Findings from the qualitative literature on wartime violence in rural Nepal

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Comments or suggestions are nonetheless appreciated.

A general timeline has Maoists expanding control incrementally with state forces steadily abandoning the countryside through 2001, followed by state forces' attempting to reclaim the countryside after a state of emergency was declared in late 2001. Qualitative accounts depict the violence endured by villagers as having been unpredictable and inflicted largely by Maoist or state forces who originated from outside the community.[1] Maoist operatives were assigned to work away from their home areas in order to distance them from "traditional pressure groups...formed by kinship or friendship ties" (Lecomte-Tilouine, 2009, 399).[2] Their work included destruction of government installations and arrests, beating, or execution of those suspected of being agents of the state, the goals being to force state agents to withdraw ("make the elephant [state] blind" (Thapa, Ogura and Pettigrew, 2009, 474)) and isolate communities for political reprogramming (Marks, 2003). Accounts by PLA commander Pasang (2008) show a PLA whose units were highly mobile across the country. Attacks on state establishments were designed to maximize "shock" value, and so unpredictability was of paramount importance. Police, armed police, and RNA units were deployed from bases near district headquarters to conduct "search and destroy" missions in the country-side. These missions regularly involved beatings and summary executions of suspected Maoists. Retaliatory killings were common: both Maoists and state forces regularly sought to avenge each death of one's own, often doing so by hunting down civilians accused of working with the other side (Amnesty International, 2002).

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[1]We draw from the field accounts of Amnesty International (2002, 2005*b*), Dixit (2003), Gersony (2003), Pettigrew (2004), Shah and Pettigrew (2009), Thapa (2004, 152-153), and Thapa (2003*b*), and military analysis of Mehta and Lawoti (2010) and Marks (2003).

[2]See also Pettigrew (2004, 274).

Two qualifications to the "violence of external origin" story are in order. Violence that came in from the outside was nonetheless made local through patterns of denunciation reminiscent of Kalyvas (2006)'s stylized account of civil war violence. In addition, things were rather different in the mid-west, especially Rolpa district, where Maoist support was locally established. There, the violence had the character of local politicians fighting each other, perhaps exploiting forces brought in from the outside.[3] Otherwise, though, we found no discussion of armed, locally organized resistance to either Maoist or state forces. A government program started in 2003 to establish local militias to resist Maoist incursions failed.[4] Areas affected by communal violence in the eastern Terrai region that began after the 2006 peace agreement are not part of the current study.

Field accounts describe Maoists as being selective in who they killed, trying to make "examples" out of killings. However, deliberate Maoist killings of non-politically-aligned civilians have been documented, for example, in the enforcement of general strikes, response to resistance to extortion, and enforcement of Maoist social policies like alcohol bans (Amnesty International, 2002). State forces are generally described as acting much more indiscriminately—"distant, terrifying, and unpredictable" (Pettigrew, 2004, 270), characterized by "aloofness and seemingly callous randomness" (Pettigrew and Adhikari, 2009). This was in part due to state forces' apparently poor training, very limited intelligence capacity, a highly fractious political leadership, and absence of mechanisms to hold human rights abusers accountable (Amnesty International, 2002, 2005b; Dixit, 2003; Marks, 2003; Mehta and Lawoti, 2010). Local, state-aligned political personalities used state forces for personal vendettas (Thapa, Ogura and Pettigrew, 2009). Another cause of this indiscriminateness appears to be the uncertainty produced by the Maoists' policy of unilaterally proclaiming that People's Committees had been established in villages, even in places where villagers had made no moves on their own to do so.[5] When Maoists arrived to activate the committees, villagers obeyed as "the only logical choice" given Maoist threats (Gersony, 2003, 71). Maoists defended this policy as necessary to bring villagers out of "false consciousness." But the effect was also to sow confusion for the state forces about the geographic distribution of Maoist support. All locations that hosted People's Committees were at risk of being targeted by state forces, who made little effort to discern whether the People's Committee was an expression of support or something forced upon the village. Locals often puzzled about the decision to target one village rather than another. The sense of being caught "between two stones" sometimes induced despair and anger at both sides (Thapa, 2003b). Other accounts suggest that the indiscriminate violence of the state forces induced villagers to grow closer to Maoists, whether simply to escape the terror or as a result of an evolving appreciation of the Maoists' revolutionary goals (Dixit, 2003; Pettigrew, 2004; International Crisis Group,

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[3]Thapa, Ogura and Pettigrew (2009) describe an exceptional case of violence in a mid-west Maoist stronghold that was propelled at first by police brutality ordered by a local leader competing against the Maoists, which was followed by targeted revenge killings by local Maoists.

[4]Authors' interview with journalist Sudheer Sharma, Kathmandu, January 2009. The program was associated with a 2005 incident of mob violence in the western district of Kapilvastu (International Crisis Group, 2005a; Amnesty International, 2005a).

[5]This policy is described in all of the accounts listed in fn. 1.

2005*b*).

Field accounts tend to emphasize negative effects of violence on social life. Thapa (2003*b*) observes the following about social conditions in violence-affected villages in the Western hills:

> [V]iolence has polarised communities and strained social cohesion to a breaking point. Living under siege, villagers now hesitate to get involved in the affairs of others, or to help neighbors in need, as they once would have. (319)

Pettigrew and Adhikari (2009) visited a Gurung village over many years of the conflict. While the village was not subject to violence itself, neighboring villages had been, and fear pervaded villagers' lives. The authors noted that,

> Outwardly, the idea of a mutually supportive society endured, and in many ways, people were quick to support and assist others. However, people knew that the Maoist surveillance-society was perpetuated by local collusion. People supported each other and betrayed each other. This generated suspicion, mistrust and insecurity. (416)

Despite this emphasis, the field accounts also show that the effects of the violence varied over time and depended on whether a villager saw him- or herself as a likely target. Lecomte-Tilouine (2009) discusses how in the village of Deurali, early exposure to the war and particularly Maoist infiltration resulted in the "atomisation of the society" and a sense of terror (388), but that feeling was subsumed by a sense of the "present...as a mere transition" which then gave way to an elated sense of positive change by 2006. Pettigrew and Adhikari (2009) observe with some surprise that by 2008, villagers had largely "forgotten" their fear and most appeared recovered, contrasting with "assumptions that conflict produces chronic fear impairing individuals" (420). Lawoti and Pahari (2010*a*, 312-314) explain how Maoist violence tended to have a clear target in the caste hierarchy, resulting in lower caste empowerment. Pettigrew and Adhikari (2009) make a similar point, observing that wartime fear of Maoists was most intensely felt among the wealthier and higher castes. State violence did not seem to have had such a clear target, resulting in heightened mistrust of traditional state authorities. Lecomte-Tilouine (2009) discusses how Maoists' selective violence and the state incursions combined to undermine elders' authority while providing avenues for youth empowerment. These accounts highlight how the effects of the violence varied depending on social position: at times liberating for youth and lower caste members, and generally terrifying and a source of distrust for others. Finally, Pettigrew (2004, 279) notes that in the Gurung village,

> Fear has changed residence patterns. Two years ago my friend Gita lived alone, although most nights a relative and her daughter joined her. Now the upstairs of her house is inhabited by a group of young men who are there explicitly to provide a measure of protection, or at the very least a sense of solidarity. (279)

Violence did not merely undo past patterns of cooperation, but in some cases, promoted the innovation of new ones. The qualitative literature clearly portrays the terror that was brought those living in areas affected by violence, but leaves open the question of what might be the lasting effects.

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