their movement during the first phase of the people's war, the Maoists expanded their area of operation to Kailali in the late 1990s. Although it would be speculative to suggest a precise date for the Maoists' arrival, one of their first major activities in the region, as recalled by many educated elites, was the robbery of a private bank in Dhangadhi in 1998. Following the heist, the seven perpetrators sought refuge in a nearby village close to Pahalmanpur VDC, where all but one were subsequently discovered and killed by the local police.

Ever since this incident, the Maoists have continued to expand their organization in the area, operating with the help of guerrilla tactics developed by Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara. While the group was initially said to have enjoyed widespread support among the local population as they sought to outlaw immoral practices such as drinking, gambling and corruption, the escalating violence soon put many people off. This was particularly evident during the second half of the insurgency period between 2001 and 2005, when conflict in the region intensified and Kailali was transformed into a bloody battleground.

Various nongovernmental organizations specializing in conflict-related issues, such as the South Asia Analysis Group (See Annex 1,

INSEC (2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006)) and OHCHR (2012), have documented some of the worst cases of violence in the region. The 'notes' of the South Asia Analysis Group, for instance, list all conflict-related incidents for the period between October 2003 and December 2004 (see Annex). These cases highlight the frequent fighting between Maoists and police, with major clashes occurring almost every month. As the table in the Annex shows for Kailali, Maoists are alleged to have killed police officers and private security personal, looted property, indoctrinated teachers and even abducted about 200 school students.

As in many conflicts, some of the Maoist actions during the insurgency period had a highly symbolic character intended to demonstrate to the state their strength and determination to fight. In Kailali, three attacks were particularly iconic: first, on 11 July 2004 the mayor of Dhangadhi, Dhan Bahadur Bom, was shot dead as he left his office; second, the jeep of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Dheuba was ambushed as it travelled along the Mahendra Highway; and third, four local landlords were beheaded and their heads displayed on a post near the village of Pahalmanpur. Taken together, these three acts suggest that the Maoists wanted to intimidate local state agents.

These symbolic attacks soon came to the attention of international news agencies. In 2005, for example, the BBC issued the following report:

Its [Dhangadhi] mayor was shot dead and it has suffered more insecurity than any other large town in Nepal. Last February, two thousand Maoists stormed its [Dhangadhi] central prison, freeing over one hundred and fifty prisoners including seventy Maoists. Seven guards were killed. (BBC 2005)

But the Maoist attacks on state security forces represented just one dimension of the 'people's war' in Kailali. Simultaneously, the Maoists attempted to change the regional balance of power in at least three distinct ways. First, they seized the property of landlords in the region. As a recent report by the *Kathmandu Post* claims, '[t]he landowners and the local administration say that about 1,300 hectares of land in Kailali is under Maoist control' ('Then or Now, It's All the Same' 2011). According to all parties involved, the land occupied by the Maoists was given to party cadres and landless people. Where there is less consensus, however, is on the matter of the share in income from production. The *Kathmandu Post* article claims that local farmers have to give twelve quintals of rice for each bigha of farmland cultivated, yet it also quotes the Maoist district in charge, who stated that less than twelve quintals of rice will be given to the party.

Second, the Maoists in Kailali also attacked existing state institutions. In Chapter 1 I list various state institutions that were targeted in Tikapur. The town is not exceptional in this regard; in Dhangadhi the state-owned agricultural development bank was attacked, and in some villages Maoists destroyed the village administration offices.

Third, the Kailali Maoists demonstrated their determination to construct parallel institutions. Near Dhangadhi, for instance, a ‘people’s court’ was established that is said to have operated throughout the second half of the insurgency period. Furthermore, as a report by the Crisis Group notes, the Maoists in Kailali operated a small weapons factory that supplied local cadres with arms throughout the insurgency period (ICG 2005: 19).

Through the seizure of property from affluent landlords, the destruction of existing state institutions and the building of new institutions, the Maoists fundamentally altered the local topography of power. Did such efforts continue after the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) between the state and Maoists?

It is important to note that although Maoists promised to return the seized lands to their rightful owners, to stop building parallel courts and to introduce ‘power sharing’ (Falch and Miklian 2008) in Kathmandu, in Kailali few of the changes were actually enacted. The people’s court closed its doors, but land seized during the insurgency remained under Maoist control. Moreover, in accordance with the CPA, four PLA camps were established in Kailali, which served as a constant reminder of the Maoists’ capacity for violence.¹⁹ And as the remainder of this section demonstrates, Maoist-state violence continued, suggesting a continuation of the antagonism between state and Maoists in the ‘post-conflict’ period.²⁰

Let me begin my illustration with the story of a kidnapping that occurred on 25 June 2009 and quickly turned into an issue of national importance. Shuva Chaudhary, the six-year-old grandson of the local industrialist and brick-factory owner Kharna Pratab Rana (KPR), was abducted from his school. According to newspapers and local gossip, his kidnappers had come to the Ganesh Baba Boarding School during the lunch break (around 10 AM) and asked a local teacher for permission to see the brothers Shuva and Laba. When a teacher brought the boys over, the kidnappers offered them cookies and tried to convince them to come along with them. When Laba refused, the kidnappers seized Shuva and sped off on a motorbike. Only later, when Shuva had not returned to the classroom, did his teachers become alarmed. The news spread quickly that the boy had been kidnapped and the police started a search operation. Meanwhile, the kidnappers contacted Shuva’s family via an Indian mobile phone and demanded a

ransom of NR 1.5 million (15,000 Euros). Police, teachers and local residents of the town began to search for Shuva in the nearby forests.

Within two days, the local police inspector Mr Prem Khadka had arrested nine of the kidnapers and brought them to a temporary cell at Tikapur's police station. The police and media published the names of the kidnapers and rumours spread in town that one of the men had been a direct relative of the brick-factory industrialist Kharna Pratab Rana. Shuva had been taken across the Nepali-Indian border by the gang. On the same day, however, the local Tikapur Industrial Chambers of Commerce ordered the shops, businesses and local transport services to close down in town. Members of the local Chambers of Commerce accused the police inspector of not acting appropriately towards the kidnapers. A crowd of about two hundred people began to gather around the police station, demanding that the arrested kidnapers be handed over to them. The police refused, and a battle broke out between local residents, political party activists of various stripes and the local police. Locals began to throw stones at the police station. Shortly after this, the police came out and began to hunt down, beat up and arrest the perpetrators. According to two close Maoist informants, their retaliation was directed mainly against the local Maoists. Among the latter, one man, who went by the nickname Bin Laden, was seriously beaten up by police officers.

This provocative police attack led to a severe crisis. The following morning, local Maoists retaliated against two members of the local police force, who were ambushed by the side of the main road and beaten up. According to one Maoist informant, Mohan, the Maoists called local Young Communist League members to gather their supporters in town. The stage was set for a larger clash between the Maoists and the police force. The local area in-charge informed Maoist district leader Hem Rash Giwali about the incident and demanded immediate action by the DSP (Deputy Superintendent of Police). The DSP, after realizing the severity of the incident, apologized to the Maoists and sacked the local police inspector and several of the other police officers responsible. The story shows that the violent conflict between Maoists and the police continues in the post-conflict period and illustrates the capacity of the Maoists to quickly organize YCL supporters in the region.

The Tharuhat and the Politics of Ethnicity

Another important sociological phenomenon in the region was the formation of a Maoist splinter movement – popularly referred to as

the Tharuhat – following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2006. The movement, which aims ‘to make the revolt of the indigenous people successful’ (SATP 2008: 1),²¹ was founded by Laxman Tharu (aka Roshan), a former People’s Liberation Army Fighter, and gained national media recognition throughout the period of my fieldwork. Specifically, the Tharuhat organized two long-lasting *bandhs* (a form of protest usually associated with shutting down a market) in the first half of 2009,²² during which local activists blocked access to main roads – often violently by burning motorcycles, jeeps and buses – and closed down schools and market places in order to achieve their three main aims: the establishment of an autonomous Tharuhat state; adequate representation of Tharu in the new constitution; and state recognition of Tharu as a distinct ethnic identity (see Housden 2009; Maycock 2011: 85).

According to local Tharuhat activists, Laxman formed the Tharuhat movement after a dispute with senior Maoist cadres, during which he accused them of acting in the interests of high castes. Following this encounter, Laxman resolved to establish his own Maoist splinter group, uniting several ex-PLA soldiers around him and campaigning for broader political support. Throughout the fieldwork period, the movement was said to be most active in the districts of Dhang and Kailali. The latter was widely considered to be the stronghold of the movement, partly because Laxman hailed from the district, but also because of its sizeable Tharu population.

Since its inception, the movement has stressed its capacity for violence. For example, in a press statement in the weekly magazine *Nepali Times* in 2007, Laxman Chaudhary claimed that the group was in possession of armed weapons (*Nepali Times* 2007). By 2008, leading Tharuhat members claimed to be in the process of forming their own army. In fact, as Maycock reports, ‘the Tharuhat ordered four thousand uniforms from a uniform factory in Kathmandu’ (Maycock 2011: 86) in order to establish their own Tharuhat Liberation Army. Within the Nepali media, Laxman’s declaration of his military intentions has been widely discussed, and during my time in Nepal I met several Tharuhat activists who claimed that the Tharuhat Liberation Army really existed and was currently based in the forests of eastern Kailali. Despite being asked by some Tharuhat members whether I could provide military training, none was ever willing to lead me to the alleged army training camps.

The point of significance here, however, is not whether the Tharuhat Liberation Army actually existed, or whether it was just part of the activists’ strategy to gain political clout in the region. What

matters is the much wider question of why the local Maoists tolerated the formation of a splinter group that had the potential – at least theoretically – to undermine their own political power.²³ Of course, it could be argued that given the Nepali Maoists' support of other ethnic movements (See De Sales 2002) there should be no reason to question their tolerance for potential rivals. But I suggest that the case of the Tharuhat is slightly different than that of other ethnic movements; the activities of the Tharuhat were not only considered with great suspicion by some local Maoist cadres, it was also sometimes referred to as a secret agent acting on behalf of royalists and their supporters. This was because the two bandhs organized by the movement in the western Terai led to large fuel shortages in Kathmandu, thus creating popular resentment against the newly elected Maoist government in the capital.

In this light it seems fair to ask why the Maoists tolerated the activities of the Tharuhat, and I suggest that there were several possible reasons for this. First, while the Tharuhat activists claimed that the Maoist movement represented an upper caste interest group, the data presented here contradicts such claims. Although it is true that senior Maoist cadres in Kathmandu hailed largely from high caste backgrounds, in Kailali the political representation of Tharu was quite different. Here, only the district in-charge, Hari Giwali, and the leader of the Maoist-affiliated Tharuwan movement, comrade Archanda, were from a Pahadi background. However, four of the six Maoist CA candidates were Tharu and sons of the soil. This largely contradicts what Tharuhat activists claimed about the 'Bahunness' of the Maoist movement. Second, there were no major skirmishes between the Maoist movement and Tharuhat activists, most likely because at the time of fieldwork there were frequent reports of other splinter groups being formed elsewhere in Nepal, and a serious confrontation between the two movements would have brought the risk of further conflict with one or more of the latter ²⁴ (e.g. with the Limbuwan Liberation Front in Limbuwan). Third, my freed Kamaiya informants were generally opposed to the Tharuhat movement, as they claimed that influential former Kamaiya masters were involved in it, and they would never side with their former masters. Moreover, as shown in Chapter 2, many freed Kamaiya in Tikapur worked in the informal economy and regarded the chance of obtaining *sarkari naukri* (government work) as little more than a pipe dream. For these individuals the Tharuhat activists' promise to provide state-sponsored employment in government and schools lacked credibility compared to the Maoists' pledge to instigate land reform.

These observations afford some fundamental insights into the changing relationship between ethnicity and class in contemporary Nepal. Much has changed since the pre-insurgency period. In terms of life chances, freed Kamaiya – who are almost exclusively from the Tharu community – have more in common with other *garib manche* (poor people), such as the *Sukhumbasi* (landless people who are often from Dalit communities in the hill regions) than they do with members of their own ethnic group. As my informants repeatedly emphasized, in contemporary Kailali there were two distinct types of Tharu: the affluent middle class and the poor. While the former commonly worked as teachers or were members of large landowning families, the latter usually worked in the informal economy and were often former Kamaiya. Thus, there was a pronounced hierarchical class distinction within the Tharu ethnic group. And, at the risk of oversimplifying, it should be noted that it was generally those more fortunate (i.e. middle class) Tharus who supported the Tharuhat movement, while the majority of ex-debt bonded labourers and land-poor Tharus in villages remained sympathetic to the Maoist promises of social transformation and the building of a ‘new Nepal’.

While this might indicate a more general shift from ethnicity to class – and would thus seem to be in line with the general trajectory that Liechty recently suggested for Kathmandu (2003) – this book also demonstrates that ethnicity remains important both in politics and at work. For example, Chapter Two argues that one of the reasons why contemporary business elites organize large-scale festivals in Tikapur is to dampen the cross-sectional appeal of the Maoist and Tharuhat movements by overplaying existing ethnic divisions within the town. Moreover, the chapters on Tikapur’s informal economy (Chapter 2, 6 and 7) demonstrate how one’s ethnic background was crucial to obtaining a job in the region. This was because managers recruited their workforces less on the basis of skill than according to ethnic stereotypes, with different castes and ethnic groups assigned positive or negative attributes (see Chapter 5). But distinctions between different types of Tharu had little salience anymore (see Chapter 2). What mattered was whether one was a Tharu, not whether one was a Dhanghaura or Kshatriya Tharu.

It would be wrong to argue that these general trends suggest something akin to Dumont’s ‘substantialization’ thesis, where castes are transformed from interdependent units in a holistic order into homogenous ethnic groups competing against each other (see Dumont 1970). Instead, what seems to occur is the formation of ethnic blocks accompanied by an ‘increasing differentiation of status, power and

wealth within each caste' (Fuller 1996: 12). As Parry argued, it is this process of 'intra-caste differentiation [that] makes it increasingly difficult to sustain a strong sense of inter-caste difference' (Parry 2007: 485). Thus, this book contends that the Tharuhat movement will most likely fail to unite the Tharu as a homogenous block because it underestimates class differentiations within this ethnic group.

Into the Field

After four months of failing to obtain permission to carry out a long-planned study of one of the Special Economic Zone (SEZs) in Kutch, Gujarat, I arrived in Tikapur on the foggy morning of 28 January 2008. I had come with the intention of spending a few days with a former study-mate and friend who worked for a local small nongovernmental organization in the town. However, this short trip turned out to be the starting point for my eighteen months of fieldwork in Kailali. Upon my arrival, I was introduced to Gyanu, a local-born *Bahun* (Brahmin) and teacher at a prestigious high school in town. He offered me a room to rent in his middle class bungalow in the town centre, where I stayed for the next six months. In conversations with Gyanu, I was intrigued to hear about the freed Kamaiya and how they had begun squatting on the highly symbolic terrain in town during the insurgency period. Our exchanges over dinners aroused my curiosity, and after a period of two weeks I decided to switch field sites from Kutch, Gujarat to Kailali, Nepal.

Over the course of the next eighteen months I carried out research in two phases at various sites, including the town and its rural hinterland, and took two ten-day long trips to India. The first year-long phase of research was spent mainly in Tikapur, where I frequently visited two Kamaiya neighbourhoods (Ganeshnagar and Ramnagar) and followed the activities of their leaders. I joined freed Kamaiya from the bastis at two larger town festivals, socialized with many of the basti inhabitants and witnessed several forms of protest and modes of solidarity of the Mukta Kamaiya Society, which I deal with in Chapters 3, 4 and 6. During this period my primary aim was to gather information on the politics within the town, the freed Kamaiya settlements and the Freed Kamaiya Society.

The first phase of research was followed by five months of observation in a brick factory in the town's rural hinterland, lasting from January 2009 until June 2009. This was broken up by a week-long field trip to Bihar, India, in April and a ten-day excursion to a chicken

factory in Maharashtra, India, in June. Throughout this second phase of my research I was particularly interested in the everyday work of former bonded labourers; I spent substantial amounts of time with freed Kamaiya working in the local construction industry and as rickshaw-walas. Choosing where to be and with whom to socialize was a challenge I faced on a daily basis. I often divided my day into three periods, spending mornings at the brick factory, afternoons with the construction workers and evenings with the rickshaw drivers in the Kamaiya neighbourhoods.

Although these various field sites may appear disconnected, I was following the trajectories of freed Kamaiya living in the neighbourhoods of Tikapur. Given that most anthropologists with a serious interest in the anthropology of labour in South Asia tend to stay at one particular place, this 'multi-sited' (Marcus 1995) approach may seem unusual. By adopting such a method, I exposed myself to the risk of ending up with data that might be shallow and superficial. However, I felt that the variety of work practices in which freed Kamaiya engage in contemporary Nepal should be reflected in my research, and I therefore sought to document their three most common occupations: brick factory work, construction and rickshaw driving. It was to my advantage that the first year of fieldwork in the basti and with the Mukta Kamaiya Samaj had brought me some small fame among the freed bonded labour community in Tikapur and its hinterland. Many of the freed Kamaiya had seen me participating in protest rallies with the FKS or heard about my research before I had even met them, which facilitated access to their places of work.

Among the main interlocutors throughout my fieldwork were the FKS basti leaders Jagdhish Prasad Dhangharua and Daniram Chaudhary (from Ganeshnagar and Ramnagar respectively). Introduced to them by my Brahmin friend Gyanu, they welcomed my plans to conduct 'research' in their settlements and were always very helpful in answering my questions. Visiting the bastis on an almost daily basis, I was also able to spend time with other members of the FKS. Moreover, during the CA elections in April 2008, I met Saikdheja Chaudhary from the UCPN Maoist and FKS when she visited Ganeshnagar. She was thrilled by my interest in the issues faced by freed Kamaiya and over the next few months we developed a friendship. Later I was invited to visit her when she went to work as a CA member in Kathmandu.

Around the same time, I also met Pashubathi Chaudhary, the freed Kamaiya leader. Our first meeting took place at the FKS office in Dhangadhi. Like Saikdheja Chaudhary, Pashubathi was enthusiastic

about my research on freed Kamaiya. He would often stop by my house in town when coming to visit the freed Kamaiya settlements. The fact that I had bought a Yamaha Crux motorbike at the beginning of my fieldwork aided my relationship with Pashubathi, who was the only person in the FKS to own a motorbike (given to him by the Maoist Party). On several occasions during the first year of my research he asked me to drive Saikdheja or Daniram Chaudhary to one of the Freed Kamaiya settlements. Together, we visited the bastis near Lumki, Pahalmanpur and Ranikunda. And by chauffeuring Pashubathi, Saikdheja and Daniram, I was able to demonstrate my support for their movement.

As a result of these friendships, I had extensive access to FKS meetings in the bastis of Tikapur and also participated in various forms of collective action organized by the FKS. In May 2008 the group shut down the municipality building for two days, in November 2008 a five-day series of protests was organized (culminating in a rally in Dhangadhi) and in June 2009 there was a militant protest against local state representatives. As I describe in detail in Chapter 3, I participated in all these actions. Moreover, in September 2008 I witnessed how members of the local elite planned protests for the eviction of freed Kamaiya from the university campus, an event described in Chapter 4.

Although after the first year of research I kept in contact by regularly visiting freed Kamaiya bastis in town and saw FKS leaders informally around the tea and samosa shops in the freed Kamaiya neighbourhoods, by January 2009 I had changed the course of my fieldwork. Gokul, a powerful local businessman with whom I had made friends, opened a brick factory on the town's periphery, with a large part of his workforce being recruited from Ganeshnagar and Ramnagar Kamaiya camps. He invited me to the factory's inauguration ceremony and I asked for permission to visit the factory every so often. While my relationship with Gokul and other industrialists in the area was initially cordial, it soured over time. To avoid trouble, I often visited the factory when Gokul was attending to his other business in town. Even then, I managed to attend on a near-daily basis for the next five months, spending long periods of time socializing with the manager in his office and with workers inside the factory. Among the latter, I became particularly good friends with the brick burners Narayan, Raj Kumar and Kishor, and shortly before the summer season they invited me to travel with them to India. This last part of my fieldwork comprised a ten-day trip to an industrial chicken processing unit on the outskirts of Baramati, India. Here I observed

how former bonded labourers and their descendants entered and experienced an industrial workplace. Their journey was an attempt to escape their poorly paid factory jobs back in Nepal. The last two chapters of this book reflect this course of my fieldwork and discuss the working environment of the brick factory.

Although it was not the main focus of my fieldwork, part of my time in Nepal was dedicated to exploring the role of freed Kamaiya in labour unions. When visiting the union office of the local CUPPEC (Central Union of Plumbers, Painters, Electrical & Construction Workers of Nepal) in May 2008, the union's chairman was at first surprised to hear that an anthropologist was interested in the participation of freed Kamaiya in union activities. But by demonstrating to him my affiliation with a prestigious Western university, I was granted permission to conduct interviews with staff at the local labour union office and to attend meetings of CUPPEC and of a rickshaw-wala union in town. Towards the end of my fieldwork, I also witnessed the organization of a labour union rally in town, an ethnographic description of which forms the core of Chapter 4.

Throughout the fieldwork period, my presence as a young, foreign anthropologist with a broad interest in the region made me highly visible and attracted a lot of attention. To avoid the dilemma of having to side with one particular group, I told everyone that I was interested in the broad social history of the region and the culture of the Tharu. Being aware of the political sensitivity of the times, I introduced myself early in my fieldwork to the local police chief, Mr Kanak Rawl, and paid occasional visits to the local police office to find out about the security situation in the area and also the links between the economic elite and the local police (see Chapter 1). On occasion, I was able to chat further with influential members of the town's economic elite over dinner at a local hotel.

Apart from getting to know Saikdheja through the Kamaiya basti, my access to the local Maoist cadres had been facilitated by a local Maoist who ran a small business. I often went to visit his shop to talk about politics in general. Gradually I developed more quality relationships with the Maoists. What seemed to play a crucial role was not only that I spent so much time with the FKS, but also that my background was German. For instance, after my first interview with local Maoists at the office, I was asked by one of the leaders about my background. I replied that I was from Germany, which brought a smile to the leader's face. 'Germany is the mother of the revolution!', he enthused.

For the first six months of my fieldwork I lived in Gyanu's house in the town centre, but having spent so much time at the freed Kamaiya bastis, I was keen to move in with a family at the camp near the airport. The leader of the basti advised against this, suggesting that I rent one of the small middle-class houses next to the neighbourhood. He told me that their houses were already cramped and it was unnecessary for me to live with them in these conditions. After a while I conceded and settled in a small bungalow next to the camp together with my research assistant, Pushba Chaudhary. Soon, I began to receive visits from freed Kamaiya and my Acchami neighbours; some of these experiences are described in Chapter 2.

My language skills limited access to people, however. While it was easy to speak with government officials, high-caste middle-class residents and some of the local Maoists in English, it took a long time before I could have rudimentary conversations with my interlocutors. To compensate for this deficit, I spent many nights learning Nepali at home, as well as hiring a research assistant, who helped me with the more difficult interviews.

Although for a great deal of my time in Tikapur I rarely conducted interviews and relied almost exclusively on daily participant observation at the various sites described, the research also involved two surveys carried out towards the end of my fieldwork. The first took place in April 2009, when I had planned to survey two freed Kamaiya bastis (see Chapter 2). The second was carried out in May 2009 and focused on wages and debt bondage in the local brick factories (see Chapter 6).

A key task for every ethnographer is to reflect upon whether their field site is representative of a larger area, region or even nation. According to my observations, many of the small towns along the East-West Mahendra Highway in Kailali had freed Kamaiya settlements, though the economic conditions for the inhabitants were worse in camps located in the forest, due to their limited access to the informal economies of nearby urban centres. In fact, the harsh economic and social conditions in these settlements tempted one to argue that the real areas of deprivation in Kailali were such forest slums. I also think that the particular ethnic issue in Tikapur is particular to the region. In Dhanghadi, the Pahadis were largely from Dhote and were said to be less 'cunning' than most people consider the Accami population to be.

One important political aspect that was not centrally considered in this book was the role of the Tharuhat in local politics. Though I met

various Tharuhat members in the pre-CA election period, and visited two local Tharuhat members at various times to gather information, it was beyond the scope of this book to deal with the politics of the Tharuhat more explicitly, but I will return to this subject at several points in the book.

Book Outline

Chapter 1 gives a brief overview of the geographical setting of Tikapur. It then introduces the politics of the town's economic elite by presenting ethnographic accounts of the social organization of two popular town festivals. By focusing on the production and consumption of these two festivals, I argue that such novel events represented sites where the post-conflict urban elite could exercise and enact patronage. By linking the latter to the changing balances of power in the region, I show how the town's elite used patronage of local festivals as a political strategy to re-establish their power base. In contrast, the former bonded labourers experienced these urban festivals both as integration into the urban polity and as exclusion, depending on their class position. This chapter thus seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of local politics in post-conflict Nepal by offering an ethnographic description of how the enduring Maoist legacy continued to wield influence upon local politics.

Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of political action among freed bonded labourers by looking in detail at processes of community formation in one of the five Mukta Kamaiya bastis in town, thereby further highlighting the importance of the political context. More particularly, I examine how the revolutionary context allowed freed bonded labourers to occupy highly symbolic urban territory, and how this, in turn, shaped community politics within the Mukta Kamaiya basti. Through ethnographic accounts of work and politics within one specific settlement, I show how the capture of urban terrain had brought about significant changes in the contemporary work practices of former bonded labourers, as well as in the political subjectivity of pockets of this urban community, and relate these changes to the broader political context. I argue that such territorial capture was facilitated by past antagonism between the UCPN Maoist and the state in the region, and that this – together with subsequent support from non-Maoist NGOs – has partially empowered former bonded labourers. In other words, I contend that the act of capture has enabled former bonded labourers to challenge contemporary urban

spatiality and escape the grips of their former agricultural masters, but that it also led to the formation of a new political elite within the community that pursued a gender-exclusive politics to the detriment of young women. Unravelling these rather unintended corollaries of the Maoist revolution, this chapter seeks to avoid the pitfalls of totalizing approaches that view the impact of revolutions on community formation as either empowering and unifying or destructive and destabilizing.

The Mukta Kamaiya Samaj and the local trade unions were important formal political organizations for freed bonded labourers in Tikapur. Chapter 3 begins by examining the history of the Kamaiya movement, paying close attention to Maoist attitudes towards different Kamaiya organizations. I argue that the Maoists' policy regarding such organizations provided political conditions that benefited the growth of the FKS but were detrimental to BASE. As a result, the Freed Kamaiya Society emerged as a powerful grass-roots movement among ex-debt bonded labourers. Having addressed this issue, I examine the FKS's organizational practices and structure, before giving detailed ethnographic descriptions of two mass protests undertaken by the FKS; namely, a large rally in Dhangadhi and a militant protest in Tikapur. I go on to argue that these represented rituals of confrontation with the state that were intended to make the local government more responsive to the demands of the FKS. As I further explain, they are also emblematic of a struggle for visibility. The penultimate section of this chapter explores how this *andolan* (demonstration) against the state was experienced and comprehended by its participants. Finally, I suggest that the FKS confrontation with local state bodies resonates with the broader UCPN Maoist aim of reforming the local state, but while there is an overlap of interests, both struggles discussed here are seen as operating separately.

Freed bonded labourers also engage in the labour politics of local trade union organizations. In Chapter 4 I give a brief description of the history of Nepal's labour movement and the emergence of Maoist-affiliated unions from the late 1990s onwards. Against this backdrop, I then examine the history and politics of labour unionization in Tikapur. Here, the Maoist movement and non-Maoist-affiliated labour unions co-resided within the boundaries of the town in a symbiotic relationship. I highlight how, while Maoists claimed to represent labour in Tikapur, their actions focused largely on the protection of a specific segment of the town's labour force; Maoists offered political patronage to freed Kamaiya neighbourhoods but neglected other labour issues. This political vacuum surrounding the representation of

labour had instead been filled by two non-Maoist-affiliated labour unions that emerged in the wake of the insurgency period. I document the development of these groups and look at the various forms of collective action they employed, which included strikes, the mediation of labour disputes, monthly union meetings and the institutionalization of collective bargaining procedures. I suggest that an important effect of the new trade unionism in town is the incorporation of freed Kamaiya – and Tharu more generally – into the unions' power structures, as discussed in the final section.

In Chapter 5 I move away from the town to explore the everyday politics of labour that freed bonded labourers experience in a brick kiln in the rural hinterland. I give an ethnographic description of the labour relations and informal work culture found in this factory, and argue that despite radical changes in the local balances of power, work relations had scarcely shifted towards egalitarian solidarity, and that hierarchy remained the core organizational principle, leaving little space for industrial democracy in the workplace. I go on to argue that the perpetuation of these hierarchical relations is related to religious practices and everyday forms of play in the workplace, which served to obscure and disguise the more structural and exploitative relationship between owner and workers. I then outline some of the changes in the daily routine of kiln work in the wake of the Maoist revolution. It is argued that the Maoist rebellion helped to produce a young, mobile and urbanizing working class that in the changed political context felt increasingly secure in claiming new spaces for its own emerging pleasure, pastimes and sociality vis-à-vis existing hierarchies and customs. I further show that there was a broad base for solidarities among more and less skilled people within this proletariat, though such solidarity does not yet seem to reach beyond 'ethnic' and linguistic boundaries.

In Chapter 6 I examine practices of debt bondage that, despite the prohibition of all forms of bonded labour under the Kamaiya Abolition Act of 2001, continued to be a common feature of brick kiln work in Tikapur's hinterland and the district as a whole. But this system of unfree labour was accepted by employers and workers only as long as it remained within certain boundaries. Apart from the economic reasons, the strong political clout of the Maoist movement in the aftermath of the revolution had imposed a limit on the practice of binding labour once again. I then propose that the Maoist movement at that time presented a new structural and moral barrier to the attempts of kiln managers to force adult workers into relations of severe dependency.

Notes

1. Some of the anthropological literature has stressed how people try to continue with everyday life projects in order to cope with the psychological dimensions of armed conflict during and after hostilities. Thus writing on the Mozambican civil war, Stephen Lubkeman (2008) explores how 'culturally-scripted' life projects are realized under the conditions of war (ibid.: 14). Similarly, Ivana Maček's account of the lived experience of ordinary people in war-time Sarajevo in the period between 1992 and 1996 emphasizes how 'a "normal life" was a description of how people wanted to live' (Maček 2009: 5). In contrast, this book stresses how armed conflict can also provide people with both the opportunity and the motivation for a major reorientation of their life projects as discussed in Chapter 2 in more detail.
2. As Ogura (2007: 335) has pointed out, already by 1995 the Maoists had organized two mobilization campaigns in the hilly districts of Rolpa and Rukhum that included the exchange of cadres, performance of revolutionary songs and dances and the construction of roads and schools.
3. The ICG report reads as follows: 'The attack on Beni was well planned and executed on different fronts: for perhaps the first time the Maoists showed that they could use mortars effectively in a classic night-time assault on a fixed defensive position, while their detailed preparations included the commandeering of stretchers and medical supplies and setting up of field medical posts. This was an important military development given the garrison nature of most RNA deployments in rural Nepal. Very few civilians were caught in the carefully executed assault; most had been warned by the Maoists in advance that an attack was in preparation. What most impressed one senior Western military expert was that the Maoists were able at the last minute to bring forward their timetable by 48 hours, "a remarkable feat for any army"' (ICG 2005: 26).
4. According to the Human Rights Watch (2007) 'the Maoists operated a "one family, one child" program whereby each family had to provide a recruit or face severe punishment'.
5. Orin Starn pointed out a similar situation in the Peruvian Andes, where 'for hundreds of anthropologists working in the thriving sub-speciality of Andean Studies, the rise of the Shining Path came as a complete surprise' (Starn 1991: 63).
6. Dillip Simeon (2010) makes a similar point about the nature of the Indian Maoist movement.
7. Nor have more recent ethnographies of post-conflict processes acknowledged the impact on labour practices. Instead, the current trend in the field is to examine local concepts of justice and reconciliation (Viane 2010), debate the impact of conflict on notions of gender (Moran 2010), or demonstrate how the fear of interpersonal persecution creates political leverage in conflict (McGovern 2009).
8. The forty point demand list was subdivided into three categories; namely, demands related to nationalism, to the public and its well-being and to people's lives. The above demand is listed as the first demand related to people's lives, indicating the importance the Maoist leadership originally gave to it.
9. The fact that bonded labour should be a distinct category for Maoist mobilization in Nepal is hardly surprising. Maoist strategy and tactics have primarily been a fight against semi-feudalism and a quintessential marker of semi-feudal relations for the Maoists is bonded labour. Nevertheless, the following two paragraphs are necessary to document briefly how Maoist articulated their support for Kamaiya as a distinct category.
10. BASE (Backward Education Society).
11. INSEC (Informal Sector Service Centre).

12. This is not to belittle the Kamaiya resistance struggles that existed pre-1990. The fine-grained historical work of political sociologist Arjun Karki (2002) lists a number of Kamaiya rebellions against landlords in the western Terai from 1951 onwards that occurred sporadically and ended in the brutal suppression of the agitators, largely because large landowning *jamindars* maintained control over local police organs.
13. Though there is a general tendency amongst scholars to emphasize that the abolishment of the Kamaiya system was an outcome of sustained NGO activism, there are several other dimensions to bear in mind. For instance, the larger political context suggests that the Nepali Congress liberated the Kamaiya to prevent Kamaiya joining the Maoist insurgents en masse. Moreover, the increasing mechanization in agriculture through the use of tractors, fertilizers and irrigation systems suggests that less labour power was in need, suggesting a decline in the Kamaiya system.
14. A report by Anti-Slavery International, for example, quotes one of the workers as he recalls how Shiva Raj Pant physically abused both him and his son: 'As he was bringing them in, one of them lagged behind, and the landlord asked where it was. Although B.R. [his son] said it was coming, Shiva Raj Pantha [*sic*] started beating both of us so hard that our backs were severely bruised for weeks thereafter making it difficult to work. Subsequently, Shiva Raj Pantha forced B.R. to look after the cows for no wages or food' (Anti-Slavery 2000).
15. Locals widely remember the flood catastrophe of 1984 when large parts of Kailali were swamped. More recently, 2006 and 2007 have seen heavy flooding, as well as throughout the period of fieldwork in September 2008.
16. Nepal has conducted a census every ten years since 1911. The census of 1981 counted 257,905 inhabitants in Kailali district, while the census of 1991 counted 417,891.
17. The most significant marker of modernity has been the construction of the East-West Mahendra Highway, and this, as many of the elders in the district recall, came with unusual difficulties. Local legends tell of how the Indian contractors who built the suspension bridge at Chichapani sacrificed a kidnapped girl to the goddess Kali during the construction process, and how, when the bulldozers passed by the Ghora/Ghore lake, they were attacked by a swarm of snakes seeking to protect a local Tharu holy site.
18. The kingdom of Oudh was a province in British India. Together with Agra, it would later be reconstituted as the present-day state of Uttar Pradesh (UP).
19. Kailali is one of seven districts where PLA camps were established. The others are located in Surkhet, Rolpa, Palpa, Kavre, Sindhuli and Ilam (INSEC 2005: 10).
20. As in other conflict regions, it is difficult here to distinguish facts from opinion (see Harriss 2009: 4). The Maoists remain secretive about their past actions and, in cases of brutal murder, are often reluctant to take responsibility. For example, the Bhandeba area of Kailali district came to international attention in June 2005 when OHCHR published a comprehensive investigative report, including site inspection, interviews with witnesses and meetings with relevant authorities (OHCHR 2005: 3). OHCHR notes that during the early hours of June 14 2005, 'a group of assailants entered a cluster of houses one hundred and fifty metres from the APF Badimalika base and abducted six victims. They were marched to a nearby forest area, abused and murdered. They were found with their hands tied behind their backs and the throats had been cut'. It goes on to report that 'no group has claimed responsibility for the incident, and allegations of the CPN (Maoist) involvement have been denied by the CPN (Maoist), principally in a press statement' (OHCHR 2005: 3).
21. As pointed out by Maycock, '[t]he wider Tharuhat movement is mainly composed of the Tharuhat Autonomous State Council (TASC) and Tharuhat Joint Struggle Committee (TJSC)' (Maycock 2011: 80).

22. In Tikapur the first Tharuhat bandh took place from 1 to 12 March 2009. According to a Tharuhat district-level member, more than one hundred motorbikes were burnt in the districts of Kanchanpur, Kailali, Bardiya, Banke and Dhang, and two protesters were shot dead in clashes with the police in Chitwan district. The second mayor bandh took place in May 2009.
23. This question touches upon a much broader theme, namely the 'revolution in the revolution'. James Scott (1979) has developed this concept to highlight that within perceived homogenous communist revolutionary movements there are often groups that have a differing vision of order and justice that threaten the very existence of the revolutionary movement.
24. In the post-insurgency period several Maoist splinter groups were formed that claimed that ethnic demands put forward by the Maoists were mere rhetoric. New ethnic militant movements emerged, such as the Janatantrik Terai Mukti Morcha (JTMM), an armed Madeshi Group, which are united by the principal goal of achieving ethnic autonomous zones. These militant movements could only surface and emerge in the aftermath of the conflict as public security remained weak and local governance could best be described as 'patchy'. The frequently cited 'culture of impunity' enabled these groups to gain ground. Up until 2010, not a single prosecution had been made for war crimes, and such a climate facilitated the growth of militant movements.