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Sticks and Stones: The Strategic Use of Development by the Maoists in the Mobilization of Nepal's Rural Population

Iyla Shornstein
SIT Study Abroad

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Sticks and Stones:
The Strategic Use of Development by the Maoists in the
Mobilization of Nepal's Rural Population

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Abstract

Nepal is a country with a brutal history of endemic domestic conflict and economic inequality. With the majority of the population living below the poverty line, development discourse has been crucial to political discussions for the past 20 years. The advent of the People's War marked a highly significant turn in the history of Nepali politics as the formation of the United Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-M) and the subsequent insurgency that followed brought issues of socio-economic equality and empowerment of marginalized peoples to the forefront of the national agenda. The CPN-M rapidly gained support predominantly in the rural countryside and carried out a violent protracted People's War in order to bring about economic transformation. However, there has been very little socio-economic change since the Maoists gained the majority of seats in the Constituent Assembly despite promises of equality and improved livelihoods throughout the bloody years of the war. This research seeks to demonstrate how the Maoists were able to mobilize the masses and gain political support through the strategic use of development as an incentive for joining the rebellion. After having studied much of the Maoist literature published at the time of the People's War as well as having spoken with several noteworthy Nepali academics, I have provided an in depth analysis of the relationship between the CPN-M and development over time. The research ultimately paints a clear picture of two distinct dichotomies resulting from Maoist political activities in Nepal: between development and destruction and growth and decline. Although the Maoists have continually made promises to further develop Nepal and bring the country into a state of stability and economic prosperity, the social structure

of Nepal remains unchanged and underdeveloped. This research presents an alternative theory for the tactics used by the Maoists to gain political support and how these tactics have affected development activities in Nepal over the past 15 years.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to all the people whose lives were affected by the brutal years of the People's War in Nepal.

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Introduction

The Nepalese society at the beginning of the 21st century is passing through the greatest upheavals in its entire history in the form of the revolutionary People's War of the oppressed classes, regions, nationalities, gender and communities against the outmoded semi-feudal and semi-colonial social order (Dr. Baburam Bhattarai 2003).

Nepal—consistently ranked amongst the poorest and least developed countries in the world—has been brutally scarred by a political history wrought with violence, corruption and conflict. The political events of the past 20 years are of particular significance to the current deadlock persisting within the Constituent Assembly and to the future of development in Nepal. The present situation is such that thousands of development organizations have carved out a political and economic niche for themselves while the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) has struggled to recover from the detrimental effects of the People's War by legitimizing themselves within the political framework of the Nepali government. However, despite the ceasing of gunfire in the early years of the 21st century, Nepal continues to reel under abject poverty, political stalemate, weak economic conditions and widespread, rampant underdevelopment.

The People's War, initiated by the CPN-M in 1996 ultimately laid the foundation for the immediate future of Nepali politics. Nepal continues to be one of the poorest countries in the world with 55 percent of the population falling below the international poverty line of \$1.25 US dollars a day (USAID 2010). A victim of natural disasters, food shortage and poverty, development in Nepal is a both a necessity and a topic of much debate. Additionally, with no legitimate government to speak of, and a Maoist majority in the Constituent Assembly preventing any legislation from being carried out, we must look to the past for

understanding, explanation and to determine a connection between development in Nepal and the CPN-M. Several questions must be raised including: Why is there a Maoist majority in the Constituent Assembly? How were the Maoists able to gain support during the preliminary stages of their political formation? How were they able to mobilize the masses ultimately resulting in a violent insurgency and integration within mainstream Nepali politics? Will the Maoists develop Nepal? All of these questions are important for contextualizing both the importance of development in Nepal and the power of the Maoists within the current political situation.

The intention of this paper is to demonstrate that since the formal inception of the CPN-M political party in 1995, the Maoists have used development as an effective power tool. Promises of elevated livelihoods, improved living conditions, and self-reliant development for all of Nepal were political strategies employed by the Maoists in the preliminary and ensuing years of the People's War for the purposes of mobilizing the masses and co-opting rural peoples, gaining support and ultimately obtaining political power. In other words, I argue that the proclamations of development made by the Maoists were ulterior motives and means for gaining power during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. As we can observe from the current political situation in which the Maoists form the majority of the legislative body, this particular strategy has proven successful. Given these conditions, the interactions between the CPN-Maoists and foreign development agencies are of increasing significance to the current economic and political situation of Nepal which warrants an examination of the past development agendas of the CPN-M, particularly during the time of the insurgency.

Methodology

In order to properly carry out this research and do justice to the proposed topic, it was imperative that I spend ample time familiarizing myself with the historical trajectory of the Maoist movement by reading publications written by and about the Maoists from the past 15 years. In doing so, I was able to determine biases and recognize false promises or exaggerations. Additionally, by looking at several economic growth charts, I was able to further understand the accuracy of many statements and see the reality of many situations. I supplemented my extensive book research with 4 semi-structured detailed interviews with noteworthy Nepali academics and one interview with a Maoist leader. This was both fundamental to my research findings, and also a potential factor that may have altered or limited my findings. By only interviewing scholars, I did not necessarily get the opinions and perspectives of those populations who were either recruited to the Maoist cause or were directly affected (either socially or financially) by the Maoist insurgency. Speaking with laypeople would have added a different dimension to this research and possibly resulted in a different outcome. However, due to issues of practicality, this was not possible as many of these people live in the Western most regions of Nepal. Also, after speaking with several academics, it became clear that I needed to keep consistent with the type of people I was interviewing, or radically change the methodology of my research.

Each interview was semi-structured in that I had prepared a list of fixed questions which were open-ended and meant to prompt discussion. The interviews consisted of a back and forth dialogue between me and the participant.

All interview participants were made to sign a full and informed consent form and were given the option of speaking anonymously or off the record. I recorded the first 3 interviews, but then decided to play a more participatory role in the interviews by conversing more and taking more hand written notes. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, I had expected to encounter some hesitation particularly in my interview with Maoist leader as I figured they would not want to have their interview included in the research paper. However, Maoist leader, Kul Prasad KC was more than complacent and happy to offer insight and opinion on all of my questions.

My research was ultimately limited by the fact that I was only able to interview one Maoist leader. Gaining the Maoist perspective through literature and through discussion are two very different experiences which I believe would have been very complimentary to each other had I been given the opportunity to interview more members of the CPN-M. It proved a very difficult feat to get in touch with individuals who were knowledgeable about this topic, residing in Nepal and willing to meet with me. For these reasons, I was only able to complete 5 extensive interviews. Additionally, I was unable to meet with anyone representing a development agency, but not for lack of trying. I repeatedly contacted several development agencies including USAID, DFID, and the Swiss Agency for International Development, but was never actually able to meet with an individual. I would have loved to have more of a development perspective as it would have contributed greatly to several sections of this paper. Time was also a limiting factor for this research. One month was hardly enough time to complete and in depth analysis of the Maoists and development. Many people I had originally wanted to interview were out of the country and perhaps if I had more

time, I would have been able to arrange a visit to several districts with a strong Maoist presence. Overall, my methodology was very simple as it mainly consisted of desk research. The following sections represent my findings and analysis of the information I was able to retrieve during the research period using the above stated methods.

Research Findings

Defining Development: How to Understand Development in the Context of Nepal

Development in Nepal has been encouraged by the presence of many of foreign aid donors and thousands of do-good nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that have made a permanent niche for themselves in the context of improving the livelihoods of the Nepali people and in so doing, promoting a path towards modernity. According to data from the Social Welfare Commission, updated as recently as August of this year, there are currently 191 international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and 21,285 NGOs registered with the Commission—not including the presence of established branches of foreign aid ministries from various Western countries such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Department for International Development (DFID) from the U.K. (Social Welfare Council Data 2010). Given the sheer volume of development efforts in Nepal, it becomes necessary to draw upon a wide array of various definitions and theories in order to reach a common understanding of how development is to be understood for the purposes of this paper and in the context of Nepal.

Development—a word that bears endless connotations, implications and definitions is also a word that stimulates the intellectual mind and frustrates the

common optimist. It can be defined as a goal and primary concern of Western nations and transnational organizations—a “white man’s burden” of sorts or the “transformation of the poor into the assisted” (Escobar 1995). We can understand it as an industry in which individuals make a profit by spearheading entrepreneurial endeavors and as a sector that employs a vast number of professionals and volunteers. Development can be a process associated with growth and change by which Western powers alter, contribute to and/or involve themselves in the livelihoods of Third World populations. Some say the concept of development dates back to antiquity when Aristotle said, “We begin at the beginning and consider things in the process of their growth (Huntington 1971).” As modernization theory would have it, development can be understood as a process of growth whereby societies are transformed simply from traditional to modern (Huntington 1971). This theory, an incarnation of post-WWII development activities, has created a standard by which to measure development in “The Third World”—standards in accordance with Western values. The dichotomy that modernization theory thus insinuates—that between the traditional and the modern—is just one of the many foundations used to understand the concept of development.

Many of the previously stated modes of approaching development often result in the “infantilization” of the Third World (Escobar 1995) and make it nearly impossible to reach a standard definition that encompasses all of these implied meanings. Thus, many people are often left confused, befuddled and disillusioned with the development process. Therefore, for the purpose of understanding this paper in a coherent manner and within the necessary context of CPN-Maoist ideology, a definition written by prominent Maoist leader Dr.

Baburam Bhattarai will be used. Bhattarai divides development theory into two camps: the Anglo-Saxon scholarship camp of the Neo-Classicists and the Marxist scholarship camp based on historical materialism. The Neo-Classicist camp includes the preceding definitions and theories and “defines development more in terms of economic growth, or as amorphous modernization and views underdevelopment as its opposite, in terms of lack of economic growth or as an original state of backwardness” (Bhattarai 2003). This definition easily insinuates a colonial perspective in which the world is divided into “civilized” and “uncivilized” thus emphasizing the existence of a preexisting and limited development model used by experts and professionals to categorize the Third World (Escobar 1995). The Marxist definition of development, in line with Maoist ideology and used by Dr. Bhattarai for his own personal research, “regards development as a cumulative process of progressive transformation of society to higher formations and sees underdevelopment as the concomitant process of blockage to such transformation or distorted structuration primarily articulated through retrograde internal and external class configurations” (Bhattarai 2003). Development in this way can be simply interpreted to mean the positive transformation or elevation of society often associated with underdevelopment which is the process of being obstructed from doing so by means of class polarization or social immobility.

In discussing development in Nepal, it also becomes important to determine how Nepalis view development in Nepal and see how they understand themselves within the development framework. Stacey Pigg (1992) uses the Nepali word for development, *bikas*, when speaking on this issue in order to draw a unique distinction between the theories and models of development in academia

and development meanings particular to Nepalese society. Before continuing to the next section, I would like provide a brief quote from Dr. Pigg who has conducted numerous studies on development in Nepal that offer insight into the Nepali perspective: “For Nepal, development—rather than the residues and scars of imperialism—is the overt link between it and the West. *Bikas* is the term through which Nepalis understand their relationship to other parts of the world” (Pigg 1992).

What’s Wrong with Nepal? A Maoist Perspective on the Causal Mechanisms of Underdevelopment in Nepal

In order to frame an argument for the Maoist uses of development in the preliminary years of the People’s War, it is first necessary to discuss different perspectives and reasons why Nepal has fallen into Bhattarai’s category of underdevelopment and determine several factors that have hindered the development process in Nepal. Bhattarai (2003) lays claim to the fact that Nepal boasts an extremely unique case of underdevelopment owing to a variety of factors which include; absence of direct colonial rule (semi-colonial experience through British and Independent India); geographic diversity ranging from the tropical terai at an altitude of 100m and the alpine Himalayas serving as the tallest point in the world at more than 8800m; land-locked position between two economic and political giants, or more commonly referred to as a yam between two boulders (India and China); and finally the centuries old feudalistic socio-political system. These are just some of the contributing factors emphasized by Dr. Bhattarai that have affected the “development of underdevelopment” (Bhattarai 2003). On a more ideological, Marxian note, Bhattarai (2003) attributes underdevelopment in Nepal to the non-development of productive

forces, rather than distorted development or development dependent on external powers. In other countries victim to the strains of underdevelopment, the core issues have rather been the failure to realize the productive potentials of society. Another major contributing factor has been the unequal organization of Nepali society and the polarization between rich and poor, rural and urban. These two issues—that of a low level development of productive forces and high levels of economic inequality—are the primary causes of underdevelopment in Nepal, according to Maoist literature (Bhattarai 2003).

The Maoist Insurgency: A Very Brief History

The history of the Maoist presence in Nepal is complex and differs largely both in practice and intention during various time periods of great political significance. A highly momentous political change occurred in 1990 which included the restoration of democracy and the establishment of a multi-party parliamentary system after many years of sudo-democratic monarchical rule. Supposedly, the role of the King was reduced to that of a symbolic figurehead. However the reality of this situation, emphasized strongly by the Maoists, was that the King remained above the law and the monarchy ultimately prevailed although behind the guise of an ambiguously worded constitution (Bhattarai 2002). Prominent Maoist political leader Baburam Bhattarai (2002) explained that in the ensuing years, “the country continued to reel under abject poverty, inequality, dependency and all-round underdevelopment. Acute class exploitation was accompanied by yet more onerous national, regional, gender and caste oppression of the overwhelming majority of the population.” The repressive political responses of the sudo-democracy further disenfranchised and

disillusioned the rural and countryside populations and greatly contributed to the growing support for the Maoists (Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004). This sense of frustration enabled the Maoists to mobilize the population by offering promises of improvement that the current regime failed to provide (Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004).

It was the presence of these conditions that eventually spurred the People's War initiated by the Maoists (CPN-M) in 1996. In February of that year, the Maoists presented a 40 point list of demands to the Nepali Congress. The demands ranged from abolishing the monarchy, restoring economic and social justice, empowering women and Dalits and establishing a constituent assembly (Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004). When the demands were not met with any seriousness, the Maoists went underground and a violent insurgency ensued (Pettigrew and Shneiderman 2004). In an interview with prominent Nepali scholar Dr. Krishna Bhattachan, Bhattachan explained that the rejection of the 40 point demands by the Prime Minister at this time was one of the biggest mistakes in the political history of Nepal and ultimately prompted the beginning of the People's War. Within five years, the Maoists succeeded in mobilizing nearly the entire countryside of Nepal (Bhattarai 2002). The proceeding years were filled with violence, bloodshed and political catastrophe. As C.K. Lal (2001) says, "when the gun starts to speak, verbal communication gets silenced" a prominent theme in Nepali politics for two long decades.

The Maoist Literature and It's Ties to Development

The CPN-Maoist party exhibits a strong history of anti-development sentiment, especially towards efforts made by foreign powers. Dr. Baburam

Bhattarai, a leading ideologue and intellectual of the Maoist movement and former Finance Minister for the Nepali government summarized the Maoist opinion of foreign intervention in Nepali political matters in his reaction to the 2003 peace talks by saying, “most of the rulers of the semi-colonial and dependent third world countries are just the puppets in the hands of their foreign imperialist masters” (Bhattarai 2003). The intensity that this statement espouses is likewise highlighted by several other academics. Jason Hart (2003) argues that there is a concern on the part of the Maoists that international development agencies are simply “agents of imperialism” and a way in which foreign governments are able to position themselves within the Nepali political and developmental arena. Imperialism appears as a constant theme in this literature and in the discussion of the Maoist position on development in Nepal.

In 2003, the CPN-M drafted a document entitled “The Minimum Content of the New Constitution.” Several provisions put forward by the Maoists are directly in line with several definitions of development that I have come across during this research process. For example, one of the provisions demands that education, health and employment be made fundamental rights of the people and free universal basic education and health services should be ensured to all (CPN-M 2003). This is reflective of the Maoist version of development expressed to me by Kul Prasad KC, (more commonly referred to as ‘Sonam’) a politburo member and leader of the Young Communist League (YCL), during an interview when he defined development as having 4 distinct bases which include Education, Health, Housing and Basic Needs/Services (i.e. food, water, etc.). Dr. Janardan Sharma of the Sangam Institute defined development as a series of necessary conditions including social welfare, education, opportunities, basic services and

employment. Additionally, Dev Raj Dahal explained that development must fill two conditions: it must set people free and fulfill basic needs. According to these definitions as well as those stated in the previous sections of this paper, many of the Maoist demands, promises, declarations and publications clearly reflect a desire and determination for development in Nepal.

In the list of 40 point demands submitted to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, several demands reflect development potential including the demand for gender equality and an end to racial exploitation as well as the abolition of the ‘untouchability’ system, the right to education, free healthcare, expression and freedom of press, the guarantee of employment and minimum wage and the provision of drinking water, roads, and electricity (CPN-M 1996). In the interview with Dr. Krishna Bhattachan, he argued that ultimately, because of the 40 point demands, the insurgency was made possible in two ways. Firstly, the Maoists were responsible for bringing these issues of development and inequality into the national agenda. They were able to demonstrate the importance and necessity of solving these kinds of problems. Secondly, upon receiving the 40 demands, Prime Minister Deuba outwardly and blatantly rejected them which Bhattachan says instigated the onset of the People’s War. The fact that the demands were not met with any seriousness further incited the Maoists to take up the arms and formally rebel.

The Strategic Use of Development in the Mobilization of the Masses

Several arguments have been made that the Maoist uprising itself is a direct result of development attempts and activities. Kishor Sharma (2005) claims that the failure of development in Nepal along with the corruption of political

institutions has created a breeding ground for conflict and civil war. As mentioned previously in the works of Seddon and Hussein, development efforts in Nepal dramatically failed to improve the livelihood of the nation's poor and have actually contributed to unemployment, poverty and inequality between the rural and the urban (Hussein and Seddon 2002) (Sharma 2005). These factors contribute greatly to frustration amongst the disadvantaged populations and breeds resentment.

By the time the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in November 2006, the CPN-M had gone from consisting of a few dozen fighters in 1996 to over 50,000 fighters 10 years later (Eck 2010). How and why was this possible? One of the main reasons that the CPN-M had so much success in gaining the support of the rural population was that after the democratic change of 1990, people were optimistic that they would be involved in the political process and it would bring them economic opportunities, equality, and social justice (Joshi 2010). However, as I have previously mentioned, the new regime failed to address the grievances of the rural peoples and neglected the needs of the majority of the population. In their recruitment strategies and in an effort to mobilize the countryside, the Maoists highlighted many justifications for their war on the Nepali state including the prolonged continuation of social and economic inequality, geographic and polarized disparity, poor and corrupt governance and repression of the Nepali people by the state (Eck 2010).

Classical recruitment literature seeks to determine why individuals become motivated to join rebellion movements. The discourse addresses the issue of whether people are more apt to take part in a rebellion for "loot-seeking" reasons or because of their personal grievances (Eck 2010). Other factors that

may motivate an individual to join a rebellion movement include geography, ethnicity, ideology and religion. Kristine Eck (2010) argues that indoctrination and political education were the primary means of successful recruitment by the Maoists. “By linking villagers’ dissatisfaction with their daily lives to larger problems in the political system, the CPN-M was able to exploit grievances for the purpose of rebel recruitment” (Eck 2010). This theory demonstrates how the Maoists were able to expose the poor living conditions and disadvantaged livelihoods of the rural populations. Participation in the insurgency became a viable option for many as the Maoists offered a means of social change through joining the rebellion.

For example, in 1995, the Maoists initiated a year-long campaign to gain the support of the peasant populations of Rolpa, Rukum, and Jajarkot in Western Nepal. Political-cultural teams would visit these districts to organize the peasantry to challenge local authorities and advocate for infrastructure improvement and ultimately gain the political support of these populations (Eck 2010). Other means of recruitment employed by the CPN-M included mass gathering that emphasized the importance of armed struggle and a protracted People’s War for improving the lives of villagers. These gatherings often incorporated the use of cultural performances, songs, and poems to win over the people to the cause of People’s War (Eck 2010). Another means of recruitment consisted of the use of “individual motivators” who would go door-to-door to discuss the grievances of villagers and relate them to the cause of the Maoist movement, thus enlisting the support and gaining the trust of many individuals (Eck 2010). According to Kristine Eck (2010), these campaigns were highly

successful in marketing the Maoist movement to the public by demonstrating the potential benefits of joining the movement.

The CPN-M cleverly linked villager's grievances about their everyday situation with the larger Maoist ideology, attracting recruits by employing local idiom. At the same time it ensured that all members were educated in Maoist ideology, guaranteeing not only commitment to the cause, but also that the diverse individuals which composed the CPN-M were united by this ideology (Eck 2010).

Another way in which development can be linked to the recruitment strategies of the Maoists is through the informal nature of Nepal's economy and the social inequality that naturally stems from this. In an interview with noteworthy Nepali academic, Dev Raj Dahal from the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation Office, Dahal explained to me that the majority of Nepali society and economic functions are based on informal systems and relations as 90 percent of the economy consists of informal subsistence agriculture. While the informal system remains very strong, the formal process has been in a state of deadlock for many years. This ultimately means that the state has been unable to bring the majority of Nepal into the formal modern economy thus further disenfranchising the people and their unequal positions within society. This has forced agriculture workers to rely heavily on the informal sector in order to earn a meager living. One of the ways in which this has manifested itself is through the establishment of informal patron-client relationships in the rural areas. Madhav Joshi (2010) argues that the existence of oppressive patron-client relationships in the rural regions of Nepal further contributed to the grievances of these populations by increasing their dependence on local landed elites.

As Dahal mentioned, a vast majority of Nepal's population is concentrated within subsistence cultivation. Land ownership is a crucial aspect of subsistence agriculture and peasant households, but also an expensive and difficult thing to obtain. Because of the persistence of social inequality and thus inequality in land ownership, many peasant populations were forced to seek the assistance and patronage of the local landed elite (Joshi 2010). The elite were able to provide the peasants with land and other basic services in exchange for a mix of rent, crop shares, free labor and political support by following instructions on who to vote for. This forms the basis of a patron-client relationship in which the bond is kept strong because the loss of a patron would "cast peasants into the pool of landless laborers, devoid of any subsistence securities and exposed to market uncertainties for land, labor and food" (Joshi 2010). Now, how do the Maoists tie in? As mentioned previously, the 1990 political shift to democracy brought no changes to land ownership reforms and social welfare programs, even though these were promises made in the election manifestos of several political parties. As can be imagined, the rural populations involved in clientelistic relationships became further disenfranchised with the political process as they were in a vulnerable position and unable to enact any kind of progressive change through the democratic process (Joshi 2010). The autonomy of peasant political behavior was severely limited and in this way, Joshi (2010) suggests that the Maoists were able to play upon their grievances and propose armed insurgency as "a means to realize people's expectations." Landlords and local elites became quick and easy targets of the Maoist insurgency because they were able to both challenge the feudal state and reduce the costs for the peasants to join the insurgency (Joshi 2010). The clientelistic bonds were destroyed and the local

elites were driven out—replaced by the Maoists who offered promises of land security and debt relief. “The CPN-M made it extremely clear that should they come to power, the peasantry would have access to a multitude of political, economic and social goods currently unavailable to them. Such promises may have outweighed the risks of joining particularly when so many had so little to lose” (Eck 2010).

Moving forward several years to the Constituent Assembly elections of 2006 in which the Maoists gained an overwhelming majority of the Assembly, we must look at the reasons behind their victory after 10 years of brutal war. When observing the details of the election patterns, it is clear that the majority of the population voted for the social, economic and political change that the Maoists promised to bring upon their electoral win. Mahendra Lawoti (2010) argues that this is because the Maoists not only gained the majority of the rural vote, they also succeeded in winning seats in the urban districts of Kathmandu and Lalitpur where elections were have said to be free and fair. Additionally, the Maoists took many votes away from Nepali Congress Party and gained majorities in districts previously devoted to the CPN-UML (Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist) (Lawoti 2010). The population’s realization of their need for change and better services was not necessarily only measured by Maoists gains, but also by the votes received by the Madhesi and indigenous nationalities’ who were also fighting for socio-economic equality and political change (Lawoti 2010).

The seriousness of the Maoists in their goals to empower the Dalits and women was made very clear when they presented the most inclusive list for the First Past the Post (FPTP) elections consisting of Dalits, indigenous nationalities,

Madhesi, women and youth candidates (Lawoti 2010). This kind of activity exemplifies the progressive nature of Maoists and their intentions to empower marginalized populations and can easily be considered a form of social development. “The Maoist win was also helped by their liberal promises. They promised different things to different groups facing discrimination and inequality. In a society of severe inequality and scarcity, hope and promises may have been better than no promises or hope” (Lawoti 2010).

Discussion/Analysis

The Dichotomies between Development and Destruction, Growth and Decline

We have said that ultimately the process of destruction is not only the process of destruction; it is also the process of construction. Without destruction there will not be construction... Like Mao said, people usually think that war is very destructive, war is very bad, it kills people, all these things. But people do not understand that war is a great process of construction. War has a very big cleansing effect. We also try to teach the people and train the cadres to understand this (Prachanda 1999).

The past 15 years of Maoist political history sparks many debates on their intentions and their success and raises several ideological issues. Given my research findings, I think it is clear that the Maoist actions before, during and after the People’s War can be understood through two distinct dichotomies. The first is between development and destruction. As it has been reiterated several times throughout the course of this paper, the Maoists have been very adamant about the need for development in Nepal. They have used development as a strategic way to recruit followers and have used it as the foundation of their political campaigns. In a 1999 interview, former Maoist Prime Minister, Puspa Kamal Dahal (a.k.a. Prachanda) spoke about the need for socialism in bringing

Nepal out of its immobile stage of underdevelopment. He said, “More than 72% of the Nepalese people live below the poverty line. This is a grave situation. We have always explained to the people that nothing can be achieved from this multi-party system—that it is fake, it is imperialist, it is feudal” (Prachanda 1999). This point was reiterated to me by Kul Prasad KC, (more commonly referred to as ‘Sonam’) a politburo member and leader of the Young Communist League (YCL), during an interview when he strongly emphasized that one-party and multi-party systems cannot solve problems of society. Only socialist systems contain the respect and cooperation that is needed to initiate social change. However, despite promises of a new state and an end to social inequality, very little reform was carried out while the Maoists were in power for nine months and very little is being accomplished presently. Additionally, it can be argued that very few improvements were made to the amount of people living below the poverty line and to the provision of basic services for these people.

Social services were drastically affected by the escalation of the People’s War and its subsequent destruction of infrastructure in the 1990s. Because of an increase in defense spending by the government, fewer funds were available for investment in the social sector. By July 2003, the Maoists were responsible for the destruction 1,683 (43%) of Village Development Committee office buildings as well as many police posts, airports, electricity power stations and substations, telecommunication towers and bridges (Lawoti and Pahari 2010). Schools were vandalized and forced to close and the threat of violence and general strikes frightened away many INGO and NGO development programs in rural areas occupied by the Maoists. This blatant attack on Nepal’s infrastructure and development activities exemplifies a dichotomous relationship between the

Maoist dialogue of development and the reality of their destructive actions. In a sense, the People's War actually pushed Nepal further backwards into a state of severe underdevelopment and conflict. According to the above quote from Prachanda, destruction is a necessary precondition of development. However, the failure of the Maoists to enact any kind of social and economic change since their integration into the formal government is a key factor that has been emphasized and reiterated by a multitude of academics, intellectuals and the general population. The Maoists "shook the foundation of Nepal but haven't provided any solutions," says Janardan Sharma; "Rural development discourse has been romanticized by the Maoists...they haven't delivered" says Hari Sharma of the Social Science Baha; "After destruction, what is next? Reconstruction. This is not happening in Nepal. We need a peace process first," says Krishna Bhattachan. The sentiments expressed by these renowned scholars are typical of the frustration felt by many with the failure of the Maoists to live up to their promise to bring about significant socio-economic change, spur development and improve living conditions. They demonstrate the intricate relationship between development and destruction in Nepal as a result of the Maoist presence.

The other dichotomy that can be derived from my research findings is between growth and decline. The primary goal of the People's War was to bring about economic transformation which was also how the insurgency was able to gain so much momentum. However, the impact on Nepal's economy has been undeniably negative and has actually stunted economic growth in Nepal. Between 1987-88 to 1994-95, GDP growth was 4.1%, between 1995-2000 it was at 5% (we can speculate that this is a result from the mobilization of the population during this time), but when the struggle escalated in 2001-2, GDP growth

declined to 2.7% (Lawoti and Pahari 2010). Lawoti and Pahari (2010) attribute this decline to the occurrence of several factors resulting from the People's War. Firstly, tourism declined more than 43% (Perry 2005) during the war as a result of political insecurity and negative publicity; there was disinvestment in the manufacturing and service sectors because of lack of law and order as well as closures and extortions by the insurgents. The Maoists did not pay off their credit for goods taken from the hill regions and thus the capital of many small traders dried up and food security was threatened, many banks were looted and industries destroyed (Lawoti and Pahari 2010) and the economy was subsequently collapsing as exports and foreign aid were cancelled (Perry 2005). "In a country where the average person scrapes by on an income of \$240 a year, many have fled to brothels in Bombay, sweatshops in Southeast Asia and servants' quarters in the Gulf: trade unions say 7 million out of 27 million Nepalis now live abroad" (Perry 2005). As the Maoists continued their campaigns with the intention of bringing the population out of a state of underdevelopment and misery, the economy in fact declined as a direct result of their actions. Again, although Prachanda claimed that destruction and therefore decline were necessary to development and growth, the majority of Nepal still remains in a state of extreme poverty showing no signs of economic improvement, especially with the current stalemate in the Constituent Assembly. "It's almost impossible to fathom what a poorer Nepal would be like, [but] I guess you move from disease to epidemic, and malnutrition to starvation. The best possible scenario is that one of the world's poorest countries just gets poorer" says the Human Rights Watch Deputy Director for Asia, Sam Zarifi in an interview with *Time* magazine (Perry 2005).

The dichotomy between destruction and development and growth and decline are extremely relevant to the ongoing development discourse in Nepal and essential to understanding my research findings. The present political situation has ultimately driven Nepal into a state of stunted development and distorted economic growth. I believe it is essential to address these dichotomies in discussing the future potential of development in Nepal, especially if the Maoists are to remain a majority in the Constituent Assembly. If development is to remain a serious goal of the Nepali government and the CPN-M, these issues of destruction and decline must be recognized. “It is crucial to remember that political mobilization does not automatically translate into economic and resource mobilization. While the CPN-M and others inspired by its success have mobilized sizeable masses and stirred their aspirations, the profile of economic assets and possibilities in Nepal remains unchanged” (Lawoti and Pahari 2010).

Conclusion

Stacy Pigg (1992) says, “Everyone’s tomorrow will (or should) look like some people’s present.” It is this mentality that has spurred so much conflict within the confines of Nepali politics. The need for development in Nepal is made clear by the extreme living conditions of the majority population and Nepal’s international ranking as one of the poorest countries in the world. After the political change of 1990, the Nepali people reached a point of complete frustration and disillusionment with the government and its failure to take action against the social and economic inequality experienced by so many. Thus, the formation of the CPN-M political party occurred at a crucial stage of Nepali political history. The Maoists made clear their intentions to bring about social and

economic transformation by destroying the feudalistic systems and replacing them with a new people's democracy. During the mid-1990s, the Maoists succeeded in mobilizing thousands of people who were disenfranchised from the political process and eager to engage in activities that would improve their livelihoods. The Maoist promises of development were contradictory in that throughout the 10 years of the People's War, the Maoists were responsible for the destruction of infrastructure, the stalled development process, and the further demise of Nepal's economy. The years of violence that ensued contributed greatly to the current state of the Nepali political situation—that of complete dysfunction and deadlock. However, it was ultimately the promise and desire for development, a transition from the traditional to the modern that ignited the flame of the Maoist movement and secured the future of a Maoist political presence in Nepal. The incongruous relationship between what the Maoists said and what they did has precipitated a situation in which once again, the people are frustrated and disillusioned with the political process. Nepal's path towards development has ultimately been hindered by the actions of the Maoists, despite their noble intentions to create an equal and prosperous Nepali society.

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List of interviews

Dr. Dev Raj Dahal, Head Nepal Office
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Office, Sanepa, Lalitpur
November 11 2010, 3:00pm

Dr. Janardan Sharma, Publications Editor.
Sangam Institute Office, Ganeshwor, Kathmandu
November 18 2010, 2:00pm

Dr. Hari Sharma, Member of Executive Committee
Social Science Baha Office, Battisputali, Kathmandu
November 22 2010, 2:00pm

Dr. Krishna Bhattachan, Professor, Academic, Speaker
Bhattachan Residence, Dhobighat, Lalitpur
November 30 2010, 8:00am

Kul Prasad KC (Sonam), Member of CPN-M Politburo, Leader of the Youth
Communist League
Everest Hotel, New Baneshwor, Kathmandu
December 1 2010, 1:00pm

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