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Learning to be Silent: Change, Childhood, and Mental Health in the Maoist Insurgency in Nepal

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INTRODUCTION

On a hot sunny day in the spring of 1995, just weeks after his birth, I rocked Raju in a bamboo cradle on the veranda of his aunt's house and thought about his future.¹ I wondered how much of his life he would live in the Tamu (Gurung)² hill village he was born into and whether he might follow his uncle into the Gurkhas or his father to the United Arab Emirates as a migrant worker.³ As I looked at his tiny sleeping face, I hoped that he would have more options to choose from than those of earlier generations.

¹I am especially indebted to my informants and to 'Ramesh' who assisted me in conducting the research on which this chapter is based. For comments on earlier versions, I am grateful to Sharon Hepburn, Mark Jordans, Brandon Kohrt, Don Messerschmidt, Sara Shneiderman, Deepak Thapa, and the editors of this volume. I would like to thank Mark Jordans for the use of a pictorial scale used at the Center for Victims of Torture, Nepal (CVICT), which I adapted to assess levels of fear. I am grateful to Mecha Gurung and Ocean Gurung for assistance with the translation of Nepali language materials and to Yarjung K. Tamu for advice on Tamu Kyui terms and cultural concepts. A British Academy Small Grant provided financial support.

²'Tamu' is the singular of 'Tamu-mai', the term that the people who are better known as 'Gurungs' apply to themselves when they speak their own language, Tamu Kyui (a Tibeto-Burman language indigenous to the Tamu-mai). As this chapter is based on research carried out in a predominantly Tamu village and conducted primarily through Tamu Kyui, I use the term 'Tamu' throughout. Most conversations in this chapter took place in Tamu Kyui (and non-English words included in the text are Tamu Kyui unless otherwise indicated). I am responsible for translating them into English. Formal interviews conducted in April 2005 took place in Nepali and were translated into English by my research assistants and me.

³All personal and place names are pseudonyms. I have chosen to give the village a Tamu Kyui pseudonym rather than a Nepali one as, although official names are in Nepali, all Tamu villages have a Tamu Kyui name which is always used when speaking Tamu Kyui. Certain ethnographic details have been disguised in this piece in an attempt to protect the identity of my informants.

I imagined that he might, like his brother Dambar, receive part of his education in the city, but I expected him to spend at least his first twelve years in the village. Raju's socialization would follow a similar course to Dambar's, who was his age when I first arrived in 1990. Tamu Kyui would be his first language but once he went to school, he would quickly learn Nepali. At an early age, he would be taught to carry water in a small bamboo basket; would play on the village paths with neighbourhood children and look after the family's animals. I also wondered if tragedy and trauma would influence his life as it does for so many – such as the hazards of monsoon landslides, accidents in the forest, inadequately treated medical conditions or lack of opportunities to match educational achievements.

Raju is now ten years old. He is a shy, obedient little boy who speaks two languages, herds goats and plays mischievously with his friends. Unlike his brother he has grown up during the 'People's War'.⁴ He is, as his mother explains, "Just a year older than the war". In addition to his usual duties, he sometimes sits by the courtyard gate at dusk and acts as a 'sentry' for his mother and *matheba* (elder mother),⁵ to warn them of the arrival of Maoists.⁶ At other times, he goes to a village shop to find out if the insurgents are in the village and if so where they intend to spend the night. He knows how to answer the Maoists' questions and what to say to conceal his family's possessions. Like Dambar, he plays with bamboo 'guns' but rarely pretends to be hunting in the jungle; instead he plays Maoists and soldiers, running around with other children mimicking the combatants he sees in the village on an almost daily basis. His play-group includes girls who carry and shoot 'guns' like the Maoist women who visit. Raju knows the names of a range of military equipment, especially that used by the insur-

⁴The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) declared a 'People's War' in February 1996 and now controls, to a greater or lesser extent, most of rural Nepal. For an overview see Thapa with Sijapati (2003).

⁵Raju's *matheba* – Dhan Kumari – is his grandfather's elder sister's daughter.

⁶Non-aligned villagers interact with various categories of Maoists. As well as the local activists, whom they live beside and may be friendly with, they encounter other party workers and members of the local militia, many of whom will be from other parts of the country. Senior Maoists in the area include the "commander", the political commissar who is responsible for decision-making and policy implementation. Other senior party members visit for specific programmes; some are liked and respected but others less so. Villagers evaluate them primarily on how they treat locals. Groups of the People's Liberation Army visit on a regular basis and stay a night or two when moving through the area. Although Maoists are not always in the village, and sometimes the security forces also visit, locals consider their area to be under Maoist control. When discussing the planned extension to a day-care centre, villagers remarked to me, "We have to get permission from the government. Our government is the Maoists." Permission might also be taken from the relevant office of His Majesty's Government; however, this is considered less imperative because other than teachers, health workers, and occasional patrols by the security forces, representatives of the government no longer have a consistent presence in the area.

gents, and last year I watched him stop digging radishes, and using his hoe as a gun, pretend to spray the ground and walls of the kitchen garden with bullets. More recently, I overheard him make shooting noises while nonchalantly walking along a village path. When he was younger, I watched Raju's mother hit him to teach him the importance of silence, and he is now extra careful to be quiet in certain situations, observing carefully what is going on around him in a manner that is suggestive of a child older than his ten years.

The Anthropology of Children in War

Despite growing interest in the anthropology of war, relatively little ethnographic study has been undertaken during ongoing conflicts (for some exceptions see Nordstrom 1995, 1997, 1998; Olujic 1995; Sluka 1995). The ethnographic material on the wartime experiences of children is similarly limited (for exceptions see Olujic 1998; Povrzanovic 1997; Quesada 1998; and Suárez-Orozco 1987 on civilian children; Dickson-Gómez 2002; and Peters and Richards 1998 on child soldiers; and Boyden and de Berry 2004 on armed conflict and displacement).⁷ Children are both victims and combatants in war. Carelessly discarded bombs injure some; others are killed when their school becomes a battlefield, others play war games mimicking and elaborating what they have seen, and some choose to fight.⁸ Writing about child and youth soldiers Korbin notes that they are

... not only conscripted but they may choose a more active than passive role in the hostilities swirling around them. Some children and youth fight because they believe in the cause, some are conscripted, and some join because they see this as a way to secure survival necessities such as food, water and shelter in the absence of other avenues to obtain these resources. (Korbin 2003: 440)⁹

⁷This follows the general trend as research on the impact of war on children's lives has received minimal attention until recently (Barenbaum, Ruchkin, and Schwab-Stone 2004; Machel 2001). Conducting research on children involves additional ethical considerations, which may have played a role in deterring scholars from studying this topic. Most research, including that of anthropologists, is conducted post-conflict.

⁸Children who play in and around the village are particularly vulnerable to bombs and landmines. For example, in rural Somalia 75 per cent of the injuries incurred from mines were to children aged five to fifteen (ICRC 1994). There are frequent reports in the Nepali media of children killed or injured by bombs or landmines (*Himal* 2003, *The Kathmandu Post* 2003, *Kantipur* 2004, *Nepalnews.com* 2004). While there are no official records of numbers of landmine casualties, the Nepal Campaign to Ban Landmines (NCBL) reported that in 2004, 1,445 people were victims of explosions resulting in 1,056 injuries and 389 deaths. This included 90 children injured and 44 killed. In the first half of 2005, NCBL stated that 406 people were injured by explosions, of whom 52 were children. Those killed numbered 156 including 27 children (NCBL).

⁹There are multiple motivations for joining the Maoists. Some are clearly considered choices,

There is an expanding body of human rights and journalistic literature¹⁰ on the impact of the Maoist 'People's War' on children as either civilians or combatants.¹¹ While this work points to the surface-level impacts of the insurgency on children, an ethnographic study recording the ongoing village level experience can document how the insurgency affects children's daily lives in more depth. This chapter on the impact of the 'People's War' on civilian children from non-aligned families in a Tamu hill village in west central Nepal attempts to address the gap in the literature on children in the conflict. Based on twelve short periods of fieldwork (of between two days and two weeks) carried out in 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005 this piece focuses on three issues.¹² First, it examines the 'culture of terror' that has developed in a village that I refer to as 'Kwei Nasa'. Second, it explores adults' concerns about their children, addressing in particular the steps that caregivers take to protect their children.¹³ While children growing up in the 'People's War' do so within an environment of community-wide conflict-related violence, their lives are framed by pre-existing structures of suffering (*dukha* in Nepali). This piece aims to examine the present situation in the context of existing distress and disadvantage, for

others serendipitous, and still others due to unavoidable contingencies. In addition to the reasons listed by Korbin, Nepali youths join to avenge the death of family members and friends; to address the structural inequalities of gender, caste, poverty, marginalization; because the Maoists provide opportunities, skills and subsistence; because they were under suspicion by the security forces and had few options but to join; in reaction to arrest and torture; because their friends joined; because they found the dancing and rhetoric at propaganda events appealing; they were attracted by the power acquired when carrying a gun; and so on. For further discussion of the motivations of young Tamu-mai for joining the Maoists, see Pettigrew (2003). For a similar discussion on youth motivation in Dolakha district in central eastern Nepal, see Shneiderman and Turin (2004).

¹⁰This literature addresses issues such as the number of child fatalities and injuries, the Maoist abduction and recruitment of children, the detention and torture of children, the need for the combatants to prioritize children's rights, sexual violence against children, the dangers of exposure to land mines, children from displaced families, the traumatization of children exposed to fighting, and the impact on education (see Amnesty International [2005]; CWIN [2004]; Human Rights Watch [2004]; Watchlist [2005]; Basnet [2004]). There is also a literature aimed at children (see HimRights 2005).

¹¹The Maoists and the government both deny the recruitment and use of children. It is difficult to obtain estimates, but it is widely believed that approximately 30 per cent of the combatants are youths (SAIR 2004). When meeting the Maoists it is obvious that significant numbers are under eighteen, a fact that those asked do not deny. On the basis of personal experience I suggest that the numbers are higher. There are numerous stories of the security forces using children as informants, couriers, and messengers. The government insists that it is not possible to join the Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) until aged over eighteen, however, it is possible to enlist at age fifteen in order to follow military training (Watchlist 2005: 37).

¹²This research builds on earlier work which stretches back to 1990.

¹³My main informants are predominantly middle-aged, middle-income Tamu women. The perspectives contained within this piece are primarily, but not exclusively, those of members of this group.

example, poverty, inadequate healthcare, and poor educational opportunities.¹⁴ Third, it considers children's interpretations and representations of Maoists and explores how the ongoing presence of the insurgents and their activities influence the day-to-day lives of village children. The chapter ends with preliminary comments on the impact of the insurgency on child development and mental health in general.¹⁵

Methodology

As the focus of this account is more on adults' concerns about their children, rather than children's experiences from their own perspectives, most of the data is based on participant observation and on informal and formal interviews (including eighty-five interviews on the impact of the conflict conducted in April 2005) with adult caregivers. The chapter includes some informal observational data on the children of my closest informants including those in the house I live in during fieldwork and in two neighbouring houses. Interviews were not conducted with children but two directed questions ("What do you think of the Maoists?" and "Do Maoists talk to you?") were asked to four children while participating in a shared activity. An additional question ("Have the Maoists asked you what you have in your house?") was asked of one child during a conversation with his mother where he was present (for a more detailed discussion on the general approaches used in conducting anthropological fieldwork in the Maoist insurgency see Pettigrew, Shneiderman, and Harper 2004).¹⁶

'Cultures of Terror'

The 'culture of terror' model is one of the main current anthropological approaches for the study of political violence (Taussig 1987, 1992; Green 1995; Suárez-Orozco 1987).¹⁷ Michael Taussig – whose early ideas writers

¹⁴Violence has a long history in Nepal, which includes the violence of exclusion on the basis of caste, gender, class, or ethnicity; poverty and inadequate health care; poor educational opportunities or employment opportunities; and state-perpetrated violence such as the use of torture. What is new is community-wide conflict-related violence. The term 'structural violence' is frequently used to refer to these types of suffering; however, I have chosen to use the Nepali word *dukha* (suffering, trouble, hardship, pain) as it is the term used by locals to refer to these hardships and disadvantages.

¹⁵Although the security forces visit Kwei Nasa they do so rarely, so this chapter is primarily concerned with villager-Maoist interrelationships (for a discussion of villager-army relationships, see Pettigrew 2004).

¹⁶For discussions of conducting research on children in conflict, see Eyber and Ager (2004), Utas (2004), and Boyden (2004).

¹⁷I have reservations about the term 'culture of terror' because I consider it to be an imprecise term which requires further definition. Furthermore, it over privileges 'terror' at the expense of 'normality'. Despite my concerns, I retain it as I feel that it provides a useful framework within which to analyse what is going on in rural Nepal. For a critique, see Margold (1999).

such as Green, Sluka, and Suárez-Orozco have further developed – states that where political torture and murder become endemic, ‘cultures of terror’ flourish. Sluka suggests that “A culture of terror establishes ‘collective fear’ as a brutal means of social control ... When fear becomes a way of life ... a culture of terror has emerged” (2000: 22).¹⁸

‘Cultures of terror’, Suárez-Orozco states, have their “own vocabulary and grammar, cultural facts and artefacts”. The vocabulary he discovered during research in Argentina, included words such as ‘disappeared’, ‘torture centres’, ‘torture rooms’, and ‘electric prods’ (1992: 240). A central aim of this chapter is to consider the ‘culture of terror’ as experienced in Kwei Nasa. In Kwei Nasa, as elsewhere in rural Nepal, daily life is lived in a ‘shadow of fear’.¹⁹ Prem Kumari, a fifty-year-old villager, sums up the situation:

There is nowhere safe. Maoists come and ask for food and shelter at any time. They do not think about night or day or our daily tasks, they interrupt us at any time. No matter what they ask for, we have to give it, since otherwise, they can do anything to us. When they arrive, we are in danger in case the army visits and when they leave we are in danger if the army finds out that they have been in our houses. The army accuses us of being Maoist supporters and ... shout and threaten us. In nearby villages, they have even hit women. If the army comes while the Maoists are not here then we worry about the return of the Maoists since they can accuse us of spying. ... We also worry about bombs and landmines. These are dangerous things that children might unknowingly pick up and play with or that we might step on in the forest.

While the activities of everyday life, such as working in the fields, preparing food, going to school, walking to town, visiting relatives, playing, eating or sleeping, continue to occupy most people’s daily lives in rural Nepal, at any moment a familiar routine can be pierced by unexpected terror and violence. Violence, as one of Linda Green’s Guatemalan informants explained, is, “... like fire, it can flare up suddenly and burn you” (Green 1995: 109). A Kwei Nasa neighbour, Padam Sobha, referring to fear, explains:

¹⁸Sluka is referring here to state terror. However, his ideas can be applied equally well to an insurgency where civilians are exposed to the terror of both parties to the conflict.

¹⁹The Tamu Kyui term for fear is *nghiba* and the word for terrified is *nghinghingan*. The latter, however, is not widely used (except by some elderly people) and instead most people use the word *the* [very] *nghiba* to describe extreme fear. When people stated they were *the nghiba* I translated this into English as ‘very frightened’, and when they stated that they were *the, the nghiba*, I translated this as ‘terrified’. In formal interviews conducted in Nepali in April 2005, I used the Nepali term *dar* for fear and the words *dherai dar lageko* for ‘very frightened’ and *besari dar lageko* for ‘terrified’.

You can't say when you will be frightened. It all depends on the situation. Sometimes there is 100% fear and I feel sweaty, shaky, my heart beats fast and my stomach feels sick. At other times, there is no fear and then sometimes there is a little bit of fear. I am 100% frightened, especially at night and when walking to and from the town or another village. I don't often feel like this during the day but you can't say when you will be frightened.

Green suggests that "... with repetitiveness and familiarity people learn to accommodate themselves to terror and fear". Fear becomes routinized. Over the last few years, many people have told me that they have become used to their unusual circumstances. Curfews, army check posts, the militarization of life in Nepal, and living with the Maoists have all become habitual. Padam Sobha continues "I was very frightened when the Maoists first came. I could not look at them without feeling terrified. Now I see them every day and most of the time I am not frightened. I am used to them." During recent interviews with eighty-five people on the impact of the conflict, many reported that while they remain frightened, familiarity with the situation has led to a decrease in fear. The majority of the time, people's greatest fears are not realized, such as death, abduction, or injury to themselves or their families, but the possibility is always there. The potential always exists for punishment for actions interpreted or re-interpreted as unacceptable. For example, villagers are sometimes permitted by the Maoists to make and openly sell alcohol, and at other times they are not. In general, experience shows that if the villagers do as the Maoists request, they are unlikely to be harmed.²⁰ The fear of being caught in the crossfire is ever present, but it is to an extent 'a fear in the back of the mind', since to date, although some people have had close escapes, it has not happened in this village.²¹

Comments about not being frightened are a reflection of what people feel, but at other times they are part of a process of denial.²² Sometimes the risks are so great, the options for escape so small, and people so terrified, that to go on they tell themselves and others that they are not frightened. During late 2002, when large numbers of the Maoist People's Liberation Army (PLA) were regularly in the village, a village woman, who knows some English and referred to the PLA using the English words 'Red Army', said to me, "When you were here in the monsoon we were frightened of

²⁰Problems occur when the demands are excessive. In early 2005, Maoists killed an ex-Indian Army officer in a neighbouring village when he did not pay the large 'donation' requested.

²¹People in neighbouring villages have been injured in crossfire and others killed when the security forces erroneously thought them to be Maoists.

²²There are multiple motivations for denial, including pride and the desire to appear to keep the 'heartmind' 'smooth' (see below).

them. Now we are not frightened. We had 400 of the Red Army stay and we are not frightened any longer.” While familiarity had apparently decreased her fear, or so she said, she was in fact terrified. Struggling to manage the situation, she convinced, or attempted to convince herself and others, that she was not frightened. When she heard that a very large group of insurgents had arrived in the village, she was clearly terrified and became panicky, shouting angrily and rudely at others. Afterwards she admitted that she was extremely frightened.²³

Socialization to terror enables people to survive in extreme situations. It is not possible to live in a constant state of alertness, so feelings of fear and chaos diffuse throughout the body but surface in dreams, bodily aches and pains, anxiety, denial, changed social relationships, illness, and behaviours such as increased alcohol consumption. Green notes that the routinization of terror “... allows people to live in a chronic state of fear with a façade of normalcy at the same time that terror permeates and shreds the social fabric” (1995: 108). A veneer of normality masks the fear that is never far away and normal abnormality best describes the situation.

KWEI NASA IN THE ‘PEOPLE’S WAR’

Kwei Nasa is a large village of several hundred households located along the upper slopes and top of a ridge in the Himalayan foothills. It contains a health post, rice mill, post office, teashops that serve as general-purpose stores, and a kerosene distribution centre, but it has no electricity. Although most villagers are Tamu, Kwei Nasa is a mixed community which includes Dalits, and in nearby hamlets Brahmans, Chetris, and small numbers of Tamangs and Magars.²⁴ The primary occupation is farming and the staple crop is rice, but maize and millet are also grown. Many villagers have relatives in foreign armies or working overseas and remittances make a

²³There are many reasons why people become terrified. In most cases, it is because they fear being caught in crossfire, or fear accusations and punishment from either side, or fear the abduction of family members. They are especially frightened of the security forces who do not usually have local connections like the Maoists, and are considered liable to “kill you easily”. On this particular occasion, Dhan Kumari was frightened because she thought that my assistant and I might be accused by the Maoists of being spies. Other people did not evaluate this risk in the same way and felt that Dhan Kumari was exaggerating the danger. Dhan Kumari’s fears must be considered in the wider context of her life as she feels very vulnerable (she is in her early sixties and her parents are dead; she is by choice unmarried, lives virtually alone, is often unwell, and has a medical history of anxiety). The topic of fear in general has received inadequate attention in anthropology. For an exception, see Green (1995).

²⁴The Dalits are mainly Damai (Tailors) and Kami (Blacksmiths). Both groups are considered ‘untouchable’.

significant contribution to the local economy.²⁵ Stretching below the village on either side of the ridge are the steeply terraced fields, some close to the village but others up to an hour's walk away. Agricultural work involves steep climbs and descents and long walks with heavy loads. Most consumer goods that people use come from the town.²⁶ Vegetables sellers visit each week and other merchants come less regularly to sell dry goods, glass bangles, and sundry items. In the winter months traders from the north sell herbs and turquoise and coral beads. For everything else people make shopping trips to the urban centre which is less than a day's walk away.

When I arrived in Kwei Nasa in the summer of 2002, it had been two years since I visited the village. At the time of a previous trip in 2000, Maoists were coming into the villages for 'donations' and guns and to give propaganda speeches and cultural programmes.²⁷ Interviews with middle-aged and older people revealed two recurring themes, their reluctance to believe that Tamu youth joined the Maoists and their surprise when they discovered women's participation. The Maoists had also become a catalyst that brought pre-existing unexpressed concerns to the surface. Talking about the guerrillas provided an indirect way of talking about conflict between neighbours and kin, and the fears associated with these conflicts (Pettigrew 2003). By 2001 a Maoist training camp was established in the area and stories proliferated about the comings and goings of the insurgents who operated openly in the area. The 'People's War' reached a new height in November 2001, when the Maoists withdrew from a several-month-long ceasefire and initiated a series of attacks across the country including ones targeted at Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) barracks. This confrontation marked a departure, since for the first time the Maoists directly challenged the army rather than just the police. In response, then Prime Minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, imposed a State of Emergency, which effectively suspended most civil rights and for the first time deployed the army to fight the insurgents.

I returned to Kwei Nasa towards the end of a hot monsoon afternoon in July 2002. At first glance, things looked very much as before: women washing at the tap, children playing by the buffalo pond, a group of people clustered in the tea shop. As I approached, I was surprised to see so many unfamiliar faces; young men and women I had never seen in the village before. This is hardly surprising, I told myself, as I have been away for some time and as the first tea shop in the village, this place tends to attract

²⁵ Particularly in the Gurkha Brigade of the British Army and in the Indian Army. The largest proportion of those outside the country are migrant workers employed in India, the Gulf states, East Asia or South-East Asia.

²⁶ In an attempt to maintain anonymity I have chosen not to name this nearby urban centre.

²⁷ I place 'donations' in inverted commas as giving is compulsory.

visitors. I called out a greeting and the three casually dressed young men standing at the door replied. As I rounded the corner into the main street the usual collection of teenage boys were playing basketball, watched by a group of younger children standing on the sidelines, too little to be allowed to join in. “You’ve come,” someone shouted out. “I have come,” I replied in the informal way of Tamu greeting. I continued my journey through the village, stopping briefly to say hello at water taps and across the walls of courtyards. I noticed that Krishna Maya’s tea shop was boarded up but otherwise things looked much as they did when I first visited twelve years before.

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

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

She stopped abruptly and tensed as we heard footsteps outside. “Stop talking,” she said. “I don’t know who it is.” Dhan Kumari was notably relieved when she discovered that it was a neighbour. “Where are they? How many are there?” She asked him. “There are five,” he replied. “Three men and two women – they have forced *Pade* [the president of one of the village women’s committees] to open the committee house and that is where they are going to sleep tonight.”²⁸ Dhan Kumari turned to me and commented:

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

On the second morning of my stay, I visited a tea shop to chat with the owner. It was midday and as most people were out in the fields we were alone except for her youngest daughter who was playing on the ground in

²⁸*Pade* is a Tamu kinship term meaning ‘second daughter’.

front of us making a ‘tea shop’ out of stones, sweet wrappings, and match sticks. In hushed tones, Durga told me about the visit of the Maoists to her shop the previous week:

In the early evening a group arrived. They were heavily armed and they wore belts with bullets around their waists. One of the girls was very young – she couldn’t have been more than thirteen. It upset me to look at her as she was about the same age as my eldest daughter. I am so glad that I sent Nani [eldest daughter] to live with my relatives in the town so there is no chance that the Maoists will forcibly recruit her. The leader of the group told me that they wanted food and to stay the night. I told them that I could feed them but I pleaded with them not to sleep in the house. I said, “If you stay here and the army arrives then all my family will be killed.” One of them laughed and replied, “Then we’ll die together.” I begged them not to stay and they left after they had eaten.

She stopped talking briefly, and looking at her little girl, commented:

It is hard to keep children safe nowadays. I have sent Nani to the town but can I protect Kaji [youngest daughter]? She is still little and does not understand and I am worried about her picking up bombs that the Maoists might leave behind. Recently they had bomb-making equipment in a house in our hamlet. One of them was reading by candlelight, she fell asleep, and the candle caught fire. She only woke up when her hair caught fire. They put the fire out but if she had not awakened, then there would have been a terrible explosion and everyone in the house and maybe even the area would have been killed or injured.

The next day we went to the lower secondary school to meet the teachers.²⁹ They give 2 per cent of their monthly salary to the Maoists and at the yearly festival of Dasain, they give 20 per cent.³⁰ “If we don’t,” an experienced middle-aged teacher stated, “they will hit us, kill us or break our

²⁹The school is for classes one to eight. Classes nine and ten are held in the high school, which is an hour’s walk away. Teachers and health workers are the only government employees still working in the villages and are vulnerable to threats and intimidation from both sides. Because of historical links between teachers and left-wing ideology, the security forces suspect them of being Maoist activists while the Maoists may consider them government spies. Caught between the demands of the Maoists to comply with their requests, and the demands of the security forces not to do so, they face extreme pressures.

³⁰Teachers are required to give a proportion of their salary to the Maoists. How much they give varies but is often between 5 per cent and 15 per cent. Previously those in Kwei Nasa were giving a higher percentage. Teachers, however, are frequently reluctant to reveal how much they give and sometimes deny or downplay the amount demanded.

legs.” In November 2003, the Maoists punished the science teacher at the high school for openly criticizing them. His face was blackened and a garland of shoes placed around his neck. One of the teachers commented: “We were forced to go there [to watch the punishment], but we couldn’t watch, and so we turned away and didn’t look.” The teacher still works in school, but was frightened and colleagues wondered how much longer he would continue to teach in the area.³¹ The school does not always close when there is a Maoist-called *bandh* (general strike) in the region but if they are asked by the insurgents to do so, the teachers comply.³² The District Education Office told the teachers not to take risks and so the headmaster commented, “Even if one Maoist comes and asks us to close, then we close.”³³ He continued:

We teachers are brave as we have to deal with the Maoists. We are used to them as they come often to the school with their guns. We are also used to dealing with the security forces and their threats. In the past, the security forces threatened the teachers and forced us to cross out the slogans written by the Maoists. This put us at risk but now they do not do this. Recently some Maoists from the student wing came and told us to gather the students and they made a speech about the work of the student wing. One of them was a past student in this school. Nowadays if students are behaving badly and making a disturbance or not attending, it is difficult to control them because they might take revenge by joining the Maoists and returning to the school and giving us trouble. One boy passed class six but did not progress to class seven. Some time later, we saw him and asked him what he was doing. He replied, “Sir, I am with the Maoists now and have studied more than you have.” They are not presently asking students directly to join them but they put them under indirect pressure to join.

Sometimes it is impossible to hold classes as the insurgents requisition the school building for cultural programmes. This puts the children and teachers at great risk should the security forces arrive.³⁴

³¹This conversation took place towards the end of 2004. By spring 2005 he had left his post and the area.

³²During a *bandh*, commercial and other services must shut down for a specified period. *Bandhs* are enforced by the threat of violence.

³³Despite the comments of the Kwei Nasa headmaster stating that they are supported by the District Education Office, this is often not the case.

³⁴Despite repeated calls by NGOs, INGOs, donors, and humanitarian organizations to respect schools as zones of peace, both sides requisition educational facilities. Maoist events are commonly held in schools (for a discussion of Maoist use of schools in Dolakha district, see Shneiderman and Turin 2004). Schools are usually the only large complexes (containing buildings and a flat courtyard/playground) in a village and are often strategically positioned on

The outside walls of the school and the nearby day-care centre are covered with Maoist slogans, and in the school grounds three out-of-district labourers were badly beaten by Maoist party workers who wrongly accused them of being thieves. As in other parts of rural Nepal, the children draw helicopters, guns and socket bombs and talk about the difference between the equipment of the security forces and those of the Maoists. They know who the local Maoist commander is and how he escaped capture by the security forces by dressing as a woman.

Children who attend the high school feel particularly vulnerable as they walk to and from school partly through a forest. An eighteen-year-old girl commented:

Sometimes I am frightened to wear my school uniform as when the Maoists see it they know I am a student. They tried to get me to join their student wing but I did not join. I am so frightened that they will take me. Sometimes when we reach school there is no class and we have to go to meetings. We can't study and as I am doing my SLC (School Leaving Certificate) this year I am worried.

Another girl of the same age, who has a long history of activism, stated that prior to the escalation of the conflict she was the chairperson of the Maoist student wing. She participated in many programmes in the school and at one stage wrote a letter to the school administration requesting additional resources, which they provided. Her family members became angry, upset and frightened about her involvement, which made her fearful, and she resigned. Although no longer involved in the movement she is frightened of both parties to the conflict and feels vulnerable to the threats and intimidation of both.

One April morning, during the ceasefire of 2003, I accompanied a group of children to collect berries and edible ferns. As we searched along the banks of a dry stream bed I asked them what they thought of the Maoists. Raju and his friend Krishna were silent and Krishna looked uncomfortable. I repeated the question before Raju replied quietly, "We don't like them," and when asked why, he replied, in a whisper, "Because they have guns and they kill people", but then quickly added the comment widely cited by adults and children alike that "Maoists don't hurt villag-

top of ridges. Holding meetings or cultural (dance and drama) programmes at schools is potentially a good source of recruitment as well as providing a medium through which Maoist educational ideology can be promoted. Because of this, schools are prone to becoming battlefields. In a particularly disturbing incident in Doti district, four students were killed and five injured by the security forces during a clash with the insurgents, which occurred during a Maoist cultural programme (Amnesty International 2005; Basnet 2004; Watchlist 2005). For additional material on education in the conflict, the National Coalition for Children as Zones of Peace (CZOP) and the responses of NGOs and INGOs, etc., see cwin.org.np and savethechildren.org/countries/asia/nepal.asp.

ers.”³⁵ Several other eight- to ten-year-olds questioned separately gave the same reply and some answered only in monosyllables. I asked a Dalit girl who initially stated: “I’m not frightened of them,” but then said, “Yes, I am frightened because they have guns.” A slightly older girl stated: “We shouldn’t be frightened of them. If they know we are frightened they can give us more trouble.” I asked the children if the Maoists talked to them and the Dalit children said, “No, they just talk to the big people,” but the Tamu children said “Yes”, and explained that they had been asked questions like, “Are there guns in your house?” The children always replied that there were none, which in most cases was true as family guns (for hunting) were hidden or had already been requisitioned by the insurgents.

Aside from the ubiquitous Maoist slogans, Kwei Nasa appears much as before the escalation of the conflict and in many ways it *is* much as before.³⁶ Each day villagers get up, work in the fields, eat, go to school, visit each other’s homes, play on the paths, plan weddings and funerals, visit the health post, and walk to town. In public places, conversations are about everyday matters: people meet and discuss who has married, who has gone overseas for work, who has died, arrangements are made to work together and the cost of the expansion to the day-care centre is discussed. The women chatting and washing the mud off their legs at the village tap after a day of work in the fields pay no outward attention to the armed insurgents sitting listening to the radio just yards away. The small group of children playing at the bottom of the steps outside the shop ignore the young Maoist who requests supplies from the shopkeeper.³⁷ The villagers seem to be used to living with the insurgents.

Yet this apparent normality is also a façade. There is another side of Kwei Nasa where fear is communicated and people struggle to use what strategies they can to cope with their changed environment. Inside homes, adults talk together in hushed tones and children seated beside the fire listen in silence. Children of Raju’s age are fully aware of the concept of *norbe ta* (‘inner’ or secret talk)³⁸. In the past, such discussion mainly

³⁵This was both a denial and an acknowledgement of reality. By early 2003, Maoists had beaten visiting labourers in the village but had not physically harmed villagers.

³⁶Although the slogans were originally painted by the Maoists, in a couple of places they have been crossed out by the security forces and derogatory terms referring to the soldiers replaced with derogatory terms referring to the insurgents.

³⁷Maoists usually pay for items they buy at village shops, but sometimes they do not. For example, they sometimes demand ‘donations’ of rice from villagers and this includes shop-owners. It is not always clear why items are sometimes paid for and at other times not. Neither is it clear if demanding ‘donations’ of foodstuffs at particular times is party policy or individual whim, as some cadres occasionally act outside the official party line.

³⁸*Norbe ta*, which translates literally as ‘inner talk’, is a Tamu Kyui term and is always conducted in that language. It refers to things that are to be kept in one’s ‘heartmind’ (see below).

concerned private family matters. Nowadays this expanded concept includes friends, neighbours and other villagers – people who need to know about the movement of either side in order to keep safe. Seated around the fire, adults discuss which part of the village the Maoists are in and wonder about future visits to their hamlet. They question why certain parts of the village are frequently targeted and others not – which is likely to do with geographical proximity to potential escape routes. Throughout my visits this ‘tracking’ of the Maoists continued, with villagers quietly passing information to family, friends, and neighbours about the presence and movements or anticipated movements of the insurgents. Information is passed verbally using code words; for example, the Maoists are usually referred to using certain indirect terms.³⁹ What is important is that the term used is polite should the insurgents discover what it is. In public places information is passed via surreptitious glances, raises of the eyebrows, minute movements of the eyes, inclinations of the head or by referring to the movements of ‘animals’ on the paths or in the jungle.⁴⁰

Children who play on the village paths tell their elders about the movement of strangers in and around the village.⁴¹ This is an extension of the usual role of informing families and neighbours about the imminent arrival of guests. In the past, such information allowed a household to be prepared for a visitor; nowadays it is important to be forewarned of the arrival of the insurgents, to have time to take small measures to protect themselves and their families.⁴² Children frequently volunteer unsolicited information about whom they have seen around the village. One day a neighbour laughingly told me that a group of village children seated at a resting place had stopped a young Tamu and told him that the Maoists had just walked past and were going in the same direction as he was, to which he replied that he and his friends were the Maoists.

The communal emphasis on sharing information and helping keep each other safe can be contrasted to the increase in levels of suspicion and mistrust. It is widely believed that the Maoists have an excellent local

³⁹The strategies used are similar to those used by the NGO workers Adhikari (2003: 369-83) encountered in rural east Nepal. I have chosen not to list the approaches used in Kwei Nasa as they could be open to abuse by the Maoists or the security forces if they learned them.

⁴⁰I have described elsewhere how villagers furtively advised me to take or avoid certain paths and parts of the village (Pettigrew 2004).

⁴¹From the stories that I have collected in other villages in the area and in different districts, it is clear that the army uses children to provide information about the movement of people in and out of villages, sometimes with tragic consequences. A villager visiting relatives in another part of the country was in a village when soldiers gave sweets to children who told them which house Maoists were sleeping in. The soldiers killed the Maoists and shortly afterwards the Maoists’ colleagues wrote to the children’s parents threatening to kill them. The family left for India the same day.

⁴²For example, during times when there are restrictions on the making and/or selling of alcohol, this might involve hiding liquor or stopping the production process.

intelligence network. When I asked people how the Maoists acquired information, they replied, “Their spies are everywhere.” Recently a frightened Dhan Kumari told me that two unknown children of Raju’s age were in the village that day and admitted to local children that they were spying for the Maoists. When questioned further people acknowledged, albeit reluctantly, that some of the Maoists’ information is provided by villagers. Dhan Kumari commented, “Other people tell them but this is secret.”

The ethos of cooperation, communication, and helping keep each other safe coexists with the view of others as untrustworthy. This is not new, however, but is a pattern that pre-existed the ‘People’s War’ (Pettigrew 2003). In the face of hardship, Tamu-mai stick together.⁴³ When confronted with difficult or painful situations they rely on each other for assistance and support. The other side of this enveloping and supportive ideology is that people make constant demands upon one another for various forms of assistance that cannot always be met. As McHugh (1989: 78) explains, it is rude to refuse and so people make excuses saying that they have prior commitments or that there is no more of a requested item. Outward harmony is maintained and resources protected, but at a deeper level, this behaviour – which everyone participates in – creates a widespread sense of mistrust. In the present situation the old polarities remain but the stakes are higher and mistrust deeper. Suspicion of potentially vengeful relatives, friends, or neighbours who might take advantage of the situation to denounce you to either side are added to by a heightened mistrust of strangers. This includes a range of potentially terrifying people, of any age and gender, including the insurgents and their spies as well as violent criminals who masquerade as Maoists.⁴⁴ While cultural constructions of Tamu youth have been strongly challenged in recent years (see Pettigrew 2003), the arrival (or perceived arrival) of child spies presents new challenges to understandings of childhood.⁴⁵ This is deeply unsettling to Dhan Kumari as it contradicts her desire to believe that Raju, now aged ten, is too young to be taken and reinforces her opinion that children of Raju’s age are susceptible to indoctrination.

Trying to Keep Children Safe

Villagers questioned about how they keep their children safe provided very similar answers. A forty-six-year-old Dalit woman stated that she says to her children: “Don’t tell anyone they [the Maoists] visit. They might kill

⁴³ As Macfarlane (2001), supported by McHugh (2001), notes, this ethos remains central even in urban centres.

⁴⁴ Several villagers have had very frightening encounters with thieves masquerading as Maoists.

⁴⁵ It is not within the scope of this chapter to address Tamu constructions of childhood and their interrelationship to the conflict. This must await further treatment.

you. Don't make a noise." A sixty-two-year-old Tamu woman stated, "I tell them not to go near them, do not follow them, and do not talk to them". A twenty-eight-year-old Tamu woman replied that she tells her children, "Not to speak about their visits". People tell their children not to talk to either side and if they have to, they must do so "politely". They must not reveal details of what goes on inside their homes such as preparing food for Maoists or what property they have. Caregivers try, often in vain, to keep their children at home and/or away from the places where they might encounter either side.⁴⁶ They also tell their children not to take sweets offered and many warn of the dangers of touching "unknown objects" that might explode. They acknowledge, however, that because it is very difficult to keep children safe they are extra vigilant. Small bits of information considered inconsequential in the past, such as the age and possible identity of strangers, are carefully noted in case they provide information about the movements or behaviour of either side.

Worries about security concern children as well as adults. In January 2004 Raju said to Dhan Kumari that he thought my research assistant, Ramesh, and I should not visit Kwei Nasa as the day after the news of our forthcoming trip was received a large group of the PLA arrived. His reaction was related to events of a year previously when hundreds of Maoists were in the village and he was told by Dhan Kumari to "guard" me should they come to the house. While he could not prevent their arrival, which occurred shortly after these instructions, clearly he felt partly responsible for my safety as over the course of the following hour, during which I remained hidden inside the house, he surreptitiously checked on me several times while supposedly playing with a toy car. The previous afternoon he overheard Dhan Kumari express her fears that the Maoists might think that we were spies and instructed us to remain inside the house, which she locked from the outside in the hope that this would deter them. When questioned, Raju refused to explain why he thought we should not visit. Dhan Kumari commented that he knew that both she and I were frightened the previous year and he was trying to protect us. Assal and

⁴⁶Some strategies used by caregivers to protect children from the impact of the conflict raise child rights concerns. In a report on children in the conflict, Amnesty International stated "Children are often taken out of school for fear of recruitment and some are sent away to other districts, often unaccompanied. In addition, there have been reports of girls being married very young as parents fear that if their daughter is taken away by the CPN (Maoist) for some time she will no longer be marriageable" (2005). In 2002 I interviewed several rural women in an urban centre in the mid-west whose early marriages were arranged to ensure that they would not be recruited. Although caregivers in Kwei Nasa have similar fears for their female children, I have not encountered these practices. This may be because the threat of recruitment, while ever-present, is less extreme in this area. Furthermore, as large numbers of villagers live in the nearby urban centre those who send their children out of Kwei Nasa have family members with whom they can live.

Farrel (1992: 280) state that under conditions of war children are often frightened, not of losing their lives but of losing their families. This fear may express itself in selflessness which is partly due to the degree to which children's self-identity is bound to their immediate family. Secure surroundings create opportunities to learn a range of different roles, emotional idioms, and complex problem-solving skills. According to Barenbaum, Ruchkin and Schwab-Stone, conflict situations "... create an atmosphere where complex moral dilemmas are simplified and things split into good and bad which leads children to identify more closely with important others" (2004: 46). The growing ability to identify with others means that questions of responsibility and feelings of guilt are important to school-age children living in conflict zones (de Jong 2003). Some children may harbour plans for revenge or worry that they might have been able to prevent a traumatic event from occurring (Eth and Pynoos 1985). Children of this age may fear for the well-being of others, especially their siblings and parents (Pynoos and Nader 1988).

Teaching Children What to Say

Villagers are extra careful about what they say and to whom they say it. Silence is an important coping strategy and widely used by both sides. One evening, in the summer of 2002, when Raju was seven, his mother and I prepared vegetables for the evening meal and talked in vague terms about the recent arrival of two groups of Maoists in the village. Suddenly Raju asked in a rather loud voice, "Are you talking about the Maoists?" With barely a break in her conversation, his mother turned to him and said, "Do not talk about these things" and slapped him hard on his leg. Tearful, he retreated into the corner. When I later questioned Dil Maya about her actions, she explained that Raju had not yet learnt to be silent. "He must learn not to speak about certain things. It is hard for him but he must learn, as it could be a matter of life or death. Nowadays you cannot be sure with whom you are talking and so you must know when to be silent."⁴⁷ Three years later Raju is fully aware of the realities of village life in the 'People's War'. One evening Dhan Kumari, talking about the Maoists, said, "They ask children where their fathers are and if they have gold, guns and other things in their houses. Nowadays you have to teach the children what to say." I asked Raju, who was sitting beside her playing with a toy car, "Have the Maoists asked you what you have in your house?" "Yes, they have" he replied. "I always say we don't have any of those things." He then recited the answers he gives in which he denies the existence of guns and gold and downplays the number of possessions owned by his relatively well-off family. Recently he boasted that he "... knows what answer to give to any

⁴⁷Not only had Raju spoken loudly but he had used the insurgents' names.

questions they ask,” and he is proud that, unlike his elder brother, who only visits the village occasionally, he is viewed as *raba* (‘street-wise’, competent).

Raju is vigilant and his conversations in public places are particularly guarded. It is, however, harder to censor the conversations of younger children. One afternoon, walking through the village I met five-year-olds Nil Kumari and Man Maya on their way home from school. As we walked Man Maya started talking in a loud voice, “Mother, do you know that two Maoist girls came to our house when it was raining? They have gone now but they left their bags in our house. They said that they will be back in the evening with lots more people.”⁴⁸ Not wanting to draw attention to what she said, I replied in a quiet voice that I knew what had happened and changed the subject. As she walked along holding my hand, I wondered if anyone else had overheard what the little girl had said. She had spoken very near a shop that is frequented by Maoists, and allegedly by army spies on occasion. Later I discussed this with Asha, her mother, who commented, “Man Maya is very frank and I can’t stop her talking openly. It is dangerous but what can I do? She is still too small to understand.” That evening Dil Maya backed up Asha’s comments stating that “Five is too young to understand.” She continued:

By the age of seven or eight children can understand what to say and what not to say. Raju is nine and he understands very well, younger children are especially in danger as they can easily be tempted with sweets and then they will say things they shouldn’t.

I asked another villager, Hom Bahadur, how he and his family kept their two small children under the age of five safe. He replied, “When they are about seven or eight they can understand and so it is easier to talk to them about what to do or not do and what to say or not as they understand the dangers. Before that age we frighten them of both sides as we hope they will stay away from them and not speak in their presence.” Teaching children to be silent is not new, as children have always been taught about ‘inner talk’ – things that are secret and not to be discussed outside the immediate family or a close circle of confidantes. Children have also always been taught to be frightened of categories of beings such as witches, ghosts, and malevolent spirits. What is different now is the overwhelming emphasis on silence and fear as the primary defences against violence.

Faced with insecurity and competing ideologies, parental control is undermined and adults feel unable to protect their children. Some village children are educated in boarding schools in the town and while this is not

⁴⁸Man Maya calls me “mother” as I am the same generation as her birth mother.

new, the numbers have increased since the escalation of the conflict.⁴⁹ Sometimes this is in response to general concerns about security while at other times it is in response to specific events. When the security forces visited the home of a middle-aged couple, their two teenage daughters were alone, questioned at length, and verbally harassed. On return, their parents sent their daughters immediately to town as they worried that they would become the brunt of dangerous unwanted attention.⁵⁰ However, not everyone has the means to protect their children in this way. Many people interviewed, particularly those from less well-off backgrounds, are unable to relocate and must continue to protect their children in the village as well as they can.

Fear of Recruitment

Although there are Maoist activists in the area, particularly in some of the surrounding hamlets where there are families with long histories of Maoist involvement, the overwhelming majority of people in the village do not support the movement. When I asked villagers, they were adamant: "We are not Maoists and we do not support them. They have made life very dangerous and difficult for us. No one in this village has joined them." It is, however, difficult to judge who has left the village for employment and who has left on the pretext of seeking employment and instead joined the Maoists or was recruited forcibly. Despite their assurances, villagers would not necessarily know who has joined, as Maoists are usually posted to locations outside their home area. In addition, villagers have good reason to conceal any connection their families may have with the guerrillas. If people from Kwei Nasa have joined, however, they have done so in secret and in very small numbers.

Maoists use various ploys to abduct children or to encourage them to join the movement. In a neighbouring village, they arrived during the festival of Tihar and invited teenagers to join them in festive singing and dancing.⁵¹ A village woman explained, "We wouldn't allow them out of our houses as we thought it was a trick to get them to join the Maoists. We kept

⁴⁹The majority of children and teenagers remain in the village. However, the ethnic profile of children in the school is changing. In September 2005 teachers pointed out that because so many families are sending their children out of the village, there are fewer Tamu children in the lower grades than prior to the escalation of the conflict.

⁵⁰The security forces frequently harass young women. Amnesty International has documented an increasing number of cases of violence against women and girls including those of women shot dead allegedly following rape (2005). I encountered two such cases when visiting an adjoining district.

⁵¹Maoist cultural programmes include dancing which is appealing to many young people and therefore a good medium for recruitment. Villagers who have seen them considered the performances more impressive than the performances of local youth groups.

them in for three days, only the very small children went out.” Chuckling, she added, “It was amusing seeing the Maoists and the tiny children dancing together but what could we do?”

All caregivers interviewed fear the recruitment of their children and strongly urge them not to join.⁵² A thirty-one-year-old Tamu man tells his son, “Do not look at their activities, stay inside the house reading and play close by.” A fifty-five-year-old Dalit woman replied “I tell them to be quiet, as they can take you away.” A thirty-five-year-old Tamu woman says to her children, “Do not go with them even if they try to persuade you.” One of the ways adults deter their children from involvement is to watch them while the insurgents are in the village. When Maoists stayed in Dhan Kumari’s house one of them lifted Raju up and threw him in the air. She commented:

I was furious and immediately told him to stop. I don’t like them getting too close to him and I don’t want him to get too close to them. He understands well and knows not to go with them. He is frightened of them but as he is only a child, they might convince him. What if they took him? How would we live then?

Ideas about the vulnerability of children and their susceptibility to Maoist propaganda are expressed in ideas about the *sai* (heartmind) that governs emotions, volition and cognition and morality.⁵³ People talk of having a “full (happy) *sai*” (*sai toba*), a “small (unhappy, sad) *sai*” (*sai chyoba*), a “crying (unhappy, sad) *sai*” (*sai kroi*), a “full (satisfied) *sai*” (*sai mrei*). The *sai* is also the place of memory, thought, and competency. Capable persons are those who “within their *sai* are knowledgeable or capable” (*sai nor raba*). A child’s *sai* (*kolmai sai*) is underdeveloped. Children do not know right from wrong as clearly as adults do. Capability may develop earlier than morality, however, and while Raju is *raba* when talking to Maoists about his family’s possessions, he remains morally underdeveloped and vulnerable. Furthermore, his souls – which can easily fly out when he is shocked or distressed – are less integrated into his body than those of an

⁵²For a recent report on child and community-led strategies to avoid children’s recruitment in armed forces and groups in West Africa, see Save the Children (2005). The strategies cited overlap with some of those discussed here and include identifying and moving to safe places, avoiding separation from caregivers, changing children’s attitudes to stop children wanting to join the fighters, providing schooling and skills training.

⁵³McHugh likens the *sai* to the Western idea of personality when she writes: “The *sae* [*sai*] is believed to have fixed boundaries, which are given for each individual, in much the same way as are other personal attributes such as intelligence, beauty, height and so on. An individual’s *sae* can be bigger or smaller, its size determined by one’s life experiences. A description of the size of an individual’s *sae* resembles our colloquial description of an individual’s personality. Where the notion of the *sae* differs most from our ideas about personality is the connections that are drawn between internal states and external events ...” (1989: 78). The Nepali language equivalent of the *sai* is *man*.

adult are.⁵⁴ All round he is a more fragile being – vulnerable to fear, emotions, illness, being influenced by others and therefore susceptible to Maoist recruitment.

Distress is considered unsettling and the emphasis on communal solidarity means that there are powerful restraints against the expression of difficult emotions. The situation is similar to Robert Desjarlais's account of the social constraints on the communication of distress among the Yolma Wa of Helambu, where he states that villagers

... value the ability to "hold" one's heartmind – to "hide" one's thoughts within the body and not let on, when faced with grief, pain or anger, that one is hurting. ... Yolma Wa evince a "rhetoric" of silence, holding that they must hide their sorrows. ... Just as ... [they] disapprove of the social expression of personal turmoil, so they learn to shun it privately. A villager realizes ... that it is an entirely sensible strategy to avoid emotional distress and so keep the heartmind "clear". (1994 [1992]: 142)

The desire to control emotional expression means that people strive to hide their fear, which must be evaluated in the light of this cultural emphasis. That people admit to high levels of fear illustrates the extreme degree to which they are frightened. The 'silencing of fear' coexists with the 'silencing of dangerous talk' and so silence becomes one of the primary interactional patterns. Jagannath Adhikari, in his work in eastern Nepal, encountered this when he was greeted with silence while asking potentially sensitive questions and when making mundane comments (2003: 371).

Caregivers try to restrict their children's movements and encourage the development of competencies and morality through teaching and inducing fear, but with undeveloped *sai* there are limitations. Their task as caregivers is complicated by increasing numbers of people relocating to the towns, few visits being made by on-leave soldiers or town-dwelling relatives, and the cancellation or scaling back of many community activities. There are limited events to counteract the excitement and attraction of the Maoists. Caregivers are, however, largely successful, as few or any young people from the village have joined the Maoist movement, but determent requires ongoing vigilance.

⁵⁴Bodies have multiple souls (*plah*). Men have nine and women seven. The fragility of people is expressed by the fragility of the *plah* and, as McHugh observes, "Beliefs about the *plah* convey a sense of the fragility of the person. *Plah* can easily fly out of the body and if all the *plah* are lost, the body's elements are no longer held together by the life force and the person will die. If some *plah* are lost, illness results" (1989: 79). Children are especially vulnerable to losing souls as they are easily frightened and their *plah* are less used to their bodily 'home', and prone to wandering. This concept is similar to the Nepali language concept of *sato jancha* (soul loss), which "is seen as occurring primarily in children ... [and] results from children being frightened by a frightening event they witness or by a spiritual event such as a *boksi* [witch] or *bhut* [ghost], etc." (Kohrt n.d.).

Caregivers actively discourage voluntary recruitment but forcible recruitment is harder to prevent.⁵⁵ Village parents meet young insurgents who have voluntarily enlisted but they also encounter those who have been forcibly recruited. Kwei Nasa adults are particularly distressed by the latter and thinking of these youths' caregivers, they think of themselves.⁵⁶ Purna Maya, who recently relocated to the town as she was frightened that her two teenage boys would be recruited, talked in mid 2004 about meeting Tamu female cadres:

I can't advise them as I would usually advise young women. They are my daughters but they are on the wrong road and I cannot say anything.⁵⁷ I can only ask them where they come from but they do not reply fully. Instead, they just say "I am from a faraway village." I know from their accent which district they are from but nothing else. They speak to me in Tamu Kyui and I think about their parents, do they know or not? How they must worry for them. I feel this in my *sai*, my *sai* cries for them, those parents. Their children are the age of my children, how frightened they must be. We are moving to the town but my husband and I are only going because of our boys. They can be taken at any time and I am terrified for them. What would happen to them? They might be sent to a remote district far from here. They might suffer a lot, they might be killed, and they might have to kill people. I tell them to stay at home and not walk around the village too much. If they go out in the evening, I worry until they are back home. When large groups of Maoists come, I am terrified. They could be taken at any time and there would be nothing that we could do. On the outside we look normal, but on the inside we are shaking.

An older woman in another village talked about the aftermath of an ambush of the Maoists by the security forces and her thoughts about the parents of a dead insurgent:

After the firing ended, other villagers and I came out of our houses. On the street in front of my house, I saw the body of a 13-year-old

⁵⁵Stories about forcible recruitment are widely known. Last year a young Maoist who was forcibly recruited escaped in the area, and was hidden by an old man in his house for sixteen days. He finally made his way to town where he surrendered to the security forces who interviewed him for a day before returning him to his family in a far-off district.

⁵⁶Some will have joined voluntarily, but once in the movement should they change their minds they will encounter difficulties leaving (as well as encountering problems returning home due to stigma). The distinction between 'volunteering' and 'being coerced into joining' may be very small as vulnerable youths may be pressurized into participating.

⁵⁷In Tamu kinship terms all females of her daughter's generation are considered to be her daughters. The relationship is closer or more distant depending on the relationship between their clans.

boy who was part of the dance troupe; his guts spilled out on the road. I knew him well and fed him many times. I felt very upset when I saw him. When we feed a dog, it is grateful and wags its tail and he was like that. He was a Tamu from a far off village and a member of a clan closely connected to mine. He would not tell me where he was from, sometimes he said one village and at other times he said another. I felt very upset about his death as I thought about his parents and how young he was and wondered when they would find out that he was dead.

Fear and Fascination

During a visit to Kwei Nasa at the end of 2002, a group of insurgents appeared in Dhan Kumari's house. While entry was politely 'requested', it was obvious she was obliged to host the rebels, and although not required to feed them, she had to provide tea and accommodation. Dhan Kumari fears these situations partly because they bring Raju within the Maoist sphere of influence. While she stopped a cadre playing with him she could not prevent more subtle influences which play a role in attracting young people to the insurgents. Raju spent most of the day in the courtyard along with Man Maya, a little girl from next door. They watched the Maoists wash clothes, transcribe revolutionary songs into notebooks, kill and cook three goats, repair equipment, and dismantle, repair and clean guns. In the early afternoon, I noticed Raju and Man Maya watching intently as a teenage female cadre tried repeatedly to remove a cleaning cork that was stuck in the barrel of her weapon. Once it was freed, they stood beside her as she carefully took the gun apart and cleaned it piece by piece. She invited them to examine the weapon and with fascination both children peered down the barrel of the newly cleared rifle. By mid morning, Raju's earlier hesitancy had gone and he was clearly enjoying himself observing the activities of young people who in some cases were only six or seven years older than he.⁵⁸ It is not difficult to see why visits by Maoists provide fertile ground for recruitment as they create an air of excitement and activity, which is attractive to many young people. Since the discontinuation of development work in the village three years ago, the only people who have attempted to mobilize the youth are the Maoists.⁵⁹ To children (and indeed to many adults) large-scale visits by Maoists appear to evoke both fear *and* fascination. They interrupt the mundanity of daily life and with the courtyards full of people and numerous side-events taking place

⁵⁸With one exception the members of the group billeted in the house were teenagers.

⁵⁹All development work was carried out by an NGO. As this organization has royal connections, it is particularly unpopular with the insurgents and, in late 2002, its premises were ransacked and the staff forced to leave the village.

they are spectacles somewhat reminiscent of major community-wide events. Raju repeats the dominant narrative that he is frightened of the insurgents – and undoubtedly he is – but this is a partial picture. A more accurate representation of the emotions that Maoists arouse needs to acknowledge conflicting feelings such as fascination (albeit fleeting) *and* fear, which the Maoists draw upon in their attempt to attract recruits.

Restricted Movements and Clothing

The conflict has changed the movement of locals in the village and the surrounding countryside.⁶⁰ People fear being caught in the crossfire or mistaken for insurgents in the forest. By choice, villagers prefer to go into the jungle in groups, as it is a potentially dangerous place. While past fears related mainly to concerns about malevolent supernatural beings, present-day fears also relate to who else is in the forest.⁶¹ The local landmarks, which act as mnemonic cues for people to remember the stories of people and events of the past, are added to in new and disturbing ways as the narratives of places where people died or other insurgent-related events occurred, and become imprinted into perceptions and memories of the landscape: for example, the place where a Maoist commander died; the path where a man from a neighbouring village was killed by the security forces; the bend on the road where the Maoists attacked an ex-serviceman; the place where the Maoists made a temporary medical post.⁶²

When small numbers of Maoists are in the village, or neither side is present, children of Raju's age play freely. They venture less deeply into the forest, however, when they are at risk of meeting the opponents and are vulnerable to abduction or arrest or being trapped in the crossfire. Dhan Kumari has told Raju not to pick up strange packages or bags, but commented that this is difficult "as children are curious and like to look and pick things up". The death or injury of children by improvised exploded devices (IEDs) is common throughout the country. Last year Maoists laid mines to ambush the security forces on a road to the village. When the army did not arrive they removed them, during the process of which a cadre died when one of the ordinances exploded. The irresponsible use of explosive devices is a deep concern among the villagers. The day the two

⁶⁰See Pettigrew (2004) and Adhikari (2003) for further discussion concerning the perceived risk related to wearing certain items of clothing.

⁶¹It is important, however, not to over privilege conflict-related fears at the expense of others. While they are there, people perceive and evaluate them differently. While walking through a forest after dark recently, en route to a neighbouring village, some of the group were more worried about wild animals than armed combatants, while for others it was the reverse.

⁶²Space is an important concept in shaping local culture in an area like Kwei Nasa. I have written about this elsewhere (Pettigrew 1999).

female Maoists left their bags in Man Maya's house was, according to her father,

the worst day of my life, I was terrified all day. I wanted to move the bags but I couldn't as I was sure they contained bombs. We left them where they had placed them but we were terrified that the army would arrive and find them and then we would die. I have never been happy to see the Maoists, but that day I was delighted when they returned to collect their bags.

Caregivers tell their children not to go to places like road heads, tea shops, or houses in certain hamlets where they might encounter Maoists. Practically, however, it is impossible for children to avoid most of these places. Dambar visits Kwei Nasa during his school holidays, and one day as he prepared to leave for the town I asked his mother if it was safe for him to travel. Dil Maya explained that the town-based teenagers returning to school travelled together in a large group, but even so, they were at risk in the forests. As the motorable road, which cuts several hours off the journey, had been re-opened after partial destruction during the monsoon, they were to travel some of the way by bus to avoid the most densely forested parts of the road. Despite the precautions, however, Dil Maya is never sure if it is safe for Dambar to visit and makes ongoing evaluations about whether or not he should come. During one of my stays last year, he did not visit as she thought it unsafe for him to do so. This spring, however, he accompanied a group of village youths into the uplands as the Maoists, including the commander, were out of the area. Dambar, now a town boy, is considered less safe than village-based Raju. One day I noticed him wearing combat trousers but when Ramesh and I told him not to wear them, he replied:⁶³

They are my father's. When he was on leave [from his job in the Gulf], he wore them and the Maoists stayed in our house. They thought that he was a Gurkha soldier and so he took them off as otherwise they would think that we were rich and ask for lots of money. The Maoists will know that I am too young to be a Gurkha so there's no problem.

Ramesh and I replied that he was not so much in danger from the Maoists as the security forces who might think that he was a Maoist. He replied that

⁶³Combat dress is extremely popular in Tamu villages. This is partly because of the availability of cast-off British and Indian army clothing (and commercially available replicas) which is considered both high status and durable. In 2002, the government told the population not to wear combat dress as it put them at risk of being suspected of being Maoists. Because of this it is not as widely worn as previously. It remains popular, however, but in the case of a teenager it is particularly risky to wear. I know of one case where an on-leave soldier serving in the Indian Army, dressed in combat dress, was killed by the security forces who believed him to be a Maoist.

he did not have another pair of trousers. When we told Dhan Kumari she also told him to change his clothes and commented, "He doesn't live here and he doesn't understand the dangers so well." Shortly afterwards he found a change of clothing.

A 'Little Man'

James Quesada (1998) notes that Nicaraguan children living in adverse conditions are commonly regarded as adults and cites the case of a ten-year-old boy who was seen and treated as an adult male. Although Raju has a father and a brother, his *de facto* family consists of his mothers. Dhan Kumari and Dil Maya refer to him as the "man of the house" and symbolically bestow this role on him when they tell him to be a "sentry", "guard" me, or do a reconnaissance to the shop. This role was further internalized by him when he took responsibility for advising Dhan Kumari to cancel our visit.

Raju monitors and advises Dhan Kumari during her, at times, volatile interactions with Maoists.⁶⁴ Some months ago, two Maoists arrived one evening and asked her to cook for them. She said that she could give them rice and lentils but she could not prepare food as she "was too tired and too old" and so they should get it cooked elsewhere. After she said this one of them pointed his finger at her and spoke rudely and threateningly under his breath. She heard what he said and replied, "Why are you pointing your finger at me? If you are brave enough, shoot me, kill me now!" The other young man pulled his colleague away and said, "Mother, he is new, he doesn't know how to behave." They took the food and hastily left. Afterwards Raju told a still furious Dhan Kumari not to talk to them like that as "it was dangerous."

There is a partial reversal of caring roles in the house. Dhan Kumari has chronic back pain and over the last twelve months developed heart pain and breathing problems. Doctors in town diagnosed her complaints as anxiety but despite medication, it is worsening. Dil Maya and Raju give Dhan Kumari her tablets and provide necessary support when she is unwell, which is now almost a daily occurrence. Raju spends most of the time in Dhan Kumari's house and so it usually falls to him to assist her. Recently I watched him open packets of medication and bring her drinks. He provides more than practical support, however, as some months ago I overheard Dhan Kumari say to him, "You and I are living here in this dangerous time. Those with guns come and can do anything to us and no one would save us. Thieves also come and can kill us. Maybe one day we will be killed in our house. It is all up to our luck." In a shy but determined voice Raju whispered, "We will not be killed."

⁶⁴For further discussion of the liberties that older women can take with Maoists, see Pettigrew (2004) and Adhikari (2003).

CONCLUSION: CHILDREN AND THE 'PEOPLE'S WAR'

A 'culture of terror' exists in Kwei Nasa, and fear, danger, insecurity, increased levels of suspicion, and the need to protect oneself and one's dependents are now predominant features of village life. Fear is unevenly experienced; at times it is overwhelming and at others it is minimal or absent. During the day, most villagers are apprehensive, but at night, the majority have moderate to very high levels of fear. In interviews with 85 people, only two stated that they were not frightened.⁶⁵ Out of 47 people asked to rate their fear level, 37 had a small amount of fear (1-2) during the day. At night, 25 were very frightened to terrified (4-5) and 17 were moderately frightened (2-3).⁶⁶ Formal assessments likely produce underestimations, however, as the desire to 'smooth' the *sai* results in the downplaying of emotional distress. Individuals experience fear differently and some people are more fearful than others. These variations are linked to pre-existing personality, the impact of particular experiences and life situations, coping skills, and available resources including degree of support. Villagers are extra vigilant and make ongoing evaluations of danger and levels of security. To manage the situation people have developed a range of skills, most of which are adaptations and elaborations of pre-existing behaviours. People provide each other with information and support and communicate using coded messages, but at the same time, there is an increase in levels of suspicion and mistrust. Some people are unable to cope with the ongoing pressures and if they have sufficient resources they relocate to town. Others have no choice but to remain.

Providing food for Maoists has the greatest impact on household activities.⁶⁷ Requests for food interrupt daily activities and have economic costs, but most importantly, they place the household at risk.⁶⁸ The dangers

⁶⁵In the first case a sixty-seven-year-old Dalit woman said that there was so much *dukha* in her life that she felt untouched by what was happening (her husband and other family members interviewed separately were, however, very fearful). The second woman, a forty-six-year-old Tamu, stated consistently that she was not frightened. I do not know this person well and so cannot corroborate this response with observational data.

⁶⁶Levels of fear were evaluated on a scale of 0 to 5 using a *doko* (carrying basket) pictorial scale adapted from a scale used at the Center of Victims of Torture, Nepal in Kathmandu.

⁶⁷Sixty out of eighty people interviewed stated that the greatest impact of the war on their household activities was the requirement to feed Maoists. The remaining answers included: disruption of schooling or fieldwork, threats by the security forces, having to provide firewood for either side, having to repair and make clothes for the insurgents (Damai [Tailor] women). Five people replied that there was no impact on their household activities. Four of these people were elderly women who do not have responsibility for running households. The fifth was a fifty-six-year-old householder Tamu woman for whom I do not have additional information.

⁶⁸I asked several people to make rough estimates of how much rice they had provided for Maoists in the last two years. Each person stated that they had given approximately 20 kgs.

include the presence of weapons, and many villagers expressed surprise and horror that Maoists bring guns into kitchens. Villagers fear that weapons will go off in confined spaces and that family members will be injured and/or that the security forces will arrive and the interior of the house will be engulfed in fighting.⁶⁹ From a village perspective, guns should be outdoor objects relating mainly to hunting and army service. It is disrespectful and 'bad manners' to bring them into the most intimate social space where people relax and sit together as relative equals. When Maoists arrive in a household, all those who live in it come under scrutiny. Youths may be encouraged to join the insurgents and both Dhan Kumari and Raju fear this eventuality. Another villager described how frightened she was when "they held my child and teased me saying that they would take him". Younger children like Man Maya, below the age of seven or eight, may unwittingly reveal secrets while the Maoists are present.

Children in Kwei Nasa are growing up in the 'People's War'. They attend school, run errands for their parents, sing, dance, and play, but they do so in a radically altered context. To what extent does the description of the adult experience of the 'culture of terror' described above apply to children? Children like Raju are given responsibilities beyond their years and take other responsibilities upon themselves. They make careful judgements about when to speak, how much to say, and how to reply to interrogations about their family's material circumstances and daily activities. They are extra attentive, used to evaluating the level of danger and taking steps to diminish the potential impact of violence on their family members.⁷⁰ Growing up in a family devoid of adult males, Raju has become a 'little man' at age ten, a role that is both placed upon him and which he internalizes. Like adults, children experience fear unevenly and sometimes they are clearly more frightened than at other times. Their fears, however, are of a somewhat different nature than those of adults. As potential recruits to the Maoist movement, children and youths are targeted and so particularly experience the fear of compulsory recruitment and its consequences. While being interviewed several young women described this fear not only

They also provided additional unestimated foodstuffs including millet, maize, vegetables, lentils, tea, milk, sugar, and occasionally meat. For the less well-resourced, these demands are a particular burden. While the poorest people in the village are not asked to provide food or very infrequently, in all cases they reported that they had been required to make other contributions such as provide accommodation or firewood. For a general discussion of the economic costs of the insurgency, see Thapa with Sijapati (2003).

⁶⁹This happened in a neighbouring village and resulted in the death of two villagers. The Maoists, who are trained to escape, did so.

⁷⁰This view of children is similar to that put forward by Boyden in an article challenging assumptions about children's resilience during war. She argues that children should be seen as "... agents of their own development who, even during times of great adversity, consciously act upon and influence the environments in which they live" (2003).

in terms of being taken by force but also of the aftermath of becoming part of an army and being forced to fight and kill. Despite the normal abnormality of the village, much of Raju's life is mundane: he plays, undertakes chores, and goes to school.

The social and individual context of a child's life, along with factors such as age, personality, and previous life events, play a role in increasing or decreasing a child's risk of developing long-term conflict-related problems. Protective factors include such things as a supportive family environment, stable social relationships, and a social support system, economic well-being, the availability of school, recreational activities, and the presence of coping strategies. Continued attendance at school, for example, in conflict zones normalizes children's lives and the social role of student strengthens community cohesion (Dawes 2000; Kos and Derviskadic-Jovanovic 1998). Educational settings provide routines, clear expectations, rules, tasks, responsibilities, social interaction, and friendship. Achievement in school boosts self-esteem and coping skills (Kos and Derviskadic-Jovanovic 1998), and helps prevent isolation and withdrawal (Laor and Wolmer 2002).⁷¹ While Raju and his peers attend school, frequent Maoist-called strikes disrupt learning and school-based activities and bring children into the insurgents' sphere of influence. Maoist programmes to further their educational ideals and to encourage potential recruits to the movement are commonplace. When Maoists punished a teacher, the assembled children witnessed the other teacher's inability to do anything but avert his eyes.⁷² Frightened teachers are likely to have poor concentration and diminished energy for teaching, and as children take their cues from their adult caregivers, when they witness situations in which the vulnerability of their carers is exposed, they tend to become fearful and insecure themselves (Machel 2001).⁷³ Raju both acknowledges and denies his fear, and shows signs of behaviour which suggests that he is sometimes anxious and fearful. For those under the age of ten, the 'People's War' is all they have known. They are aware that they are growing up in an insecure

⁷¹A significant proportion of Nepali children, however, receive little or no education and so cannot take advantage of these supports. Most children in Kwei Nasa attend the lower secondary school. While continued attendance at school plays a protective role, the standard of education is often poor, classrooms are frequently overcrowded, and the surroundings often abysmal. I recently provided a small grant to the Kwei Nasa school as approximately a third of the students in grade one are from impoverished backgrounds and are without basic supplies such as school books, exercise books, pens, and uniforms.

⁷²Raju was not at school that day. Other children who were required to watch were upset, confused, and frightened.

⁷³A teacher quoted in the documentary film 'Schools in the Crossfire' (Basnet 2004) stated this very succinctly when he said, "We ourselves are living in fear. We are terrified. How can we impart knowledge in such a state? Students are also being killed, so they are also terrorized. How is it possible to learn anything in such a state of mind?"

and dangerous time, but they have nothing to compare it against, it is the totality of their lived experience. The situation has led to the development of competencies that are not only prized but, as discussed below, may have a protective role.

A 'culture of terror' institutes fear as a means of social control. Villagers feed Maoists and provide donations because they are frightened of the repercussions if they do not. When the Maoists are out of the village during ceasefires or, for example, earlier this year when the local cadre left for some weeks, their influence remains, and decisions such as building a clinic at the day-care centre, are made in the light of how the insurgents will evaluate them when they return. The security forces are feared deeply, but as they rarely visit their influence is minimal. Nonetheless, the possibility that they could appear at any moment remains, and being caught in the crossfire is a primary feature of the 'culture of terror'. Fear of the combatants parallels a fear of thieves who masquerade as Maoists and there is a widespread feeling of insecurity and potential or real lawlessness.

Suárez-Orozco notes that 'cultures of terror' have their "own vocabulary and grammar, cultural facts and artefacts" (1992: 240). In a previous publication, I suggested that the following words and phrases, which I translated into English from Tamu Kyui, should be included in the Nepali case: "frightened", "terrified", "forced to provide food", "forced to give money", "patrols", "helicopters", and "random firing" (Pettigrew 2004).⁷⁴ Recent research highlights the following additions: "fear of being killed", "threatened", "danger", "bombs", "abduction by the Maoists", "trembling", "heart beats fast", "difficulty breathing", "dizziness", "talk politely to both sides", "do what they say", "do not talk to either side or tell them anything", "do not go near them", "do not go with them", "stay at home". Most of the latter terms are told to children by their caregivers.

It is important, however, not to over privilege the 'culture of terror' concept. In multiple ways, on a daily basis, people interact with and make decisions against this background, whether it be something as small as noting that a number of Maoist party workers are in the village through to negotiating with the commander about the extension of the day-care centre, or hearing from a neighbour about the arrest of another neighbour by the security forces. However, this does not account for the sum of all experiences in the village. Not every decision is made with the conflict in mind, and there are events such as deaths, healing rituals or marriages, which are organized much as they were in a pre-conflict era. This overriding 'culture of terror' coexists with other 'cultures' such as the 'culture(s) of rituals' and

⁷⁴I have deliberately chosen to present these terms in English as they remain current and some of them could be open to abuse by the Maoists or the security forces if they discovered them. For the same reasons I have omitted some terms as they refer to strategies that help keep people safe.

the 'culture(s) of work'. These 'cultures' may be affected by the 'culture of terror'; for example, a recent discussion by the Maoists regarding the potential prohibition of share cropping impinges on the 'culture of work', as do the Maoists' occasional pronouncements that death rituals should be conducted with less expenditure. There are, however, spheres of life which are unaffected, unevenly affected, or only occasionally affected. The 'culture of terror' model applies, but to present it as the umbrella within which *all* of daily life is lived is to overemphasize it.

Psychosocial Impacts

Children are a highly vulnerable group, and living in a conflict-affected area can have a lasting impact on cognitive, moral and psychological development as well as interpersonal relationships and coping abilities (Pynoos and Nader 1988; Sack et al. 1993). Children may display more war-affected symptoms than adults (Chimienti, Nasr and Khalifeh 1989).⁷⁵ Somasundaram and Jamunanantha (2003) writing about Sri Lanka suggest that common symptoms of conflict trauma in children include (in descending order): sleep disturbances, irritability, war vocabulary, decline in school performance, war games, hyper alertness, aggressiveness, clinging, anti-social behaviour, sadness, separation anxiety, and withdrawal. Children in Kwei Nasa have some of these symptoms as they play war games, know and use war vocabulary and are hyper-alert. It is possible that there are other indicators of the impact of conflict: for example, Dil Maya and Dhan Kumari worry about Raju's poor school performance, but without additional research, this information is inconclusive.⁷⁶ Behaviour such as playing war games, however, can often be a normal response (Mark Jordans, personal communication). These games may simply be a form of mimicry, they may provide an outlet for feelings such as distress or anger, may allow a child to create a place in his/her mind for a particular event, or they may merely reflect the type of games that children like to play. They become a possible cause for concern when, for example, they involve

⁷⁵Some scholars suggest that considering the suffering caused by political violence in terms of trauma is an inappropriate medicalization of human distress (Bracken, Giller, and Summerfield 1995; Summerfield 1998). There is a detailed literature on the interplay between culture and trauma which focuses on issues such as how cultural factors influence the expression of trauma and the treatment of suffering, the appropriateness of western psychological models in non-western contexts, the limitations of an approach which focuses on psychopathology and neglects environmental and relational aspects of well-being and development, and the limitations of a universalistic development and child protection model. Aside from some brief comments below it is not within the scope of this chapter to address these issues in any detail (for further discussion see Boyden 2003; Boyden and de Berry 2004; Bracken and Petty 1998; Kleinman and Good 1985; Summerfield 1998; Tol et al. 2005).

⁷⁶Poor school performance is noted in other parts of the country and in some districts School Leaving Certificate results have deteriorated (Basnet 2004).

hurting other children, when a child is unable to express or deal with her/his own anger or the anger of others, or when anger or revenge become part of a child's emotional development.⁷⁷ Evaluations of what is dysfunctional, however, should only be made taking accepted cultural norms and practices into account.

Not all children exposed to conflict develop psychological symptoms and conclusions about the impacts vary (Barenbaum, Ruchkin, and Schwab-Stone 2004).⁷⁸ Some contend that the effects are enduring (Stein et al. 1999), while others state that the majority of children exposed to war show no evidence of clinical disorder (Cairns and Dawes 1996) or they have symptoms that are fleeting or short-lived (Weine et al. 1995). Muldoon writing about Northern Ireland notes that just as children's experiences of conflict are highly variable so also is the impact on their adjustment. Furthermore, "... children's conflict experiences may be more likely to result in acting out or externalizing behaviours than in anxiety or depression, despite the latter reactions being more commonly expected" (Muldoon 2004: 465). Muldoon concludes that mental health represents only one aspect of the potential impacts of conflict on children as other social divisions and inequalities such as poverty and deprivation generally accompany political violence.

The overwhelming emphasis taken by many medical, psychiatric, and psychological researchers is on intrapsychic functioning. This perspective is premised on ideas about childhood which are based on universalistic child development and well-being models that pay inadequate attention to diverse cultural constructions and experiences of childhood. Not only are the social, cultural, and relational aspects of children's lives ignored but the impacts are generally viewed negatively. While children are perceived by many writers to be more vulnerable than adults because they are believed to have fewer survival strategies, anthropologists have pointed out that this is not necessarily so and the reverse may apply as there are usually fewer social prescriptions concerning children's tasks and roles. As Boyden (2003) notes, a smaller amount of attention is paid to children and they can more easily undertake tasks that adults cannot perform. Raju arouses less

⁷⁷In a study of seventy Nepali boys aged six to nine, Kohrt et al. (2005) found that boys orphaned by the conflict and living in an institution had more severe aggression problems (recorded by the Behavioral Assessment Scale for Children-BASC) than boys of the same age at boarding schools. These children also displayed other symptoms which suggested that they may have been traumatized. For example, they had lower daily salivary cortisol levels than other boys, which may suggest childhood Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

⁷⁸Estimates of the incidence of symptoms range from 22 per cent in Israeli children after scud missile attacks (Laor et al. 1997) to 48 per cent of Cambodian children exposed to shelling (Kinzie et al. 1986) to 70 per cent of Kuwaiti children following five months of military occupation (Nader et al. 1993) through to 93.8 per cent of displaced children during the Bosnian war (Goldstein et al. 1997).

suspicion than an adult when he sits on the courtyard wall playing with his catapult while surreptitiously doing 'sentry duty' for Dhan Kumari.

While it is important to consider the potential impact of living in a conflict zone, it is essential to position the present suffering in a wider context. Life in hill villages has always been difficult and frequently dangerous. During a visit to Kwei Nasa in 2003, I found that people were deeply affected by the death of six villagers from monsoon-related floods and landslides. In the fifteen years that I have conducted research, there have been many tragedies including accidents in the forest, falls from cliffs and steep paths, drowning, the death of women and infants during childbirth, the deaths and injuries of villagers working overseas. The effects of war or violence are not new either.⁷⁹ Several families I know have lost male kin serving in the Indian or British armies. High numbers of men from villages like Kwei Nasa lost their lives while serving in the First and Second World Wars. While these may be geographically and temporally distant, the losses of war and the affects of political violence are within living memory.⁸⁰ The suffering created by disadvantage and inequality is also ever-present and includes, depending on one's situation, caste, gender, class, and ethnic exclusion, poverty, poor infrastructure and governance, inadequate health care, and poor educational and/or employment opportunities. The impact of the latter means that Raju is growing up without a consistent father figure, as his father visits only every couple of years and his uncle no longer comes since he is a retired town-dwelling ex-Gurkha and a target for Maoist extortion. Although Raju sometimes stays with his uncle, his day-to-day social world, aside from school, is almost exclusively female. He looks forward to the visits of my research assistant as they provide an opportunity for him to identify with a man. On the day Ramesh leaves Raju disappears, as it is too painful for him to say goodbye. The lack of a consistent father figure has, I suggest, a greater impact on Raju's development than the insurgency.

Living in the 'People's War' does, however, mark a disjuncture, as community-wide political violence is differently evaluated to other sorrows. Dil Maya notes that Raju is a year older than the insurgency and his life tainted by growing up "in the war". This she contrasts to Dambar's upbringing, whose early years took place "in a time of peace". Raju with his underdeveloped *sai* is especially vulnerable to recruitment, landmines, crossfire, or apprehension as a Maoist. His *plah* (souls) are less integrated

⁷⁹Domestic violence is also a feature of village life although I have no systematic data on it. Violent crime, although rare, is now perceived to be a real threat particularly from thieves masquerading as Maoists.

⁸⁰Older men often retell the stories of the hardship and suffering experienced by the Gurkhas in World War II to the young. Up until his death in the late 1990s Dhan Kumari's father, a retired high-ranking officer, recounted these stories on a daily basis.

than those of adults are, and he is more susceptible to fear and emotional distress. Raju's *sai* in other respects has developed early, as he is *raba* (competent) beyond his years. As competency is highly valued, this is a source of pride for Raju as well as for Dil Maya and Dhan Kumari. This positive evaluation is supported by the literature which suggests that if the risks do not pose a threat to the child or his/her family a limited degree of exposure can lead to "self protective, adaptive cognitive styles" that facilitate more effective functioning (Jensen and Shaw 1993). Adaptive responses, however, do not mean that psychological distress is absent (Miller 1996).

Routinization and acclimatization may play a role in individual responses to conflict stress (Zimmern 1941; Ziv and Israeli 1973) resulting in a degree of resilience to long-term exposure to violence (Cairns 1996). If this is the only context a child has experienced then what occurs is viewed as normal, everyday reality (Jensen and Shaw 1993). The armed insurgents he saw on the street as a toddler while walking holding his grandmother's hand or in the courtyard when he was playing were, for Raju, 'normal' village characters. Similarly, instructions to "check for Maoists at the shop" in the same sentence as being told to "buy torch batteries" are routine. He knows that the appearance of Maoists is not 'normal' and contains dangers, but to him they are part of usual daily reality. As noted above, a supportive family environment, stable social relationships, and the presence of coping strategies helps diminish the impact of conflict. Although Raju lacks sufficient male role models, he is loved and cared for by Dil Maya and Dhan Kumari and a wider circle of kin and friends. They are unable to protect him from the difficulties of village life but they assist him by providing him with the skills he needs to survive.

When questioned about the impact of the insurgency on their children, caregivers in Kwei Nasa emphasize the dangers they face such as abduction, injury from explosive devices or crossfire, and they worry about disrupted education.⁸¹ They observe that children spend time making 'guns' and playing war games, although like Povrzanovi's (1997) Croatian informants they do not attempt to interfere with or stop these activities. Children are susceptible to emotional distress and caregivers acknowledge that they are sometimes fearful of what is happening around them. Their less than fully developed *sai*, which makes them vulnerable, also offers a measure of protection, as being less aware than adults they are not as prone to anxiety and worry. When questioned about the emotional impact of the insurgency on Raju, Dhan Kumari is somewhat troubled. She admits that Raju experiences fear, but points out that he "is with us all the time".

⁸¹ A detailed understanding requires children's self-evaluation of the impact of the conflict on their lives. I am in the process of developing a project which will focus on these questions.

Fundamental to the Tamu world view is the idea of interrelatedness and interdependence. People need each other for the practical demands of life, but they also need each other to survive as social and emotional beings, particularly at times of personal distress. Dhan Kumari states that family support helps keep Raju safe from injury and abduction and counteracts any emotional stress he might have. She also points to the competencies and protective skills that Raju has acquired and compares him favourably with his elder brother, who is less conflict-*raba*. Caregivers find it difficult to talk about the psychological impact of the conflict on their children partly because they are not used to doing so. That frightened adults may somatize their distress is acknowledged, as Dil Maya cites this as the underlying cause for Dhan Kumari's ailments, recently corroborated by medical opinion. Children with immature *sai*, however, are considered less susceptible to the internalization of distress. War games are seen by most to have their origins in mimicry but are not evaluated as possible psychological outcomes of the conflict. The disregarding of these impacts is partly because caregivers are not used to looking for them.⁸² However, it is also because close examination of this and other conflict-related behaviours demands acknowledgement of the full extent of the challenges faced and calls into question parents' abilities to protect their children in this deeply altered time of danger, insecurity, and fear.

⁸²Those individuals deeply distressed by the conflict are acknowledged as such. In another village I met a youth shot by the security forces during an ambush, because he was the only young person in a group of villagers and, therefore, a suspected Maoist. Both he and other villagers evaluated him as conflict-affected, pointing out his changed behaviour and mood swings.

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