

The Double Life of Development:  
Peasants, Agrarian Livelihoods, and the Prehistory of Nepal's Maoist Revolution

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## Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between the long history of developmental interventions and peasant rebellions in Nepal by drawing on ethnographic inquiries of a pre-history of Nepal's Maoist revolution of the 1990s. Specifically, it interrogates the transformations generated by the Rapti Integrated Development Project (RIDP) in peasants' moral economy, ecological processes, appropriation of the commons and peasants' consciousness, and their role in creating the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the Maoist revolution in Nepal. Various developmental schemes successfully enrolled rural villages into development projects, ostensibly to contain an upsurge in rebellious sentiments. Ironically, these same subjects of development later became the backbone of the Maoist rebellion and were instrumental in spreading the armed revolt against the state throughout Nepal. The Rapti region was hailed as a model of success for agrarian development in one era and the locus of the peasant-led Maoist revolution in another. The main question asked in this research was why the Maoist revolution emerged from the Rapti area of Nepal despite the long history of development in the region.

My main argument in this dissertation is that development involves simultaneous processes of enrollment and othering of subaltern subjects, which I call development's "double life". This is central to how we understand the relationship between development and rebellion in the global South. Developmental conditions are reproduced through hegemonic ideas and practices, and it normalizes certain kinds of knowledge and subject positions, aside from producing economic domination, vulnerability and scarcity. At the same time, development carries the potential to incite political awareness among marginalized groups that can result in a willingness to rebel at the individual level and to engage in collective defiance or revolt. Conceptual and empirical contradictions inherent to development generate such possibilities in particular times and spaces. In peasant society, the enrollment and othering of subaltern subjects are manifested in everyday livelihood practices, in historically evolved metabolic interactions with nature, and in the transformation of individual and collective subjectivities and consciousness. This dissertation demonstrates that the organic intellectuals and activists can articulate these processes of enrollment and othering, reproduced in development, to generate a new commonsense, instigating rebellious consciousness and transformative possibilities.

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## Preface

The Maoist revolution of Nepal has now receded into the past, leaving fragmented memories and fractured hopes of transformation. The ideological hegemony of Maoism and the historically developed “rebellious bloc,” which successfully led a decade-long revolutionary uprising in Nepal in the 1990s, began to crumble as soon as the Maoist party entered into a peace agreement and electoral politics in 2006. With the arrival of the Maoists in Kathmandu in 2006, it seemed that the revolution had been achieved. However, the revolutionary alliances built over time quickly started to unravel, making visible differences between the aspirations of rural working classes and peasants and the interests of the urban bourgeois party leadership. Urban business classes and technobureaucratic intellectuals emerged as important sources of power in the newly emergent national alliances. The intellectual and political thrust of these alliances coalesced around the interests of national and international bourgeoisie, who reinvented the old explanation about the Maoist revolution of the 1990s, recasting it once again as a “developmental problem” to be fixed by economic means.

Development reappeared as the force that would secure a durable peace in the revolution’s aftermath, and the reinvented ideology of development conferred power and legitimacy upon the interests of the middle classes and urban intellectuals. Soon, a neoliberal agenda of economic reform and elite-centered, ethnic-identity politics took precedence over the issues and concerns of peasants and marginalized communities. The quick arrival of counterrevolutionary possibilities exacerbated factionalism and splits within the Maoist party. Despite the fact that the Maoists remain in power, the desperate

socioeconomic conditions that catalyzed the revolution in the 1990s are largely the same. If we compare the contemporary scene with the prehistory of the Maoist uprising, the conditions of possibility for another organized revolt are startlingly alive. But recovering that heterogeneous prehistory, now in danger of being lost in the tumult of the revolution and post-revolutionary era, may yet have salutary effects on how we understand the promises and perils of the revolution and imagine future possibilities not only for Nepal but for South Asia in general.

The dominant narrative so far has characterized Nepal's Maoist revolution as an unexpected rupture in history. The revolution was understood as a disjuncture in mainstream politics on the subcontinent, even though it was one of the most powerful rebel movements ever witnessed in South Asia. One cause of this hubris lies in the paucity of scholarly analysis on how the Maoist movement emerged. What were its historical conditions of possibility? The reasons for such oversight are no doubt manifold: One is that the rapid spread of Maoism in the region was unthinkable until recently, given the global defeat of communism, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was unimaginable also because an otherwise "natural" ally, China, had devoted much of the last three decades to consolidating its status as one of the most powerful capitalist states in the world. In fact, the Maoists in Nepal not only upbraided their northern comrades for being revisionist and reactionary, but also openly criticized them for building alliances with imperial states and western capital. In short, what is remarkable about Nepal is that the ideology of the Maoist revolution entered popular commonsense after the collapse of communist states and ideologies elsewhere in the world.

What I seek to offer here is not a standard correction to existing accounts of the Maoist revolution. I want to write about the revolution from its margins. What does this mean? It means to render visible the everyday experiences, multiple struggles and deep histories of rebellion that are overlooked or erased in mainstream narratives of the Maoist movement. It also means writing the movement not from its ostensible center – the party leadership located in Kathmandu – but from the margins – in this instance, peasants from the village of Thabang in western Nepal – who served as rank-and-file in the Maoist revolution and enabled its success. Their micro-histories of struggle against dominant groups over at least two centuries were vital in furnishing the force of collectivity that held the revolution together. My interest in writing about the revolution from the margin emerged out of the realization that understanding how a particular political consciousness emerges and becomes common sense requires attention to the historical processes of everyday struggles, which are often fragmented in time and space and marked by spontaneity. These fragments, however, were articulated into a contingent unity in the Nepali Maoist revolution. How is such contingent unity formed, and in what ways did it generate a new political imaginary?

The success of the revolutionary war and the revolution's failure to consolidate changes in the post-revolution period are the result of particular characteristics of the movement in Nepal. For example, the Nepali Maoist movement involved a conglomeration of forces, especially peasants, rural and urban workers and urban educated youth. But in the final reckoning the movement was led by peasants, who generated its historical conditions of possibility and acted as the ultimate strike force during the People's War. They first established full control in rural areas by military

means and later mobilized urban workers in the cities, especially in the post-2006 peaceful transition period, thereby popularizing the Maoists' political agenda among urban populations. However, as soon as the Maoists gained formal state power in 2008, the alliance of peasants and urban middle classes started to fracture. In fact, for many peasants, Maoism was the strategy of countering state oppression and exploitation of the landlords. However, during the post-2006 period, the concerns raised by peasants and marginalized communities have been silenced.

Development gained traction as an adhesive force in these processes, particularly in generating pre-revolutionary conditions and shaping post-revolution changes and ideas. It has reproduced its relevance in both instances as a machine capable of *enrolling* and *othering* its subjects simultaneously. As the prehistories of the revolution show, the rebellion was not only an unintended consequence of developmental transformations but also a substantive outcome of development's own internal contradictions. These in turn allowed for a radical political articulation of development to Maoism prior to 2006 and for a more conservative political re-articulation with bourgeois interests and identity politics in post-2006. What is starkly apparent is how, in a country like Nepal, it is almost impossible to take historical account of social and political processes without also considering the iterations of development. Illustratively, the rate of development loans to "manage" the political transition has tripled since 2006 as compared with pre-1990s developmental aid.

A surge of literature has focused on the revolutionary war period of the late 1990s. Some of the most-covered themes are military tactics and structures, the

establishment and operational mechanisms of the local peoples' republics, death and damage to property and the national political aspects of the revolution. The armed military structure of the party was at the forefront in gradually eliminating state control from rural areas. But, as I contend in this dissertation, the most effective strategies for enrolling the masses were the use of new political tools and the creation of wider political structures to consolidate diverse peasant communities through everyday awareness campaigns, cultural activism, ideological debates, development activities such as road construction, on-site judiciaries, anti-alcoholism and anti-caste campaigns and collective forms of production. They operated as popular mechanisms for connecting the long and often discrete peasant struggles throughout the country.

What is missing in existing analyses of the Maoist revolution, thus, is close attention to its variegated prehistory. The Maoist revolution is not only the outcome of the macro-political activities of Nepal's communist parties but should be viewed, more comprehensively, as the consolidation of diverse micro-histories of oppression, activism, rebellion and social transformation in rural Nepal. But as Karl Marx, voicing Hegel, famously said in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, history repeats itself "the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." And farce it has been. While the Maoist revolution was successful in the sense that it captured state power, it has largely failed in achieving what it said it meant to achieve. The role of capital-friendly development has been further institutionalized, and the political agenda of the Maoists has gradually come to resemble those of political forces it opposed. Most importantly, the peasants and working classes are increasingly alienated from mainstream politics in ways that may catalyze other "unexpected" political upheavals in the country. I am cognizant of this

ongoing tumult in Nepal and hope to show in the future how the Gramscian analytical framework developed in this dissertation can be leveraged for understanding Nepal's political present. This dissertation, however, is about illuminating a severely understudied, yet vitally important, aspect of Nepal's contemporary history: namely, the revolution's prehistories and its ambivalent connections to the long history of development in Nepal.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### The Double Life of Development: Enrollment and Othering

One cannot be a philosopher, by which I mean have a critical and coherent conception of the world, without having a consciousness of its historicity, of the phase of development which it represents and of the fact that it contradicts other conceptions or elements of other conceptions (Gramsci, 1971:324).

We want changes in our lives. How long can we live under such suffering and exploitation? We don't want to live this way. But not all new developments are good for us. They destroyed our forests and planted apple trees. Some people earned more money, but we cannot live without forests in this village. When we stood firm against the orchard they used police force against us. What could we do? The situation made us rebel ... it was not our wish. We want *good* changes that take away our miseries, not the food (Purna Bahadur Roka, February 16, 2011, Thabang Village, Nepal).

#### Introduction

On the night of February 12, 1996, about 35 militants attacked the Holeri police post of Rolpa district in western Nepal with rifles and a dozen locally made guns and grenades. They captured a small amount of gelatin and weapons and burned down the building. Marking the attack as the start of *Jana Yudha*, the peoples' revolution, the next day the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) officially declared nationwide war against the state in Nepal. This proclamation was the culmination of many years of local uprisings against the state, especially in Rolpa and Rukum districts<sup>1</sup>. Within a few years,

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<sup>1</sup> The state maintained its oppressive strategies against the growing peasant uprising in the upper Rapti region even after the establishment of parliamentary democracy in 1990. The newly elected government, using its anti-communist rhetoric, launched Operation Romeo to repress the sporadic peasant revolts in the region. The peasant groups took it to be the extreme brutality of the state. It became one of the main triggering assaults forcing many peasant cadres to go underground, beaten, killed, raped and dispossessed in most of the villages dominated by settlements of Magar peasants, an indigenous ethnic community who are economically poor but largest in number in the region. The spontaneous resistance to such operations in various parts of the region turned into armed revolt, which later became the Maoist movement of the country.

the Maoist revolution spread across the country like wildfire. Armed warfare lasted for more than ten years and ended with a peace agreement in 2006. After the constitutional assembly election in 2008, the Maoists took control of Nepal's government, marking the culmination of a remarkable episode in world history.

One of the little-known ironies is that this revolutionary war emerged from the Rapti region, which has long been the focus of intensive development interventions since the 1950s. The region was showered with huge financial and technical investments by international development agencies aiming to showcase the region as a model of modern development for transforming poverty stricken and “primitive” Nepali society toward prosperity and stability. The early priorities of development were promotion of rural infrastructure, agricultural modernization and peasants' capacity building for economic growth. In light of the Chinese take-over of Tibet (on Nepal's northern border) and the possible threat of increasing communist influence over peasants, development for agrarian transformations was conceived by the West as the only way to achieve “economic and political stability” in the region “to resist internal and external communist aggression” — in effect, reducing the vulnerability of the peasantry to communist ideology via economic growth and technological change (Mihaly, 1965:31).<sup>2</sup>

Informed by these notions of agrarian change, the highly regarded Rapti Integrated Development Project (RIDP) was implemented in the Rapti region of western Nepal with financial support from USAID. Conceptualized in the late 1960s and

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<sup>2</sup> As Eugene Mihaly highlights, the US Government's *Mutual Security Program for Fiscal Year 1952* states that ‘the weakness of the present economies of South Asia bear most heavily upon the agrarian population, and under current conditions, the agrarian sector offers a major target for communist subversion’ (cited in Mihaly, 1966:32).

continuously implemented through the 1990s, the main activities of the RIDP were undertaken between 1980 to 1995 at an expenditure of more than 67 million dollars in five districts of the Rapti region, primarily targeting Magar and Tharu peasants with a population of little more than half million (RIDP, 1980; USAID 2001).<sup>3</sup> The RIDP successfully mobilized hundreds of rural villages for “intensive” implementation of various schemes, ostensibly to contain an upsurge in rebellious sentiments. Ironically, these same subjects of development were to later become the backbone of the Maoist cause and were to prove instrumental in spreading the armed revolt against the state throughout Nepal. Thus, the Rapti region carries the strange distinction of being hailed as a model of success for agrarian development in one era and the locus of the peasant-led Maoist revolution in another.

This puzzle is further complicated by the fact that the RIDP was in fact successful in implementing some of the most effective community-based development programs in the region, such as community forestry, watershed management, agricultural modernization, income generation, adult literacy and rural health, by promoting self-reliance and local governance schemes (RIDP, 1995). Community forestry (CF), for example, involves an array of economic, political, institutional and ecological interventions, and it has been hugely successful in mobilizing local communities as the main driving force of Nepal’s rural development efforts.<sup>4</sup> It has been implemented with

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<sup>3</sup> The Rapti region consists of five districts with a total population of about one million. The Magars are predominant in the upper Rapti region, especially in the Rolpa and Rukum districts, constituting about fifty percent of the total population, whereas the Tharus are in majority in Dang district, which borders India.

<sup>4</sup> Nepal is a pioneer in implementing a community forestry program supported by international development agencies. By the end of 2011, there were more than 17,000 community forest user groups

highest priority since the early 1970s to foster participatory development and has been widely regarded as a unique model of “successful” development (Malla, 2000). Yet peasant uprisings continued to surface throughout the region. New political activists and peasant intellectuals emerged who were actively engaged throughout the 1970s and 1980s in consolidating these movements into organized resistance against local elites, landlords, moneylenders and state police. Despite decades of strategic development interventions and the unprecedented defeat of socialist regimes globally, the continuous proliferation of peasant uprisings in the Rapti region and their consolidation at various levels provided a foundation for the emergence of the Maoist revolutionary war in Nepal. During the revolution, more than 14,000 people died and thousands were displaced. By the time the war ended, the Maoists were effectively in control of more than 70 percent of the territory. *Why did the Maoist revolution emerge from the Rapti region despite the long history of development there?*

This dissertation aims to consider this puzzle by exploring how ostensibly successful development programs can seed social uprisings and to thereby allow us to more adequately theorize causal connections between development and social movements in the global South. I suggest that an interactive exploration of the socioeconomic, ideological and ecological effects of development initiatives might better enable us to understand the causes of unrest and rebellion. In doing so, it is important to consider how development normalizes certain kinds of knowledge and subject positions, aside from producing economic domination, vulnerability and scarcity. The central

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formed, handing over 1.6 million hectares of forestlands (40 percent of the total), where more than eight million people (80 percent in rural areas) are involved. In the Rapti region, more than 60 percent of the forest area is community forest.

arguments of this dissertation revolve around the question: *How do the particular economic, ecological and ideological changes brought about by development create possibilities for reproducing developmental subjugation (“subjects” in subjection to) and also rebellious consciousness (“subjects” as rebels, authors of resistance) simultaneously?* To put it other way: Why did peasants in the Rapti region play an active role in seemingly oppositional processes, development projects on the one hand and the Maoist revolution on the other?

One of my central arguments is that development carries the potential to incite political awareness among marginalized groups that can result in a willingness to rebel at the individual level and to engage in collective defiance. Conceptual and empirical contradictions inherent in development generate such possibilities in particular times and spaces. Development is an ideology (and of course, an attendant set of practices), and it must manifest itself through the historical material processes of particular geographies. Developmental ideas are external, articulated politically to demonstrate certain ways of life as naturally superior to others. But the idea of development carries an ontological contradiction in the process of its own reproduction; as such, it fails to fully subjugate other ideas and ways of being and remains vulnerable to its own breakdown.

Development must enroll its subjects as always becoming to continuously legitimize the superiority of its ideology, and therefore it always reproduces a subaltern relation between the master (agents of development) and the follower (subjects in need of developing). As it is a process that strives to be hegemonic, the subjects of development must come to “like” their alienation from prior ways of being, unless, of course, the alienation becomes the condition of possibility for an alternative critical consciousness.

In short, development involves simultaneous processes of enrollment and othering, what I call development's "double life"; and in peasant society, these are manifested in everyday livelihood practices (on the terrain of moral economy), in historically evolved metabolic interactions with nature (the terrain of peasant ecologies) and in the transformation of individual and collective subjectivities (terrain of consciousness). My dissertation examines the double life of development in rural western Nepal on these three terrains. I contend that development striving for hegemony continuously produces fissures that can become portals for the emergence of rebellious, counter-hegemonic possibilities.

*Figure 1: The Rapti region, Nepal*



By exploring the prehistory of the Maoist revolution in Nepal, I will expand the idea of double life of development over the course of four main chapters, covering the terrains of moral economy (Chapter 2), peasant political ecologies (Chapter 3), and the articulation of resistant consciousness (Chapter 5), with a mediating chapter on the commons (Chapter 4). This introductory chapter outlines the conceptual and empirical

basis for subsequent chapters by highlighting some of the concepts that are central to my argument. The first part of this chapter highlights the potential wider connections of this analysis in understanding development and social movements around the world. The second section provides the historical background of development and peasant rebellions, tracing histories of connections between development and social uprisings in modern Nepal. The third section elaborates some of the important concepts that are central to my dissertation. Finally, the last section provides an outline of the dissertation with a brief introduction for each chapter.

### **Thabang**

On the February 13, 2011, Thabang village was colorfully decorated, and thousands of villagers from the surrounding areas gathered in the main plaza. The flapping sound of hundreds of red flags and the revolutionary songs in the loudspeakers calling for “turning the world upside down” were the main attractions until a helicopter landed, covering the village in plumes of dust. Comrade Prachanda, the chairman of the Maoist Party, along with his deputies and the chief of the military wing, had landed in Thabang to celebrate the 16<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Maoist revolution in Nepal. Speeches began. But Thabang leaders lambasted Prachanda for compromising on the revolution’s agenda and threatened to take up arms once again if the people were not genuinely liberated through the ongoing peacetime political processes. “In our history of struggles, we have changed the p arty many times,” a local commander reminded Prachanda and his coterie.

When I asked why he came to Thabang instead of celebrating the anniversary in Kathmandu, Prachanda replied: “What I speak in Thabang gives more power than what I say in Kathmandu. I am here to generate ideas, strength and threaten the reactionary forces from this liberated zone.” He went on to say that Thabang’s spirit had produced thousands of other Thabangs in Nepal and that the word “Thabang” remained a source of inspiration for revolutionaries and a “nightmare” for reactionaries. Prachanda traveled to Thabang for two reasons: to smooth relations with the peasants who were increasingly unhappy with the party and to demonstrate his popular strength for power battles in Kathmandu. It was clear that what happened in Thabang had a direct influence on how political negotiations unfolded in Kathmandu. Thabang, a remote and poverty-stricken village, has exercised decisive political and pedagogical influences on Nepal’s political trajectories at various moments in time, perhaps even more so than Kathmandu in the recent past.

As such, my dissertation strives to reconstruct the prehistory of Nepal’s Maoist revolution *from* Thabang. This is in keeping with my post-colonial stance of writing from the margins. The prehistory (or more accurately, prehistories) that I refer to were explored through relational ethnographies; that is, by understanding *via* participant observation how the village of Thabang historically interacted with extra-local forces such as development, communism, capital, nationalism and the state in course of forging particular political sensibilities and trajectories for the village, which were to ultimately shape political processes at the national scale. Relational ethnography explores the micro-stories of research subjects not as discrete narratives but always in relation to other historical processes and geographies. Thabang consists of thirteen major settlements,

high-altitude pastures, common forests, lowland valleys and pockets of farmlands scattered throughout the Jaljala Mountain and adjoining riverine basins. Given the diversity and differences in geography, settlements and village structure, it is hard to draw up a single logic that explains Thabang as one village. Rather Thabang as a village came into being through the amalgamation of various attributes. In fact, it was the conquering Nepali state that erected a boundary around people, geography and practices, producing Thabang as an entity. With its histories of struggle and transformation, Thabang went on to become a locus of revolutionary peasant politics; as such, studying Thabang provides deep insights into the prehistory of the Maoist revolution.

### **Development and mass uprisings in the global South**

Nepal is not exceptional in terms of its recent political history of rebellion and uprising. In fact, around the world, especially in the global South, uprisings have emerged in many countries in the twenty-first century after the globalization of capital; rapid deterioration in conditions of life, especially for peasants, indigenous minorities and marginalized masses in Asia, Africa and Latin America; and the concomitant rise of global solidarity networks (Li, 2011; Shah, 2010; Roy, 2011; Hart, 2007). In fact, a relation of implicit solidarity or at least shared conditions of struggle among social uprisings in the global South has always existed because of their common legacy of colonial rule, long histories of exploitation and post-colonial disenchantment in the wake of development's unrequited promises. There have been periods of ups and downs in the cycle of social movements largely following geopolitical shifts in the global balance of power and in paradigms of development. But, ultimately, every historical moment

emerges out of geographically specific conditions of possibility. Therefore we must examine the diverse prehistories of contemporary rebellions, attentive both to their deep pasts and their contemporary articulations with development.

While many such prehistories of struggles go unnoticed, I contend that their scholarly recuperation is a prerequisite for us to understand both the present political conjuncture and future possibilities. Writing prehistories of rebellions may give insights on the historical trajectories and political consequences of contemporary capitalist development and growing armed and unarmed uprisings in the global South. The prehistory of the Maoist revolution in Nepal, the focus of this dissertation, provides an illustrative framework that could have conceptual leverage for understanding other recent rebellions, such as the diverse Maoist uprisings in India, indigenous movements in East Asia, Latin American peasant revolts and African movements against the growing trend of land grabbing. Each of these, arguably, reveals development's strange double life.

Since the 1950s, the figure of Mao, providing a political doctrine for Maoist revolutions, has traveled to the hinterlands of the global South, especially in South Asia and Latin America. The popularity of Maoism took an unexpected turn in South Asia in the 1990s, and since then it has become not only an ideological philosophy of revolution but a political thread joining diverse anti-state rebellions and other various forms of subaltern politics, especially in agrarian settings (Roy, 2011; Shah, 2010; Banerjee, 2009; Hutt, 2004; Bhattarai, 2003; Prachanda, 2004; Bhatia, 2005; Sundar, 2006; Kunnath, 2006; Harriss, 2011). Armed rebellion is not a new form of struggle in agrarian society; there has been a long history of revolts against the state such as the sepoy mutiny and

peasant uprising of 1857 in India, the Zapatista revolution in Mexico from 1910 to 1920 and the Chinese Revolution of 1949. My argument here is that it was not Maoism that first instigated rebellion in Nepal, but it was Maoism that provided an intellectual and ideological framework for consolidating diverse rebellions into a collective anti-state force by the 1990s. But that still begs the question of what happened in the decades leading up to that historical conjuncture of the 1990s. To answer this properly, it is necessary to understand how massive developmental interventions since the 1970s have created conditions ripe for revolt, following growing dispossession of people's means of living and irreversible transformations in rural livelihoods (Banerjee, 2009; Bhattarai, 1998).

The prediction that the prevalence of agrarian lifestyles would shrink dramatically over the course of modernization was proved wrong. Innumerable instances exist of uprisings led by peasants and marginalized communities taking deep roots in East Asia (Perry, 1980; Tsing, 2005; Li, 2010; Glassman, 2011; Baird, 2011), Latin America (Stern, 1998; Taylor, 2006; Wainwright, 2008; Rodgers, 2009; Stoll, 1993) and many parts of Africa (Hart, 2007; Kriger, 1991; Moore, 2005; Jackson, 2004). Development, instead of transforming peasants into a fully industrial labor force, enrolled them into a scheme of accumulation. As a consequence, agrarian issues continuously remained central in national politics, especially in the global South, and subaltern struggles and uprisings gradually developed ideological affinity to Maoism. The subaltern politics of the 1970s, which was understood as sporadic, heterogeneous and spontaneous in nature in the South Asian context, started to be consolidated into a relatively coherent and organized revolutionary framework by the early 1990s.

## **A brief history of Maoism in Nepal**

What did it mean to be a Maoist in Thabang? It meant different things to different people, depending on the communities and geographies they inhabited. Maoism operated as an ideological thread in consolidating diverse uprisings, discontent, resistance and sporadic defiance against oppressive exploitation and domination by the state, landlords, moneylenders, commercial entities and political elites. In Thabang, two main lines of explanation are offered for why peasants identified with the idea of Maoism: first, they did so in order to generate a collective power that could retaliate or resist the particular forms of domination and exploitation (that were immediate in nature and varied according to the particular situation of individuals or communities), and second, following the Maoist party's ideological path, peasants embraced Maoism in order to capture the state through a socialist movement for a complete societal transformation. These two layers of reasoning were co-constitutive, and, collectively they generated the conditions for rebellion as a commonsense. The active consolidation (by organic intellectuals and political activists) of the diverse histories of the resistance to oppression allowed peasant communities to identify common sources of domination. Such consolidating acts of solidarity generated the possibilities for a contingent unity of individuals and communities out of necessity at various points of time. It was not Maoism that made the peasants of Thabang rebel but rather, given the long history of struggles in Thabang, it took the form of Maoist rebellion in accordance with its own paths of internal reasoning.

Burman Budha, who led a rebellion in 1954 to dethrone the Mukhiya (tax collector) and is also considered as Thabang's first communist, has gone through a number of ups and downs in connecting Thabang's rebellion with communist ideologies.

He says:

“We became communist before we knew what communism was. They named us communist for what we did in this village. We deposed the Mukhiya, fought to protect our resources, redistributed the land, established the school, refused to work for them for free, demolished the practices of untouchability and fought against administrative hurdles imposed on us. If these were the things a communist would do, then we decided we should join the party. But we have changed the party several times. Whenever we felt that our agendas and interests were different, then we just left the party and moved on to look for alternatives. It was same with the Maoists, and don't be surprised if Thabang people split from the Maoists and join another party.” (Interviewed on June 12, 2010, in Thabang).

Burman Budha's statement clearly reveals the pragmatic reception of Maoism in rural Nepal. While Nepali Maoism's ideology gained in popularity and enrolled peasants into a world historical project, Maoism itself was never a static or orthodox program for peasants who entered the Maoist fold with long histories of rebellion against oppressive conditions. Communist politics started among educated urban elites in Nepal, and a communist party was first established in 1949. But the left's political influence in Nepal had been growing since the early twentieth century after the Bolshevik revolution (Rawal, 2007; Singh, 1976; KC, 1999). Following the massive ideological differences among various communist blocs around the world and especially the growing differences between the Soviet Union and Chinese Communist Parties in the 1960s, the communist party in Nepal started to disintegrate into various factions (Baral, 1977). The early

factionalism was driven by the quest for leadership opportunities, personal egos and the interests of the national and international political alliances (Shrestha, 1974).

But, since the 1970s, the differences have grown tremendously in terms of revolutionary strategies of whether the communist parties should embrace conventional armed guerilla warfare against the state and imperialism or follow the peaceful path of peoples' revolt toward socialist agendas (Singh, 1976; KC, 1999; Banerjee, 1980; Cailmail, 2008; Thapa, 2004). Influenced by the Chinese Cultural Revolution, armed agrarian revolt against the state in various parts of the world and Mao's idea of new democratic revolution, the movement collectively understood as Maoism entered into Nepali left politics in 1974, led by one of the factions of the communist party called Communist Party, Fourth Convention (KC, 1999; Singh, 1976). This group went through various splits and mergers, but by the early 1980s one of the stronger factions named Communist Party (Mashal) formally adopted Maoism as its official philosophy of revolution.

In contemporary scholarship, the history of the Maoist revolution in Nepal starts from the early 1990s. As previously noted, the various factions of the party, following Maoism as their political philosophy, forged an alliance named the United Peoples' Front to participate in the democratic movement of 1990 and subsequent parliamentary election. The newly elected government in the early 1990s (also known as the "Chicago boys" in Nepal) deployed extreme forms of neoliberal reform in the country (such as privatization of key industrial and service sectors) and launched anti-communist crusades especially targeting Maoist-influenced peasants in the western part of Nepal. According

to popular writings, in retaliation against such state repression in rural areas, the United Peoples' Front launched various protest programs throughout the country. The Front submitted 40 demands to the state, urging that it start a complete transformation of state structures and implement programs that would guarantee livelihoods, identity and political representation of marginalized groups. The government immediately declined the demands, and these emerging confrontations led to the formation in 1995 of the Maoist Party, which then launched an armed revolution against the state in 1996 (Karki and Seddon, 2003; Hutt, 2004; Thapa, 2003; Gellner, 2003; Pettigrew and Adhikari, 2009).

As the Maoist revolution was an unexpected event for many intellectuals, it generated great interest in the period of the armed revolution starting from 1996 (Pettigrew and Shneiderman, 2004; Shakya, 2003; Gautam et al. 2001; Manchanda, 1999; Onesto, 2005; Ogura, 2007; Parvati, 2003; Shneiderman, 2009; Lawoti & Pahari, 2010; Bhattarai, 2010; de Sales, 2009; Hachhethu, 2004; Leve, 2007). But this mushrooming literature of the post-war period ignores more than two centuries of alienating politics, exploitation and moral economic transformations that produced a series of uprisings and laid the conditions of possibility for the Maoist revolution in Nepal. My dissertation intends to fulfill this vital scholarly gap, thereby sharpening our understanding of development and revolutionary politics in agrarian societies in South Asia and elsewhere.

## Historicizing development in Nepal

Development has a long history in Nepal. It represents a single unifying logic within the otherwise fragmented, heterogeneous and hierarchical political, social and economic conditions that prevail in Nepal, a country of extremely diverse geographies, cultures and ecologies. Nepal has never been directly colonized in the modern sense of the word; one attempt by British India was defeated in 1816 by the Gurkha military, providing a sense of victory and legitimacy to the Nepali ruling dynasty to extend their internal control. But development has become a culture and *raison d'être* for everyday living in Nepal (Pigg, 1992; 1996; Shrestha, 1990; 1997). Correspondingly, Western states and scholars popularized Nepal as an isolated and geographically insignificant country to the outside world before the arrival of international development programs in the 1950s.

This conventional narrative of Nepali history, however, does not acknowledge the deeply transnational composition of Nepali society, creating a mixture of indigenous communities with Hindus coming from the south after Muslim conquest in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and a vast number of Tibeto-Burmans from the north following the ancient Silk Road trade connection.<sup>5</sup> These histories of transnational connections inspired Nepal's ruling dynasties to become powerful in the region but also catalyzed social changes that led to a gradual shift in polity from self-ruled communities to state controlled citizens, especially as a spillover effect of British colonialism in India.

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<sup>5</sup> Since ancient times, Nepal was central in regional geopolitics either in expanding Buddhism to the East, trading Himalyan *Jadibuti*, spices and medicinal herbs along the Silk Road trade routes or providing a buffer between British colonial power in the south and expanding Chinese dynasties in the north.

Nepal's unification in the 1760s was driven by fear and a desire to protect smaller territories from colonial invasion, although it materialized a project of building an empire under the Shah dynasty of the Gorkha kingdom. However, another, albeit less visible, aspect to the process was the desire of the ruling dynasty to modernize and to strengthen the state by demanding higher levels of production and taxation. The increased trade connections to India and Tibet, the conversion of communal lands into forms of private property and the promotion of surplus production to collect higher taxes were three main priorities of the state during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – and seen as the route to a prosperous, modern and united Nepal (Cammann, 1951; Hamilton, 1971; Regmi 1961; 1976). Directly influenced by the colonial ruling system in India, the state introduced a new commercial taxation system in 1815 by enforcing the compulsory registration of farmlands (Regmi, 1984). This modernizing drive became further entrenched during the Rana regime (which replaced the Shah dynasty and was to rule Nepal from 1846 to 1952) immediately after the Rana Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur Rana, visited Britain and France in 1850 on a mission to learn about modern development and industrialization in Europe.<sup>6</sup> He launched a project of modernization to regulate land, establish administrative procedures and bureaucratic control, construct modern palaces, develop urban centers, open mining sites, trade timber to India and generate surplus capital to reinvest in mining and trade (Hamilton, 1971; Cammann, 1951).<sup>7</sup> These moves brought

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<sup>6</sup> As soon as the prime minister returned to the country in 1851, a massive regulatory mechanism (to promote the rule of law and the trade) was promulgated by enacting a 1,400-page long *Muluki Ain*, or public law, in 1854.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to extraction of resources and taxes from the people, the Rana regime started to develop yearly development plans for conducting cadastral surveys and allocating budgets for irrigation, schools and foot trails. These practices directly mimicked the British colonial systems. Official exchange visits were frequently organized between Nepal and British India after Nepal provided military assistance against the

not only new ideas of modernization, accumulation and surplus production but also different mechanisms of private control and regulation in Nepal. Although proto-developmental ideas were mobilized in the interests of the British colonial power and Nepali elites, these changes nevertheless seeded new social dynamics in the country.

Like many countries, Nepal entered into the modern era of international development in the early 1950s, following decolonization movements around the world and the democratic movement in Nepal.<sup>8</sup> Given Western interests in restoring post-colonial stability and maintaining a colonial structure of economic order in the South, international development programs entered Nepal fueled by geopolitical imperatives. The political objective of the early development assistance was guided by the idea of anti-communism awareness (Khadka, 1997). The United States was the first country to enter into Nepal's development terrain, signing an agreement in 1951 for the Four Point program with the Nepali government.<sup>9</sup> Various donors followed under the banner of

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peasant uprising in northern India in 1857. In return, the British extended cooperation to the Nepali Rana regime as their ally and provided necessary skills to strengthen bureaucratic structures, primarily through interpersonal connections.

<sup>8</sup> The fall of the British in India weakened the regime in Nepal, and, when the historically brewing social discontent (mainly peasant uprisings) coagulated as a new political force, people revolted and a new political regime of parliamentary parties emerged. Political parties were operating underground and were inspired by the decolonization movements in India and the Maoist revolution in China. Soon, a new class of national elites emerged.

<sup>9</sup> To achieve stability in the newly independent developing countries, the U.S. government announced a Four Point program "to support the people of developing countries in their efforts to acquire the knowledge and resources essential to development, and to build the economic, political, and social institutions" (USAID, 2001:5). The rationale of the program, as cited in Mihaly (1965:31), was that "the people of the underdeveloped areas have been stirred by a growing awareness of the possibilities of human development .... By leaving them unable to fulfill their reasonable aspirations, their misery makes them fertile ground for an ideology which will be hold out to them promise, however false, of means towards a better life." See U.S. Department of State, *Point Four: A Cooperative Program for Aid in the Development of Economically Underdeveloped Areas* (1950:2), cited in Mihaly, 1965.

poverty reduction and infrastructure development.<sup>10</sup> The target of those programs was rural populations, urging them to enact efficient rural production systems and farming practices. The general assumption was that rural people lacked knowledge and technologies for intensive agriculture and, therefore, the priority was to change peasants' production behavior to increase food supply for subsistence and the market (USAID, 2001). Even though these interventions created enormous enthusiasm among the rural farmers, especially the landlords, they miserably failed to spread ideas widely. These new initiations, however, increased the already-entrenched inequality in landholding as commonly used lands were brought into private ownership.

In the decade of the 1960s through the mid-1970s, Nepal became an icon of development, a nation whose identity became inextricably wrapped up in the notion of *bikash*, development (Shrestha, 1997; Pigg, 1992; Blaikie et al., 1980). *Bikash* entered everyday public lexicon as a measure of national and local success, a telos of life and an indicator of modernity (a parameter for differentiating developed *versus* backward categories).<sup>11</sup> The peasantry remained the highest priority, followed by industrialization (establishment of industrial zones), infrastructure (transportation) and community

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<sup>10</sup> During the 1950s, three main international interests guided the development assistance in Nepal: 1) the U.S. interest of countering potential risk of spreading communist ideologies in South Asia, 2) interests of countries such as India and China to extend regional influence to guarantee border security and 3) interests of countries such as Switzerland, which saw Nepal as a destination for exotic adventure and tourism and as a kin mountain community to which they owed solidarity.

<sup>11</sup> More than sixteen international development agencies were active in Nepal during the 1960s, providing development leadership and financial assistance in the form of loans, grants and technical support. They included USAID, as well as development arms of India, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, Switzerland (SATA), West Germany, Israel, the United Nations, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Ford Foundation, United Mission to Nepal, Helvetas Switzerland and the Peace Corps (USA). By the end of 1960s, the Village Development Program alone formed 13,700 Local Improvement Committees around the country to mobilize them as agricultural extensionists (USAID, 2001).

awareness. Overall productivity more than doubled from 1950s rates, but, because the loans were tied to the ownership of private land as collateral, poor people were denied access. As a result, poverty and hunger grew substantially even as Nepal was able to export cereal crops in the 1950s.<sup>12</sup>

These national development mechanisms produced context-specific and culturally compatible normative standards. They re-imagined rural life at individual, family, community and broader societal levels, informed by the general principles set out in development schemes. Battalions of the development “army” fanned out throughout the country, operating as extension workers, facilitators, conflict mediators and agricultural technicians at the community level. Local institutions acted as development’s “ideological apparatuses,” to borrow Althusser’s (1971) concept, (re)producing some of its subjects as development “intellectuals” capable of bridging and translating abstract ideas of social change into the everyday language of rural communities. These intellectuals were local teachers, model farmers, entrepreneurs, and civic activists. Nevertheless, the emerging role played by development intellectuals and activists was to perpetuate the power and hierarchy of higher-caste elites, men, educated landlords and professionals. It provided the latter new opportunities to extend their “trusteeship” over villagers and to reap opportunities created by rural development programs.

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<sup>12</sup> By the 1970s, the area cultivated under improved varieties of rice and wheat had tripled from what it was in 1960 (see USAID, 2001). In addition, skill training, awareness campaigns, women’s empowerment, school curriculum, farmers clubs and mothers’ groups were some of the local mechanisms used to promote the idea of development as everyday commonsense and “practical ideology to the rural population. In a Gramscian sense, practical ideology” refers to the articulation of everyday necessities (especially in terms of economic production and modes of living) in developing a particular consciousness about the world. Here, development was articulated as a way of living that satisfied every necessity of an individual. See Buci-Glucksmann (1980) for Gramsci’s explanation of the relationship between practical ideology and theoretical ideology.

Still, there were signs of genuine change. In some cases, development programs enabled peasant groups to contrast their traditional subordinated positions under feudalism to new ideas of development-led change. Such moments took political turns sporadically; more importantly, they allowed peasants to question feudal social hierarchies of caste, class, gender and ethnicity, as well as their own subordinated position. In fact, development provided a platform for “organic intellectuals” – both women and men – who, while pursuing developmental ideas, were also able to articulate new political possibilities and consciousness.

The decades of the 1980s and 1990s witnessed a massive expansion of development programs in rural areas. Development professionals adopted community-based approaches informed by the principles of individual rationality and community self-reliance in maximizing economic growth through market mechanisms. Community forestry, progressive farmers groups, savings-credit groups, irrigation groups, mothers’ groups and other organizations put forward individual, as well as community-based, schemes of development. Everybody was organized under sectoral institutions such as forest, agriculture, health or education. When I met Laxmi Bishwokarma (a *dalit* woman) from Okhaldhunga district in 2010, she said, “I was a member of sixteen different community development groups, and I had to spend sixteen days every month for meetings. I didn’t have time to work for myself.”

The Maoist revolution emerged in the mid-1990s despite these histories of developmental change. Albeit with different valences, development was also the centerpiece of the Maoist agenda. In fact, during the period of revolution, Maoists spent a

major portion of their time in working for various developmental activities. During the long and diverse histories of resistance and revolt, development was a political strategy of both the state and social movements in articulating social change and a particular political common sense.

### **The double life of development: a theoretical framework**

“The adult literacy classes [in the 1980s] were our eye-opener. We were encouraged to join those evening classes so that we would be better prepared for income-generating activities and safe-motherhood programs. But the teachers encouraged us to learn more about our society. Women’s groups did not only learn how to read and write, rather the classes became the place to talk about social discrimination against women. Later, we formed a women’s association and fought against gambling and alcoholism and demanded equal rights to property. It was a “revolution” in the village, and later, most of the members joined the Maoist party. I don’t think our women’s association would be that powerful without those literacy programs.” (Interviewed on June 10, 2012)

- A woman, 65, Thabang village

This section develops an analytical framework for the exploration of the double life of development. Here I introduce some concepts related to the relationship between developmental hegemony and rebellious consciousness. The dialectical relationship between enrollment of people as subjects into development ideas and their simultaneous othering produces split subjects who are incomplete and always becoming, and who therefore intensify development’s internal contradiction. It is important to understand these inherent, albeit geographically and historically conditioned, contradictions within the process of development in order to explain why people taking part in development might also revolt against it. Such conceptual *and* empirical contradictions built into the process of development become visible and politically charged only through processes of

conscious articulation. This analytical approach not only emphasizes how contradiction emerges at a particular historical conjuncture but also a) the formation of this conjuncture through a contingent articulation of processes comprising moral economy [society], political ecology [nature] and transformation of consciousness [individual] and b) the conditions of possibility for future trajectories of change brought into existence by this particular articulation. In this dissertation, an array of interrelated concepts – development, hegemony, subalternity, moral economy, political ecology and consciousness — provide prisms to explore the prehistory of the Maoist revolution in Nepal.

### *Development*

The idea of development has become one of the most effective, deeply embedded and conceptually persuasive political machines in world history, producing, normalizing and perpetuating differences between the North, as absolute and universal, and the South, as the inferior but natural “other” of the universal.<sup>13</sup> Development is suffused by Western

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<sup>13</sup> In many instances, the word “development” is used to denote both the internal processes of societal change immanent to every society and the external interventions driving social changes toward a particular direction. Cowen and Shenton (1996) use that differentiation to show how development has become a colonial trusteeship and control in expanding capitalism and Northern superiority. Hart (2002) uses the interventionist meaning of development only to mean the international development projects in the postcolonial period. Elaborating similar ideas, Hart (2010) distinguishes between “D” and “d” developments, where capital D is “the project of intervention in the Third World” after the 1940s; and development (with a small d) refers to “the development of capitalism” in a self-refashioned way “dialectically connected with the discourse and practices of Development” (p. 119). She hints that the d/development is a self-unfolding and a natural process of capitalism. But, in fact, the expansion of capitalism in the South has taken place as a “project of intervention” through the long histories of colonialism, trade and conquest driven by enlightenment thought, even though capitalist development is geographically differentiated, fragmentary and incomplete. Likewise, the internal social dynamics and changes do not necessarily lead to capitalism, and also such changes are considered inadequate and inappropriate in development. Therefore development always involves intentional and external intervention with pre-given ideas and interests.

enlightenment thought and can be likened, within Hegelian conceptions of history, to the Spirit of Europe; that is, as a drive to absolute knowledge and, by extension, the quest to actualize freedom via the powers of reason. Indeed, for Hegel, the development of history is the striving for freedom of Spirit, i.e. the expansion of self-conscious European ideas as universal, in a dialectical progression toward ever-greater understanding and concrete achievements.<sup>14</sup> The chief protagonist or internal determinant of history here is the subject of consciousness who develops through a repeating process of alienation from and reconciliation with the self. Hegel says that this self-understanding and the material achievements that accompany it are most advanced in Europe. In development's terms, the North (as Europe's diaspora) leads the South in the realm of ideas and material production and, therefore, has the authority to impress its universality on the South, liberating it from ignorance, necessity, and backwardness.<sup>15</sup>

As the idea of development carries with it a perceived necessity of changing the rest of the world in the image of Europe, developmental principles invariably revolve around the central points of Western liberalism: namely, individual liberty, rational knowledge and economic freedom (which come to be associated, in greater or lesser degrees, with capitalist enterprise). These tenets are naturalized as the route to individual and social betterment, what Tanya Li (2007) evocatively calls "The Will to Improve".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Hegel (1975 [1830]), *Philosophy of History*, where he defines Spirit as the absolute knowledge possessed in Europe as a true career of the history as a unifying or totalizing whole of the world.

<sup>15</sup> For further discussion and mobilization of Hegelian conception of the history and knowledge in defining and explaining the idea of development, see Cowen and Shenton, 1996; Dussel, 1998; Hettne 1995; Kraniauskas, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> See Li (2007). Tania Li defines development as a willful scheme of improvement of the others, "Indonesian," by those who occupy the position of trustees "claiming to know how others should live" (p.4).

Given the historical affinities between development and capitalism, it comes as no surprise to see that, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (particularly its latter half), the two come to be viewed as co-constitutive: that is, development as a terrain for the expansion of capitalism and capitalism as a set of social relations that can promote development. From a leftist vantage point, development becomes the “invisible hand of the imperial form of liberalism.”<sup>17</sup>

Even though, in a general sense, we can understand development as a reciprocal extension of capitalism, it exceeds the economic sphere and involves cultural, political and social changes leading to structural transformation. In this process it can generate liberating possibilities for some because of its capacity for dissolving certain social structures and bonds, but the perpetuation of differences and subordination remain integral to development. In doing so, development attempts to convert all non-human entities into a productive force of capital by transforming their physical properties, as well as their associated relationships with society. But most importantly, development aims to achieve these transformations, i.e. progress, by generating submissive ideology as everyday common sense.

Developmental consciousness (subjugation), by both effacement of other conceptions of the world and creation of desire for change, naturalizes the preeminence of European path of progress, establishing Europe’s present as the future of the global

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<sup>17</sup> See Gidwani (2008:11), where he defines development as “liberalism’s problematic – what liberalism *can no longer think without*” (italics in original). Development operates as a “suture” for liberalism’s contradictions, and it attempts to justify the telos of progress. Gidwani asserts that the suture is marked by a scar that threatens to erupt into a bleeding wound, denoting that development can never overcome its contradictions; as such, the possibility for transformative politics is always present.

South. These simultaneous processes of enrollment and effacement preserve the conditions that can generate the possibility of revolt when the masses develop a “critical consciousness” (Gramsci, 1971) of the relentless “othering” in development. This critical consciousness could become a part of larger revolutionary process, providing a spark to the various other geographically specific forces of resistance. The othering in development is not the only source of power for revolt, but the processes of effacement could generate negative consciousness among development subjects. It could happen when development processes are “articulated” with multiple sources of subordination (class, gender, caste, race, ethnicity, religion, language, geography), constituting a historical conjuncture of oppositional movements through “organic intellectual activities” (Gramsci, 1971). In this sense, development reproduces its existence as a double movement — a dialectical contradiction that it cannot solve.

Studying the relationship between development and social movements has been a principal focus of the critical social sciences and a widely researched topic over the last fifty years (Edelman, 1999; Watts and Peet, 1996; de Janvry, 1981; Scott, 1976, 1985, 1990; Rangan, 1996; Guha, 1989; Tsing, 2005; Mohanty et al., 1998; Amin, 1974). Various strands of scholarship have emerged in this period, largely attempting to “decenter” development as an irretrievably Western phenomenon. Much of this literature describes social movements as an articulation of differentiated, place-specific, everyday struggles. An exception to this trend is the poststructuralist genre of “post-development,” which postulates development as a unilateral hegemonic project of the West that emerged after the U.S. triumph in the Second World War, creating a cycle of exploitation in the Third World (Sachs, 1992; Rahnema, 1997; Escobar, 1988; Esteva, 1988). In this strand,

social movements are understood as a response to the exploitative conditions created by development; by extension, the alternative to development is proposed as “autonomous,” “indigenous” and “local” ways of living (Radcliffe, 2001; Slater, 1985; Escobar, 1995; 2008).

Meanwhile, feminist post-colonial scholars have long critiqued mainstream and Marxist scholarship on development and social movements as patriarchal and econocentric, ignoring or effacing considerations of gender, race and cultural difference (Mohanty, 2002; Spivak, 1988; Li, 2007; Tsing, 2005). Scholars in the critical tradition, especially geographers and feminists, have demonstrated that development is variegated, contradictory and geographically uneven in its policies and practices (Nagar et al, 2002; Hart, 2002). Such analysis also shows that development is contested, appropriated and reshaped by resistance movements and vice versa (Leitner et al., 2007). To understand the colonial and nationalist legacies of development, postcolonial scholarship is particularly useful and also unavoidable because it systematically lays out the diverse ways in which the authority of enlightenment Reason is perpetuated through capitalist development in post-colonial societies (Chatterjee, 2001; Spivak, 1999; Chakrabarty, 2000; Moore, 2005; Wainwright, 2008, Gidwani, 2008; McEvan, 2009). As a critique of Eurocentrism, postcolonial scholarship does not provide ample systematic analysis or theorizations of development and social movements, but it offers meticulous analyses of how class, race, knowledge, geography, gender, discourse and practices are produced and reproduced in hierarchical schemes, with some rendered superior to others. At another scale, it also explores the ways in which hierarchical relationships of domination and

subordination between the global North and the global South and between nationalist elites and the masses are naturalized and perpetuated.

But as Hall (1985:92) points out, the celebration of difference as “the endless slippage of the signifier” also has the danger of undermining the forces that “unite differences” into “a complex structure,” and, by only highlighting the differences, we might end up theorizing the interconnected social elements as “nothing ever fits with anything else”. Obviously, the category “subaltern” is not homogenous, and subalterns live within their own unequal structure and hierarchies. In general, these heterogeneities and hierarchies are “embedded in larger political and economic realities” (Crehan, 2002:5), blurring the boundaries of domination and subordination. But, following Hall (1985), these differences and subaltern heterogeneity do not preclude the emergence of commonality. Recognizing differences should not undermine the historical material processes that generate particular conjuncture of forces and a complex unity of differences at various points of time.

### *Developmental Hegemony*

“Corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups, too. This is the most purely political phase, and marks the decisive passage from the structure to the sphere of the complex superstructures; it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies become ‘party,’ come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a ‘universal’ plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups.”

Gramsci (1971: 181-2)

As a growing literature has demonstrated, the idea of hegemony, as a problematic of power and consciousness, helps to explain the politics of development and its relationship to agrarian uprisings.<sup>18</sup> The notion of hegemony was first used in its modern sense by V. I. Lenin to define the relationship between the proletariat and peasantry in the revolution, and later mobilized by Gramsci to describe the broader mechanisms of bourgeois subordination of the working class. This concept can now be extended to explore the dialectical contradictions of development: how development reproduces the conditions of subject formation while naturalizing the idea of progress and how it might also induce organized defiance, creating inevitable ruptures for rebellious consciousness.

The problematic of hegemony has been extensively invoked in the development literature to understand how the ideology of development combines with heterogeneous and hierarchical social elements in enabling conditions that are conducive for capitalist development. It does so through a mix of consent and coercion: on the one hand, eliciting the consent of masses to bourgeois ideals of progress (generating desire for “development” via various ideological apparatuses located in the realm of civil society), and on the other deploying punitive state power to suppress alternative arrangements (Hart, 2002; Gidwani, 2008; Wainwright, 2008; Critchley, 2002; Ledwith, 2005; Greenhouse, 2005). Many of these analyses use Gramsci’s notion of hegemony in

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<sup>18</sup> Literatures on moral economy and agrarian change have mobilized the notion of hegemony extensively to explain the impacts of development on the peasantries (see Feierman, 1990; Edelman, 1999; Moore, 2005; Gidwani, 2008; Li, 2007 for details). Also see Scott (1976, 1985, and 1990) for a fierce critique of the notion of hegemony in the context of peasant movements in East Asia, where he rejects the idea of hegemony and claims that the peasantry is an autonomous sphere of power and capable of mobilizing rational strategies of everyday resistance against the domination. For the genealogy of hegemony, and also its extended Gramscian elaboration, see especially Althusser, 1969; Anderson, 1977; William, 1977; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Hall, 1988; Crehan, 2002; and Thomas, 2009.

conjunction with Foucauldian notions of discourse, power and governmentality (Moore, 2005; Li, 1999; 2007; Mosse, 2005). Development is generally understood as a disciplining mechanism that operates through geographically specific political and cultural discourses and practices. Counter-hegemonic politics or, in other words, subaltern insurgencies remain a possibility, creating ruptures in development's hegemonic sphere.

Hegemony thus refers to a “mechanism” of (re)producing subordination of the great masses to the direction imposed on them by the dominant groups. It is a process that bundles together different social strata in a hierarchical order, mediated through the interests of dominant groups, i.e. moving in a given direction, in which the interests of dominant groups are constantly reproduced as also of subordinate groups.<sup>19</sup> This process of hierarchical “equilibrium” and “coordination” in the interests of the ruling class “not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (Gramsci, 1971:244). In Raymond Williams' words, it provides “a sense of reality for most people in society, a sense of absolute” (Williams, 1977:100).<sup>20</sup> The Gramscian explanation of hegemony goes beyond the sphere of ideology to incorporate economic, political and ecological dimensions unified by

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<sup>19</sup> For Gramsci, the state plays a central role in maintaining hegemony of the ruling class through “a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups — equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail” (Gramsci, 1971:182).

<sup>20</sup> Gramsci reveals that the subordinate group has its own “conception of the world” which “occasionally” manifests in this group's “action,” but “for the reasons of submission and intellectual subordination” the group “adopted a conception which is not its own but is borrowed from another group, and it affirms this conception verbally and believes itself to be following it” (Gramsci, 1971:327).

hegemonic apparatuses<sup>21</sup> into a “historical bloc” as the “complex, contradictory and discordant ensemble” of social relations. Hegemony is also a “real material force, embodied in institutions,” as Crehan (1997:24) says, “which brings into being specific landscape of power and molds the individual subjectivities that feel at home in those landscapes.” It is a passage between contradictory elements and their hierarchical articulation toward a directional change by producing social relations according to the direction and interests of the dominant group.

Hegemony is not “the antithesis of domination”; it is also a form of domination but with directional leadership, in which “it leads the allied classes, and dominates over the adversarial classes” (Gramsci cited in Thomas, 2009:163). Domination operates vertically and it is static, whereas hegemony puts domination into motion, combining vertical stratification (domination) with horizontal direction (leading). Due to this nature of hegemony — “a generic and formal theory of social power,” as Thomas (2009:160) recognizes in Gramsci — it “can be applied equally to bourgeois and proletariat leadership strategies.” But the concern is to understand the historical and spatial processes of hegemonic practices and counter-hegemonic oppositions by exploring their dialectical relationship.

In development, the question of hegemony is to ask: *How is it that bourgeois consciousness becomes commonsense in development while continuously maintaining the*

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<sup>21</sup> The idea of hegemonic apparatus is central to Gramsci. It is “the wide-ranging series of articulated institutions and practices” of a specific class or class alliance and is mobilized for “political power” by also integrating “antagonists” of a particular class project (Thomas, 2009:226). Gramsci understood hegemonic apparatus as a vehicle of reform that is central to the generation of “the new conception of the world” which “creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge” (Gramsci, 1971:365).

*subordinated position of its subjects, and how does rebellious counter-consciousness emerge as its antithesis?* New relations of production evolve with development, demanding new physical and human arrangements. As Gramsci (1971:242) might have pointed out, development conjures a new type of “humanity,” whereby individuals are “incorporated into the collective man” to secure their “consent and collaboration.” Hegemony is not about a “brain washing of the masses” (Greenhouse, 2005; Lears, 1985:577); rather it is “a complex series of struggle” that, once achieved, “must be constantly and ceaselessly renewed” (Hall, 1988:53). Thus, a Gramscian approach allows us to dissect and unravel development’s internal processes of transforming multiplicities into a collective whole, enrolling the masses into its scheme of directional change.<sup>22</sup> As a hegemonic enterprise, development operates at the level of consciousness and human relations. In fact, consciousness and human relations are the two central tenets behind Gramsci’s idea of hegemony: Their makeup is always deeply political and integral to class domination and resistance. A third element, about which Gramsci is not explicit, is the role of geography (see Wainwright and Mercer, 2009). Hegemony is reproduced through spatial relations where development naturalizes geographical differentiations as associated with evolutionary stages of social change, which require overcoming through development.

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<sup>22</sup> Development is directional in two ways: first, it is a teleological intervention based on the idea of “progress” moving from a simpler nomadic life to more advanced society following the path of European civilization, and second, it is the flow of ideas from the North to South. Arguing for how ideas travel from the North to the South, Gramsci argues that “a particular ideology, for instance, born in a highly developed country, is disseminated in less-developed countries, impinging on the local interplay of combinations. This relation between international forces and national forces is further complicated by the existence within every State of several structurally diverse territorial sectors, with diverse relations of force at all levels” (Gramsci, 1971:182).

Hegemony is always embedded in hierarchical power relations and therefore remains haunted by the fear of revolt. It is never fully secure, because individuals tend to maintain elements of autonomy, albeit in fragmented and subordinated forms; as such, the possibility that they could “emerge into consciousness of themselves” is always present (Crehan, 1997). Furthermore, because the dominating structure cannot fully grasp the interests and experience of subordinated groups (because it must continuously validate its hierarchical structure to legitimize the domination), it can fail to recognize how the sense of subordination might transform into a force of defiance. Development operates as an adhesive to minimize differences and create equilibrium in hegemony, but it can fall prey to its own contradictions of simultaneously enrolling and effacing subalterns. In short, development creates possibilities for both hegemonic domination and counter-hegemonic insurgency at the level of material forces, as well as consciousness.

### *Subalternity*

Relations of subalternity are inevitable outcomes of and a necessary condition for the reproduction of hegemonic domination. Gramsci uses the term “subaltern” to refer to the subordinated positions of working classes that are disjointed and fragmented along the axes of class, gender, ethnicity and occupation, as well as to signify the importance of understanding the complex historical relationship between domination and subordination for imagining political transformation that overcomes the conditions of subalternity.<sup>23</sup> It

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<sup>23</sup> The idea of the subaltern denotes the “other” of the history in enlightenment thought. For example, Hegel (1975 [1830]) recognizes the existence of some forms of “otherness,” but “inconsequential” therefore not “worthy” of knowing; nevertheless, the other is necessary for him to achieve freedom of history because, only through the process of negation (suppression of the other), does being for another-self return to being-for-self (see Gidwani, 2008). But, Gramsci, in the essay “*Some Aspects of the Southern Question*,” originally came up with the idea of the subaltern to explain the geographically and socially

is important to state that, for Gramsci, the category “subaltern” refers to those in *relations* of subordination and exclusion rather than a discrete, objective category of people.

The Indian Subaltern Studies Group recuperated Gramsci’s notion of the “subaltern” in a forceful and influential way in the 1980s as “a approach to restore the history to subordinated” groups, placing them in an “autonomous domain” outside the purview of bourgeois hegemony but persistently dominated by the elites (Prakash, 1994:1478).<sup>24</sup> Rejecting the teleological conceit of subalterns as “pre-political,” Ranajit Guha (1983; 1988; 1997) contended that subalterns were makers of their own histories and that regular uprisings by subaltern groups in India reveal their incomplete assimilation into structures of elite hegemony, whether colonial or nationalist.<sup>25</sup> However, at the same time, subalterns are not located outside the domain of elites, and they are “permeable” and “multi-layered” (Spivak, 1988; 1999). Attempts to excavate authentic subaltern consciousness simply outside the domain of elite might erase their heterogeneity and differentiated political agency (see Spivak, 1990). In fact, for Spivak, the category “subaltern” refers to those who live beyond the possibility of representation

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subordinated position of the peasants in south Italy. He mentions that the south Italy is composed of “amorphous” and “disintegrated” peasantry, bourgeois intellectuals and landowners, where the peasantry is “incapable” of being self-organized because it is socially subordinated and also mentally subjugated to the landlords mediated by the intellectuals of the bourgeoisie (Gramsci, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> Critiquing the colonial, nationalist and Marxist accounts of subaltern history as “robbing” the agency of the subalterns, some Indian scholars formed a SSG under the leadership of Ranajit Guha, aiming to create a “sovereign” space for subaltern politics by recuperating “independent” histories of indigenous *adivasis* and the peasants “as makers of their own destiny” within India (see Guha, 1983; Guha and Spivak, 1986; Chatterjee, 1986; Prakash, 1994; Chakrabarty, 2000; Spivak, 1988; Chaturvedi, 2000).

<sup>25</sup>The Subaltern Studies group has consistently insisted that the subaltern consciousness is the consciousness of resistance, which is marked by spontaneous uprisings and insurgencies as a deliberate strategy of countering elite’s domination and exploitation (see Spivak, 1988; Guha, 1997; Arnold, 2000; Chakrabarty, 2000).

in any organized politics because they are displaced to the margin and lack capacity to be organized politically.

However, these extensions of the idea of subaltern are narrowly constructed and distinct from Gramsci's conception of the conditions of subalternity. In my reading of Gramsci, subalterns are neither located outside the hegemonic structure of domination as an autonomous group nor incapable in understanding and organizing themselves politically. Even though they are fragmented and disorganized, subalterns are enrolled into hegemonic submission and, therefore, the political articulation of the relations of subordination into a collective conjuncture is always possible. The historical processes of counter-hegemonic struggles and solidarity can generate the possibilities of coalescing subaltern forces into a complex unity. These important political realities would remain unexplored if we simply perceived the subaltern as a category which must be located outside the sphere of hegemony, fully equipped with essential consciousness and political possibilities. In short, while they have provided a compelling methodology to recuperate the histories of the subalterns from the subterfuge of elitist discourses, the subaltern historians have overlooked the complex, intertwined relationship between domination and subordination.<sup>26</sup>

Development's enormous capacity for creating desire for organizing human and non-human worlds in a particular fashion has profound implications for the way

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<sup>26</sup> In light of the pervasive expansion of capitalism in its myriad forms and generally successful persuasion of the masses into the idea of development globally, now it is necessary to recuperate Gramsci's original idea of the subaltern in examining the intricate relationship between capitalist development and growing subaltern resistance around the world. Such recuperation is particularly important in development as a process that enrolls subordination into the scheme of domination through consent (see Arnold, 2000; Beverley, 2001; Bahl, 2000 for critiques of the Subaltern Studies Group).

subalternity is produced and understood. Here, my earlier remarks bear repeating: In development, subalternity and bourgeois hegemony become co-constitutive. Their dialectical relationship is maintained by development through the process of creating desire for progress among masses while simultaneously effacing their histories and capacities. Subaltern relations emerge out of development's process of "othering" of these masses — a systematic effacement and subordination of differences as the "others" of the dominant — within a system of domination. The discourse of dominance cannot fully appropriate other conceptions of the world, and therefore they remain as an intractable surface of the dominant system, leaving the process of effacement always incomplete, distorted and partial (Prakash, 1994). This intractability persistently separates subalterns from elites, producing positions of subalternity as a part of the hegemonic discourse of dominance (see Chakrabarty, 2000; Prakash, 1994; Chaturvedi, 2000). Therefore, the position of subalterns is not the result of the existence of exterior relationships of domination between the two distinct entities, elites and subalterns; rather, it is the *effect* of the internal process of creating hegemony of bourgeois ideology by constantly producing and effacing subalterns' subject-effects. Because this process of effacement and enrollment never achieves complete success, dialectical possibilities for counter-hegemonic praxis remain ever present.

Power, knowledge, compliance and capital are crucial elements that operate through development in producing particular subjectivities as the "other." The cycle of subalternity in development becomes perpetual, where the "others" are involved in schemes of empowerment and where their heterogeneity and differences are mobilized to circulate and accumulate capital in culturally and geographically specific ways. By

analyzing development's internal process of othering (alienation), we can begin to understand subaltern rebellion not as autonomous cultural resistance against a bourgeois, imperial discourse (as "post-development" scholars tend to) but as internally generated struggles against hegemonic domination and exploitation.

*Triangulating the double life of development: moral economy, political nature and consciousness*

In peasant society, development is about changing moral economic practices by reinventing agrarian environments in ways that are compatible with the market and in generating desire for "improvement" among peasants. Development's double moment is reproduced through an interacting combination of these changes, and therefore the analytical framework of this dissertation assimilates the conceptual terrains of *moral economy, political nature* and *consciousness* in exploring the dialectics of development and revolution in Nepal.

The idea of *moral economy* is one of the most celebrated analytical concepts in interrogating the relationship between capitalist agrarian transformations and peasant uprisings. The scholars who inhabited the English New Left mobilized the adjective "moral" to evoke the distinctive quality of pre-capitalist economic systems, where economic production was primarily determined by the work of the peasantry but where landlords and the state extracted the bulk of agrarian surplus.<sup>27</sup> E. P. Thompson

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<sup>27</sup> E. P. Thompson in his path-breaking monograph, *The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century* (1971), first used the term moral economy to describe "confrontations in the marketplace" against "profiteering" on people's "necessities," especially food. Such profit-making in the market was considered immoral, and it provoked food riots and protests that were charged and inspired by the moral values and beliefs of the working classes (Thompson, 1991). For the English New Left, the

(1991:340) suggests that moral economy should be understood as the basis of resistance to free market economy in defense of an economic system organized by “nonmonetary” norms and values. The aim was to identify the revolutionary potential of peasants and analytically ground the underlying sources of peasant rebellions. The main argument was that peasant rebellions were a response to changes in property relations and market encroachment. But it was also the contention of some within the English New Left that peasant uprisings become only a series of “scattered enclaves” unless “inspired from outside or even better, from above” (Hobsbawm, 1973:11).

Interjecting rational economic precepts into moral economic practices, James Scott (1976; 1985; 1990) reworked the concept of moral economy to define the structure of peasant communities as a dyadic unity marked by hierarchical submission of the peasantry to superordinate classes and moral expectation of subsistence and reciprocity from them. In Scott’s formulation, the vertical relationship between peasants and landlords is beneficial to both, as it guarantees subsistence to peasants while providing rents, prestige and power to landlords. This vertically integrated but reciprocal social structure, according to Scott, is at the heart of peasant communities and the true form of moral economy. Peasants rebel only in exceptional circumstances (Scott, 1976); more commonly, peasant resistance to elite domination takes everyday, disguised forms with open defiance a rarity (Scott, 1985).<sup>28</sup> Market forces and developmental interventions

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focus was on the study of the working classes and peasantry as always active but often conservative political actors, who were willing to rebel in defense of older, frequently paternalist, moral economic practices. See Thompson, 1971; 1991; Moore, 1966; Wolf, 1969; Hobsbawm, 1973.

<sup>28</sup> For James Scott, individuals take a rational decision based on costs and benefits of each action to decide whether to take part in resistance or not and in which form, rather than determined by the class position of the peasantry as a collective mobilization against the elites. The systems of reciprocity and subsistence

pose a threat to the moral economy by destabilizing systems of reciprocity and subsistence. This often provokes peasants to rise up and revolt against their superordinates. Scott foregrounds two aspects of peasant societies: first, the existence of a paternalistic social structure that is stable and morally grounded, binding peasants and elites in a patron-client relationship, and second, peasant uprisings when they occur are in defense of a “subsistence ethic” and “right to reciprocity”.

Unlike Scott, I believe that the most generative approach to moral economy is one that highlights not just vertical relations between patrons and clients but also *horizontal solidarity* between peasants. While several scholars evoke the horizontal moral economic structures of peasantries (Hunt, 1988; Sayer, 2000; Edelman, 2005; Shah, 2010; Li, 2011), few conceptualize it as a key feature of agrarian practices and an essential political strategy of peasants and other subaltern groups. As Partha Chatterjee (1993:163) writes, such “solidarity does not grow because individuals feel they can come together with others as the basis of their common interest; on the contrary, individuals are enjoined to act within a collectivity because, it is believed, bonds of solidarity that tie them together already exist.” In villages such as Thabang in Nepal, the agrarian economy is organized around a structure of mutual expectations that take the form of customary norms of conduct. This universe of moral values, I argue, provides a more adequate foundation for comprehending transformations in common sense and political consciousness and their consolidation into rebellious uprisings. Moral economy in Scott’s (1976) understanding refers to inter-class obligations and expectations rather than intra-class or intra-

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guarantee are the most powerful “moral components” of the peasant tradition that sustain vertical structure with widely believed moral expectations from both sides.

community structures of solidarity and egalitarianism. Scott, in my view, misunderstands feudal institutions and systems of domination such as hierarchical customary practices, religious institutions and practices of food distribution as forms of reciprocity and the right to subsistence. In fact, these systems are ideological apparatuses and coercive instruments borne of the alliance between feudal overlords and the state. Scott's approach to moral economy and peasant-landlord relationships underplays the brutal exploitation of peasantries by the state and elites, and his emphasis on "everyday forms of resistance" and "weapons of the weak" overlooks the historical frequency and geographic spread of overt resistance by peasants against dominant groups.

I have glossed the second important constituent of the double life of development as "*political nature*." The idea of progress aims to establish a rational and efficient unity between society and nature that is governed for human ends. Nature is frequently portrayed within narratives of progress (such as "development") as a force beyond reason that thwarts human endeavors; as such, development becomes about overcoming nature's barriers. Development seeks not to conquer nature, per se, but to reorganize it for productive mobilization. Nature's material forces (both physical material properties and associated human relations), however, play a significant role in how such mobilization is reproduced. In creating the conditions for hegemonic social relations of production, development aims to overcome the material differences of natural entities and their social relationships by enrolling both society and nature in the same scheme of production. In development, hegemonic social relations are extended to nature; and therefore, political nature should be understood in the terrains of ideology and hegemony by exploring how

nature becomes a part of particular political conjuncture and commonsense in different points of time (see Mann, 2009; Moore, 2005).

In a Marxist framework, nature and society “metabolize” through an interactive relationship, where labor process mediates and determines the level of material exchange in the metabolic interaction<sup>29</sup> (see Smith, 1984; Harvey, 1996). Such interactive relationship is more important here than the actual material content in understanding nature. The historically coevolved metabolic unity between society and nature is largely governed by use-value relationships and non-alienating exchanges which are mediated by concrete material processes. But when it takes an exchange value form, society is estranged from nature and vice versa through the labor process, where nature’s materiality is abstracted and suppressed in producing exchangeable equivalences. The shift from historically coevolving metabolism to estrangement might provide an effective economic explanation on how nature is mobilized in organizing society in a particular way. But, as this shift in metabolic relationship is hegemonic and operates at the level of consciousness, it is important to understand how life (matter) is enrolled in hegemonic processes and in what ways it can also disrupt hegemonic unity. The ideas are also concrete material forces (Mann, 2009) and, therefore, we must understand political nature in conjunction to the realm of idea.

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<sup>29</sup> Signifying this metabolic process, Marx says “man lives on nature – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die. Man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself” (1978:75). Elaborating on this idea, Smith (1984: 19) highlights that “men incorporate their own essential forces into natural objects, and natural things gain a new social quality as use-values; hence, nature is humanized while men are naturalized.”

Development's disruption of the historically coevolved relations between peasantries and their surrounding environmental resources as a result of capitalist development has long been debated (Peet and Watts, 1996; Heynen et al., 2007; Agrawal, 2005; McCarthy, 2005). Market-led environmental governance has not only undermined the longstanding coexistence between local communities and surrounding ecological systems, but it has also altered the material composition of resource pools (Leach et al, 1997). Disruption in these patterns of relationship has altered the dynamics of ecological systems, producing an incompatible relationship between ecological entities and indigenous practices (de Angelis, 2004). The general understanding in these literatures is that this altered relationship between humans and nature has destabilized cohesive, if sometimes unequal social structures, allowing collective resistance to emerge.

The recent literatures on nature-society relations and understanding of the politics of the materiality are organized around the ideas of *political ecology*<sup>30</sup> and *socio-nature*<sup>31</sup>, each of distinct philosophical provenance and position on how we ought to

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<sup>30</sup> Challenging Malthusian explanation of environmental crisis and inspired by Marxist theory of political economy and peasant studies, political ecology emerged in the 1970s, focusing on unequal power relations and access to resources mediated through social relations of productions as a key force in destabilizing human and environmental relationship (Blaikie, 1985; Watts, 1983; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Neumann, 2002; Peluso and Watts, 2001). In this explanation, capitalist structure of accumulation by integrating natural diversity into global markets has grossly undermined the history of successful coexistence of humans with their environments, leading to conflict, ecological degradation and social disintegration. The focus of political ecology in the 1990s was on local environmental movements and discursive analyses of power, knowledge and technology (Agrawal, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Critiquing the structural framework of political ecology and its idea of capitalist production of nature reproducing dualistic understanding of nature and society in two separate realms, a new thread of scholarship has emerged recently highlighting the role of other-than-economic processes in forging an interactive unity between nature and society. This neologism "socio-nature" describes these nature-society conglomerations (Castree and Braun, 1998; Whatmore, 2002). Their main critique is that the dualistic account of nature and society relationship a) is anthropocentric and insufficiently attentive to nature's materiality and b) does not incorporate socially embedded extra-economic and non-capitalist relations to nature into its analytical framework (Braun, 2009).

understand the dynamics of nature and its societal interactions. Political ecology claims that ecological politics is about human relations and differences in power. In this tradition, the role of the material content and productivity of ecological processes are important elements but remain secondary to the social relations of power in generating particular political conjuncture. The material entities are considered to be socially constructed and subordinated to social relations of production. Similarly, the idea of socio-nature aims to provide an active agency to nature by transcending the nature-society dichotomy with the emphasis on the relationality and co-production of socio-nature. But this account of nature-society relations is not entirely attentive to heterogeneous structures and dynamics within nature and society. Cultural, discursive and noneconomic elements are central to constructing socio-nature, but we must also question their dominating and hegemonic characteristics.

An important aspect of recuperating nature's materiality is to recognize how populations, stratified along class, caste and gender lines, interact differently with the diverse and dynamic material forces of nature. A truly relational understanding of nature and society would understand that different social groups experience different modes and intensities of metabolic interaction with nature, according to hierarchies of access that privilege some and exclude others. Development intervenes through various programs to alter nature's materiality and re-arrange existing hierarchies of access. These disruptions both consolidate and jeopardize development's legitimacy and, as such, propagate what I have been calling development's "double moment".

The third and perhaps the most important aspect of the triangular framework of analyzing the double life of development is *consciousness*. Formation of a particular social structure or propagation of a transformative social change is not a spontaneous phenomenon occurring naturally and inevitably in the course of history. It is a deliberate outcome of historically developed and consciously articulated trajectories that emerge through active struggle (*praxis*) carried out by social actors. Such outcomes can serve both bourgeois developmental social formations and freedom from subordination and exploitation. Therefore central to understanding development's quest for hegemony via enrollment of masses and its simultaneous generation of possibilities for revolt requires unraveling how certain ideas or ways of thinking develop as commonsense within particular historical conjunctures. The role of organic intellectuals, who are capable of conjoining ideas with the political practice, is central in these processes.

In a Gramscian framework of understanding the transformation of consciousness, organic intellectuals are a key conduit of change, who “function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong” (Gramsci, 1971:3).<sup>32</sup> It is equally true in development, where intellectuals and professionals persistently present and articulate certain ideas and actions as “desirable” and “inevitable” by constantly mobilizing “persuasive narratives” transforming them into material force and general culture of a larger group of people (see Crehan, 2002:25-26). For Gramsci, peasants are

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<sup>32</sup> The organic intellectuals of the working class are “defined on the one hand by their role in production and in the organization of work and on the other by their ‘directive’ political role” (Gramsci, 1971:4). However, Gramsci also maintains that the peasantry which performs production function eloquently, but it is incapable to “elaborate its own ‘organic’ intellectuals” (1971:6). Here Gramsci highlights that intellectual activities are framed by and embedded to complex social fabrics, and we must acknowledge fragmented position of the peasantry in politics.

themselves “spontaneous philosophers” who can become organic intellectuals and give direction to mass uprisings. Indeed, history shows that peasant leaders can have remarkable organizing capacity. Thus, while the individual and collective potential of peasants is also mobilized by development for its own reproduction, the capacities developed in peasants by development’s schemes of “empowerment” may generate a cadre of organic intellectuals who transform general disaffection into mass revolt.

Instigating “critical consciousness” among the masses from within hegemonic common sense is the primary function of organic intellectuals, mainly by providing organizing and leadership roles and by elaborating the nexus between ideas and practice.<sup>33</sup> Critical consciousness is the antithesis of ideological hegemony. While the germs of this critical consciousness sprout like weeds in the seedbed of hegemony, only one set of ideas becomes common sense at a given time following the intellectual and political activities of a directive group. Therefore an analytical framework that seeks to link development and social movements must explore hegemonic ideological apparatuses and their role in generating common sense; but also the dialectic whereby subaltern social groups can re-articulate development’s commonsense into a critical consciousness.

Development produces contradictory subject positions and unplanned effects even as it works to consolidate the status quo (Gidwani, 2008; Li, 2007). Specifically,

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<sup>33</sup> According to Gramsci, the individual conception of the world is a response to the problems that are specific and immediately relevant. For him, the spontaneous ideas of the multitude (multiple conception of the world) must be transformed into a common conception of the world for generating collective defiance and revolt. A human mass does not distinguish itself as a collective group without critical consciousness (Gramsci, 1971), and this is only possible by generating common ideas through intellectual activities.

injustice, subordination and exploitation – but also avenues for emancipation – are built into the development process itself (Gidwani, 2008). Unintentionally, then, development carries the potential to incite political awareness among marginalized groups that could result in a willingness both to rebel at the individual level and to engage in collective defiance. It is important to note that empowerment by development programs can have unplanned effects of politically radicalizing its beneficiaries – creating political awareness of the need for mass mobilization as the principal means to overcome entrenched structures of domination and exploitation.

### **Research methods: relational geography and relational ethnography**

This dissertation research was conducted *from* Thabang village of Rapti region in western Nepal. Thabang was not merely a *field site* for my research; rather it was a *prism* to examine the historical conditions and processes of social and political transformations within the village and in complicity with its external connections. As such, I treated Thabang as a “place” formed through a *relational geography* encompassing socio-natural relationships, modes of solidarity and everyday practices. Accordingly, I studied Thabang as a locus where forces operating at multiple scales came together in contingent and catalyzing ways. Following in the footsteps of this relational geography, I visited several villages in Rolpa and Dang districts of the Rapti region. But I conducted detailed research only in those places, which bore the imprint of Thabang society and politics through direct historical connections.

Correspondingly, I explored the prehistory of the Maoist revolution through what might be called *relational ethnography*, by acquiring a micro-political and infra-political

understanding of socio-ecological transformations in Thabang and its varied connections with other villages in Rapti region. Using this approach, I zoomed into the everyday construction of social spaces and political practices at individual, family and communal levels in Thabang, and I extended the ethnographic encounters to explore the role of historical connections in instigating transformations that reached broader society. Thabang's transformations and trajectories have been shaped by two interrelated forces that have reproduced the village, iteratively, as a locus of rebellions: first, the internal structural transformations within Thabang, which continuously generated new spaces of dissent and political possibility; and, second, their articulation with other places local and extra-local, as well actors, geographies, ideas and power, both near and far.

Studying the relational ethnographies of Thabang and its external connections, I explored how the internal dynamics of a village can enter into a wider relationship with political processes at multiple scales (including national and sub-continental) and how that can swiftly transform the structural importance of the village itself within the wider universe of socio-political processes and mobilizations, allowing for unexpected conjunctures. For example, the physical attack on the *Mukhiya* (tax collector) of Thabang village by Burman Budha and his fellow peasants in 1954 led to their imprisonment and subsequently to their unexpected meeting and political collaboration with a communist activist in prison, which in turn prompted the arrival of communist ideology to Thabang. This conjuncture not only transformed the micro-political dynamics within Thabang but also sowed the seed of revolt that took shape as the Maoist uprising in later years. The conscious political articulation of such relations between internal and external forces produced a powerful flow of ideas, resources and connections. Thabang village became a

political and pedagogical locus of the Nepali Maoist movement and went on to acquire iconic status within the struggle's lore.

I undertook in-depth interviews, archival research and oral histories as my main methods of gathering information for this research. As part of my broader ethnographic inquiry, I gathered thirty-seven life histories of key informants from Thabang and Dang Valley. These were individuals who were involved in development programs in villages in the Rapti region and who also went on to become a part of various peasant uprisings, especially after RIDP era and the political events of the 1990s. I spent at least one day with each participant and had informal discussions about individual experiences of the developmental change and rebellion in the region. One of the important aspects of gathering oral histories was to visit different cantonments, where several thousand members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) were stationed after the peace agreement. I conducted individual and group discussions with PLA members in different cantonments, both from Thabang village and also outsiders who worked in Thabang during the revolution. Individual life histories were pivotal for understanding how an individual can become a subject of development and a rebel at different times.

I conducted several in-depth interviews, mainly with peasant leaders, political activists and development facilitators in the Rapti region and with Maoist leaders and policy makers in Kathmandu. I also interviewed retired officials of RIDP in Washington, D.C. I focused on identifying the major economic and social changes enacted by RIDP, the process by which these changes happened and how these changes were mobilized by individuals in these communities to organize social uprisings in the Rapti region. I visited

the forests to gather information on ecological processes, and conducted surveys of forestry diversity and growth in order to trace changes in local forest ecosystems. I talked with more than thirty-five individuals covering various villages in the Rapti region. The interviews were held alongside focus-group discussions, which I conducted in order to understand collective dynamics within community groups. I recorded these interviews, but they were conducted in informal settings where I was a part of conversation rather than occupying the typical position of a researcher who would ask questions in anticipation of precise answers.

Archival materials constitute the largest source of data. I gathered them from the district headquarters in the Rapti region, government offices in Kathmandu and the USAID office in Washington, D.C. Because many offices in the district headquarters were destroyed during the ‘People’s War’, it was hard to locate historical materials and official documents in designated offices. But many of these materials, fortunately, had informally safeguarded by individuals, office staff and retired officials, often in their own homes.

In many ways, this research was not an objective interpretation of events and processes by an *external* researcher. As someone who grew up following the norms of peasant moral economy in the mountains of Nepal, a subject of development who also witnessed the rebellion for several years, I was also a research subject and I was able to use my own experience and observation of social processes in Nepal to inform my inquiry.

## **Outline of the dissertation**

This dissertation is divided into six main chapters, including this introduction. Each successive chapter elaborates economic, ecological, collective and political aspects of the peasants to understand how changes brought by development created conditions of possibility for the rebellious movements in the Rapti region of Nepal where the Maoist movement first emerged.

In the second chapter, “Seeds of Rebellion: Peasant Moral Economy and Agrarian Change,” I provide detailed ethnographic insights on how indigenous moral economic institutions and agrarian practices were transformed and disrupted by development. It situates historical changes in economic and livelihood practices as a consequence of newly introduced commercial mechanisms since the 1970s and how these contributed to rebellion in the peasant communities of Nepal’s Rapti region. This chapter highlights the main consequences of rural integrated development projects that were implemented as one of the strategies of Cold War politics. Extending the idea of moral economy, this chapter argues that horizontal solidarity; moral economic practices of the peasants were a basis for historical processes of unity, community and uprising. Modern development interventions disrupted moral economic practices, contributing to the conditions for collective uprising against the state. But at the same time the possibility of reproducing some aspects of subsistence practices under their horizontal moral economic framework allowed peasants to consolidate rebellious ideas into a coherent political force. This chapter develops the moral economic aspect of the double life of development in the Rapti region.

Chapter Three, “Political Nature and Subalternity,” analyzes the role played by development in reinventing Rapti ecologies and their social relations, generating particular political conjuncture in peasant politics. This chapter shows how different social groups experienced different relations with the changed ecological processes, allowing some to benefit more than others. The central argument of the chapter is that the disruption in the historically coevolved relationship between peasants’ moral economy and reinvented ecologies generated the particular hegemonic and counter-hegemonic conjunctures in the Rapti region. By exploring the micro-political roles played by the ecologies, this chapter develops a framework that includes an active constituency of nature as an important aspect of double life of development.

In Chapter Four, “Re-inventing the Commons: Capital, Community and Collective Potential,” the ideas of the commons and commoning are discussed to understand how development utilizes indigenous community norms and collective potential in generating the double moment of commercial and subsistence production in the Rapti region. By examining the history of community forestry programs in Nepal this chapter builds arguments on how community-based development has rendered some of the conventional ideas on capital and capitalism irrelevant, demanding new insights on capitalist development in the global South. Overall, this chapter details how the reinvented forms of the commons facilitated the process of commercialization in the Rapti region and how the peasants who were active appropriators of the commons and subjects of the community-based development initiated various uprisings leading up to the Maoist revolution in the early 1990s.

Chapter Five, “Politics of Empowerment,” consolidates arguments made in previous chapters on economic, ecological and collective practices of the peasants and provides a nuanced framework on how rebellious ideas were articulated into generating a movement. This chapter develops insights on how developmental empowerment abetted the rise of a rebellious consciousness in the Rapti region of Nepal. The concept of articulation is mobilized to understand the processes of building political consciousness and activism. By examining the idea of empowerment in development programs, especially capacity building, this chapter identifies the possibility of radical politics within development.

Finally, Chapter Six is the conclusion of this dissertation, which highlights some of the major conceptual insights of this research and also points out implications of the findings in the contemporary scholarship on development and social movements especially in the global South. This chapter also indicates some of the possible future research agendas that are directly relevant to studying double life of development and prehistories of rebellious movements around the world and especially in South Asia.

## Chapter Two

### Seeds of Rebellion: Peasant Moral Economy and Agrarian Change

#### Introduction

Change in the name of development has tended to serve as justification for every political activity that has taken place in the Rapti region of western Nepal. The Maoists invoked *bikash* (development) as reason for rebelling in pursuit of a better life, whereas the state repressed agrarian uprisings in the name of peace, prosperity and development. Development interventions in the Rapti region have invariably targeted peasant forms of community solidarity, horizontal reciprocity and subsistence production – what I have earlier called their “moral economic” practices. The Rapti region is predominantly a rural area where the main sources of livelihood come from subsistence agriculture. While feudalism, landlordism, paternalism and most recently market mechanisms have been the central features of the political economy of production in the region, the horizontal reciprocity built into peasant moral economy has remained key in maintaining subsistence livelihoods. Development projects, however, have viewed moral economic practices as marks of backwardness that perpetuate poverty, cause environmental degradation and encourage political instability. Consequently, the stated or unstated purpose of development programs in the Rapti region has been to shift peasant communities away from their “inefficient” moral economic practices, which ostensibly keep them mired in poverty. Rapti has been bombarded by so many development projects since the 1950s that development (*bikash*) has seeped into peasant lives as a commonplace feature of their existence.

Since the 1970s, development programs — especially the Rapti Integrated Development Project (RIDP) — introduced intense modern agricultural systems to quickly transform subsistence moral economic practices in the region. As a consequence, new social relations of production have emerged, extending commercial and extraterritorial economies into rural livelihood systems by destabilizing (or displacing) existing communal subsistence practices of production and reciprocity (Zurick, 1993; Mishra and Sharma, 1983; Panday, 1999). By the 1980s, the Rapti region was thickly connected with the wider political economy of the market, lifted out of perceived “isolation,” thanks to the emergence of new economic institutions, supply chains, infrastructures, wage labor flows, capital investments and commodity circulations (Fujikura, 2005).

Yet, by the early 1990s, the Rapti region had become an incubator for the Maoist insurrection: one of the most fertile areas for the proliferation of rebellious ideas among peasant masses. Indeed, Rapti emerged as the leading site of Nepali revolutionary politics (see Fujikura, 2005; Onesto, 2005), where a series of peasant uprisings and revolts were consolidated into an armed Maoist insurrection against the state in 1996. The Maoist revolution has had two distinct phases: the initial period of armed struggle against the national police force from 1996 to 2000 and advanced military warfare against the national army between 2001 and 2006, when the peace agreement was signed. The first wave of the revolution started from the hilly areas of the Rapti region, especially from Rolpa and Rukum districts. The second and higher level of military warfare emerged in the Rapti region with an attack on the national army brigade in Dang district, located in

the southern plains.<sup>1</sup> Both phases of armed militancy started from Rapti, where indigenous *Magar* communities and *dalits* are the majority in the hill slopes<sup>2</sup> (northern part of Rolpa and Rukum districts) and the *Tharu*<sup>3</sup> population is the largest group in the southern plain. *Why did peasants from the Rapti region take part in the Maoist insurgency despite RIDP's relative success in transforming subsistence production practices?*

To untangle this conundrum, one must probe, alongside other factors (which I discuss in subsequent chapters), the content of peasant moral economy in the Rapti region. Unlike other parts of the world where agrarian relations are more class-stratified and, hence, the nature of moral economy entails vertical reciprocity between landlords and tenants (or patrons and clients), agrarian relations and livelihood practices in Rapti are sustained by horizontal solidarity grounded in a constellation of shared meanings. I argue that the disruption and attempted reinvention of these horizontal forms of reciprocity by their subordination to processes of capitalist development gave major impetus to peasant uprisings and, ultimately, mass participation in the Maoist People's

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<sup>1</sup> The first five years of the war remained as an armed fight between the Maoists and the police force. The national army was not mobilized against the Maoist. The state wanted to keep the Maoist revolution as a local issue of security to be managed and suppressed by local police forces. By 2000, the influence of the Maoist party grew throughout the country, and most of the police posts were evacuated from rural areas. In 2001, the Maoists declared the defeat of the police force and attacked military barracks. They then exclusively fought the army.

<sup>2</sup> Magars are the indigenous hill ethnic community accounting for about 8 percent of the Nepali population. Kham Magar, a sub-group of Magar ethnic community, dominates the northern Rapti region. Dalits included (20 percent) Magar community occupies more than 80 percent of the total population in the region where the Maoist revolution first emerged.

<sup>3</sup> Tharus have lived in the southern plains since ancient time, but, when malaria was eradicated in the 1950s from the Terai, migrants — especially from the hills and Indian territories — displaced them from their land and kept them as *kamaiya*, bondage labor, for not being able to pay the loans. This practice started in the 1950s and was abolished in 2002.

War. This chapter makes two parallel arguments. First, development driven by the ideas of progress and growth creates ruptures in the structures and mechanisms of peasant moral economic systems. Such ruptures are also generated in the feudal hegemonic structure and alliances of the ruling blocs, but more crucially, development destabilizes horizontal livelihood structures within peasant communities by encouraging competitive entrepreneurial conduct at the household, family and group levels. Second, development also remakes moral economic structures for their productive mobilization in commercial endeavors. This reinvention has a twofold purpose: to blunt the damage to peasant livelihoods from various forms of commercialization in the attempt to retain development's legitimacy as a program of agrarian transformation among peasants and to ensure the profitability of new forms of commodity production, such as agriculture and forest products, in agrarian context. But, in the course of these managerial endeavors, development can inadvertently transform peasant moral economic structures into a political force.

Through a relational ethnography of various economic development programs implemented by RIDP since the 1970s, this chapter focuses on the dynamics of peasant moral economy, an important aspect of the double life of development, in proposing possible causal links between the long histories of development programs and the eventual arrival of the Maoist revolution in the Rapti region. The second section outlines how existing scholarship explains the uprising and development by deploying narrow economic indicators without historicizing the events. The third and fourth sections analyze the major features of Rapti's rural moral economy, as well as the changes wrought by RIDP that sowed the seeds of rebellion. The last section highlights some of

the major implications of this analysis for understanding the double life of development and the prehistories of social movements.

### **Ahistorical explanations of the Maoist uprising**

Anti-state sentiment and resistance has long been present among peasants in the Rapti region, especially within the Magar populations in the northern hills, the “red zone.”<sup>4</sup> People in the red zone were able to maintain relative autonomy from the state right up to the 1950s, which was partly possible because of their ethnic homogeneity and relatively independent status in economic and social practices. Since the 1950s, such autonomous and community-oriented social relations have come to be understood in development narratives as sources of peasants’ economic vulnerability and politically risky isolation from national and regional economic endeavors.<sup>5</sup> Surprisingly, after the arrival of massive national and international development programs in the 1970s, the sporadic and geographically heterogeneous peasant uprisings in the region began to be consolidated into larger and more organized revolts. By the mid-1990s, resistance to the state and its local machinery had become an everyday phenomenon in the red zone. Thabang village, where the RIDP located its satellite station to implement comprehensive development packages comprising more than a dozen activities in the region, became the center of this zone.

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<sup>4</sup> The Kham Magar area of northern Rapti is termed the “red zone” because it is where armed resistance to state oppression emerged before the start of the Maoist war. Various uprisings started in that area in the 1950s, especially in Thabang, and it became a “liberated base area” after the Maoist revolution began in 1996.

<sup>5</sup> Nepal initiated a Five Year Development Plan model in 1956 to achieve high economic growth in rural areas. Regional interests, vulnerable areas and sectoral priorities are identified in every successive Five Year Plan.

Scholars have attempted to identify some of the socioeconomic reasons for the emergence of the Maoists from the Rapti region.<sup>6</sup> Economic grievances and the lack of modern opportunities are highlighted as central to people joining the movement (Kumar, 2000; Einsiedel et al, 2012; Panday, 2012). The crisis of underdevelopment appears as a taken-for-granted cause. Several scholars focus on post-1990 events in their efforts to understand the political genesis of the movement in the Rapti area (Hachhethu, 2002; Baral, 2006; Ogura, 2007; Onesto, 2007). Barring a few attempts at exploring the history of local political processes (de Sales, 2009; Fujikura, 2003), no comprehensive analyses point to the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the Maoist insurrection in the Rapti region.

As a consequence, the long and diverse histories of peasant uprising and the role of rapid transformations in the moral economy of peasants are subordinated to grand narratives about the Maoist revolution in Nepal. With notable exceptions (Fujikura, 2003; 2005), the possible role of development, with its long and saturated presence in the region, in generating the conditions of possibility for the Maoist uprising, has been overlooked. The popular belief, especially in Western scholarship, is that there was not enough development in rural Nepal to keep the peasantry from revolting (Hutt, 2004; Gersony, 2005). It is this line of explanation that I intend to challenge and correct.

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<sup>6</sup> Some argue that it was the consequence of a longstanding “crisis of underdevelopment” in Nepal (Blaikie et al, 1980; Bhattarai, 1998; 2003; Mishra, 2004; Panday, 1999). A lack of economic opportunities (Deraniyagala, 2005; Bray et al, 2003; Seddon and Hussain, 2002; Gelner, 2007; Pfaff-Czarneeka, 2004), geographical remoteness and isolation from the national developmental path (Kernot, 2006; Murshed and Gates, 2004), a high proportion of indigenous ethnic populations falling prey to Maoist persuasion (de Sales, 2000), failure of state hegemony (Riaz and Basu, 2010) and the exploitation of naïve indigeneity (Thapa, 2012; de Sales, 2003; Lawoti and Pahari, 2010) are some of the common explanations for the emergence of the Maoist uprising in the region.

## The moral economy of Rapti's peasants

“Since ancient time, we live as a single community. Our houses are clustered together, and everybody is available if something happens to any of us. *Bethi* [collective work as a group in farm plot turn by turn, until each peasant's land is cultivated or harvested during the farming season], *aicho-paicho* [exchange of goods during periods of shortage], and *parma* [exchange of manual labor for farming related occasional work] are very common *chalan* [customs or ways of life] in this village. We forget our *dukkha* [suffering] while working together ... . These were the occasions where we used to talk about politics and share stories of other people ... . But as I am getting older I see some changes happening.” (Interviewed on February 15, 2011, Thabang).

Ruj Bahadur Roka, 71, Thabang Village

As the epigram suggests, the peasant moral economy of Magar communities in the Rapti region is constituted by the horizontal elements of solidarity, mutuality and collective production systems. In these practices, the main concern is to secure subsistence livelihoods of all families through collaborative work practices and horizontal reciprocity. This moral economy is grounded in shared norms, values and conducts.

These features of the peasant economy in the Rapti region vary in important respects from the commonly used notions of moral economy, in particular Thompson's (1991) understanding of a pre-capitalist subsistence economy that resists market incursions, and Scott's (1976) concept of hierarchical reciprocity between peasants and landlords. In his path-breaking essay, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in Eighteenth Century” (1971), E. P. Thompson first used the term *moral economy* to describe peasants' “confrontations in the market-place” against “profiteering” upon people's “necessities,” especially food. Profit-making in the market was considered immoral under certain circumstances, and it provoked food riots and protests inspired by deep-seated moral values and beliefs (Thompson, 1991; Moore, 1966; Wolf, 1969). The

story in Rapti is somewhat different: development has enrolled peasants in both commercial production and subsistence livelihoods, even though priority has been on profit-making. The ensuing rebellions, unlike Thompson's riots, have not only sustained themselves through time, they have in fact spread rapidly across space in the 1990s, not to move back to their traditional moral economies, but for a complete transformation.

Scott (1976; 1985; 1990) deploys the idea of moral economy to discuss a reciprocal but hierarchical relationship between peasants and their overlords. In Scott's framework, the vertical relationship between the peasants and the landlords is beneficial to both as it guarantees subsistence to peasants in times of distress, while conveying rent, prestige, authority and the power to rule to landlords.

Each of these conceptualizations of moral economy is vital but incomplete for my purpose, because the production system in the Rapti region reveals a third attribute of moral economy that fails to feature prominently in either Thompson or Scott: namely, horizontal reciprocity and culturally encoded forms of mutuality. Such solidarity is vital in the Magar and Tharu communities that predominate in the Rapti region. Vertical connections between peasants and landlords are also present in Magar communities, but they are not as vital as in Tharu areas in the south. Land distribution is relatively equal in Magar areas, and therefore landlords are not a big source of power in this region. But in the south, immigrant landlords forcefully dispossessed Tharu peasants from their lands during the 1960s and 1970s and used peasants as bonded laborers by non-Tharu landlords. These coercive displacements created an extreme form of patron-client relation in Tharu area.

But in both Magar and Tharu communities, horizontal reciprocity and mutuality remained the main features of moral economy. The moral economic structures in agrarian society are determined by how peasants interact with each other rather than how they are controlled by landlords. For example, Tharu peasants always understood their vertical relationships with landlords as an extension of exploitation rather than a source of livelihood. In fact, in any peasant society, vertical relationship cannot be an organic unity (or not even hegemonic subjugation of peasant lives); it is rather a form of sheer domination, which is used by peasants for an immediate survival. Through community-based approaches, however, development has reinvented peasant communities, and this process has demonstrated that it can unexpectedly consolidate horizontal unity of the peasants into a new political force. This force can undercut vertical relationship and propagate new political possibilities. Ultimately, it is the horizontal moral solidarity that ties peasants together as a collective force for subsistence *and* revolt.

Ethnographic work among Thabang's peasants and the histories of subsistence production in the Rapti region reveal a number of moral economic features such as subsistence farming practices, exchange systems, livelihood security and distribution patterns that demonstrate how horizontal solidarity and moral unity are the central organizing elements of peasant economy, politics and rebellion.

#### *Subsistence agriculture and rebellion*

Subsistence agriculture that is combined with animal husbandry is the primary source of livelihood in the predominantly rural Rapti region. The Rapti is a geographically diverse area, ranging from low-altitude plains in the south to high-altitude

mountain slopes in the north. Over many generations, the peasants in the Rapti region have developed distinctive moral economic practices and relations of production suitable to their particular community structures and geographical specifics. These economic practices can be grouped into three main categories in correspondence with the differences in ecological attributes, the dynamics of peasant-landlord relationships and distribution of the means of production (especially land). Elements of solidarity, horizontality and collectivity are common to moral economic practices across these differences.

The first and perhaps most representative feature of the region is the horizontal solidarity economy of Magar peasants in the northern mountains of the Rapti region.<sup>7</sup> As noted, among Magar communities in the upper Rapti, land distribution is relatively homogenous; forms of absolute landlordship employing peasants as sharecroppers rarely exist; and collective farming and mutuality among group members are mainstays of subsistence production.

The middle-altitude ranges, where upper-caste Hindus are the majority, reveal a second category of the peasants' economic practices. In this part of the Rapti region, social hierarchy and economic inequality are more noticeable than in the upper region, but tenancy is not the main mode of production even though small-scale sharecropping and landlordship exist, especially in the river valleys. Some of the main features of the peasant economy in this area are household-based farming practices, hierarchical

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<sup>7</sup> The north of the Rapti River with Kham Magar settlements is generally known as the upper Rapti region. This region is characterized by dense forests, pasturelands, ethnic homogeneity and dense housing in each hamlet. The slope lands and pasture economy determined particular moral economic practices among the Magar peasants.

community structures within the peasantry, and surplus-oriented subsistence production. But one of the important moral economic features of this area is the exploitation of *dalit* peasants. *Dalits* constitute more than thirty percent of the total population, and most or many are landless peasants who provide artisanal services to other peasants and landlords. Artisanal services include playing songs and music in festivals, blacksmithing, tailoring, painting and cleaning, and *dalits* always work in groups to provide those services to their clients. They are neither assimilated into moral economic practices of other ethnic peasants nor allowed to work as bonded laborers for landlords because of the perceived untouchability. It is only through horizontal solidarity and mutuality that the *dalits* are able to reproduce their artisanal capabilities and the means of everyday living within the social structures dominated by upper-caste landlords and ethnic peasants. Social discrimination against *dalits* was so extreme (and subjugating) that *dalit* movements remained suppressed for generations until they joined the Maoist revolution in the 1990s. Upper-caste peasants are relatively self-sufficient in terms of producing food from their land, but, due to the long history of left-leaning political activism, they are well-connected with Magar and Tharu peasants in both upper and lower areas of the Rapti region. Many upper-caste landlords, however, migrated to the south and became landlords in Tharu areas.

The southern plain area, which is primarily populated by Tharu communities, represents the third category of peasant lives in the Rapti region. Tharu people are indigenous to the region and were displaced from their lands by upper-caste migrants from the hills and urban areas, particularly after the eradication of malaria in the 1950s. As a strategy of capturing land, landlords used to provide nominal loans to peasant

families and, in return, confiscate their land, citing nonpayment as a reason. Some Tharu peasants refused to take loans and managed to protect their land, but the majority was forced to work for upper-caste landlords as *Kamaiya* (bonded laborers), a bondage that came to represent one of the most extreme forms of peasant exploitation in Nepal.<sup>8</sup> Tharu resistance to take loans and work as laborers prompted various uprisings in the 1970s, but they were coercively suppressed by the state. The growing resistance to land grabbing forced landlords to withdraw their plan in many instances, and, as a consequence, many Tharu communities were able to save their lands and remain non-Kamaiya peasants. Despite being in forced Kamaiya systems, Tharu peasants relied on communitarian cultural and economic practices for subsistence security. They continued using common lands and community practices, such as fishing, cultivating, hunting and gathering in groups, following the indigenous systems and moral economic practices. In conjunction with these practices, they continuously lived together in big families and increased the use of alcohol and pigs as a strategy to separate them from landlords. In other words, large family structures (members of a kinship group live together), collective labor practices as sharecroppers and shared use of the commons such as forests and river are the main features of Tharu moral economy in the region.

Historically, the Magar and Tharu communities have had communal governance practices, with the Magars relatively autonomous from the state. Both Magars and Tharu

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<sup>8</sup> Tharu uprisings first noticed in 1857 after Nepal's government allowed the British India's companies to exploit timber in the region. After the eradication of malaria in the 1950s, the state systematically encouraged landlords from hill areas to migrate to the region and establish farm plots in massive scale. Tharu resistance was a big hurdle for new settlement programs. The state was not the direct official sponsor of the *Kamaiya* system, but it remained an implicit supporter of the landlords' encroachment and saw it as a strategy of keeping the Tharu peasants from rebelling. In fact, state officials were relatives of the landlords, and they remained supportive of land grabbing.

peasants organized various sporadic revolts against the state in different periods as they realized that the arrival of state power was an encroachment on their autonomy and an extension of domination. During the Cold War era, the peasantry, especially the Magar communities, coupled with their long histories of autonomy, contestation and communal harmony, were seen as sources of political instability and receptive to the expansion of communist ideologies. Geographically remote locations, ethnic homogeneity, communal economic practices and the lack of state capacity to control peasants' activities were viewed by the West as fertile ground for uprisings and the diffusion of political propaganda.<sup>9</sup> New political and economic measures were designed to tackle the situation from both ends: expand state apparatuses to rural hinterlands and extend development to modernize the isolated peasantry. These arrangements not only overestimated the potential of communist influence from the North but also overlooked the long histories of rebellion, as well as cultural, economic and political porosity and connections among peasants in the region.

From the 1950s, peasant uprisings started to take an organized form in both the Magar and Tharu areas. The Maoist movement itself emerged from the Magar region, which remained the revolution's epicenter; the southern Tharu region joined the movement and became a base area for the entire period of the warfare. The middle region (with its settlements of higher-caste populations) was also active in the movement, but

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<sup>9</sup> The growing communist influence in the region during the 1950s was the evidence of instability. Some people from the Rapti region who also lived in Kathmandu for education became instrumental in spreading the anti-feudal slogan in the region. The landlords, moneylenders and local *Mukhiyas* were the main agencies of the state, and they were also the target of the new ideas, which were articulated politically by young activists such as Mohan Bikram Singh and Kaluman Gurung. People's resentment was growing, although they were not just following the communist ideology.

actual involvement in the rebellion was selective; it stemmed from the middle-class educated and young people, rather than a revolt of the entire peasantry as in both the Magar and Tharu areas.

Subsistence production, group settlement and a cultural memory of struggle and resistance are some of the main features of Magar and Tharu moral economic practices that allowed them to sustain their unity, solidarity and rebellion in the region. Magar peasants in the upper Rapti were relatively free from exploitation by landlords; their resistance was directed towards moneylenders and the state. By contrast, Tharu peasants were subjugated to the exploitation by Hindu higher-caste landlords, in which the state allowed the bonded labor system as a strategy of repressing peasant uprisings in the region. As the ethnography of Magar and Tharu struggles suggests distinction between the state, landlords, money-lenders and elite politicians was nominal or non-existent; therefore both Magar and Tharu peasants experienced the same histories of oppression and marginalization. Because of their moral economic similarities and shared forms of change wrought by the state and development in both areas, the conditions of possibility for uprisings grew similarly and simultaneously in Magar and Tharu communities, ultimately leading to the emergence of the Maoist revolution in the region.

#### *Farmlands and moral economies*

The distribution of *farmland* has a direct relationship with the reproduction of particular moral economic practices in the Rapti region. A massive program to physically clear lands and create open spaces began in the region in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to generate revenue for the state by introducing sharecropping systems, cultivation taxes

and new contract lands for the *Mukhiyas* [the village heads and tax collectors] (Regmi, 1976; McDougal, 1968; Stiller, 1973; Zurick, 1988). Predictably, given topography, ecology and political histories, more land was cleared in the mid-hills and lowlands of the south, allowing the migration of the landlords from the neighboring, relatively affluent areas. As a result, the average landholding for some landlords grew tremendously in the plain areas, whereas peasant family landholding remained small and relatively uniform in the upper Rapti region. The Magar communities in the upper Rapti area were successful in retaining their control over the land because of continuous resistance to the state's intrusion in local affairs. Also, there was no significant incentive for the landlords to clear land and migrate north because of its low productivity and geographical remoteness. But the cleared lands in the south, which had been used for centuries by the Tharus as common lands for fulfilling subsistence livelihoods, was annexed by the migrant landlords, creating significant inequalities in land distribution. Since the 1970s, however, the pattern of landholding has changed dramatically even in the upslope Magar area with the introduction of modern farming practices and commercial production of cash crops, including fruit orchards and vegetables.

Meanwhile, in the low-lying Tharu area, land-based inequality grew substantially under modern agricultural practices as land productivity differed significantly between rich and poor farmers. Landlords also migrated to the river valleys and fertile foothills in the upper- and middle-altitude areas. Landholding became the major source of attracting modern agricultural benefits during the 1970s. Peasants with larger landholdings and the capacity to afford payments were able to purchase modern fertilizers and seeds. The banks used to provide loans easily to those who had good quality land as collateral. These

factors added land productivity as an additional element in determining the value of the land and level of household income. As a result, land values in the valleys and river basins increased tremendously, encouraging the rich farmers to migrate to the area for the production of cash crops (primarily vegetables and fruits). Landlords, money lenders and businesspeople bought lands from ethnic and *dalit* peasants. This pushed the poor peasants out of the productive tracts, toward less-productive slopes and fringes. In short, the commercialization of agriculture promoted class and ethnic stratification in lowland villages, what I call a process of “rural gentrification” grounded in cultural discrimination. When I asked a *dalit* peasant why most of the *dalit* communities live in sloped and marginal lands, he said, “They gave us little bit more money at that time, and we moved to this area. Now they make more money from our land where we go to work as labor.” (Interviewed in July 2010, Rolpa).

### *Horizontal solidarity*

The continuation of historically developed *collective farming practices* has been the central feature of the Magar peasantry’s ability to successfully reproduce the moral conditions for horizontal production structures and the possibility of a solidarity economy. This has allowed the peasantry to secure subsistence needs without submitting to the Mukhiyas and the royal families. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of the common lands in the upper Rapti region, especially in the Magar areas, were confiscated and given to royal families and state bureaucrats. Even though there were no traditional landlords and feudal elites, these new owners of the commons became powerful in the region. Magar peasants continued practices of collective farming to counter the increased encroachment of the

commons, which was also a strategy of resistance against the state's drive for modernization in agriculture. The collective farming strategy is used mainly for subsistence farming, sheep herding and the exchange of surplus products with other essential goods. During the main farming seasons, adult members of each household assemble together (always in clusters of around 20 to 50 families) for cultivating or harvesting the cereal crops, hemp and wild products.<sup>10</sup> Such farming activities go on for weeks during the season, starting from the land of one household and moving to the next turn by turn, until the process is completed for all involved households. Similarly, sheep herding in the highland pastures is also a collective effort, with the men living and sharing work together.

Built into the system of collective farming practices, the system of *paicho* [borrowing goods, especially food grains, when there is a shortage in the family] is another important feature of horizontal moral economy in the upper Rapti. A very common practice among families who farm together, *paicho* entails that families usually do not sell surplus grain outside the community unless there is enough for every household. This is especially true during the off-farm seasons and bad years. The exchange of surplus goods, if any, takes place at the local *haat* [a weekly bazaar] during the season. Women take control of this exchange process, involving homemade alcohol, meat, cooked food, lentils, household utensils, agricultural implements, locally made

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<sup>10</sup> The Magar families live in clusters of some dozens to several hundred households together in one settlement. Such settlements are located either on hill tops or plain lands between the hills. Living together often has strategic benefits to these communities by promoting collective farming practices and sharing ideas and resources.

textile and goods brought from urban areas, especially salt, kerosene oil, shoes and cottons.

However, as markets and shops have begun to spread in villages, the systems of *paicho* and *haat* have fallen into decay. “When we were in a shortage of grains, we used to go to the neighbors and borrow from them, but these days there are shops all around. People who have money buy from the shop, whereas poor families have to rely on *paicho* and other forms of sharing. For some it is easier, but for many of us survival is becoming difficult,” says Purna Bahadur Roka, revealing the rapid transformation in his village’s moral economic practices. Since the initiation of various developmental activities in the 1970s, such as road and shop construction, seed-supply centers, fertilizer depots and micro-credit, moral economic systems have been either replaced or altered, leaving some with greater opportunities and others with fewer.

*Figure 2: A Cluster of houses in Thabang Village*



As part of the larger system of paicho, indigenous *trading practices* have been the main strategy of acquiring additional income and market goods such as salt, oil and clothes. In this system, locally produced goods are exchanged with other essential goods in towns in the south. Historically, trade was the job of women. They used to travel in groups of 10 to 15 with their backpacks, carrying products such as woolen blankets, hemp cotton, hemp seeds, artisanal products and spices from the forests. On their way back, they would purchase enough household essentials to last until the next season or trip. Such practices generated opportunities for establishing contacts with other villagers and traders, as well as exposure to new geographies. In fact, this mechanism acted as a way of negotiating, rethinking and conceptualizing alternative possibilities to their present living conditions. This practice was politically significant because it developed historical processes, routes and mechanisms in connecting diverse peasant practices, uprisings and stories of oppression. Through the long histories of struggle, activism and solidarity, these historic trade routes provided a thread in building a collective peasant politics. The producers were not competing against each other, as the production was driven by the necessity of household consumption rather than surplus production for increased sales. No one would produce anything in excess of the limit of one load of a backpack. Generating the possibilities of solidarity, connectivity (to other villages), and community thinking, group trading was an effective political machine, especially among the young men and women of the upper Rapti region. Travelling in groups, peasants were more active in generating new ideas and building stronger ties with other communities. The Maoist revolution of the 1990s traveled along these routes connecting not only the Magars and Tharu areas, but also a vast landscape in the middle Rapti region.

The *commons*, especially forests, water bodies, pastures and uncultivated lands, have been well-integrated into systems of moral economy in the Rapti region, thus generating the possibility of horizontal solidarity. The commons were a source of livelihood and a part of subsistence security, especially for those whose landholdings were smaller. In fact, the commons were the centripetal force of peasant moral economy (elaborated in Chapter Four). The production of artisanal goods for exchange, productivity of subsistence farming practices, distribution of private landholding, patterns of seasonal migration and everyday schedule of work and overall availability of the means of livelihood were hugely dependent on access to the size of the commons. Contrary to mainstream accounts that emerged by the 1970s, the commons were not the reason for the growing “environmental tragedy” in the Rapti region but were rather integral parts of the peasant economy.<sup>11</sup>

However, with the introduction of increased commercial harvesting, mining and encroachment by the state and feudal landlords after the integration of the region into modern Nepal, the moral economic functions of the commons were curtailed substantially, particularly during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, in the 1950s, the nationalization of the common forests eliminated communal entitlements and collective management practices. Subsequently, forces of commercialization and entrepreneurship introduced

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<sup>11</sup> The notion of environmental degradation was one of the most effective and successful ideas in promoting external governance of commonly-held resources in the Himalayas. With the invention of the Theory of Himalayan Degradation in the 1970s, environmental conservation by mobilizing rural peasantry became the most preferred Cold War strategy in the region (see Eckholm, 1975; Sterling, 1976; Thompson and Warburton, 1985). The idea that Himalayan degradation was leading to ecological and human ruin, affecting the vast plain areas in the south, provided justification for massive environmental conservation programs such as community forestry, watershed management, river training and agricultural farm modernization (see Zurick, 1988).

into the commons played a significant role in alienating communal resources and practices from the peasants' everyday means of livelihood. Even though the commons were reinvented, inserting them into the circuit of capital (through programs such as community forestry, which is discussed in Chapter Four), the integral subsistence relationship between the commons and peasant livelihoods persisted as a main feature of the solidarity economy.

### *Female-led moral economies*

Women's leadership and control of the household economy has been at the crux of various aspects of peasants' solidarity economy, especially within the Magar communities. The female-led household economy was a result of the historical necessity of securing family livelihoods. As male members of the family were forced to work as labor for feudal landlords, royal families and the state, women had to take care of family matters. Herding has been a central feature of subsistence economies in the highlands; therefore, at least one or two male members of the family had to spend time in the pastures. They used to produce raw materials such as wool, hemp, medicinal herbs, ghee, wooden crafts, wild honey and spices, which were sent home, where women family members would process them further and exchange them for other goods.

The historically developed female-led structure of the household economy naturally allowed the female members to be active in resource allocation and decision making in extended families and clans. Cultural practices such as marriages, festivals and rituals and maintaining relationships with the external world, such as dealing with the state and seasonal migration, were deeply patriarchal in mountain communities; but in the

realm of household economy, women's control persisted even as peasant societies underwent various transformations over the past two centuries (Molnar, 1981; Acharya et al., 1980). This continuation was a mechanism of subsistence security and a strategy that allowed men to remain free from household chores, but it had profound implications for how peasants' moral economy was constituted and generated political possibilities at the family, clan and community levels.

Women's leadership in peasants' moral economy allowed both men and women to participate equally in household affairs and increase their role in communities. This practice also prevented the emergence of strong gender-based social hierarchy. A peasant woman recalls her familial experience:

“Since ancient time men used to live in *Goth* [herds] and women used to take care of home, managing everything including farming, trading, festivals and meetings. It is like a culture; mother-in-law hands over the key the house to elder daughter-in-law. We used to travel places to sell goods that were produced in *Goth* by our husbands. We were free to travel wherever we wanted for selling goods, and we were fully responsible for family-related things. Even these days, husbands do not decide about household matters without asking their wives. But things are changing now. The way we used to farm our land or trade our products does not exist anymore.” (Interviewed on June 17, 2010, Thabang).

Women's leadership in the peasants' moral economy is particularly common in mountain agrarian subsistence economies where a special division of labor, which puts women in the center, is the backbone of everyday practices. Such household-level organization of production, generally unique to peasant subsistence economies, has historically provided political agency to women. Development under the RIDP was unable to understand these household economic processes and therefore attempted to separate women from their household leadership by involving them in externally

controlled entrepreneurship programs and commercial production schemes. This change in the agrarian subsistence mode of production not only alienated women more than men but also created the conditions by which women joined peasant politics more than before. The moral economic changes that were occurring in the everyday life of the peasants in the highlands of the Rapti region were articulated by organic intellectuals, which attracted women, especially in the 1980s, to be involved in various uprisings.

### **Sowing the seeds of rebellion**

The material processes and historical features of peasant moral economy in the Rapti region were perceived by the Nepali state and international development agencies as blockades to growth and threats to the ruling classes, especially the landlords and monarchy (Mihaly, 1965; Fujikura, 2001; Thapa, 2012; Karki and Seddon, 2003). In particular, peasants were believed to be involved in political activism because they were considered vulnerable to influence by communist ideas because of their geographical remoteness and growing communist activities in the region. State responses to peasants in the Rapti region were twofold: first, strengthening state power in the region by promoting state apparatuses for direct and effective control of the peasants (Blaikie et al., 1980; de Sales, 2009), and, second, implementing rural integrated development programs “to change the behavior” of peasant communities in every aspect of their lives by systematically enrolling rural populations into the scheme of economic growth (Fujikura, 2001; Molnar, 1978).

The Rapti Integrated Development Project (RIDP) was conceived out of these confluences of Cold War politics<sup>12</sup>, the repressive Nepali state and shifting international developmental paradigms. The project had three main goals: changing the economic conditions of the peasants, promoting environmental conservation and ecological diversity, and democratizing and empowering the communities (RIDP, 1980; 1985; 1987; 1995). The idea of integrated development was to transform every aspect of peasant lives so that the barriers to growth were rooted out and a more secure and stable society could be created (USAID, 2001; RIDP, 1981).<sup>13</sup> The RIDP became one of the biggest interventions in a politically “sensitive” area of Nepal. It gained huge success in generating desire for and participation by Rapti peasants in development (*bikash*), which the peasants understood as prosperity, justice and dignity. This section identifies the micro-changes brought about by the RIDP in the moral economy of the peasants in the Rapti region and the political possibilities generated through those changes.

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<sup>12</sup> The Cold War had a strong influence on Nepali politics because of the country’s strategic geopolitical location between two Asian giants, China and India (Levi, 1954; Riaz and Basu, 2010; Mihaly, 1965; Khadka, 1997). The attempt had been to erect the Himalayas as a border frontier with the goal of securing the southern territorial buffers from the potential threat of communist ideologies, especially the penetration of Chinese and Soviet politics into the southern peasantry. The Cold War construction of Nepal (and the Himalayas) was a joint mission of the Nepali ruling class and the West. Nepal’s ruling regimes always used the necessity of the “wall” as a means to retain power and gain legitimacy from foreign powers.

<sup>13</sup> After the acknowledgement of the failure of industrialization of the 1960s to address the problem of poverty, a new approach of development emerged to integrate every aspect of society collectively. All together, eight integrated development regions, which were considered vulnerable and dangerous to political stability, were identified throughout Nepal in the 1970s, and each region was adopted by a separate development agency.

### *Politics of “employment”*

One of the initial seeds of revolution in the Rapti region was planted by the idea of “employment” that the RIDP promoted.<sup>14</sup> It left some trenchant and irreversible impacts on the structure, mechanism and everyday practices of peasants’ moral economy. Because the reason for the increased poverty and consequent social instability was identified as a lack of employment, the primary focus of the project was to create employment opportunities in rural areas, replacing the so-called inefficient and unproductive rural production practices. “We were told that there were not enough employment opportunities in our village; therefore, we did not have enough food and income for our families,” remembers an orchard owner, recalling how he got involved in commercial production of apples in the 1980s. Most of the adult members, who were always busy in their farms, herds, forests and pastures, producing goods for everyday living, were suddenly identified as a category of “unemployed” and therefore poor.

The RIDP initiated a number of programs to generate employment opportunities for the poor, including road construction, rural industries, farm-related employment, self-employment activities, marketing and other infrastructure development. Primarily adult males were provided with seasonal and long-term employment. Peasants gradually fully or partially dissociated themselves from the traditional farming practices to obtain a

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<sup>14</sup> The Nepali state and international development paradigm (informed by Cold War strategies) held that poverty and lack of income in rural areas were the most favorable conditions for the possible growth of communist ideology (see Gersony, 2005; Zurick, 1993; Seddon, 1987). The growing peasant rebellion was understood as the causal effect of lack of economic growth, and therefore it became a priority to deal with, especially in rural areas. But for the ruling bloc of the state, the multi-ethnic groups, languages and diversity were seen as barriers to securing political hegemony in rural areas (see Bhattachan, 2000; Brown, 1996; Burghart, 1984). The idea of employment served the interests of economy, hegemony and poverty in the Rapti region.

better income from outside the moral economic structure. Women were now fully responsible for the household economy, more so than before, sometimes mobilizing the extra income generated by the male members of the family. These changes created massive transformations in family dynamics and rural demography, creating a vacuum or a disjuncture in the historically developed system of division of labor within families and communities.

*Table-1: Local employment generated by the activities of the RIDP (1981-1986)*

Employment sectors	Additional employments in five years
Modernizing the farming sector	6.8 million person days
Natural resource management	1.1 million person days
Rural works (roads, buildings, etc)	1.5 million person days
Rural industries/commerce	900 (fulltime employments)
Appropriate technologies (self-employed)	1,114 (fulltime employments)
Extension workers/agents	3,254 (partial employments)

*Source: Project document and evaluation report of the RIDP (RIDP, 1980; 1985)*

The idea of employment triggered a number of irreversible transformations in the peasants' moral economy. First, the sudden arrival of these massive employment "opportunities" in rural areas negatively impacted indigenous farming practices by introducing new techniques and transforming the existing division of labor at the family, community and village levels. The male (and also some female) members of the family, who were otherwise responsible for taking care of herds, collecting raw materials, managing planting and harvesting and organizing collective farming as a group, suddenly switched their everyday engagement, becoming temporary workers for the RIDP's employment-generating activities. These shifts in the everyday working patterns of the peasants enormously increased the workload of the women. In many cases these employment opportunities led peasants to abandon indigenous means of livelihood,

especially sheep herding, pasture management, cultivation of winter crops and production of artisanal goods.

Second, such changes in the peasant's subjectivity from a subsistence farmer to a seasonal laborer or commercial producer massively transformed the dynamics of the peasants' household economy and community subsistence practices. The role of women as the head of the household's economic activities diminished tremendously as the traditional sources of income (such as the female-led trade of the artisanal goods, hemp fibers, spices, ghee and woolen products) were displaced by the wages from seasonal employment (mostly earned by men). Such transformations not only dispossessed the peasants of their indigenous means of livelihood but also gradually increased the economic dependency of the family on external powerful actors (such as buyers, contractors and companies), who became increasingly visible in the region because of the idea of employment.

Third, the possibility of employment outside indigenous community structures created entirely different social hierarchies, individual subjectivities and family consumption and production behaviors. Landlords and some peasants emerged as petty contractors, middlemen, moneylenders, entrepreneurs, facilitators, extension workers and trainers. It destabilized the existing solidarity, moral economy of the peasants, as these new identities had specific lines of communication, networks and interests, the result of which was to accentuate the importance of external forces in the lives of people. But some moral economic structures were reinvented, with new roles and responsibilities for implementing the new economic mechanisms in the villages. Finally, as these

employment opportunities were temporary in nature, the peasants who were fully involved in such activities suffered greatly once employment opportunities vanished. This led to long-distance migration to cities and even foreign countries such as India, creating the conditions of complete dependency on remittances or state handouts.

The employment-led transformations in moral economic structures and livelihoods became an additional source of the political articulation of peasant lives in an already antagonistic relationship between the state and peasants, especially in the upper Rapti region. Employment opportunities transformed peasants into the category of “semi-peasant laborers,” and, in this process, peasants perceived their lives as miserable and no longer wanted to continue practicing peasantry if they had other opportunities for work. This was the result of a simultaneous double articulation of the conditions of the peasants: the RIDP’s programs of employment and empowerment for increased income outside the subsistence practices on the one hand, and the stagist revolutionary idea of change of the communist activists on the other. In working sites, such as road-construction areas, peasants used to live in groups, where they interacted with activists from other villages and encountered modern ideas of change. As a result, the peasants themselves came to view the practices of the peasantry as a remnant of the rudimentary traditional systems at the bottom of the ladder of the developmental teleology. The temporary employments became a site of articulating “practical ideologies” (the necessity of everyday life) into political organizing.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This was especially the case on road-construction sites. The RIDP targeted young adults for its employment activities. They were considered to be the most politically vulnerable, given rising expectations and lack of opportunities, which, the thinking went, might lead them to revolt and instability.

The best expected scenario for the state and the RIDP was neither to leave the rural adults as ignorant peasants, who would then continue to be vulnerable to the influence of communist ideas and barriers to developmental change, nor to produce them as fully proletarianized labor power, which would increase the threat of immediate revolt as they would lose their means of livelihood and require spatial relocation to new worksites. The idea of “rural employment” provided an effective conceptual framework for RIDP with the potential of reproducing the subjects as both peasants and workers simultaneously. In many villages, especially in areas rich with natural resources, such schemes of employment were successful in depoliticizing the peasants’ moral economy and also achieving developmental goals of economic growth, accumulation and changed subjectivities. Peasant moral economy was always the backbone of peasant politics and strategy of countering the state and oppression of landlords.

### *Hemp rebellion*

More specifically, the scheme of employment was first conceptualized to generate alternative sources of income in the Rapti region (and throughout the country by other projects as the main goal of development) as an immediate remedy for the economic hardship created by the ban on the production of hemp (*Cannabis spp.*) in the region.

Bam Kumari Budha, a former parliament member from the Rolpa district, recalls that

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The project first established youth clubs in rural areas to target the appropriate population segments for the new opportunities. The young adults from different villages lived together for several months every year in road-construction camps, where – ironically – they had the opportunity to share, internalize and strategize political aspects of peasant society. Even though the roads were constructed largely for reasons of maintaining security, suppressing uprisings and extending markets for exploiting natural resources and the peasants by penetrating agrarian economies (see Blaikie, et al., 1980; Zurick, 1993; Fujikura, 2003; Seddon, 1987), they massively spread the seeds of revolution by both transforming the peasants’ moral economy and providing sites for articulating, organizing, connecting and propagating the various local movements.

“the RIDP came to control hashish production by creating alternative income generating sources locally.” In 1973, the government banned the cultivation of hemp to stop the production and distribution of *hashish*, derived from gum gathered from the young leaves and shoots of the hemp plant. The production of hashish was a new phenomenon, but its demand was growing as middlemen from urban areas in Nepal and India flocked to hemp-growing areas such as Thabang, offering villagers unprecedented prices for young hemp plants. After the ban was in place, a village police post was set up to enforce it. As the hemp plant had been one of the main sources of livelihood for centuries, the ban on production of the plant not only jeopardized this newfound source of income but shook the entire moral economic structure and the everyday practices of the peasants in the region.

For the peasants, the significance of hemp far exceeded its value for hashish. In fact, its bark, seeds, stems and roots were much more significant and extraordinarily interwoven in the peasants’ livelihood practices.<sup>16</sup> Hemp seeds and textiles in particular were mainstays in centuries-old trade circuits, in several instances accounting for 60 percent of implicit household income, and key to acquiring locally scarce necessities such as salt, sugar, shoes and later kerosene. But the state, instead of controlling the production and trade of hashish, forcefully prohibited its cultivation. For the local people, the ban was nothing less than an attempt to undermine their livelihoods and autonomy, and it reinforced the common-sense view that the state was unresponsive and predatory.

Women mobilized by defying the ban, engaging in “underground” cultivation of hemp.

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<sup>16</sup> Hemp seeds are used in cooking and pressed for cooking oil, its bark for textile, and its stem for firewood; the living hemp plant shelters cereal crops as mulch and manure within intercrop agriculture; and, because hemp flourishes in poor to moderate soils, it stabilizes hill slopes.

Hemp's natural properties aided their resistance. As it is able to survive on marginal lands and is immune to grazing by cattle, hemp could be grown in adjoining forests, in gullies or on slopes, and it could be intercropped with corn, wheat, potatoes and millet, thereby evading the efforts of the state to snuff it out. In the years to come, hemp furnished a crucial source of income for households, as well as tax revenue for the Maoist movement. The ban on hemp became an emblem of state injustice, nourishing anti-state consciousness over several generations and alternative development imagery. Hemp remained central to the moral economy of the peasants even after the ban on its production, but during that period it emerged as a rebellious seed, providing a foundation for the Maoist revolt of the 1990s. I will elaborate the ecological aspect of hemp in the next chapter.

### *Commercial apparatuses*

As a doctrine of development of the time, these new endeavors of creating alternative income and employment opportunities were driven solely by market forces, where the priority was to create market institutions, financial infrastructure and local systems of circulating capital, information and goods. In those interventions, different aspects of new market mechanisms were promoted as a way of creating an entrepreneurial society and spreading commercial production in rural areas. The main instruments used to institutionalize commercial production, which later became the seeds of rebellion by generating negative consciousness among the peasants, included: financing mechanisms (loans and disbursements), market infrastructure (supply chains) and production of commercial goods. In addition to creating general conditions of

exploitation and deterioration of indigenous means of livelihood, market infrastructures dramatically accelerated the existing confrontational relationship between state machineries and peasants, especially the poor and women, toward an organized revolt. These interventions in fact created conditions by which the peasants' incoherent and disjointed feelings and experiences of marginalization (othering) surfaced openly and contributed to the process of consolidating historically developed political consciousness and ideological unity.

Following the capitalist notion of a self-reliant entrepreneurial model of development in the global South (see Rankin, 2001; 2004; Roy, 2010), the RIDP initiated various institutional mechanisms to ensure the availability of loans for establishing commercial activities such as cash crops, poultry and vegetables at individual, family and group levels. The basic idea behind these initiatives was that the lack of money, especially among the poor and women, was the main constraint to initiating commercial production. To overcome capital constraints for commercial production, the project systematically intervened by creating three main lending institutions – promoting local moneylenders, bank loans, and micro-credit through saving and credit groups. Small Farmers Development Groups were formed in every target village to facilitate access to credit by helping individual peasants develop specific business plans and also acting as a local enforcer of the plan to guarantee the payback. The peasants had to deposit their land entitlement and house ownership certificates with the bank as collateral. These loan schemes were not accessible to women, and therefore a micro-credit program was initiated by forming saving and credit groups to facilitate wider lending. As in many parts of South Asia (see Rankin, 2004; Roy, 2010), the micro-credit scheme grew rapidly by

enrolling at least one female member of the family. By circulating micro-credit as a developmental intervention, the peasants of the Rapti region, especially the women, were drawn into networks of global financial capital as the money invested in such loan programs ultimately came from international banking institutions and companies.

These new financial arrangements, however, not only plunged the peasants into a cycle of debt but, more importantly, introduced new hierarchies of power, involving moneylenders, big entrepreneurs and defaulting peasants. “I had to leave the village because I could not pay the interest, let alone the loan. I worked for five years in India and paid back the loan. They are like lice; they won’t leave us until we die,” said a Tharu peasant from Dang district, angrily recalling his experience of commercial production. He took the loan for vegetable production, but he was unable to earn enough profit to pay back the loan.

The micro-credit scheme was particularly ruthless towards women. Credit was provided to individual women after the approval of the savings and credit group. These groups operated through a mechanism of peer collateral, in effect, a guarantee to pay back the lender. A leader of the saving and credit group remembers her duty in the past: “We used to travel house to house to collect the loan, and, if someone was late, we used to fine her. Fined amounts were our group income. We did all those things thinking that we were doing development work.” Women, who had never before dealt with the loans as they did not have collateral for bank loans, suddenly entered into debt, creating further deprivation, isolation, anger and social shame. Some did emerge better off from the scheme, but the majority did not. These changes to the fabric of village moral economic

structures produced confrontational relations between the well-off and deprived women locally. Male members were often dragged into legal cases by the administration as loan defaulters. In many instances, the defaulters also became the subject of political repression and were kept under state surveillance. The newly introduced financial schemes produced some successful entrepreneurs, but most of the many peasants were left as semi-proletarian labor available as a labor pool for the successful ones.

In addition, the project focused on creating entrepreneurial supply chains to make commercial production efficient, long-term and fully controlled by the market. These interventions were carried out in the name of developing entrepreneurial infrastructure, and the main objectives were to develop semi-capitalist producers at the local level and connect them to the supply chain of the market. “Successful” entrepreneurs became the local middlemen for supplying goods up the value chain. They were brandished as a “model” for the rest of the villagers and a success story of the project. These semi-capitalist producers specialized in supplying particular goods such as timber, vegetables or fruits, and this mechanism minimized competition among the producers. They remained semi-capitalists because they also continued to be involved in traditional subsistence farming practices. Market infrastructure for establishing the supply chain was further strengthened by other rural infrastructures, such as rural roads, bridges, market centers, storage facilities, seed cooperatives and collection centers. These rural infrastructures were connected to the market for supplying commercial goods.

Initially, such new arrangements for supplying local goods to marketplaces were perceived by the peasants as beneficial. Within a few years time, however, the

middlemen, entrepreneurs and successful producers developed by RIDP started to create cartels, securing their positions as local investors and brokers. This was a successful outcome for the project, as the peasants' indigenous mode of production was slowly and successfully incorporated into market-based production mechanisms. However, these changes drastically affected the indigenous systems of trade mentioned earlier, where peasant women were in the center. The barter system was completely replaced, and the women were left high and dry (other than working as labor for production). The peasants, whose external income came mostly from the exchange-based trade of the artisanal goods, now had to rely on the middlemen and market demands (with externally defined design, quantity and quality). They were perhaps earning the same (or even more) income from new arrangements but lost their control over production and exchange. It put them in contact with various external forces, but the historically developed horizontal systems of trade, informed by the communal subsistence and solidarity moral economic values, were destabilized or displaced by market hierarchies and the power of capital.

### *Reinventing moral economies*

The moral economic practices of the solidarity of peasants, however, continued to exist. This happened in two ways: 1) The majority of the peasants continued to practice longstanding moral economic systems of production and distribution, and 2) the RIDP invested those practices with new norms and mechanisms to guarantee market penetration in rural areas. In the first case, historically developed peasant moral economies remained a main feature of agrarian society because the moral economic structures developed over several generations were followed without question by the

peasant communities. Moral economies persisted as one of the main sources of everyday livelihoods and cultural practices because developmental changes were unable to generate alternative means of livelihood, particularly in areas lacking modern infrastructure. Some peasants used modern agricultural practices in conjunction with indigenous systems of subsistence. For example, Thabang peasants cultivated improved breeds of vegetables, potatoes, barley and fruits, which were promoted as key income-generating activities by the RIDP. But these communities also refused to use hybrid seeds of corn, beans and wheat, their main food sources, because they did not want to risk crop failure. Provoking moral economic norms, Ruj Bahadur Roka of Thabang says: “Our ancestors have told us that we should not contaminate our corn and millet. New things are coming into our village, but we also follow our traditions because we know them very well and we believe on what our ancestors have told us. We always talk about these things with our children.” (Interviewed in January 2011, Thabang).

The survival of old moral economic practices was a political strategy of Thabang peasants. Because the state was seen as an encroacher and oppressor in Thabang area after the unification of Nepal in 1760s, peasant communities utilized their moral economic structures to counter increased encroachments on their lands and lives. For example, in the 1930s, the state planned to introduce rice in Thabang valley, particularly in the river basins. The state was promoting it throughout the country as a symbol of civilization and a source of higher income and productivity. Several attempts to plant rice failed in Thabang because Magar peasants considered it as an encroachment on their cultural practices and an extension of the state. Burman Budha recalls: “They [royal families] saw wide river basins in Thabang and sent rice to cultivate in entire area. Our

parents did not like that idea, and what they did was roasted the rice seeds and planted to show them that they tried but failed.” According to Burman, the resistance against the rice continued, and there are no rice fields in Thabang even today, even though many peasants purchase rice from the market, and it is now consumed widely in the region. Similarly, in the 1970s, Thabang peasants (led by women) destroyed the newly established brewery which was promoted for the generation of employment and income locally. Thabang peasants were not anti-alcohol, but traditional methods of producing alcohol were an important part of their moral economy. Likewise, in the 1980s, Thabang peasants destroyed an apple orchard to protect the forests and grazing lands. The orchard was established by the RIDP to boost local economic growth, but it challenged peasants’ indigenous connections with the forests.

Another important mechanism of “reinventing” subsistence production practices and aspects of moral economic structures is the long history of developmental interventions in the region. The RIDP, through its community-based approaches to development, sought to transform the peasant society in the Rapti region by modernizing agriculture and promoting commercialization. Community groups were formed for forestry, agriculture, income generation, animal husbandry, health care, adult literacy, irrigation, commercialization and artisanal production. This group-based approach was effective for timely implementation of the programs and also cheaper in terms of actual operational costs. The project promoted subsistence production of some crops, such as vegetables, cereals, potatoes and ground grasses, which should directly also contribute to the production of commercial goods. For example, if a peasant established an orchard for commercial fruit production, he could also plant intercrops for subsistence purposes. The

RIDP developed a comprehensive plan for each village, identifying which products were to be promoted for community subsistence and which could be produced for the market. But for both subsistence and commercial productions, the community moral economic structures were found to be effective and less expensive institutional arrangements. Community groups were formed among peasant families sharing the same moral economic structures because it was the only way to identify communities and possibilities of working together for development activities. Even though these community moral economic structures were reinvented for developmental purposes, it helped to consolidate fragments of a moral economy into a collective force in peasant society.

At the household level, commercial production operations were carried out in combination with indigenous subsistence farming activities. Commercial goods were produced when the farming was over for the season or during the evening. For products that were not processed in a factory (as was the case for many cash crops supplied only as raw materials), there was no actual daily schedule of production operations (that was disciplined by clock-time). These daily production operations were invoked as leisure-time activities and opportunities for additional income (on top of traditional income sources). Market mechanisms were promoted as a process of entrepreneurial empowerment and utilization of “wasted” resources and skills. By combining these two modes of production, the cost of production for families remained cheap.

The simultaneous rupture and reinvention of the peasant moral economy provide a greater explanation of the prehistories of the Maoist revolution in Nepal. The reinvented moral economic practices created different socioeconomic dynamics in the communities

characterized by mixed livelihood practices. In this system, means of living were generated mainly from subsistence farming (mostly by women) but also supplemented by the income from new employment opportunities (of men). Those changed practices created the conditions for peasant uprising in the region in two main ways: 1) reinvigorating the community collective potential and peasant moral economic dynamics, and 2) providing commercial exploitation as political fodder for organic intellectuals who articulated the need for rebellious organizing in villages. Development, while aiming to contain the growing social discontent in the region through reinventing peasant moral economy, in fact rapidly expanded the conditions for the possibility of revolt.

*Political articulation: defining a good life*

The changing moral economic practices and their impacts on peasants' lives contributed substantially in the historical processes of generating new ideas about a good life. Those ideas were provoked politically and the rebellion against the oppression was justified as a course to take. As the successful entrepreneurs were mainly the feudal landlords and urban elites, the traditional hierarchies of feudalism were reproduced within capitalist social relations. These everyday operations of producing commercial goods, however, intensified the process of separation between the producers and entrepreneurs. These transformations in peasants' social relations became fodder for organic intellectuals and activists in transforming existing negative consciousness into a sharper critique of patriarchy, exploitation and the role of the state and development. Women, in particular, who felt the brunt of RIDP's intrusion into household economies, emerged as the vanguard of change. By the mid-1980s, the women managed to rid some

villages (Thabang in particular) of polygamy and put in place protocols that guaranteed women an equal share in property after divorce. Thus, the new roles assumed by women as a result of massive socioeconomic changes in the region became fundamental to new political consciousness and leadership in consolidating various peasant uprisings in the region.

Driven by these transformations in moral economic structures, the fragmentary negative consciousness and sporadic uprisings of the peasants became consolidated into a more organized rebellion against the state. The state had been responding militarily to those sporadic uprisings for decades, but it intensified offensive repression as soon as villagers started to challenge the status quo openly. For example, Thabang village stood firmly against the king in the 1981 referendum on the role of monarchy and boycotted the parliamentary election in the next year. The village came under a massive military operation, followed by many arrests, false charges and destruction of property. Police operations continued throughout the region even after the declaration of parliamentary democracy in 1990. The peasants in the region started to protest, organizing massive cultural campaigns in the early 1990s. The campaign emerged as a vital ideological instrument for unifying geographically scattered uprisings and popular mobilizations across the region. The state retaliated violently with Operation Romeo, unleashing armed force on Rolpa's inhabitants. Peasants, angry and fearful, joined as rank-and-file in the newly constituted Maoist Party, which then started armed attacks across the region against landlords, moneylenders, police and government offices. In February 1996, the Maoists formally declared war on the Nepali state.

## Revisiting Development

Development in the Rapti region was about changing peasants' behavior and moral economic practices toward growth and stability. However, there was no need for complete transformation of peasants' lives, as long as development processes were successful in investing them with new subjectivities, interests and positions. In fact, with RIDP, the peasants' moral economic practices were mobilized to the extent that they were useful in spreading commercial production, by blending them with methods of efficient use of resources and rational economic principles. The Rapti peasants came to view themselves as new subjects desiring developmental changes, while simultaneously finding themselves enmeshed in larger political processes that sought to conceptualize alternative ways of living, which articulated changing moral economic practices and growing commercial exploitation into new revolutionary politics in the region.

For example, the Rapti peasants started to denote *bikash* [development] as concrete physical material changes (distinct and visible) brought into the locality, which lead to betterment, comfort and abundance. Development was perceived as something that comes from outside, but was desirable. "*Bikash* is about adding or altering what we have and how we do things," says a peasant from Holery, Rolpa. "Look our situation ... we are always in difficulty, always facing scarcity and domination. We would not be in this situation if we were *bikasit*," he adds. "But some things have changed; I used to travel two days on foot to buy salt and kerosene oil and carry them home on my back for another three days. But now that the road has arrived to the village, I can go and buy things in Holery bazaar whenever I need them." Despite creating enormous desire and

physical and material changes, developmental interventions were not successful or interested in transforming every aspect of peasant society so that it would fit into the framework of economic growth and entrepreneurship. The result was that the conditions for existence of the solidarity moral economy of the peasants were continuously reproduced; but such practices were maintained in a subaltern relation to capital and the idea of development.

The conditions of possibility for the existence of both modes of production – commercial and subsistence – by disabling and also reinventing the peasant moral economy, in fact perpetuates the contradictions inherent in development. The contradiction of enrollment and alienation propagates the historical material processes of political articulation, representing the conditions of development's double life. For example in Rapti, development as a “mission” of modernity has successfully subjugated people to the “authority of consciousness,” i.e. the self of the North (see Hegel, 1975, Cowen and Shenton 1996; Dussel, 1998). However, in these processes, Rapti peasants (considered as fragments) not only survived with contradictions of superiority and subordination but reproduced new hierarchies and trusteeship. Instead the Rapti region experienced new conditions of rebellion that grew simultaneously with the history of developmental interventions. In this sense, development is an articulation of heterogeneity into “complex structures of hierarchies” (cf Hall, 1988; Althusser, 1969), and alternative conceptions of the world can be generated by rearticulating the same structures with critical political consciousness. A critical consciousness of the differences leads to defiance of the hierarchy.

Development hegemony reproduces the hierarchical “equilibrium” necessary to satisfy the interests of the state, capital and the ruling class. In hegemony, the ruling idea does “not only justify and maintain its dominance, but manage to win the active consent of those over whom it rules” (Gramsci, 1971:244). However, through the long history of political articulation of the changes happening in Rapti, subalterns have developed their own conception of the world (such as an understanding of what constitutes a good life). The discourse of hegemony has not fully appropriated other conceptions of the world, and therefore the moral economic space in the Rapti region remained as a fertile ground for imagining alternative political possibilities and revolt.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, as the account of agrarian changes and rebellious politics in the Rapti region shows, peasants are neither a category of people to be rescued and liberated from their conservativeness and conditions of drudgery by an enlightened vanguard from the outside (the orthodox Marxist understanding), nor are they communitarian insurgents outside the modes of bourgeois or proletariat politics (as claimed by the Indian subaltern studies group). These dominant accounts of peasants in Marxist and subaltern studies, respectively, are inadequate in explaining the interrelationship between the growing developmental desire of the peasantry and peasant rebellions in places such as Nepal. The general attributes associated with peasantry, such as differentiation in property (land) holding, social fragmentation, lack of unity in interests, geographical specificity, cultural conservatism, lack of flexibility (immobility) and apolitical attitude, in reality, have been reworked as a result of the continuous enrollment of the peasants into the scheme of

development. Therefore, it is important to examine peasant rebellion not as static and episodic gestures of anger but rather as historically developed struggles against dominant structures from these reworked positions of the peasantry.

Agrarian commodification and expansion of the capitalist economy can function as a ground for seeding rebellious ideas, but they require active and continuous political articulation to generate geographically specific historical contexts for peasant uprisings.<sup>17</sup> Agrarian commodification undermines the peasants' "subsistence ethic" and traditionally developed "right to reciprocity" between feudal landlords and peasantries, as James Scott (1976) elegantly demonstrates in his study of peasant uprisings in Southeast Asia. In these explanations, the coexistence of the pre-market structures of peasant society that are hierarchically tied together by cultural norms and the subsistence mode of agrarian production are conceptualized as forming a "moral economy"; the breaching of that moral contract and disintegration of harmonious unity between the landlords and the peasants as a result of agrarian commodification triggers rural upheavals. Here, the stress is on vertical structure or unity in domination, and the social conducts established to serve the interests of landlords are understood as a moral binding force. There are two main implications in this notion of peasant upheavals: First, it presupposes that the pre-capitalist society was largely peaceful and harmonious, and it underplays the histories of peasant revolts against landlords, principalities and colonial states. Second, it does not take into account how the elements of "moral economy" are integrated into capitalist

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<sup>17</sup> A number of scholars however have argued that diffusion of the market into the peasant economy creates unbearable conditions of exploitation and generates new social strata among the peasantries, sparking revolt to return to the pre-market communities (see Scott, 1976; Moore, 1966; Wolf, 1969; and Paige, 1975).

development, making pre-capitalist imaginaries less relevant in understanding peasant politics today. Moral economy is juxtaposed as the opposite of the commodification of agrarian economy. However, it is important to recognize the fact that the conditions for the existence of both peasant moral economy and the commodification of peasant lives and means of production are reproduced simultaneously, co-constituting each other as a result of development's double life.

Development's double moment involves peasants producing commercial goods and subsistence requirements simultaneously. As Sanyal (2007) argues, development has to deal with the basic survival issues of the peasantry while promoting capitalist growth and accumulation. The reinvention of subsistence production is designed to reduce the immediate devastating effects of primitive accumulation but also to make the accumulation process cheaper and more acceptable from the outset and to facilitate its entry into agrarian society. Therefore, in primitive accumulation via development, primary producers (especially the peasantry) lose their land and other means of production as per the demand of capital; but at the same time, they are supported with basic survival needs by the state and other developmental programs. This double engagement of development provides legitimacy and involves the masses in the scheme of commodification, especially in producing fictitious commodities such as natural resources (water, forest) and labor power (individual peasants and community collective force). Furthermore, this double engagement makes primitive accumulation a highly profitable and continuously expansive process (see Chatterjee, 2008). But peasants are not only the subjects of exploitation by the network of markets and commodification, they also become a part of larger movements, solidarity and networks creating different

political possibilities. Therefore, peasant uprisings today are neither undertaken only against the commodification of moral economy, nor are they only resistance against feudal domination. Rather, they are both. Therefore, to understand peasant rebellions and their relationship to development, it is important to consider the intersection between capitalist development and feudal moral economic production. Neither moral economy nor commodification alone can explain the history and mechanism of the peasant rebellion in the global South.

As shown in this chapter, the simultaneous processes of rupturing and reinventing the peasants' moral economic structure had sown the seeds of rebellion, and the possibility of continuation of such moral economic practices contributed to the consolidation of rebellious ideas into sustained revolutionary movements in rural areas. Developmental interventions thus reshaped the social structures and political possibilities in rural areas. Such processes of reshaping the moral economic institutions were articulated politically toward a revolutionary imagination of the world in conjunction with massive ecological (Chapter Three), communal (Chapter Four) and mental (Chapter Five) changes occurring in the Rapti region of Nepal, creating the conditions of possibility for the emergence of the Maoist revolution in the early 1990s.

## Chapter Three

### The Political Ecology of Subalternity

The birth and the development of the idea of progress correspond to a widespread consciousness that a certain relationship has been reached between society and nature (including in the concept of nature those of chance and "irrationality") such that as a result mankind as a whole is more sure of its future and can conceive "rationally" of plans through which to govern its entire Life.

Gramsci, 1971:357

#### Introduction

The main argument in this chapter is that development as a scheme of overcoming nature's barriers for achieving human progress enrolls the productive potential of human ecologies into systems of accumulation in a particular way. It aims to create the conditions of subordination of these human ecological processes (both the physical properties of ecosystems and the social relations that emerge around them) to the hegemonic relations of the state and capital. However, I contend that, first, these hegemonic processes fail to transform the material properties of ecosystems and the repertoire of social relations that have historically co-evolved with them in the manner intended and, second, this lacuna serves to undermine the desired outcomes of development programs. In effect, I argue that nature's materiality – by which I mean the ensemble of ecosystem processes and the social relations that exist in metabolic interaction with them – becomes a force of jeopardy for development, destabilizing it in unanticipated ways. (One could, if one wanted, call these destabilizing effects “nature's agency,” but I opt not to because of the humanist lineage of the term “agency.”)

More strongly, I argue that a fuller understanding of the prehistory of Nepal's Maoist revolution – the conditions of its possibility – requires attention not just to histories of economic deprivation and political subjugation, nor just to environmental crises that threatened rural livelihoods, but rather to the contingent articulation of social and natural processes that generated possibilities for the transformation of existing peasant common sense into a new conception of the world (a new common sense) through political praxis. In adopting this approach to political ecology, I take my lead from Gramsci's (1971) writing on hegemony and subalternity, in conjunction with historical materialist accounts of capital accumulation and the production of nature (Marx, 1967; Smith, 1984; Harvey, 2003; Castree, 2003; 2008; Perelman, 2000). In so doing, I extend Gramsci by thinking more insistently about ecological processes and the nexus of nature-society within relations of hegemony and counter-hegemony than he does; by the same token, I extend the "production of nature" thesis by introducing historical contingency into its structuralist framework via Gramsci's performative notion of hegemony.

The possible role of the diverse historical material processes of human-ecology interactions in generating the particular political conjuncture of the Maoist revolution in Nepal are largely ignored in contemporary scholarship<sup>1</sup>. Existing analyses rely on the notion that Himalayan environmental degradation and the presence of rugged mountain

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<sup>1</sup> There has been a voluminous work done in Nepal (Nagendra and Ostrom, 2007; Agrawal, 2010; Bhurtel and Ali, 2005; Gersony, 2003; Panday, 1999), South Asia (Guha, 2000; Rangan, 1996; Rangan and Lane, 2001; Shiva, 1991; 2006; Agrawal, 2005; Sultana, 2011) and globally (Peet and Watts, 2004; Watts, 2004; Edelman, 1999; Hecht and Cockburn, 2011; Peluso and Watts, 2001; Peluso, 1992; Leach and Fairhead, 1997; Kosek, 2006) on grassroots movements seeking access to ecological resources and against dispossession from appropriation rights. Particularly in Nepal, the focus has been on access to (or denial of) the use of natural resources, especially the commons, rather than on understanding how ecologies become a part of local or national politics.

geographies were the sources of deterioration in livelihood conditions and the reasons for peasant uprisings in rural Nepal (see Bhurtel and Ali, 2005; Eckholm, 1975; Ives, 1987; Zurick, 1993; Hutt, 2004; Thapa, 2012). These accounts gloss over the historical relationship between particular ecological processes and the emergence of hegemonic (and counter-hegemonic) politics. Ecological entities have always been central organizing features of Nepali politics. Since the arrival of international development in the 1950s, human ecological relations have come under increased political scrutiny as part of efforts to transform them in the image of capital and modern environmentalism. This has had enormous impacts at various scales. RIDP has been critical in this broader scheme to reinvent Himalayan ecologies. It has sought to transform ecological processes and associated social relations as per Western norms of efficiency, growth and environment – a significant transformation in the region that, I argue, unwittingly consolidated the use-value-based co-existence between nature and society, generating new rebellious ideas and political possibilities in the Rapti region.

The narrative in this chapter examines these processes of ecological transformation in the Rapti region to understand the historical, material conditions that facilitated the emergence of this particular political conjuncture between human and non-human elements. As in the other chapters, the ecological aspects of the Maoist revolution (discussed here) are analyzed through an in-depth ethnography of the Rapti region, especially of Thabang village, where the Maoist revolution emerged. This chapter is divided into six sections. In the second section, I offer three vignettes from Thabang village to illustrate how ecology was vital to revolutionary politics. The third section outlines the history of environmental politics in Nepal, mainly drawing on the Theory of

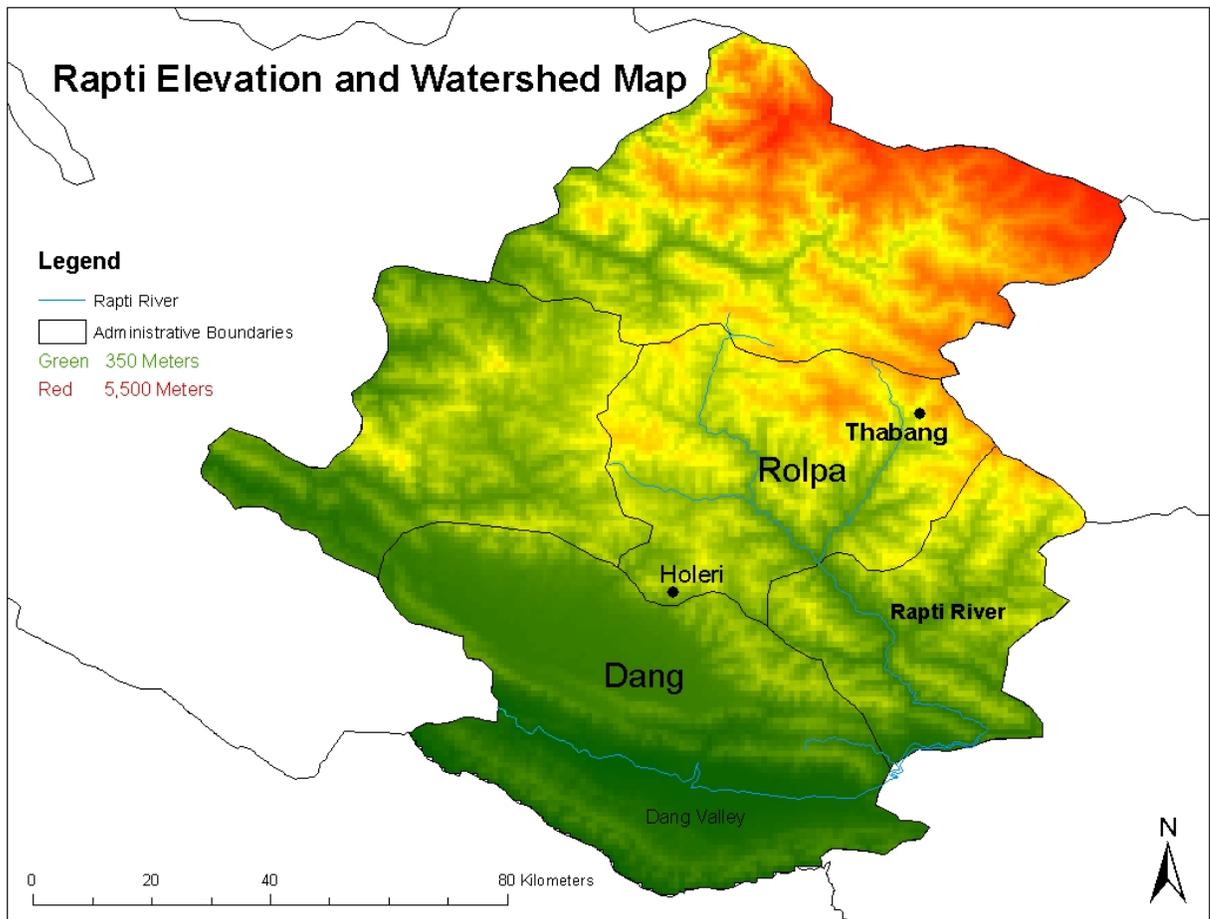
Himalayan Degradation. The concepts of “production of nature” and “subaltern ecologies” are discussed in section four to develop a conceptual framework to understand the possible role of ecological entities in political processes. In section five, major changes in Rapti’s ecological process are highlighted to demonstrate how such changes in ecological processes created possibilities for the revolution. The concluding section begins to connect ecological changes in the Rapti with the idea of the double life of development in Nepal.

### **Revolutionary Tales of Thabang Ecologies**

*Politics of geography:* Burman Budha and his fellow shepherds used to follow a fixed ecological calendar for moving their herds from high-altitude pasture to dense, lowland forests every year. Thabang peasants have specific relationships with different geographical features of the region, and their moral economic practices used to rely heavily on the yearly seasonal calendar of local ecological dynamics. But this peasant-nature relationship changed once the state introduced legal restrictions on the use of common forests for grazing in the early 1970s. It forced shepherds to reduce the number of sheep they tended and restricted grazing to small, selected areas. As a collective farming and herding community, the cultural, economic and political spheres of peasant lives were directly linked to the geographically specific attributes of high-altitude pastures for summer grazing, valleys and flatlands in the foothills (*Bang*) for settlements, lower-slope lands for farming and southern forests for winter grazing. (See Figure 3 for altitudinal distribution of the Rapti region.) Burman Budha, an iconic peasant leader from Thabang now in his eighties, recalls, “We moved from one place to another according to

the wish of the land; when one place is tired and needed to regenerate itself, then we moved to another place, completing a full circle every year.” Local practices such as farming patterns, cultural festivals, trade seasons and routes, religious ceremonies, political events and even marriage seasons were planned according to seasonal ecological patterns and geographies.

*Figure 3: Map of the Rapti Watershed*



The distinct geography of herding patterns in Thabang created a particular type of community structure that functioned as a basis for a common consciousness and

revolutionary activism. For example, the high-altitude pastures were sites of creating collective unity, political consciousness and activism among the adult herders. Leaving young children and the elderly at home in Thabang, two to three adults from each family used to move to the *Goth* [a temporary thatch house to look after the herd] in highland pastures. Many families used to build *Goths* in the same area for safety and collective use of tools and materials. Without the fear of surveillance and with the availability of abundant time together, the highland provided ample opportunities for herders to live in one place, discuss village-related issues and plan political activities as a collective force. For example, in the summer of 1954, Burman and other shepherds decided to revolt against the atrocities and exploitation of the local *Mukhiya*, the tax collector<sup>2</sup>. They traveled back to Thabang village at night and attacked him, ousting him from the village. The attack resulted in the imprisonment of Burman and others for one month. In prison, they met young communist activists, who were later instrumental in catalyzing a series of revolts that grew into the Maoist revolution in the 1990s.

The region's diverse ecology entered into an active peasant politics as early as the 1950s (see Figure 3). The low-altitude forests in the south bordering the Rolpa and Dang districts were meeting sites for herders, farmers and gatherers from other ethnic groups, especially the Tharu. The organic networks established in the lowland pasture between the Magars of the north and the Tharus of the south would eventually allow them to join

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<sup>2</sup> The *Mukhiya* was a title given by the state to the tax collecting officer in each village. Generally, the local landlord was given such role. A landlord and influential elite was chosen as a *Mukhiya* of Thabang village in 1950 as an heir of the earlier one. He was connected to the new government in Kathmandu. With his idea of making the village modern, he ordered the killing of dogs and pigs, and he imposed heavy fines for those who denied his orders. His "modern" ideas and desire to strengthen his power by providing more taxes to the state triggered the revolt. The rebellion lasted for three years, and in between the peasant leaders including Burman Budha established contacts with communist activists in prison and also formed a Peasants' Association, which led to the expulsion of the *Mukhiya* in 1957.

forces in the revolution that erupted in Rapti region. Furthermore, the corridor from the highland pastures to the lowland forests in the south via Thabang provided a space for generating solidarity and consciousness amongst Magar women. Women, always in groups, traveled through the corridor every week to supply food to the *Goths* and also sell sheep products and hemp textiles along the way. The corridor became the lifeline of the Maoist revolution, and these groups of women emerged as a leading force in Thabang. Finally, the tracts of flatlands near the river basins and foothills (created by thousands of years of soil erosion) were the only places where Magar communities could establish sizable settlements in the hilly landscape (see figure 3). Families used to construct adjoining houses in those flatlands (see figure 2). In Burman Budha's words: "Building houses in each other's front and back yards became a culture because of the lack of flat areas, and now it is our norm" (interviewed on June 11, 2010). The paucity of flatlands forced them to live in clusters – a geographical force in the creation of an organic unity.

*Political enrollment of reinvented ecologies:* In the winter of 1991, Ruj Bahadur Roka escaped being arrested, but many of his fellow peasants were caught and imprisoned for months under the charge of destroying private apple orchards. "We had to take weapons to defend ourselves, and that was the beginning of the armed revolt for us in Thabang," says Ruj Bahadur (interviewed on February 16, 2011, Thabang). The apple orchards were introduced to replace the production of hemp. The state banned and destroyed hemp production in the Rapti region in 1973. To enable alternative sources of income, the RIDP introduced various activities, such as vegetable production, seed marketing, forest nurseries, milk products, harvesting of forest products and apple orchards. In the early 1980s, the RIDP financed (through an agricultural development

bank) an apple orchard in a common forest land located just north of the Thabang settlements. A large chunk of forest was cleared for the orchard. “In the summer of 1987 and many times thereafter, there was a huge landslide originating from that forest area, which swept away all our land along the Thabang River,” remembers Ruj Bhadur (interviewed on February 16, 2011, in Thabang).

The land preparation for the orchard was heavy work, requiring digging big holes and cutting soil surfaces. The root systems of the apple trees were very shallow and were unable to hold the soil mass. During the summer, the entire area flooded, and the next day Thabang peasants marched to the orchard and destroyed it. Small-scale producers also gave up production because they were unable to sell the apples. The stock was not consumed locally because the apples were sour because of the inappropriate aspect of the hill slope. Changing forest ecologies created negative consciousness amongst the people of Thabang and led them to revolt against state programs. The destabilization of the organic relationship between the forests and Thabang’s peasants provided political fodder for both an oppressive state and local activism. The orchards and the accompanying soil erosion were pivotal in triggering armed resistance in Thabang.

*Gullies into Maoist revolution:* Just before dawn in one of the summer nights in 2001, Purna Bahadur Roka realized that the Nepali army had completely surrounded the village. By then Thabang’s residents were used to military attacks and retaliation but usually during the daytime because the army feared the dense settlements and the prospects of surprise counter attacks. Purna recalls the event: “I quietly went door to door, gave them the code word, and in ten minutes we were all in the gully. Everybody

walked through the narrow strips between the houses to take the deep gully route upstream. The gully next to the village is so deep that no one can figure out what happens inside the gully channel. We walked upstream quietly and reached the hilltop within an hour. The furious army could not find us but burned down some houses.” Thabang’s gully averted the potential loss of lives on that day by providing safe passage to the villagers. Thabang is a valley surrounded by high mountains and dense forests and composed of gullies, caves, narrow ridges and a rolling landscape with many nooks and crannies. These geographical features protected the Thabang area from military assault numerous times, ultimately becoming part of a liberated zone and base area for the revolution.

These preceding stories about the relationships between ecology, geography and peasant rebellion offer insights into the relatively unexplored terrain of nature-society relations that provided enabling conditions for the emergence of Nepal’s Maoist revolution. In Thabang, a non-dominating and co-constitutive relationship between social and natural processes was to prove politically vital. Watts and Peet (1996:263) refer to this as the balance between “social construction of nature” and “natural construction of the social.” Retrospectively, it is evident that rapidly changing ecological conditions and uneven geographies of the mountain landscape served not as a centrifugal force but rather as a centripetal force for rebellions in the Rapti region, thwarting the quest for control by dominant social structures. It isn’t farfetched to say that the historical interaction and intimacy between human and non-human entities provided a material basis for political activism in Thabang.

An important but unnoticed irony of the Maoist revolution in Nepal is that the revolutionary uprising emerged after the country was successful in averting “highly expected” ecological catastrophe, particularly that of deforestation, through community forestry programs that were undertaken since the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Community-based programs have been successful in enrolling communities, their commons and capital in a scheme promoting environmental conservation while also introducing highly profitable mechanisms of accumulation. Despite this, the rebellions continued. Ecological processes remained central to revolutionary movements in Nepal. *Why and how did the ecology enroll itself into hegemonic or counter-hegemonic politics?*

### **The Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation**

“Agricultural modernization - better seeds and innovative techniques, land reform, extension services, and so on - will quickly have to replace the extensive spread of farming to new lands if Nepal is to avoid an acute food crisis”.

Erik Eckholm, 1975: 765

The Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation (THED) was both a turning point and the foundation of the reinvented ecologies in the Rapti region. It was proposed in the early 1970s and paved the way for most of the modern ecological and developmental policies in the Himalayas (Metz, 1991; Joshi, 1986; Blaikie and Muldavin, 2004; Ives, 1987; Ives and Messerli, 1989). THED declared that the Himalayan

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<sup>3</sup> The dominant environmental discourses have consistently blamed the local population for the destruction of “the very young, fragile, unique and globally important Himalayan environments.” See Regmi, 1980, and Whelpton, 2005, for the pre-1950s depictions of people-environment relationships in the Himalayan mountain region of Nepal. Such environmental destruction was believed to be a consequence of the lack of economic development and therefore national and international agencies focused primarily on “mobilizing” natural resources, especially the forests, for economic growth and development.

ecosystems were on the verge of complete disappearance and that such callous degradation of the environment was the result of rampant population growth, as well as wasteful farming and livelihood practices of the peasants (see Eckholm, 1975; 1976; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987). The THED was readily adopted by the Nepali state and international development agencies as an authoritative diagnosis, as, too, the promise of a “scientific” solution to the problems of Himalayan ecologies and demographic growth. That notion of ecological crises, especially the findings on deforestation and soil erosion, were used by the state as a strategy to divert attention away from the growing peasant uprisings across the country.<sup>4</sup> The state used it as an opportunity to gain international legitimacy and sympathy as a developmental state. The crisis in the Himalayas, a place commonly known in the West as an adventurous destination and site of ecological diversity, led to technical and financial support by international organizations.<sup>5</sup>

Erik Eckholm published an article called “Deterioration of Mountain Environments” in the journal *Science* in 1975, highlighting the ecological crisis in Nepal. He starts by saying, “There is no better place to begin an examination of deteriorating mountain environments than Nepal” (Eckholm, 1975:764). Written in highly effective

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<sup>4</sup> Ecological degradation in the Himalayas was real (Ives, 1987; Zurick, 1993; Goldstein et al, 1983), as the rate of deforestation, especially of the high value lowland *Sal* forests and temperate coniferous trees, was high (Jackson et al, 1998; Thompson and Warburton, 1985; Houston, 1987; Myers, 1987), and the soil erosion in the hills had increased (Forsyth, 1998). Nonetheless, the much-talked-about ecological crisis arrived due to the long history of state-led exploitation, dispossession, enclosure, restriction on utilization and commercialization rather than overpopulation or malpractice of the peasants.

<sup>5</sup> The THED came along with increased environmental debates at the international level, especially in the West. Resource economists and environmental managers of Western countries were mobilized to assess the Himalayan environmental degradation, especially soil erosion and its impacts downstream. The World Bank and various environmental foundations located primarily in the United States took the lead in identifying the culprits. The theory was first written by Western scholars/economists and dispatched to Nepal for implementation.

prose, Eckholm argued forcefully that rampant population growth and very traditional and wasteful subsistence farming practices in the mountains created a Himalayan ecological disaster by accelerating deforestation, topsoil loss, landslides, flooding and siltation in the Ganges plain.<sup>6</sup> Small numbers of mountain peasants, herders, indigenous nomads and their livelihood practices were depicted as a regional threat to the existence of millions in the Ganges plain, a reason for growing regional conflicts and a hub for possible community ideological influences. The ecological crisis was held responsible for the growing conflict between China and India, various wars between India and Pakistan and regional tensions in controlling access to Himalayan water supply (see Ives, 1987). To combat the Himalayan ecological tragedy, aggressive measures were introduced to control and teach the peasants about efficient ways of production and conservation. In effect, the THED reproduced Himalayan ecologies as subaltern entities through the mechanisms of development, global environmental politics, Cold War geopolitics and the market.

Since the 1970s, a number of policies and programs were implemented, primarily to expand state institutions into various ecologically sensitive areas by increasing the number of governmental and non-governmental institutions. State institutions such as departments of wildlife and national parks, watershed management, plant protection, forest research and survey, agriculture extension and rural development were established. Banks, seed cooperatives, marketing companies, fertilizer suppliers, training centers and

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<sup>6</sup> The idea was further expanded by scholars (Eckholm, 1975; 1976; Lall and Moddie, 1981; Singh, 1985, Joshi, 1986) and institutions (World Bank, United Nations). As Ives (1987) eloquently summarizes, the general consensus was that the Himalayas would turn into a desert within decades, leading to the tragic and complete ruin of mountain subsistence agriculture, fueling chaos and instability in the already vulnerable geopolitical situation of the Himalayan region.

processing plants were promoted in rural areas. These institutions were embedded within development programs and communicated to the local people as a means of achieving growth and prosperity.

As an immediate effect of the THED, the Nepali government (with the support of international environmental agencies) started to establish protected areas and sanctuaries. People were either relocated or denied access to newly established protected areas. Currently, more than 24 percent of the total area of Nepal, across twenty geographical regions, falls within protected areas (GoN, 2011). For example, the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve was notified in 1983 and covered an area north of Rapti where the Magar communities used to hunt Himalayan Blue Sheep and other deer species for their daily diets. Once the reserve was declared, the hunting licenses were given only to foreign tourists, while local people were prohibited from using the forests.

Under the scheme of protecting forest ecologies, highly productive chunks of forestland were designated as plantation zones in the Terai in the southern plain region, where an exotic and fast-growing Eucalyptus species was planted to supply the country's timber and fuel wood, thereby alleviating growing "scarcity" of these. Mexican pine and other fast-growing species were also planted in the mountain region. People did not have direct access to those forest areas but could buy the products through commercial channels. Both plantations were composed of fast-growing species and, therefore, they were less durable than timber. Pine and eucalyptus forests were extremely prone to increased soil acidity, which severely inhibited understory growth and increased the risk of fire outbreaks.

In the 1980s, the THED was increasingly criticized for being unrealistic in its claims that the subsistence activities of the mountain farmers were primarily responsible for deforestation and degradation (Ives, 1987; Bajracharya, 1983; Tucker, 1987; Mahat et al., 1986; Thompson and Warburton, 1985) and that the mountain range was experiencing desertification (Gilmour et al, 1987; Hamilton, 1987).<sup>7</sup> Increasingly, scholars had come to believe that historical relations of exploitation and marginalization of peasants by the state and the market were the main culprits in exacerbating the rate of deforestation.

Despite the intensification of national and international development programs as envisaged by THED, peasants continued communal practices of farming, appropriating common resources and organizing as a collective group. It was partly resistance against the ongoing threat of being dispossessed from the farmland and the commons by the state and market. But the continuation of communal moral economic practices was a necessary condition for maintaining their livelihoods. In places where people were denied access and entitlements, they used aggressive, destructive methods to extract resources, further deteriorating existing ecological conditions and threatening the success of newly initiated environmental interventions. For example, Ruj Bahadur reveals his experience about the Thabang forest: “In those periods, we never paid any royalties to the state to use our forests; we used to harvest big trees at night, but sometime we ended up paying bribes to

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<sup>7</sup> Criticism emerged pointing out technical faults in the prediction of the THED. But most importantly, the focus was on finding out ways to involve local communities in those environmental and development programs initiated as a part of the THED. Those ideas came out of the critiques of top-down developmental paradigms to advocate for the participatory approach to development. Since then, development programs such as community forestry were reoriented to include the peasants for making such programs a success by winning their hearts and minds.

the officials. The fact is that they can neither carry the entire forest lands away from us nor fence it with concrete walls; here in Thabang, we cannot survive even a single day without going to the forests.”

A community-based approach to development was conceptualized to mobilize both rural inhabitants and the commons in restoring ecological integrity and promoting the role of capital and entrepreneurship. Community forestry gained momentum from the 1980s, generating tremendous peasant involvement, especially in commercial production. As a result, resource abundance has gone up in both plantation areas and community forests. Through these processes, the THED redefined Himalayan ecologies and its dynamics and these ecologies became the center of developmental change for several years from the 1970s.

### **Producing subaltern ecologies**

#### *Producing nature*

The ecological processes play a significant role in organizing society by enabling or disabling prevailing political structures and configurations of domination and subordination. In the social production of nature thesis, the political role of nature is highlighted through the social relations of production determined mainly by economic forces (see Smith, 1984; Harvey, 1996). In this tradition, nature and society relations are understood as metabolism of human ideas and the physical world, but nature is mobilized as a homogenous category produced by economic relations. The ecological differences and their particular relationships with diverse social categories are ignored. In reality,

nature is heterogeneous and dynamic, and it interacts differently with differentiated social groups. The homogenization of ecological entities undermines its dynamics and allows for hegemonic economic relations to dominate nature-society relations by reproducing ecologies in subordination to economic production. Therefore, the challenge for us is to develop a new analytical framework that explores the political role of ecological processes without universalizing the domination of economic explanation while at the same time refusing deterministic views of the ecological construction of the social.

Some scholars argue that specific features of the non-human world can enable or disable the accumulation of capital (Prudham, 2005; Bakker, 2005; McCarthy, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2005). In some places, it can disintegrate the conditions of production, but in others it may provide new opportunities for accumulation (O'Connor, 1996; Henderson, 1999; Castree, 2003). These arguments imply that the material connection of the nonhuman world to the political (for example, the Maoist uprising) is via capital. This may not be the case in every instance. Similarly, scholars of socio-nature understand the material properties of "things" (nonhuman nature) as active constituents of society (agents) coming together to produce effects on social, cultural and political processes (Latour, 1999; Braun, 2008; Whatmore, 2002; Callon and Law, 1995). Non-human agencies enter into relations with each other and humans, creating a combination of forces within a social assemblage. In this sense, the political force of the Rapti ecological features should be understood as an effect of combinations of multiple agents rather than the hegemonic enrollment of entities into the relations of subordination.

Political significance of ecological processes is not indirect and involved not only as an “effect,” rather it is an “active” constituting force. It is by analyzing hegemonic relations between nature and society that we might better understand the political role of ecological processes.

### *Subaltern ecologies*

Nature’s materiality comes into “existence” only through the interactive relations it builds with society. There is no material effect unless there are social relations built around it. Such relations could be of two types: one that is mutually coexisting, non-alienated and non-hegemonic, driven by the direct mobilization of the relationship in reproducing both (use value based relations in Marx’s sense); and a second that alienates nature by reproducing hegemonic systems of accumulation and maintaining relations of subordination. In development, the materiality of nature and its processes are reproduced but in subordination to capital, allowing its productive mobilization. Nature’s materiality plays an important role in how such relationships are reproduced, but simultaneously development seeks to overcome the material differences (see Mann, 2009; Moore, 2005). Therefore, ecological materiality should be understood in relation to the ideology and commonsense as a site of hegemony. In other words, nature participates in political processes, but development intends to involve natural entities in consolidating hegemonic relations. But in this process of transformation, ecological relations can also facilitate counter-hegemonic politics. These double possibilities generated in development constitute subaltern ecologies.

The processes of enrolling particular spaces and ecologies of the Rapti region into the Maoist revolution can best be described by exploring the history of subordination of ecological processes and the ruptures in hegemonic domination through the rebellious articulation of new conceptions of the world. Achieving hegemony is about altering the ensemble of relations between nature and society (Gramsci, 1971). In this process, the materiality of particular geographies and ecologies are enrolled in the scheme of hegemony, altering or reproducing them as new ecologies within relations of subordination (see Ekers and Loftus, 2008; Ekers, 2009; Loftus, 2009; Wainwright, 2010; Moore, 2005; Fontana, 1996). Therefore, examining the relationship between ecologies and social groups requires us to focus on everyday practices that generate the possibility of hegemonic conjuncture of social and ecological processes.

### **Reinvented ecologies and subaltern politics in Rapti**

One of the first externally driven and transformational ecological events in the region was the massive deforestation that began in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century after the unification of modern Nepal. In the beginning, deforestation was used to create settlement areas and administrative towns and to clear lands for mining and agricultural expansion. These newly created areas became the property of the king, royalists, militaries and state bureaucracies (Regmi, 1978). In the upper Rapti region, the state military was mobilized to burn down hill forests in order to establish barracks, palaces and tax offices, whereas in the southern plain areas the forests were cleared to supply timber to regional administrative towns, the capital Kathmandu and British India (which in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century embarked on projects to expand railway systems in

northern India). The Nepali state used the cleared lands as sites for extending its control by imposing extra tax on tenants and sharecroppers.

*“Taming” the peasants*

Since the unification of the country, Nepali politics has revolved around the issue of access to and control over land and land-based resources. Every successive royal dynasty and political regime has used land as its principal source of power, resources and government. For the last two centuries, peasant uprisings, resistance movements and every form of anti-state political activism, including the Maoist movement of the 1990s, has emerged from social discontent around the issues of landlessness, land grabbing, land tax and dispossession of rural inhabitants from their natural means of livelihoods<sup>8</sup>. This political centrality of land and land-based resources emerged as a cumulative effect of the history of various ecological changes in the Rapti region, instigated by the massive transformations of the forest lands into farming plots in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of the major ecological changes wrought by newly formed settlements, towns and agricultural fields was massive landslides in the hills along the Rapti River, leaving deposits at the bottom of the hill slopes and expanding river valleys with highly productive soil suitable for rice cultivation.

People from other regions, especially feudal landlords with connections with the royal regime, migrated to these river valleys and captured the most productive land for agriculture. The ethnic peasants (primarily the Magars) were basically pastoralists and

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<sup>8</sup> The peasants have been the leading political force in most anti-state movements in the country, especially in the pre-1970s period, when urban growth was nominal. As the peasants were leading them, the political articulation behind these movements was around issues of land. Distribution of the land was the main demand of the Maoists' political manifesto for the revolution in the 1990s (see Bhattarai, 2010).

occupied only smaller-sized slope lands for settlements and subsistence farming. But these ecological shifts in Rapti (due to deforestation, permanent farming plots, new settlements, land grabs by the migrated feudal landlords) drastically altered the demographic structures in the region and transformed the solely pastoralist practices of the peasants into permanent agriculture as tenants. Pastoralist peasants became tenants of the landlords, acquiring new subjectivities, which constituted the first political hegemony of the ruling regime. At the same time, the newly created subject position and tenant identity (changed from the nomad and pastoralist) became the seeds for new peasant politics and anti-state resistance movements for the next two centuries. The changed subjectivities not only forced peasants to adopt a different means of livelihood but also triggered higher taxes and land grabbing.

In the most remote villages (including Thabang), pastoralism continued as a strategy to resist sharecropping and land grabbing (even though a tax was imposed on it) and in turn reproduced peasant ecologies inaccessible to the state. But because of the changed relationship, peasants' dependency increased after the shifts in means of livelihood. The ruling regimes gained more control over the everyday activities of peasant communities. At least one male member of each family was required to work mining iron ores, collecting spices from the forests, transporting slates for roofing, hunting wild animals for royal families or supplying sheep meat and wool to the administration. The program of turning nomadic hunters and gatherers into settled pastoralists and peasants continued at a faster rate, but the issue of access to and control over land also continued to grow simultaneously — generating peasant politics and rebellions.

The ecological transformations in the southern Dang area increased substantially after British India took control in 1816. When Nepal lost Dang (and a huge area in the south) in the Nepal-British war (1814-1816) the British companies started to exploit timber from the region, which followed a massive influx of landlords from the south to occupy the cleared land. As a reward to the Nepali regime which supplied more than ten thousand soldiers to suppress the peasant uprisings of the 1850s in northern India, the British Indian authority returned Dang valley (and three other districts) to Nepal in 1858.<sup>9</sup> The communal farming practices of the Tharu communities who were indigenous to the region were undermined and also restricted. The Tharu peasants were dispossessed from communal ownership of the land as early as the 1920s when the state introduced a new land survey and entitlement schemes for increasing state control over productive lands. The successful malaria eradication program of the 1940s invited many landlords to grab the land from the Tharu peasants. By the 1950s, the changed demography not only established a new order of land utilization but also transformed the landscape into big farmlands where indigenous Tharus were forced to work as tenants.

A Tharu peasant in his eighties remembers the story of his kinsman. He says, “Our kin refused to cultivate rice because they thought the forests were more important than rice. We used the forests as our land to dwell around and supply our food. We cultivated only around our settlements. But our settlement areas were very small because families lived together in clusters. But when people from outside came, they converted

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<sup>9</sup> The Rana regime that came in power in 1846 was an ally of the British Indian occupier to suppress growing peasant uprisings. The return of some of the conquered territories was a way of extending political influence to the Nepali regime. With these returns, the extraction of timber and other resources was extended to the entire Terai.

our forests into rice fields and also encroached on our farmland. They forced us to work in their rice fields. They used to give us some rice and take more land. We became landless. Look, I sharecrop my own land; it used to be ours.”<sup>10</sup> Dissociating land from indigenous systems of livelihood not only generated new subjectivities but also provided a hegemonic tool for taming peasants for production. However, the peasants have not forgotten the past, and their claim to the land has continued.

### *Subalternization of the Rapti ecologies*

Since the 1950s, Rapti’s ecologies were violently thrust into subaltern relations with capital, environmentalism and governmental power. The developmental discourse of the time identified traditional agricultural practices, inefficient use of forest products, absolute waste of available water resources and the lack of infrastructure as the main reasons behind growing poverty, political instability and social conflicts in the region. As a way to overcome these barriers, the state focused on maximizing economic benefits locally by expanding commercial exploitation of ecological entities, especially the forests (by supplying timber to the Timber Corporation of Nepal from the Dang valley), water systems (by building dams on the Rapti River as well as rice irrigation channels) and agricultural production (by introducing improved vegetable seeds, chemical fertilizers and cash crops). The remaking of ecologies in the region was driven by a nexus involving state bodies, development agencies, the royal regime, traders, landlords and local elite. The shared interest of these diverse forces was to transform ecosystems (including the indigenous farming and cultural practices they sustained) so that the developmental goals

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<sup>10</sup> Interviewed on January 16, 2011, Satbaria, Dang district

of poverty reduction, modern infrastructure, economic opportunities and capital accumulation were all achieved.

Land grabbing continued throughout the 20th century, particularly in the Dang valley, which became a regional urban center by the end of the 1960s, connected by highways and national trade routes. Along with expanded road networks, urbanization and flows of capital into rural areas, forests were further cleared for supplying timber to urban consumers, and commercial agriculture emerged as a new frontier of ecological changes in both the hills and plains areas of Rapti region. Following the success of malaria eradication programs, the USAID, FAO and the World Bank introduced various agricultural modernization programs in the Terai region, especially around improved seeds, chemical fertilizers, irrigation, hybrid and off-season vegetables, fruit orchards, supply of insecticides and improved breeds of animals (USAID, 2001). Initially, agricultural productivity increased tremendously in the Rapti River valleys and the Dang area. But the benefits of these programs went primarily to landlords and rich farmers because the target of development schemes was to raise overall productivity of the land rather than the productivity of each plot, including those of small farmers. However, by the end of the 1960s, the productivity of land cultivated using modern techniques started to decline. The shift from organic fertilizer, which was common among the peasants, to chemical fertilizer (mainly urea) increased soil acidity. The increased leaching out of the remaining organic components because of the availability of seasonal irrigation in some cases turned the alluvial soil in the plains into harder granular structures.

Meanwhile, heavy usage of insecticides and herbicides proved beneficial for large-scale production of vegetables and fruits. Highly concentrated chemical compounds such as dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) and other toxic materials were used as insecticides throughout the region. One of the farmers involved in spraying DDT in the Dang area says, “Hundreds of individuals were employed in the Dang valley alone; our job was to spray them using hand pumps or by hand.” Those insecticides were banned in the 1980s, but their doses exceeded the limit in many places, and the human and environmental impacts are still clearly visible in many rural areas.<sup>11</sup> One of the most devastating longer-term effects of chemical usage was the decline in biodiversity and in the quantity of vegetables and fruits in small farmlands on the upper slope. The populations of pollinating insects also dropped; bees were especially hard-hit. As a result, farmers experienced reduced productivity in their harvests, with marginal peasants bearing the brunt of this ecological calamity.

Abolition of customary, collective forestry practices in 1957 after nationalization of the entire forest landscape was a historic moment in catalyzing irreversible transformations in forest ecologies. Its effects were immediately visible, especially in the northern hills, where every community had at least one patch of forest for everyday uses. Hill forests were scattered around the settlements rather than existing as a continuum of forest areas, as in the Terai belt to the south. Because of the proximity and historical relationship between the peasants’ livelihoods and the patterns of forest growth,

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<sup>11</sup> These chemicals were spread not only in farmlands but also around water sources and public places to protect from malaria outbreaks. Hundreds of tons of chemicals were imported in the region. The stock was so high that, when those insecticides were banned from use in farmlands, there was no place for proper disposal. They were dumped in various places in the central Terai, and even today people suffer from various diseases.

separating the forests from the communities was not only a difficult goal to achieve (in terms of actual implementation and associated costs) but detrimental to the well-being of both the peasants and the growth of the forests (see Gilmore and Fisher, 1991). For the peasant families, the common forests used to provide more than 70 percent of the total household requirements in terms of energy (firewood), shelter (timber, thatching, roofing, fencing), food (vegetables, fruits, medicines, minerals), income (selling timber and firewood in towns), farming (grazing, organic manure) and cultural functions (Gilmour and Fisher, 1991; Edwards, 1996).

As an immediate intervention, the state substantially increased its presence and surveillance in rural areas by appointing forest guards and introducing a paramilitary structure for the protection of the forests and the national interest in economic growth.<sup>12</sup> People were barred from using the forests (even though they continued), and those who broke rules were imprisoned or heavily fined. “Forest offenses were considered more severe than murder charges in those days,” said a peasant from the Dang area in explaining the severity of the situation.

As peasants were denied access to the forests and punished for their longstanding routine activities, they felt no responsibility to the forest and started to “destroy” it as an enemy. The state was not able to protect the forests, as its surveillance system was undermined by bribery, corruption, smuggling, elitism and inefficiency. The trade of timber, the primary objective of the state, increased substantially, but the micro-processes

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<sup>12</sup> Such military structures in forest bureaucracy were directly adopted from the British Indian system of forest protection in India. Foresters were trained in Deharadoon in India in a military uniform and the training involved not only the timber production techniques developed by traditional forestry science (also known as the German system) but also techniques of prosecuting, arresting, onsite shooting and patrolling.

of conserving, regenerating, weeding, rotational grazing and controlling fires remained halted. Communities continued indigenous systems of utilization in many places, but the rate of encroachment increased greatly. Similarly, the sudden break in the historically co-constitutive relationships between the dynamics of the forests and the livelihood practices of the peasants generated rapid changes in the composition, abundance and distribution of forest species. The ecological balance had always been restored through the indigenous practice of using multiple species in different seasons associated with diverse livelihood strategies. The weeding would happen naturally as the peasants would harvest the “weeds” (that threatened one species) for daily use in one season and the competitors of the other species in another season. These links were broken down in new arrangements, creating denuded hills, decaying forests and soil erosion.

A story from a peasant in Rolpa district reveals the dramatic situation of these ecological changes. Chandra Bahadur from Holeri (a border village between Dang and Rolpa districts) observed a dramatic change in the forest near his village after the shepherds from the Thabang area stopped traveling to his village. “Within a few years time, I realized that the forest was full of *Uneu* (hard-stalked fern) covering the entire ground. The fern grew like a mat, and other species could not grow,” he remembers. Traditionally, sheep herding was the main profession of many communities in the upper Rapti area, including Thabang. They used to travel the entire north-south corridor, moving to the south in winter and back to the north in summer. “It is clear now that they were the great weeders,” Chandra says, highlighting the importance of the herds’ movement. Before the movements of herds were stopped, the sheep used to eat all of these ferns and make the space available for the regeneration and growth of other species.

“Now the species we have are very different, and we are suffering from fire hazard every year even after community forestry,” he says (interviewed on January 17, 2011, in Holeri Rolpa).

The sequence of events in subalternizing Rapti ecologies (especially the farming practices and forestry) continuously marginalized the peasants by pushing them away from the productive lands and denying them access to trade, commercial production and means of livelihood. The rate of poverty was high, and food sufficiency declined. Land productivity decreased substantially, especially for marginal families, as they did not have access to modern agricultural facilities and were pushed to less-productive areas, and the forests near these settlements were denuded, accelerating topsoil erosion and gully formation. The Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation emerged in these contexts and imposed its misguided explanation of the reasons for degradation. It was in fact the system of denial, rather than the indigenous farming practices of the peasants, that was the driving force behind such destructive changes in local ecologies.

In response, the peasants started to revolt more aggressively than in the past. Access to means of livelihood through progressive land redistribution was the primary demand of each successive uprising in the region. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Thabang area experienced massive uprisings against the Mukhiya, and the Dang valley was constantly shaken by revolts against the landlords. By the 1970s, the Rapti region, especially the Magar region in the north, emerged as a dangerous tragedy in terms of both irreversible ecological destruction (the region was predicted to be the next desert in the Himalayas) and peasants uprising against the state.

### *Reinventing Rapti ecologies*

To check this increasingly disastrous ecological and political situation in the region, the Rapti Integrated Development Project was initiated in the 1970s with two clear ecological objectives: 1) reverse the alarming trend of ecological degradation in the Rapti region (as defined by the THED), and 2) avert peasant uprisings in rural areas by reducing poverty and providing modern developmental changes. Even though the RIDP continued the idea of “conquering” Rapti ecologies and the peasants for social stability and growth, it aimed to achieve this through the concepts of sustainability and beneficiaries’ participation. As an integrated development program, the RIDP touched every aspect of peasant lives, but its primary focus was on changing farming practices, introducing scientific forest management, creating income-generating opportunities and developing rural infrastructures. In this process, the restoration of ecological entities was given the highest priority where the elements of indigenous community structures and their traditional relationships with ecological processes were reinvented as a strategy for maximizing economic and ecological benefits. Massive developmental ideological apparatuses (composed of ideas, institutions, resources, skills, networks and schemes of articulation for naturalizing particular developmental changes) were established at national, regional and local levels to reinvent the Rapti ecologies.

Since the 1970s then, the Rapti ecological processes entered into another phase of transformation, driven by the ideas, strategies and activities of the RIDP. The participation of concerned community groups was a necessary condition for designing and implementing environmental programs in rural areas. The idea was that the local

people were deeply acquainted with how local ecological events and material processes were evolving and their impacts on livelihood strategies. But these community-based approaches also fostered conversation among peasant communities about various ecological changes in the village. Multiple villages joined such conversation because the ecological activities in one village had direct consequences for other villages. These reinvented conversations, in fact, generated political connections among villagers, where peasants had a chance to articulate local politics with the changes happening in villages. Similarly, as the activities for restoring ecologies were driven by particular economic and political methods, material changes in the ecological processes were reproduced within the subaltern relations to the market and capital flows. These processes had enormous impacts on everyday livelihoods and created specific conditions for diverse micro-processes of peasant politics.

#### *Moving soil particles as political messenger*

For RIDP, soil erosion was a priority environmental issue in the Rapti catchment area. The cultivation of crops in the slopes and deforestation in the upper catchment areas caused enormous loss of topsoil, mass sliding and formation of gullies. This flow of soil materials deposited silt in the immediate plain areas and the river valleys, as well as nutritious alluvial soil further south of the Dang district. In fact, the movement of soil from the upper catchment to the lower plain areas had been happening since time immemorial; it was through this process that the Rapti River created deep and fertile valleys and vast plain lands in the south with a thick layer of topsoil particles. But such movement of soil particles accelerated starting in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the pastoralist

peasants were forced to produce agriculture and forest products for ruling regimes. The rate of movement of the soil further dramatically increased in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of commercial exploitation of the forests.

The solution forwarded by RIDP, however, further aggravated the situation, triggering massive landslides, river swelling and siltation in the Rapti catchment in the 1980s. Project managers were unable to understand that the displacement of peasants from their means of livelihood and rampant commercial exploitation by the state and businesses caused increased encroachment, deforestation and soil erosion. As the project aimed to tackle poverty (the perceived reason for soil erosion) by increasing economic growth rather than dealing with the issue of displacement, the RIDP continued to promote commercial forest harvesting, fruit orchards in the slopes, irrigation, road construction and monoculture of cash crops. These economic tactics provided additional benefits to already-rich people and further marginalized the peasants. The acceleration of the movement of soil particles was characterized politically as conveying a message of resistance to the already “volatile” peasant communities. It became a political moment and added an additional element to growing peasant uprisings in the region.

The story of Purba Bahadur Roka of Thabang illustrates these developments clearly:

The Thabang River, one of the tributaries of the Rapti River system, used to flow through the middle of the extended and relatively flat farming lands at the bottom of the village. These farmlands along the river were the main food basket for the village. “Our settlements have always been in the middle of the hills, but we rely on the high-altitude

pastures for animals and the farmlands along the river for grains,” says Purna. But, starting in the early 1970s, Thabang people started to remark on some unusual fluctuations in the course and the level of the water in the river, especially in summer. “During the 1970s and 1980s, almost all big trees were cut down on the Jaljala hill,” according to Purna. Jaljala is the vast forest area that borders many villages in the north, and it is also a main watershed of the Thabang River. “We used to have more or less equal-size land and houses, but in the 1970s some people became richer than others as they were involved in different businesses. They started to build new houses, and the demand for high-altitude pine grew. But poor people from the village, who were deprived from commercial benefits and not permitted to use timber (as they could not build their house), started to grow potatoes in the newly created open spaces as a way of survival,” Purna elaborates (interviewed on February 11, 2011, Thabang).

Thabang communities raised serious reservations about such changes and feared that their village would be destroyed. They formed the Jaljala Conservation Committee and started to patrol the forests. Coincidentally, RIDP came up with the proposal of improving the Thabang economy by promoting apple orchards so that poor people would benefit from the employment and would not participate in the seasonal potato farming and timber harvesting. “They (a joint venture of some local investors) established the apple orchard, but it was also in the forests. They dug big holes in sloped land and cleared the ground for cultivation,” explains Purna Bahadur. Smaller landslides were already very common in the forest, but in the mid-1980s the river started to destroy its banks and moved on to the farmlands. It destroyed the entire farm area on one summer night of 1991. “This was it; next morning we rushed to the orchard and destroyed it. The

flood came from the orchard and destroyed everything along the river. We were arrested, but the people started a collective resistance,” Purna said (interviewed on February 11, 2011, Thabang). These moving soils became one of the organizers of the armed revolution of the 1990s.

*Exotic trees – a plantation of confrontation*

The RIDP sought the quick recovery of the denuded Rapti hills by introducing massive plantations of exotic, fast-growing and disease-resistant species such as Mexican pine, eucalyptus, poplars and varieties of ground grasses. Forest nurseries were established in almost every village, and hundreds of thousands of seedlings were planted every summer. “It was like our cultural ritual. Every year the entire community would participate in planting trees immediately after the first monsoon rain. Planting trees was a kind of celebration, a lot of fun,” a nursery *Naike*, manager, in Rolpa recalls of the old days. The exotic seedlings were planted in open spaces, which excluded the marginalized peasants from other uses such as grazing animals, collecting ground grasses and dwelling for minor forest products. Recalling his experience of the 1980s, a dalit peasant from the Holeri village says, “The nearby water pond was closed for plantation. We had to travel thirty more minutes to get to another one. They said our animals were the enemies of the forests.”

Most strikingly, the exotic species were not suitable for any of the subsistence requirements such as animal feeds, thatching materials, organic manures, mulching straws, cooking and other daily uses. They were unpalatable, acidic and less degradable, therefore limiting the regeneration of other useful species, especially in the pine forests.

They best served the interests of local elites, environmentalists, traders and bureaucrats. As an object of alienation, the exotic trees in fact planted the seeds of confrontation in already-marginalized communities in many parts of the Rapti region, especially in the upper pine forest areas.

As the new plantations grew, traders came to villages to buy timber for furniture factories and pine resin and eucalyptus leaves for oil distilleries. The plantations once again started to disappear because of the overharvesting, and what was left in the previous “barren lands” were further-degraded conditions because of acidic soil, high runoff, lack of regeneration of native grasses and increased fire events because of the deposits of oily leaves. A peasant who lives just outside the fence of the forest near the Holeri bazaar says, “Every year our goats die because they eat some of those leaves, which are not digestible.” The unpalatability and adaptive material contents of these exotic trees successfully transformed the denuded hills and barren plains into the reinvented “green belts,” but these greeneries turned into a black hole for many peasants, providing new content for revolutionary political articulation.

### *The hemp revolt*

The hemp plant has been the nucleus of Thabang ecologies for centuries. The multiple possible uses the plant, its well-established symbiotic existence with other cereal crops, the long history of its integration with local farming systems and the plant’s adaptability in diverse soil conditions collectively made hemp a central node of livelihood and ecological practices. Its seeds are used as food grains and also processed for cooking oil, textile threads are produced from the bark, green leaves and young stems

produce hashish (for traders), stems are used as firewood, and young branches are used as vegetables. For example, an elderly woman from Thabang says, “At least one of the contents/ingredients of our daily life is linked to hemp. It could be a food or textile or firewood, but in one form or other this plant enters our home every day.” It is a local secret because hemp production in any form is illegal in Nepal. The ban on production moved the actual site of cultivation from open spaces to gorges, valleys and upper slopes (hidden spaces from external visibility), but it has remained central in reproducing Thabang ecologies.

*Figure 4: Hemp and corn farming in Thabang*



In farmlands, hemp is grown together with corn, barley and potatoes (see Figure 4). Hemp plants function as mulch for the corn seedlings, and the dense rows of hemp plants at the edge of the sloped terraces work as a barrier to soil and manure leaching. It is a relatively deep-rooted plant and therefore has the capacity to stabilize loose soil particles. Peasants believe that it produces a certain odor that protects cereal crops, especially corn, from flies and worms during the early monsoon period. “The corn grows fast and looks very green when planted together with the hemp,” according to an elderly woman of Thabang who indicates that there is a possible nutritional exchange between the two plants. It does not require additional work if planted with other cereal crops. But in the wild, it grows in open areas, which is also used as an indicator of the suitability for sheep grazing. The sheep and goats do not eat this plant, but its growth follows the herds’ movement as the trampling and scratching of the soil surface increases the rate of seed germination. In the early spring, when the sheep herds move upward to the high-altitude pastures, their physical movements and intensive grazing spread and bury the hemp seeds throughout the pasture area. On their way back south in the fall, the shepherds collect the plants and process them for different uses. As the plants are well-integrated with the grazing animals, it maintains particular type of species composition and generates certain kinds of ecological dynamics in the high-altitude pasturelands.

Hemp was already one of the leading ingredients of the Thabang’s peasant politics as it was harvested, processed and marketed (exchanged with other goods from other villages) collectively for generations. But its role in instigating local uprisings increased significantly after the ban on production and processing in the early 1970s. One of the priorities of the RIDP was to implement the ban effectively by creating alternative

income-generation opportunities at the village level. The state mobilized the police force to uproot the plants (a police post was established in Thabang for the first time for this purpose), and the RIDP was involved in minimizing the immediate effects on the people and the possible revolt against the ban. Hemp, especially hashish, was already in circulation in national and international markets as the demands for hashish increased substantially, especially in tourist towns in South Asia. In fact, the middlemen, usually from Kathmandu and India, trained the peasants in techniques for processing hashish.

The peasants generally welcomed the ban on the production of hashish as they were not benefiting from it substantially, anyway (although the middlemen were). But, the uprooting of the entire plant was an enormous blow to their livelihoods, ecologies, farming practices and general everyday life. The peasants continued to cultivate hemp but rather quietly. The battle between uprooting and cultivating continued, but the historical symbiotic relationship between the plant and cereal crops was disrupted, contributing to the further decline in food production and also changing the material contents of farm ecologies and pasturelands. As hemp was continuously produced outside the state's gaze of surveillance (although in less-fertile and more work-intensive sites), the alienation of the peasants, especially the women, from the state increased substantially, deepening the already articulated commonsense that the state was an enemy of the peasants. These new places where hemp was produced (and banned) reinforced the idea of revolutionary politics, and the underground economy, which was created after the ban, substantially contributed to sustaining families when the adults were involved in the Maoist revolution in the 1990s. The ban on hemp was just one episode of the long history of the relationship between ecological events and social processes in the Rapti region (see Table 2 for

details), but it was particularly detrimental to peasant life because of centrality of hemp in peasants' moral economy. This ban in fact initiated a new era of political change from Thabang.

*Table 2: History of ecological events and their social relations in the Rapti region*

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15 <sup>th</sup> century:	Magar ethnic people arrived in the Thabang area from the north as hunters, and settled in Thabang River valleys and highland pastures
17 <sup>th</sup> century:	Thakuri kings from the south invaded Thabang area and introduced land enclosure along with tax on the land, compulsory labor, hunting and spice collection
17 <sup>th</sup> century:	Tharu chiefs were used to collect taxes in the south and tame elephants for the kings; the Dang area was considered a “death zone” because of malaria
1768:	After the unification, the Shah dynasty introduced the Mukhiya system to collect tax from the land, forest and herds, paid as wool, ghee and meat
1790:	Birta system introduced to provide lands to the royal families and relatives. Throughout the 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> centuries, most of the productive valleys and flatlands were distributed as Birta
1814:	Nepal lost Dang to British India, and an arrangement was made to supply timber to India
1858:	Peasant uprisings emerged in various places, and Nepal formally requested that India send settlers in Nepal's Terai area, which used to be the only Tharu belt at that time
1890s:	Throughout the 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> centuries, the trade in spices, textiles, medicinal herbs, and wool was one of the main occupations in the northern Rapti area
Early 1920s:	Deforestation in Dang area for Sal timber causing siltation and fire in the entire region. Famine deaths were recorded at their highest levels at that time
Early 1900s:	The arrival of settler landlords from the north of India and also relatives of royal families from the nearby towns
Early 1900s:	Tharu people lost their autonomous status and were treated as humble guards in the south and brave elephant trainers
1930s:	Land survey in Rapti area changed communal entitlement into private ownership, grabbing lands from Tharu and Magar owners for royal relatives
1930s:	Thabang peasants revolted against the introduction of rice in the region.

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	Rice was seen as a symbol of state control and permanent occupation of the land
1952:	Massive peasant uprising throughout the Rapti region
1956:	The Mukhiya was overthrown in Thabang, the land was redistributed, and the tax system abolished
1957:	Commonly owned forests were nationalized for industrial production and conservation
1950s:	Malaria was eradicated in the Terai with the support of U.S. agencies and other health organizations, allowing massive migration into Dang valley
1961:	East West Highway construction started, destroying large swathes of forest and also providing easy access to military and security forces
1962:	Timber Corporation of Nepal established with the support of USAID
1960s:	Seed production project was implemented by USAID; more than 1,000 seeds were tested for improving production
1970s:	Dang Valley Road Project constructed road to Dang and USAID used that moment as a way to introduce commercial production with new road access
1970s:	Theory of Himalayan Environmental Degradation arrived, and in response forest department offices expanded into many parts of the Rapti region
1972:	National Parks and protected areas were declared. Dhorpatan, which was declared as a protected area in 1983, is located next to Thabang village
1970s:	Community-based forest management and plantations with the support of the World Bank, ADB, USAID and many other foundations
1976:	Hemp cultivation, harvesting and selling was banned
1976:	RIDP formally started its program in the region
1980s:	Massive implementation of community forestry programs
1985:	Apple orchard and landslides in Thabang
1980s:	Commercial production of vegetables
1990s:	Commercialization of community forests

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### **Ecological subalternization and rebellious consolidation**

As Rapti village ecologies were subalternized, reinvested with new meanings and relationships, the conditions for the consolidation of various forms of discontent into

organized uprisings grew tremendously. Apart from the major ecological reinventions described in this section, the state and RIDP intervened systematically to reinvigorate other ecological entities such as the commons (elaborated on in Chapter Four), introduction of new crops, pasture management, kitchen gardening, land terracing and various forms of irrigation. Such reinventions, however, were driven by the developmental goals of creating economic opportunities from the revived ecological processes (for villagers, markets and the state) and changing people's perception about their own practices and inefficient behaviors. As the project focused on empowerment, participation and training for establishing unhindered social processes (elaborated on in Chapter Five), the whole idea of reviving ecologies rested upon the creation of new subjectivities of the peasants who desired to participate in restoring new ecological dynamics in their villages. Some benefited more than others in these transformations, while the processes of alienation and marginalization of other peasants continued to deepen. The peasant leaders (organic intellectuals) who were imprisoned many times viewed these interventions as percolation of oppressive state strategies and exploitation.

The reinvented ecologies provided a platform for the consolidation of oppositional political forces and the historically alienated relationship between the state and the peasants. Broadly, it was because the new interventions systematically enrolled ecological entities and practices into the framework of bourgeois hegemonic change. As said earlier, these enrollments were tied up with the economistic logics, strategies and activities, giving supremacy to the market in deciding which ecologies would be protected, reinvented or suppressed. Ecologies became developmental entities molded by the idea of investment and profit. Their ecological significance and material worth were

measured based on their capacity to fulfill developmental interests of economy, environment and politics. The capitalist development tied up with these ecological entities benefited the rich and middle-income people initially, and the landless and poor families were further deprived of their means of livelihood. The middle-income peasants, who possessed just enough farmland to produce food every season, started to lose from the reinvented ecologies as soon as the new arrangements such as the plantation of exotic species started to generate counter-productive effects on the local farming systems (such as increased fire events and acidic soil from pine leaves). The rich farmers and middlemen were still enjoying the benefits, but this process actually alienated the middle-income farmers and marginalized peasants.

Simultaneously, the peasants continued to reproduce non-commodified and non-alienating ecological practices for survival. In some cases, these practices, such as grazing in a weedy area, collecting dead branches for firewood or cultivating local vegetables along with cash crops, were permitted (or even encouraged) as long as they did not threaten, or appear as barriers to, the ongoing processes of ecological restoration. In other cases, the peasants continued reproducing non-alienating ecologies to reproduce their own conditions of survival by hiding, avoiding, confronting or resisting the state's oppression and developmental persuasion. But either way, non-commodified ecologies continued to exist even though they were reproduced within the relations of subordination in the form of hidden, suppressed or modified entities. This possibility of reproducing non-alienating ecologies combined with negative ideas generated from the effects of reinvented ecological practices provided a foundation and content for a successful political articulation and reasoning for growing peasant uprisings in the region.

The ecological materialities created conditions for political activism and revolt not only by reinventing new ecological processes that created new cycles of exploitation and marginalization, but also through the possibility of reproducing non-commodified ecologies and non-alienating practices. In Rapti, it was definitely the long history of ecological alienation of the peasants that gradually contributed to the emergence of the massive Maoist movement in the 1990s, but the possibility of continued reproduction of ecologies based on the peasants' cultural practices, association, solidarity and moral economy facilitated the consolidation of that movement into a successful endeavor. For example, the uprooting of hemp was definitely one of the main factors in alienating the peasants and therefore leading to revolt. Yet the possible ways of growing it in hidden spaces made the movement successful in Thabang. Articulating the importance of non-alienating ecological production and increased exploitation by the reinvented ecologies, the Maoists demanded radical land redistribution and guaranteed access to traditional means of livelihood and recognition of indigenous identity associated with cultural and ecological geographies. These demands for non-commodified and non-alienating materialities associated with the land, livelihoods and identity emerged as a consolidating force in creating revolutionary conjuncture in the Rapti region and especially in Thabang in the 1990s.

## **Conclusion**

One of the important insights of this chapter is that politics is always socio-natural. It is the historical processes of metabolic interaction between the material forces of the natural world and the dynamics of human society that generate particular political

conjunctures and possibilities. Such a dynamic understanding of political nature requires historicizing the relationship between natural entities and the diverse and differentiated components of the social. This can be done neither by relying only on the thesis of social production of nature (nature as homogenous objects to work on), nor by being deterministic about the natural construction of the social. Such binaries prevent us from understanding the moments of hegemony and subaltern positionality of the human ecologies across space and time (both the material contents and their social metabolic interactions), which carry the potential for defining the possibility of politics by providing the content for political articulation.

The bottom line, as I have shown in this chapter, is that nature through its materiality participates in either facilitating or inhibiting certain kinds of political arrangements and actions. In the case of Rapti, development and state forces invested to transform local ecologies through various schemes, such as modern agriculture, horticulture, community forestry, watershed management, soil conservation and plantations in a manner that resembles with the hegemonic aims of these dominant, external apparatuses. While some of these transformations of local ecologies helped consolidate development's hegemony, other transformations ironically aided the emergence of opposition to dominant apparatuses (for example, the apple orchards in Thabang). Over and above this, some facets of nature (such as hemp) simply evaded development's grasp and thwarted its efforts to hegemonize nature and society.

A full assimilation of the material contents of natural entities is impossible because of the diversity and specificity of the physical properties that are peculiar to both

human (labor-power) and non-human nature (Bakker, 2004; Castree, 2003; Prudham, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2005). As a function of development, ecological differences are sometimes mobilized in preparing grounds for commodification, but at the same time such differentiated features or properties could become barriers in the circuit of capital (see Henderson, 1999). As the Thabang stories demonstrate, market mechanisms cannot subsume every ecological entity. To overcome such barriers, development through its hegemonic mechanisms creates conditions for commodification by also generating the possibility of use-value relationships for subsistence under the relations of subordination to capital.

As this chapter demonstrates, nature and society interactions are either enrolled into an alienating relationship driven by the hegemonic relationships of capital *via* development, or they continue reproducing a non-alienating unity where co-constitutive horizontal interactions are maintained (for example, the continuation of hemp production for subsistence livelihoods in Thabang). Therefore, the exploration of the political role of particular ecological processes requires us to unpack those historical moments of shifting relationships and understand how they are enrolled into hegemonic relations of subordination. Therefore, a framework that understands the triad of materiality, consciousness and political conjuncture as a relational and co-constitutive process might explain political nature comprehensively. In this sense, the most productive approach to nature-society relations would be to focus on understanding how ecological processes are enrolled in hegemonic structures and under what conditions the ecologies might align with rebellious politics. This allows us to think of social relations of contestation through the reinvented material landscape. Ecologies join the constellation of forces that generate

particular political conjunctures in place and time. The emergence of the Maoist revolution in Nepal was a conjuncture generated as an effect of the constellation of multiple forces in which materiality of ecological processes was critical.

## Chapter Four

### Re-inventing the Commons: Capital, Community and Collective Potential

#### Introduction

The commons has always been a defining feature of Nepali society. Underlying the historical processes of indigenous social formation, the commons has established and perpetuated the co-constitutive relationships between social and natural processes in peasant society. Historically, the commons was a social nucleus and a centripetal force, especially among indigenous populations, in producing community collectives, political solidarity and moral subsistence livelihoods, especially in rural Nepal. In general, the commons refers to commonly appropriated resources, indigenous collective practices and non-alienating relations of production that traditionally do not fall under the realm of commodity production (see Hardt and Negri, 2005; 2009; Harvey, 2012; de Angelis, 2003; Thompson, 1991). In development, the commons refers to the stock of natural resources that are neither entitled to private ownership nor fall under the full command of state authority.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the failure of market-based approaches of the 1960s to enroll community elements, especially commonly held resources, into the scheme of commercial production and exchange, the international development industry came up with the idea of community-based development, which was implemented on a priority

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<sup>1</sup> The common is understood very narrowly in development, where the communities are mobilized, empowered and reproduced as a new collective subjectivity. The primary goal of such interventions has been to produce goods (commodities) and services (environmental, livelihoods) effectively and efficiently from the commonly held resources by interpellating market mechanisms to the cultural practices of the communities.

basis from the 1970s on, in sectors less conducive to industrialization (see Ostrom, 1990). The programs primarily targeted commonly held natural resources (forests, water, fisheries) and community groups (peasants, women, villagers, indigenous nationalities) throughout the global South.

The community forestry program in Nepal, initiated in the 1970s, was pioneering and one of the largest-scale interventions under this new approach. It has gathered momentum since then and has been used with great effectiveness for the production of high-value products and as a local host for a variety of other developmental activities, such as health care, education, micro-loans, small-scale industries and institutional practices of representation, governance and empowerment. Even though this paradigm shift in development has had tremendous success in allowing capital to accumulate by circulating through the commons, it has failed in one vital regard: It was unable to function as an “anti-politics machine” that inoculated peasant communities in Nepal against revolutionary ideological influences and politics. This chapter argues that development successfully mobilized the commons in an instance of “accumulation *without* dispossession”, while simultaneously creating a basis for the transformation of community-resource-management collectives into the kernels of organized revolutionary politics in Nepal during the 1990s.

In so doing I consolidate my overarching argument that development's "double life" operates in two registers: On the one hand, development enrolls “subjects of development” and alienates (many of) them; on the other hand (amending the claims of both David Harvey and the late Indian Marxist economist, Kalyan Sanyal), I show how

development catalyzes a process of “accumulation without dispossession” that nevertheless causes social upheavals, whose damage it must repair if it is to endure. Specifically, I contend that the community-based paradigm of development in Nepal systematically enrolled peasant societies in schemes aimed at commercializing the commons and in the process generated a “double movement” (in a Polanyian sense) whereby the defense of traditional livelihoods and collective practices found articulation in the forms of a mass political mobilization: the Maoist revolution.

This chapter contributes to the overall argument of the double life of development in two registers: First it demonstrates the simultaneous processes of enrollment and alienation of community groups as developmental subjects. Both the moral economic structures and the commons can be enrolled into the scheme of accumulation. Second, by enrolling the commons and communities into the scheme of accumulation, it generates possibilities for both commercial and subsistence modes of production. This hybrid system retains primitive accumulation as the main strategy of capitalist development in peasant society. The dual systems of production help to repair the damages caused by primitive accumulation and justify the necessity of commercial production. The double modes of production in the commons discussed in this chapter mobilize other aspects of the double life of development, namely moral economic transformations (Chapter One), changes in nature-society relations (Chapter Two) and the emergence of a new collective consciousness (Chapter Five). But in so doing, this chapter focuses on collective subjectivity and consciousness. The arguments developed in this chapter operate as a connector of social, natural and collective processes in developing the overall framework of the double life of development.

As I elaborate in this chapter, the commercial appropriation of community forestry cannot be explained as a capitalist mode of production proper, one that is typified by wage-labor. It is a scheme of accumulation that reproduces the conditions of possibility for both commodities for exchange and use-value goods. Community forestry requires the production of commercial goods (timber, minerals) and subsistence means of livelihood (fodder, leaves, firewood) simultaneously for perpetuating the increased rate of accumulation. Through the subsistence activities of laborers, the cost of reproducing labor is reduced. This works to ensure an abundant supply of cheap labor. In Nepal's community forestry, commercial production and subsistence utilization are encouraged simultaneously, but commercial goods are prioritized over non-commodified products. This arrangement has guaranteed profitability without degenerating community structures in order to avoid the possible setbacks or resistance. Unexpectedly, these processes became a prehistory of the Nepali Maoist revolution by generating the possibility of collective articulation and a site for solidarity and class consciousness.

The remainder of this chapter provides insights into the processes of commercialization in community forestry and its possible connection to the emergence of the Maoist movement in Nepal. These are discussed in six sections. The first section provides a background of community-based development in Nepal with reference to community forestry. The second section outlines the concepts of primitive accumulation, a hybrid mode of production and commoning as a framework for analyzing the relationship between the initial stage of capitalist production and the dynamics of peasant communities. The third and fourth sections introduce the major processes of community forestry and specific mechanisms of commercialization. Finally, a conclusion offers some

conceptual implications of these new insights into the relationship between capital and the commons.

### **“Community” in development**

Dispossessing people, especially peasants, from their means of livelihoods has always been a key element of capitalist development, and it is still unfolding on a large scale (see Harvey, 2003; Sanyal, 2007; Glassman, 2006). But the scheme of community-based development seeks to sustain community access to the commons, such as forests, water and land, while retaining the profitability of commercial production. This is done by transforming traditional nature-society relationships and moral economic practices into entrepreneurial and market-friendly modes of production.<sup>2</sup> In a predominantly agrarian society such as Nepal, the full dispossession of peasants’ access to the commons would not only lead to immediate revolts and rivalries, but it also would be very expensive (and therefore unprofitable) to reproduce the existing stock of the commons, especially because of the geographically scattered plots of resources, such as forests, without the care of the communities.

The notion of “community participation” grew out of a failure in implementing development in Nepal. The earlier focus on national economic growth and employment was found to be ineffective in transforming subjectivities and ways of thinking.

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of involving the communities in managing the commons comes directly from the rational choice theory of efficiency and production. Countering the thesis of “the tragedy of the commons” proposed by Garret Hardin (1968), new institutional economists (NIE) argued for involving collective behaviors of the communities in appropriating the commons. Under this thesis, the commons are governable under market mechanisms, but it requires reinventing community institutions that ensures exclusive entitlements over the resources with the rights of limiting the number of appropriators (see Ostrom, 1990; 2007; Agarwal, 1990; Agrawal, 2005; Holey, 1996).

Individuals continued to participate in community cultures and beliefs and practices that were less effective in mobilizing resources with the idea of efficiency and productivity. The process of “individuation,” or the separation of labor power from the means of production, was ineffective and coercive. Rather than confronting such community cultural practices, which could be expensive and brutal, the idea of community-based development emerged to enroll communities in developmental programs and mobilize communities’ collective potential. Initially, the enrollment of community groups in these processes significantly minimized the otherwise growing confrontations between the state and communities.<sup>3</sup> The program looked very “socialist” at the beginning, because it talked about community collectives for subsistence security, and it gave the impression to leftist political activists that it was the appropriate approach to development. These shifts in approaches to development through the notion of community created a conjuncture of the market, state power and the interests of the community elites. This conjuncture generated the conditions of possibility for the co-reproduction of capital and agrarian communities simultaneously.

The reinvention of the notion of community and the commons (as community forestry), however, fell short of fully perpetuating developmental hegemony and reversing the growing peasant uprising in rural Nepal. Community-based strategies were happily embraced by peasant communities, and such mechanisms were successful in providing immediate solutions to the growing environmental, livelihood and

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the forests were nationalized in 1957, and in effect, the bureaucracy was the sole owner. This not only prevented the communities from using the forests, which they had been doing for generations, but also became a tipping point for local resistance. With the invention of community forestry program, however, forests were handed over to community groups for management, which softened the existing tensions for the time being.

representational problems at the local level. As the role of capital increased in local affairs, such local-level transformations became the subject of a political articulation that generated alternative ideas and revolt. As a tool of state governmentality, community-based mechanisms allowed for the emergence of a stronger alliance between the state and local elites, representing similar interests of control and power. But the subalterns perceived it as an extension of the increased control and exploitation of their resources by state bureaucracy and local elites. The abstract tension between the state and the peasants that had been sustained for generations percolated down to the community level, where local elites represented the interests of the state, making the confrontations visible in everyday practices. As a consequence, the latent expressions of resistance and discontent surfaced in collective revolt, using the community group as a new platform of struggle, aiding the spread of the Maoist movement in the 1990s. In the process, capital superseded the indigenous community norms, values and differences, and it created new layers and hierarchies, which became compelling moments for the articulation of revolutionary politics.

### **Schemes of Accumulation and the Commons**

#### *A system of primitive accumulation*

Primitive accumulation, for Marx, is an event of transition from feudal social formations to the capitalist mode of production proper. This event “transforms, on the one hand, the social means of subsistence and of production into capital, on the other, the immediate producers into wage-laborers” (Marx, 1967:668). Primitive accumulation thus consists of three intertwined processes: 1) the emergence of a capitalist class who

accumulates an initial stock of capital from other disappearing modes of production; 2) the creation of a free proletariat, separated from their means of subsistence except one's own labor-power; and 3) the emergence of social relations of production where labor-power is exchanged for wages (Marx, 1967; Perelman, 2000; De Angelis, 2004; Harvey, 2003). As such, primitive accumulation includes the commodification of labor power, the suppression of indigenous forms of production, the dispossession of the majority of small-scale producers, the conversion of various forms of property rights into private property ownership and the monetization of exchange. This process ruptures and replaces the pre-existing mode of production with the capital, wage-labor, and commodity-exchange typical of the capitalist mode (Perelman, 2000; Harvey, 2003).

Conceptually, as laborers and small producers become fully separated from their means of subsistence, they must sell their labor-power to the capitalists in order to gain the means by which they reproduce themselves and in turn become wage-laborers. Once the society is divided into classes of wage-laborers and capitalists, primitive accumulation ceases, but both categories continue to reproduce the conditions of production and reproduction of capitalism. This is an ideal depiction, but it provides a compelling analytical framework to understand how the regime of accumulation emerges and establishes itself as a capitalist system of production. This framework, therefore, suggests two possible explanations for the contemporary peasant uprising: 1) resistance against proletarianization or 2) class conflict between capitalists and wage-laborers. Yet both questions presume the complete separation of laborers from the means of production without asking whether this complete separation is possible in the first place. To what extent is the complete separation of laborers from the means of production possible? In

development, the focus on the commons and commercial production does not necessarily involve the complete dispossession of subsistence means of livelihoods.

Harvey's (2003) idea of "accumulation by dispossession" explains how capital accumulation actively dispossesses people of their access to and control of natural resources throughout the world. Harvey expands Marx's concept to denote dispossession of land and resources in order to make way for the new processes of capital accumulation, which are often directed and carried out by state regulation or development interventions (Sites, 2000; Prudham, 2007). Consider as such, accumulation by dispossession through the privatization of common resources is a means by which the capacity of capital to circulate is enhanced (Prudham, 2007: 412). Accumulation by dispossession continuously opens up non-capitalist societies for trade and cheap labor and investment while keeping aspects of these societies decidedly non-capitalistic – both of which are crucial for the stabilization and growth of capitalism.

In accumulation by dispossession, additional elements, such as external capital (investment from already-accumulated capital) and state policies, target the commons and play a major role in dispossessing people from otherwise commonly held resources (Sites, 2000; Elyachar, 2005; McCarthy, 2004). This approach is especially relevant to identify how market-driven processes of development promote the dispossession of resources and constrain the livelihood opportunities of rural communities. Development programs, in particular, are key interventions that create permanent features of accumulation by dispossessing people and resources (see Sneddon, 2007; Glassman, 2006; De Angelis, 2004). Nevertheless, the idea of accumulation by dispossession often

treats the moment of dispossession as an “event” in which a “new site of accumulation” is established within an emerging capitalist system. However, in development, especially community-based approaches, accumulation reproduces conditions of displacement and replacement simultaneously, making the regime of accumulation “desirable” to the people and also highly profitable.

Although the enclosure of the commons is a main feature of capitalist production (Bakker 2007; McCarthy, 2004), community-based approaches in the global South have been systematically involving rural communities in establishing systems of accumulation. As the accumulation in the common is reproduced as a perpetual system of accumulation rather than an event of transition, the state of primitive accumulation continues for a long time, emerging as a main feature of capitalist system proper. This feature of permanence of primitive accumulation is achieved through hegemonic relations reproduced in development, where community potential is mobilized for profitable schemes rather than complete proletarianization. It is this process of development that makes the commons a subaltern entity, which always retains the potential for political articulation and consciousness.

#### *A hybrid mode of production*

We must first understand the hybrid mode of production instituted in the everyday practices of the communities for producing both commodities and subsistence goods simultaneously, in order to fully understand the dynamics of accumulation in the commons and its political relationship with the peasantry. This co-constitutive double functionality is initiated and perpetuated by development as a system which reinvents the

commons without dispossessing the peasants. In this process, new collective subjectivities are generated by articulating economic, environmental and livelihood necessities and also invoking the importance of traditional relationships between the commons and commoners. These reinvented systems of accumulation (without a full dispossession) might provide us a different understanding of the system of capitalist production, especially the continuous primitive accumulation in agrarian society and subsequent political possibilities in relation to peasantry.

The conditions for the simultaneous production of commercial and subsistence goods in the commons by mobilizing the collective potential of the commoners, as elaborated in this chapter, is a different concept from the solely economic logic of the idea of functional dualism.<sup>4</sup> By extending the concept of the dependency theory of development, the idea of functional dualism depicts the peasant agriculture as a dumping site of marginalized population in the process of capitalist accumulation. According to this explanation, the peasant performs the dual functions of subsidizing capitalist growth in rural areas by producing free (cheap) means of subsistence and also supplying cheap labor (out of the destitution of the peasantry) to urban (core) economic production (see De Janvry, 1981; Bebbington, 1999). The dualism in this sense represents a capitalist system of production in agrarian society whereby the peasants provide cheap raw materials and labor-power (means of production) by continuously pushing themselves

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<sup>4</sup> The co-constitutive relationships between capitalist development and agrarian practices, and the political implications of the continued existence of peasant society have long been conceptualized within a Marxian tradition (Kautsky, 1988; De Janvry, 1981). Since the 1970s, the processes of reproducing the peasants' economic practices along with capitalist development have been explained by combining a number of ideas, including core-periphery fragmented economies (Frank, 1970; Amin, 1974), world system theory (Wallerstein, 1974), feudal-tenant moral economy (Scott, 1976) and the idea of "functional dualism" in Latin America (De Janvry; 1975; 1981).

toward the margin. This analysis implies that such functional dualism increases the rate of accumulation and simultaneously reproduces the condition of marginalization in rural areas. This situation might lead to the emergence of peasant uprisings as a last resort.

However, the double functions inbuilt in reinvented commons are rendered inevitable and considered to be “win-win” for livelihood security, economic growth and ecological integrity. In this process, commoners are empowered for entitlement over the commons and, at the same time, enrolled into the scheme of accumulation, creating new subjectivities of developmental hegemony. In Nepal, these processes became widely accepted as commonsense because of national socio-political configurations that took advantage of a deeply agrarian society and the commons in order to enhance the living conditions of the peasants and the national revenue stream. Because of the long history of hostile relations between the state and the peasants, the reinvention of the commons as community forestry, where state power over resources is devolved to community groups, was considered to be a major victory for the peasants. Even though the commons are reenrolled into the scheme of accumulation<sup>5</sup>, the “de jure” community entitlement over the resources tremendously increased the collective confidence and unity. In fact, it is the devolution of development responsibility to local communities, such as schools, health

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<sup>5</sup> For example, community forestry program was originally meant to produce basic needs of the people especially to guarantee everyday livelihood requirements of the peasants. But later when the forests started to be rejuvenated and the stock increased because of intensive protection by the communities, the market entered for creating “economic opportunities” at the local level and also implementing “scientific forestry practices” for higher yield.

posts and irrigation, by self-reliant development philosophy (of the contemporary neoliberal era) that has forced communities to commercialize the commons.<sup>6</sup>

Through these peculiar symbiotic double functions interjected or interpellated in the reinvented commons all other forms of common life are enrolled in accumulation and economic revenue streams. It is almost impossible to understand the processes of primitive accumulation in the commons without understanding the mechanisms of these double functions. These simultaneous double moments generate the possibility of a new collective subjectivity and political transformation and new collective conceptions of the world.

#### *Commoning and collective subjectivities*

The societal arrangement of capitalist development (accumulation) is no longer driven by the actual physical processes of producing commodities (objects) for surplus value in a direct sense. Instead, it is perpetuated by generating and naturalizing particular social relations and subjectivities, i.e. hegemony of the bourgeois social formation, by which the conditions for accumulation are continuously reproduced. Accumulation in the commons without dispossession fulfills this need by reproducing a collective subjectivity of the commoners in which commercialization, entrepreneurship, self-help and efficient and “scientific” managements are incorporated into community practices and reinvent community groups as organized producers rather than free-dwelling commoners.

However, through the interjected double functions of the reinvented commons (such as

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<sup>6</sup> Communities are responsible for providing local developmental services, and therefore they have to generate their own revenues to finance these activities. It ranges from a salary to school teachers to local roads and trials.

commercial and subsistence productions in community forestry); the social practices of commoning continue to exist as a binding social fabric within and between communities (the commoners).

Here, the idea of commoning refers to non-commodified social and spatial relations between the commons and the commoners, driven by a shared interest and understanding (Hardt and Negri, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 2006). This continued practice of commoning, even though it is reinvented as an integral part of accumulation, not only generates “new relations between people and thing” (Hardt and Negri, 2009) but could also act as a local ideological apparatus generating collective interaction and new conceptions of the world. As a new site of political articulation and activism, these simultaneously reproduced conditions of commoning (even though these conditions are reproduced with the relation of subordination to capital) within the reinvented scheme of the commons might generate new social relations of solidarity, collective subjectivity and politics.

Within the idea of multitude, Hardt and Negri (2009) mobilize the Foucauldian concept of *dispositif* to propose a new mechanism of producing collective subjectivity in the common. For Foucault (1978), the *dispositif* indicates a network of heterogeneous elements which reproduces relations of force in a certain direction inscribed in a power relation at a particular historical moment. The practices of commoning could be an alternative *dispositif* “as an intervention in the current relations of forces” for “subverting dominant power relation” and production of a new collective subjectivity (Hardt and Negri, 2009:129). By connecting multiple practices of commoning as a new set of

network or institution, the common as a *dispositif* not only allows for solidarity and collective thinking but also pushes for crossing the boundary of rule that can instigate a collective defiance and revolt. These practices of commoning can instigate a “polycentric mechanism” (Ostrom, 2008) of solidarity and flow of ideas, thereby allowing the emergence of alternative political consciousness as a commonsense.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the reinvented commons are a conjuncture of a continuous process of primitive accumulation *via* double functions of commercial and subsistence production, and a new ideological apparatus in creating subaltern solidarity, consciousness and politics produced and reproduced as a double life of development.

### **Capital and commoning in community forestry**

The community forestry program was initiated in the 1970s as one of the pioneer interventions for economic and environmental development in Nepal (Varughese and Ostrom, 2001; Agrawal and Gibson, 1999; Gilmour and Fisher, 1991). The main strategy of community forestry was designed to replace the state’s control of forest resources extraction, typical in the 1950s and 1960s, with that of communities (Laerhoven and Ostrom, 2007), after the widespread acceptance that the commons were economically and institutionally governable entities (see Ostrom, 1990). Community forestry was implemented as a method of securing subsistence livelihoods, especially of rural

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<sup>7</sup> For example, in community forestry, the production of subsistence goods (while promoting the commercial production) fosters the practices of commoning that are based on non-commercial values, necessities and social relations. These practices are largely restricted to the subalterns who, while producing commercial goods, reproduce the conditions of commoning. But as a way to defend community rights (commercial and legal entitlement), multiple community groups form federations at watershed, district and national levels, creating possibilities for solidarity and connection beyond the localized practices of commoning. One must, however, be attentive to the possibility of capitalizing such new *dispositif* for re-establishing the order of capital.

communities, and also a mechanism of “reinventing property rights of common forest lands”<sup>8</sup>, which in turn could be mobilized for economic growth and the market (Ribot et al., 2006). The reworking of indigenous systems of production subservient to the interests of capital accumulation came to typify community forestry in Nepal in the 1970s.<sup>9</sup>

The nationalization of the forests in 1957 was proved to be a policy catastrophe as it increased deforestation, commercial extraction, encroachment and bureaucratic corruption. At the same time, the commoners, who were using the forests collectively (even though it was governed under local feudal hierarchies), were denied access to the forests leading to further antagonism and resistance. Community forestry was seen as an answer because it enrolled communities as collective groups, which were believed to increase the productive potential of the forests and protect the environmental integrity. Scientific forestry practices and governable institutional arrangement also enhanced commercial production and market development. Since the beginning, community forestry devised its policies and programs targeting both subsistence livelihoods and

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<sup>8</sup> Lockian ideas of private property and enclosure are the heart of contemporary development philosophy. For John Locke (1988[1689]), exclusive entitlement or defined property rights to the resources are central to their efficient utilization and maximization of the production of values. However, in places where a complete private property regime was impossible to impose, such as in common forestlands, a new set of mechanisms was developed so that the commoners were not dispossessed and also the commons was reproduced as a governable property regime. Community forestry emerged as an effective property-right regime in the forests, where a collective ownership of a defined community was established utilizing the inner essence and tools of a private property regime.

<sup>9</sup> The emergence of this conjuncture as community forestry was grounded into multiple national and international contexts and developmental ideas such as: 1) the dominance of development donor's ideas of market-led development against state-led industrialization, 2) the emergence of concepts of participation as an alternative model of development, 3) the growing concerns over environmental conservation in light of the Theory of Himalayan Degradation, and 4) the existence of indigenous feudal systems of resource allocation and use (Gilmour and Fisher, 1991; Malla, 2001; Metz, 1991; Eckholm, 1976).

commercial production by mobilizing the communities and the commonly held forests in Nepal.

In its forty-year journey, community forestry became one of the biggest environmental development interventions in the Himalayas, with more than seventeen thousand registered forest user groups, encompassing more than eight million people, or two-thirds of the entire Nepali population.<sup>10</sup> Considered as a mainstream development strategy, community forestry was fully backed by national policies and is promoted via multi-layered alliances between community leaders, NGOs, foundations, development donors, environmental organizations and government institutions. Community forestry has redefined and developed commercially compatible relationships between community groups and the commonly held forests, which led to a new mode of production, mobilizing the collective potential of communities and the dynamics of forest ecosystems. In most cases, though, the poor households with small landholdings saw community forestry as an imposed form of control by local elites over forests and people, as a site for restriction, compliance and punishment and reinforced elite domination.

Take for example the dynamics of a community group in Dang district, which illustrates the complex relationship between capital and commoning developed by community forestry: The community group is composed of two hundred households, and it owns about three hundred hectares of community forests. Forest resources are measured and the yearly harvestable quantity for each species is identified. What goes to

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<sup>10</sup> Forest user groups are identified based on their proximity to the forest. Usually, communities around a patch of forest are instituted as a group with the responsibility of managing the given forestland. The actual number of forest user group is different in different recording systems as there are many groups operating under the same idea but not registered formally. Each group is composed of more than one hundred households on average.

the market and what is consumed locally are defined clearly. Those who defy the rules are punished, and those practices are institutionalized via formal community structures of committee, secretariat, and operational plans and so on. Non-commercial species are encouraged to use, but the harvesting practices must improve the productivity of commercial species. The executive committee is composed of educated elite members because the job requires reading and writing. One landless peasant remarks:

“We are working as free laborers for them (the committee). We cut the trees, but they sell the timber to contractors who are also their relatives. Our community funds were spent to build a temple, but we do not enter the temple because we are *dalit*. But sometime we get firewood, leaves, thatch grasses and also timber if we construct a new house. I feel OK because we never used those big trees in the past anyways.” But he also summarized how he was able to understand the alienating aspect of community forestry: “Other people think that we are the owner of this forest because it is a *samudahik ban* (community forest). It is *samudahik*, but we are not free to use. Money speaks louder; if you have money, you are the owner of everything.” (Interviewed on April 21, 2011, in Dang).

In reproducing these conditions for both commercial and subsistence production, community forestry has gone through a number of policy changes at the national and local levels by invoking ideas of participation, efficiency and growth. In this process, it has been continuously molded in accordance with the changing ideologies, concepts, strategies and methodologies of the dominant development discourses. Indeed, there exist multi-layered alliances between development projects, business companies, conservation organizations, NGO activists, national bureaucracy, community federations and networks and community leaders, all of whom implicitly and explicitly produce, strategize, contextualize and implement changes in community forestry priorities and policies. These alliances operate in very complex ways, in that each participant maintains a

separate identity although they collectively create a discursive space for implementing new ideas that guarantees accumulation at multiple levels. One district level NGO activist in Rolpa shares his experience:

“These communities here believe that they are the owners of the forests (and development programs), but in reality what they can do and how they generate benefits are designed by people in Kathmandu and the offices of big NGOs. Very powerful are the contractors; their money brings everybody in agreement, even poor farmers. But nothing goes smoothly all the time; community members sometimes rise up.” (Interviewed on March 11, Libang Rolpa)

The enrollments of communities and the commons worked as gradual processes of changing people’s behaviors and forest dynamics from subsistence modes of resource utilization toward commercial production. For example, in the 1970s and early 1980s, the focus was on generating higher stock of forest products by implementing a massive drive for plantations, especially of exotic and fast-growing species to create a resource base. This was done by creating community institutions, which were capable of governing the forests as rational appropriators rather than inefficient dwellers.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, local institutional modalities of community forests user groups (CFUGs) were conceptualized to carry out plantations and management operations in the allotted forest plot. Through these initiatives, CFUGs’ practices were found to be very heterogeneous, and therefore community forestry sought to create common institutional mechanisms at community

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<sup>11</sup> This idea was based on development concepts prominent in late 1970s, which suggested that poverty in rural areas could be reduced by providing local peoples with opportunity to fulfill basic needs by modernizing indigenous practices (Gilmour and Fisher, 1991). Fulfilling basic needs by involving local communities in the protection of forests and allowing them to collect forest products was the initial priority (Metz, 1991). In this perspective, the lack of available forest products was conceptualized as the explanation for poverty, so subsistence farmers were asked to plant trees in their private land, as well as common forests (Metz, 1991).

levels to systematically change the local practices (Gilmour and Fisher, 1991; Hobley, 1996; Thompson and Warburton, 1985).

Nevertheless, these local institutions provided a new political aspiration among the peasants in rural areas as it allowed for the open discussion of corruption, elitism and ineffectiveness of forest officials, even though many of these groups were mostly led by local elites who had strong ties to bureaucrats and state officials. It not only connected multiple communities but also facilitated the process of re-inventing the practices of commoning, which were restricted when the common forests were under either the feudal landlord in pre-nationalization period or the state after nationalization in 1957. The collective practices of commoning were primarily focused on the production and appropriation of subsistence goods, such as controlled grazing, group firewood collection, seasonal harvesting, monthly forest visits, collective enumeration and distribution of goods according to family needs.

The collective laboring was also introduced in commercial production such as planting seedlings, weeding, cleaning, silvicultural operations, fencing, patrolling and recording the stock in the forests. Such collective practices in commercial production were promoted as the social and environmental responsibility of the community for the overall good of the society and planet. These reinvented community practices of commoning (which were driven by non-commodity relations of production) systematized and effectively institutionalized rather than discouraged. These practices created the foundations for eventual commercialization. However, the continued collective practices institutionalized by community forestry generated ideological affinity among the peasant

communities and increased confrontations with the state and local elites. These institutions (CFUGs) became conducive in providing additional political avenues for women and dalits.

In the early 1990s, however, the focus was on the promotion of entrepreneurial management by developing multilayered partnerships with private investors and the market. Activities of community groups were identified by development programs as still being inefficient, irrational and dominated by informal local practices – i.e., there was a lack of “expertise” (Nightingale, 2005). The focus thus changed to the alteration of people's attitudes and behaviors to be in line with the norms and values as developed by the project of community forestry. These interventions were based on the then-emerging developmental concept of "social capital" and "multi-stakeholders" ownership. Specifically, multi-partnership in community forestry was a move to allow private companies to take active roles and ownership in providing services that were traditionally offered by government (Springate-Baginski and Blaikie, 2003). In effect, the problem of excluding poor people from the potential benefits of community forestry was attributed to their own limited capacities or willingness to participate in community entrepreneurship and the market.

However, the idea of social capital encouraged community groups to form networks with other communities at local, regional and national levels. Forest user groups formed a federation to protect their rights from the state.<sup>12</sup> Even though it was facilitated

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<sup>12</sup> Federation of Community Forestry User Groups was established in the early 1990s for the coordinated implementation of community forestry. It established branches at district and village levels, and also developed collaboration with other indigenous movements. The federation somehow represented a

by development projects to enhance collaboration and collective empowerment, the network, especially at the district level, emerged as a pressure group against the state and commercial companies. Issues related to discrimination, such as landlessness, representation, domination in decision making and over-exploitation of the forests shaped local political activism and articulation. Even though many of these networks ended up forming alliances with forest officials and contractors (to be elaborated in the next section), they played a role in politicizing issues of access to land, resources and power at local levels. A former PLA commander reveals that they used community meetings to spread their messages and also recruit new members. He says, “Community groups were effective places to create awareness that the state was a common enemy” (interviewed on January 7, 2011, Horeli Rolpa).

Starting in the late 1990s, communities were encouraged to produce raw materials, and private sectors were fully engaged in harvesting, processing and marketing, nationally and internationally. Community forestry took a lead in producing not only the raw materials from community forests but also other agricultural products, cash crops, animal products and small-scale industries. Community structures were mobilized in integrating other forms of common life into a commercial system of appropriation. This process was further intensified by introducing the idea of pro-poor growth and market development in recent years, which sought to establish clear relationships between poor people (displaced from indigenous means of livelihood) and markets. The goal was to enhance the capacity of poor people to be able to take part in

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movement of communities for enhancing the practices of commoning, even though development projects continuously involve them also in advancing market reach in rural areas.

market systems and also to develop sufficient market mechanisms in which they could participate (see Scherr et al., 2004).

The sequential shifts in community forestry ideas and strategies have sought to change the structure of the commons (forest ecosystem) and practices of communities into a state of primitive accumulation. These changes were built in a systematic order toward commercially compatible community forestry. Each successive shift was built on the previous one by introducing new ideas toward more rational and efficient group activities. As a result, this process has made great efforts to change community groups into quasi-production units for corporations by systematically building conditions that allowed the market to play a decisive role in replacing indigenous ways of making decisions. Accumulation in community forestry is inbuilt as an internal process of change, and, as shown in this section, it requires systematic external interventions utilizing the power of capital, government policies, development ideas, coercive forces and ideological alliances at various levels that create conditions for commercialization.

### **Accumulation without dispossession in Rapti**

As outlined in the previous section, commercialization of community forests in the Rapti region has been induced and sustained through “a reinvented conjuncture” of multiple mechanisms, forces and everyday practices initiated by the Rapti Integrated Development Project (RIDP). Such conjuncture of forces was in operation in the past in appropriating the commons (primarily feudal order and subsistence uses), but these commercial arrangements invented new elements (such as entrepreneurs, market agents, trainers, equipments, skills, group leaders, etc), and also rearranged the existing forces

(caste, patriarchy, loan provisions, informal rules, distribution systems, and so on). The RIDP specifically promoted the idea of progress via additional income generation, the role of skilled entrepreneurs, scientific techniques and market alliances to sustain conditions of commercialization.

The high-altitude, non-timber forest products (NTFPs) from the upper Rapti area (including Thabang) entered into commercial circuits by re-mobilizing middlemen and contractors who traditionally supplied these products through such conventional market channels as barter exchange with other products, whereas new forms of supply chain emerged in the southern plain area (especially in Dang district) to commercialize high value *Sal* timber (*Shorea robusta*) led by urban traders and companies located in Kathmandu. In both cases, efforts of community forestry projects in generating higher stocks of forest resources, exposing communities to external institutions and the market and developing local control of traders and entrepreneurs collectively pursued community groups in adopting commercialization. One of the justifications repeatedly used to justify the urgency for commercialization was the total stock of the forests, which increased substantially because of intensive protection by the communities for many decades. The argument was that the annual harvestable quantity of the forests was higher than local demands.

Community forestry instigated and institutionalized commercialization in a number of ways in the Rapti region:

*Articulation of livelihood desperation*

As one of the first strategies of spreading the idea and importance of commercialization, community forestry successfully articulated the necessity of commercial production as a natural step toward better living conditions. The prospect of additional income was convincingly presented in group meetings, community plans and daily harvesting operations, mapping out a positive relationship between income generation via commercialization and improvement in desperate livelihood situations of the peasants. Commercialization was seen as a solution to unemployment, lack of infrastructure (such as school, trail) and poverty. The special nature of commercial production of timber and non-timber products, which requires only partial involvement as wage labor, was particularly attractive to the communities, especially to women. For example, women collect most of the medicinal plants to sell to the contractors while they visit forests to collect dead branches for firewood or taking cattle for grazing. Hiring full-time wage-labor was neither required nor beneficial for the commercial production. It allowed peasants to work as partial wage-laborers for the contractors while also generating their own means of living apart from commercial production. As a result, commercialization has become continuously profitable at an increased scale, and community members have been more disciplined through their changed behavior to work for both commercial production and subsistence goods simultaneously.

Take for example the experiences of a group of women, who have been collecting non-timber forest products for contractors for more than fifteen years in Thabang:

In one of the early spring sunny days in 2011, as I was walking along the ridge of Jaljala hill (northern high hill of Thabang), I met a group of women who were taking a rest in a *Chautari* (a resting place at the edge of walking trail), each with a heavy bundle of firewood. On top of each bundle (of firewood), a tightly tied, big-sized plastic sack was hanging. These sacks contained *Guchhi Chyau* (Morchella mushroom), two types of fern and some herbal roots. The firewood and the ferns were collected for household consumption as an everyday routine work, whereas the mushrooms and herbal roots were gathered to sell to the middlemen. Both types of products were collected in one trip. “When we reach home, first we eat lunch and then take our cattle for grazing, but our *Sasu* (mother in-laws) cleans and dries the mushroom. We pack them before we go to bed at night. *Naike* (middleman) comes once in a while and takes them away,” they revealed the processes of selling these products. In the interaction, they identified names and quantities of more than seventeen species that they have been trading including mushrooms, ferns, mosses, fibers, barks, leaves, fruits, leaves, herbal plants, roots, stems and stone minerals. They also listed more than eleven species, which are used just for household consumption. One of the women received training on cash crop production, and three of them were active in savings and credit groups.

I asked: “Why do you sell them instead of consuming by yourself? Is it profitable?”

They replied: “We used to consume them as our *Khanki* [everyday diet], but we started selling mushrooms and other products to buy other things that we need. One of the members of our mothers’ group participated in a training on income generation activities many years ago. Two of us took a processing and packaging training. We collect these products while we do other things for families. We came to collect firewood this morning, but we also collected mushroom.”

I asked: “Does the extra income you receive compensate enough for your time?”

They replied: “We never calculate that. As we do many things together, there is no exact allocation of time only for mushrooms. We don’t have enough land, and there are no other options for income. With this income, we buy rice, kerosene oil, clothes and utensils. In fact, during the people’s war period, we lived on these incomes as our family members were involved full-time in the party. Even now, whatever comes from these businesses go away immediately. We end up in more debt every year. Do you know other buyers (middlemen) who would pay more?” (Interviewed on June 21, 2010, Thabang).

Even though the women were paid less and pushed into the continuous cycle of debt, they were willing to produce and sell more products. Their dietary system has been changing (now they consume imported vegetables), and the commoning practices have been restricted to only certain products. It is in fact the strong association developed between the bundles of firewood for cooking (provided freely as a common to the commoners) and the sacks of mushroom produced as a commodity (that generates accumulation without dispossessing the commoners) that has continuously reproduced the conditions of possibilities for commercialization in community forestry. By successfully articulating the material conditions of the poor, the creation of wage-labor as a semi-proletariat class has become the main feature of commercialization. As rural peasants would never be truly proletarianized because of the continuous existence of minimal subsistence means of livelihood, the wage-laborers are promoted through skill development training and partial employment opportunities. Increased requirement of cash for buying goods, education and for other services has driven people to wage-laboring.

The continuation of a subsistence mode of production in non-commodified sectors has allowed primitive accumulation to become long-term in community forestry. If masses of wage-labor, free from every means of production except their labor-power, are produced in every community, then there won't be any incentive for wage-laboring community members to protect and manage forests. As a consequence, the resource depletion in the commons would escalate and the whole project of commercialization would fall apart. This would happen because, for the traders, the capital investment required for the protection and management of trees and other biological resources,

which requires hundreds of years, is not profitable. For wage-laborers, as they would not rely on subsistence utilization of forest products for their livelihoods under a proper capitalist mode of production, they won't look after forests if their wages are not paid.

### *Alliance of dominance*

As an immediate outcome of the long history of the RIDP's intervention (such as capacity building, network development and entrepreneurship), multiple alliances between traditional power centers and the traders have emerged, giving a crucial turn in commercialization. Alliances have started to emerge between community elites, contractors and government officials. These informal networks of powerful actors played a vital role in producing technical plans, getting community endorsement and involving community members in harvesting and trading forest products. This has satisfied the interests of all participants of the alliance: 1) community elites' interest of taking leadership and earning additional income, 2) government officials' interests of maintaining control over commercial distribution and gaining personal financial benefits (bribes) with less legal and social risks at individual level, and 3) contractors interests of increased profits in a shorter period of time.

The commercial alliances were formed by mobilizing the existing social heterogeneity in terms of agricultural land holding, caste, gender, power and education, within and immediately outside of the community groups. Local communities are not homogenous, and upper-class people, who act as representative of whole community, have interest in building alliances with contractors and commercial companies that ultimately benefit them. Heterogeneity is found to be a necessary condition for capital to

become dominant in setting priorities, both for management of forest resources and for its appropriation. As primitive accumulation continuously reproduces heterogeneity in communities, the conditions for accumulation are also reproduced simultaneously. In this process, various interests and ideas, such as forestry science, government policies, development ideas, environmental governance and participatory approaches lubricate the interactions and create conditions for long-term collaborations.<sup>13</sup>

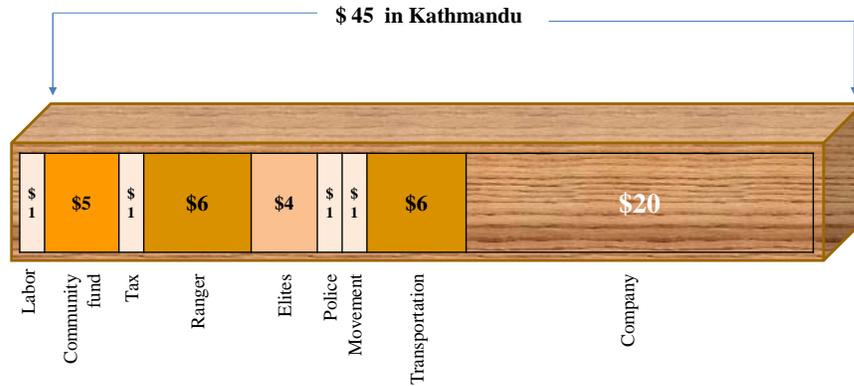
Such alliances between community elites (increased control), government officials (bribes) and traders (profits) are sustained by developing an informal mechanism of distributing benefits (see Figure 5). They are mostly invisible, and it is also often hard to recognize how these actors interact with each other. But they are capable in co-opting resistance at local level. For example, criticisms of entrepreneurial uses of community forestry that do not benefit poor people in the Rapti region culminated in massive plantations of cash crops on poor people's land. This was a way of compensating poor people by introducing income-generating activities. However, it not only legitimized the process of capital accumulation from the forests but also served as another source of profit for the traders.

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<sup>13</sup> The emergence and revival of alliances between community elites and commercial interest groups are central to the commercialization of the commons. Different interest groups, stakeholders, ideologues, officials and community members built alliances at various levels and satisfy their interest without diminishing collective identity (see Selfa and Endter-Wada, 2008; Li, 2002; De Angelis, 2003; Watts, 2004; Malla, 2001; Ojha, 2006)

Figure 5: Distribution of benefits from timber commercialization in Dang

### Distribution of benefits from timber commercialization



One tree = 100-150 cubic feet of timber volume

Source: value chain analysis of timber trade by the author

However, such alliance building is not a monolithic and straightforward process. It has to reproduce the legitimacy and acceptance among the involved actors in every transaction. Even though every actor involved receives benefits of some sort from being a part of the alliance, the actual share of the benefits is extremely skewed (figure 5). To increase the share of the total benefit, each actor mobilizes its constituency as a force for renegotiation and revitalization of its importance in commercialization. For example, community elites (usually the executive committee and middlemen) mobilize community members as a collective force if they feel that their share is not appropriate in the process. They may obstruct, delay, produce low quality or reduce the quantity as a way to reinsert their position and power for getting more benefits from commercialization. The involved

actors must invoke the community rights of commoning to constantly renegotiate and sustain the alliance. In fact, it is the idea of commoning (livelihood of the people) that community forestry repeatedly mobilizes in justifying the necessity of alliances not only for the higher rate of profit but for the success of the very idea of commercialization of the commons without dispossession.

In many parts of the Rapti region, the increased political activism created another level of coordination among the peasants, which collectively exposed the hegemonic exploitation of the poor by the alliance of traders, bureaucrats and community elites. Internal contradictions and competitions played a significant role in weakening the informal system that was institutionalized in commercialization. The collective strength developed around practices of commoning resisted the alliance's exploitation of the timber. In some cases, the local Maoists became a new element in the alliances, taking their share of the total benefits. During the revolution, commercialization of timber was one of the main sources of income for Maoists in the Terai area. Such alliances continued even after the Maoists came to power in 2008. It is partly because the Maoists are not outside the elitist alliances and interests. Such renewed alliances of the Maoists with the national and international forces of capital and power (as a way to establish themselves as recognized political force) have already created fissures in their hegemony, leading to splits and distancing of the peasants from reinvented "bourgeois" politics of the Maoist party in the post-revolution period.

### *Small producers as local capitalists*

One of the central aspects of commercialization, especially in hilly areas, was the development of local entrepreneurs capable of mobilizing community groups to produce commodities from the forests and build alliances with the market. Community forestry trained local entrepreneurs, investors, middlemen, contractors, lenders and so on, who represented a capitalist class at community level. This process not only channelized the goods from the forests into commodity circuits but also enrolled other forms of public and private goods into the scheme of commercialization. In addition, this played a vital role in changing behaviors of community members to produce more in quantity and be vigilant about other members, to protect resources from extraction. In reality, external companies are less successful in gaining access to community resources directly without developing partnerships with community elites and contractors. This process takes a series of interventions and reworking of the entire livelihood strategies of the selected individuals.

The story of Chitrakali Magar illustrates how these processes operate at individual level:

Chitrakali, who lives now in one of the market centers in the Pythan district (south of the Rolpa district where most of the hemp fibers from Rolpa area are supplied), was a poor peasant from a remote village in the north side of the Rapti River. “My daily routine used to be working at home for the family in the morning, and, during the day, I had to work as a farm labor almost every day. But I spend every evening and sometime night to produce hemp and *Allo* fibers (Himalayan nettle). Some unknown contractors

used to collect them and pay me after some months,” she reveals. Those fibers were highly demanded in the cities, but the contractors in the regional market centers and Kathmandu were facing acute shortages of reliable producers and middlemen who would guarantee the supply. The Poverty Alleviation Program (PAF) selected Chitrakali as a potential middleman, and, after various training, exposure and entry to the commercial alliance, she is now a “successful” entrepreneur who supplies most of the products from the upper Rapti region to Kathmandu-based traders.

Chitrakali was glorified as an example of change and model of progress. Her fame traveled to national and international audiences via reports, pamphlets, documentaries and visits. Now she runs a processing factory along with her collection centre. One of her sons lives in Kathmandu and supplies goods to specific traders. She owns a house, restaurant and shop, and her investment in other businesses has grown tremendously. Nonetheless, the glory also revealed the gloomy sides. Her “entrepreneurial success” emerged as a demonstration for other fiber producers of how much they were exploited locally (they were not able to articulate such thing in the past as the middlemen used to come from Kathmandu). “I know how much to pay, and in what ways to give them their salaries. I have gone through that by myself. I also know what they would buy from that money. Most times, I just give them goods they need from my shop as their salary,” Chitrakali said, describing her profit-making scheme from the fibers. The tussle grew so much that she had to leave her village, as the fiber-producing women joined the Maoists and she became one of the targets. (Interviewed in June 2010).

However, the development of local capitalists was also mixed up with local subsistence system of production. There was no need for fully involved capitalists at the local level. It was because their role in commercialization was only to consolidate the community-level investment and facilitate the supply chain. Therefore, the newly introduced entrepreneurs (capitalists) also continued to be involved in traditional, feudal, land-based productions such as tenant-based farming and money lending. The local entrepreneurs benefited tremendously from those schemes because of their increased control over double sources of income as they were enjoying the benefits from both systems of production. But, at the same time, it became a source of confrontation as the gap between the new entrepreneurs and peasant producers increased every year. The emerging capitalists were seen as agents of the state and repressive forces. It added an additional element to already existing political divisions between the elites (Mukhiyas in the past) and the peasants. These differences were actively articulated in peasant movements as a way to mobilize the potential of community collective forces in generating rebellious political consciousness.

#### *Capital and the notion of self-reliance*

In enrolling communities as collectivities into the scheme of commercialization, the idea of self-reliant development at local level has been playing a central role, especially in communities with abundant high-value products such as *Sal* timber in the Terai. As a part of the contract with the government, every community group must develop an operational plan for community development that could include school buildings, teachers' salaries, cash-crop production, micro-hydro, road, trails, small

irrigation, drinking water, health posts, adult literacy and small-scale rural industries. Forest user groups are considered as resource-rich communities with access to forest products that could generate income from commercialization. As they are expected to finance such development initiatives by themselves (the neoliberal philosophy of self-reliant and sustainable development), the proposal for commercialization gets endorsed with enthusiasm and responsibility. Here, the involvement of communities in commercial production takes the form of urgency and a natural way of generating community betterment, equating commercialization as development.

The reproduction of subsistence modes of production in unproductive sectors has been characterized also as a community-development program. All in all, community groups spend more than 50 percent of their funds in community development activities<sup>14</sup>. A part of these expenses goes to rejuvenating forest conditions. The main objectives of such investment have been to prepare community members to generate their own means of living and also become available to work as a cheap labor for commercial production. The investments are made under the title such as income generation, community infrastructure, forest conservation and plantation, commercial harvesting, CFUG's institutional strengthening and supplying forest products.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in 2009, CFUGs invested \$5.71 million in such activities with the highest priority on infrastructure facilities to ease harvest and transportation of forest products (Paudel et al., 2010)

*Figure 6: Timber transportation from a community forest in Dang*



However, the relationship between community development and commercialization is not always self-explanatory. For example, this story of a contractor reveals that the idea of development allows communities to take part in commercialization swiftly: Mr. Gautam, who hails from Kathmandu, has been a well-connected timber contractor in the Dang district at least for the last ten years. For him, maintaining good relationships and establishing “financially lucrative” contacts with forest officials and community leaders are not enough for running the business. His business involved harvesting timber from the community forests.

Gautam reveals his commercial strategies: “We use the idea of community development to enter to the communities, and this ensured a good deal for the extraction of timber on time. Sometimes, it takes years to make everything in

order in one community. So we always work with many communities simultaneously and start investing for various community-development activities, especially the road, before we finally extract the timber. We collaborate with the committee and start building roads. We always try to ensure that the timber transportation becomes easier after the road is constructed but at the same time give impression that we are contributing to local development. Communities pay back by letting us cut the trees. The profit margin is very high if you can balance everything well.” (Interacted in July 2010).

The contractors “invest” in community development activities before actual business agreements with the community to informally secure their “rights” to harvest the timber. Most of these activities are implemented to fulfill the interests of local elites and also increase their access to development facilities. For example, *dalits* are not allowed to enter the Hindu temples built using community-development funds. In this entire process, community development is implemented for sustaining commercialization rather than the other way around. As commercialization requires approval from the community group in every harvesting season, it is only through the idea of community development (and the community practices of commoning) that the possibility of commercial production is regenerated.

#### *Politics of scientific forestry*

Community forestry uses commercialization as a natural response to appropriate the stock of the forests in rural areas. The main message has been that when the stock of the forests grows and exceeds the minimum required level, it needs to be cut and sold. Nevertheless, what counts as growth and which products must be produced to be acknowledged as scientifically managed forests are different from indigenous ways of

interacting with the forest ecosystems. Scientific forestry techniques are deployed with the emphasis on producing high-value timber and other profitable products. Community members are encouraged to collect non-commercial products, which serves the purpose of “weeding” and also the subsistence needs of the people. This scheme has reduced the cost of production because commercial companies never pay for the investment made by the community members, especially the poor families, to protect, manage and grow forest resources for generations. It is taken for granted and extracted without compensating people who grew it. Some rich people in the community also benefit from not paying the cost of raw material, as some of them become entrepreneurs and develop partnership with commercial companies. The community as a group continues managing and growing forests voluntarily because they are allowed to use less-productive products such as leaf litters, barks, grasses and dead woods.

For example, *Sal* and *Dhagero* trees grow in exactly the same geographic conditions. They are dominant species in most of the lowland Terai forests. In fact, *Dhagero* is an undergrowth of *Sal* forests, where it occupies the lower canopy. With spreading branches, lower height and a tendency to be easy to climb, *Dhageros* are used by women as a main source of fodder for goats. Branches are easy to cut for firewood. But the *Sal* trees grow higher and are used mainly for timber. Men are usually employed to harvest the trees, and it is one of the main sources of income not only for contractors, workers and elites, but also for the state and the market. Forestry science, however, identified the *Dhagero* trees as weeds for the growth of valuable *Sal* trees. *Dhageros* were weeded out to make the forest more productive. It not only destabilized the local system of farming and food, as the goats were the main sources of livelihoods for

women, but it dangerously jeopardized the regeneration of the *Sal* trees. The *Sal* seeds have the germination capacity of only twenty-four hours after they fall to the ground. *Dhagero* leaves used to provide a protective cover while seeds germinated and also a shelter for the young plants. The women now collect the fodder of *Sal* trees (which is less palatable) from the harvesting sites, but the number of goats per family has gone down substantially.

However, the natural growth patterns of the forest – e.g. slow growth, changing seed years and various ecological responses to changed forest compositions – do not allow for uninterrupted capital accumulation.

Together, all these micro-processes, community forestry, using the scheme of accumulation without dispossession, I argue, generate the condition that enables a “permanent” state of primitive accumulation, where both subsistence and commercial productions are continuously maintained. This simultaneity allows commercialization to be easier, cheaper and less prone to persistent crises for two specific reasons. The first can be traced to the dual sites of production wage-laborers rely upon for their subsistence – one is the wage from commercialization, and the other is the direct uses of non-commercial products (or not yet commercialized products) from the community forest – e.g., leaf litter, wild fruits, vegetables, etc. This dynamic not only provides cheap labor for commercial production but also frees capital investors (contractors) from paying full costs of living for the wage-laborers. The second reason is that community forestry as a form of environmental governance impairs the capacity of capital and contractors, external to communities, to directly gain local footholds. Rather, community forestry

schemes promote the production of local capitalist classes (entrepreneurs, contractors, loan lenders, investors) through their entrepreneurship development program. Creation of this additional layer of contractors allows capital to counter local resistance more easily, as well as setting in motion micro-processes of uneven development (cf. Harvey, 1985; Smith, 1984), which together, facilitate capital accumulation at the local level.

## **Conclusion**

Marx's concept of primitive accumulation and its advancement by Harvey (2003) could be understood differently from the understanding of political economy of common resource management and commercialization. Primitive accumulation is an ongoing phenomenon in the global South, and this is especially the case in the commons. Except for a few attempts (e.g. de Angelis, 2001; 2004; Bond, 2007), I argue that common property resources managed under community ownership are not conceptualized enough in terms of primitive accumulation. The analysis of the case of community forestry in Nepal provides a number of useful elaborations that could be further researched and used to understand primitive accumulation in the context of common property resource management. First, privatization of natural resources creating individual ownership title is not required for the introduction of primitive accumulation. The emergence of the conditions for primitive accumulation is possible without privatizing material resources themselves. Separation of wage-laborers from their indigenous practices of resource utilization can be achieved by introducing mechanisms of capital flow in alliances with community elites (emerging capitalists) without changing ownership entitlements. As McCarthy (2004) suggests, the focus of analysis should be the production of conditions

for accumulation rather than means of production alone to understand primitive accumulation better in the commons.

Second, in analyses of primitive accumulation and commodification, nature should be understood not as an aggregated single entity but rather as a set of innumerable values that can satisfy every kind of human need. Castree (2003) rightly points out that there is no one nature to be commodified, therefore, we better understand which component of nature is under commodification. Until every natural component is commodified, and separated from its direct producers, primitive accumulation remains a dominant political economic feature of rural communities. In community forestry, timber and other valuable products are commodified, but leaf litters are still available for subsistence use. Third, primitive accumulation or accumulation by dispossession could also be understood from the perspective of displacement of "material things" from natural conditions and their indigenous relationship with people. Displacement occurs through the process of commodification, and when all natural "things" that are associated with people are commodified, then full proletarianization could be achieved to reach a proper capitalistic mode of production. These additional aspects of how primitive accumulation can be understood in common management of natural resources provide different ways of conceptualizing the relationship between the reinvented commons and the revolutionary politics, especially in peasant society.

## Chapter Five

### Politics of Empowerment: Consolidating Rebellions

Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political "hegemonies" and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. Consciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive selfconsciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one. (Gramsci, 1971:333)

#### Introduction

The emergence of revolutionary consciousness and the consolidation of a shared conception of the world, creating conditions for a contingent universality<sup>1</sup>, become possible through the active political articulations of social forces such as necessity, sentiment, ideology and everyday life. It involves a pedagogical activism and appeal to the everyday life of people. In this process, a particular consciousness, consent and subjectivity are (re)produced upon which a new universality of norms and practices materialize. Such articulation generates new ideas and destabilizes existing structures, allowing the possibility of critical consciousness and collective revolt. No matter how dreadful the conditions of displacement, inequalities, exploitation and domination, the "crisis in the hegemony of the ruling bloc" (Gramsci, 1971) through counter-hegemonic resistance and revolt necessarily relies on political organizing, especially with the

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<sup>1</sup> The collective will, ideology or a thread of similar interests generates the possibility of a contingent universality. It provides a decisive framework in generating particular commonsense that might lead to questioning the hegemonic structures. When multiple forces are articulated into a common understanding of the world, the condition of contingent universality emerges. The idea of contingent universality is very different than the Hegelian totality.

leadership of the “organic intellectuals.”<sup>2</sup> As the political history of Thabang demonstrates, the consciousness needed for revolt is not just a natural effect of subaltern exploitation but rather is a result of the historical processes of consciousness and political articulation.

Development is also a transformative process in societies, producing subaltern subjectivities with a desire for progress and thus requiring destabilization of existing social structures, bonds, norms and practices. In achieving hegemonic superordination, development produces and mobilizes its own organic intellectuals, who propagate ideas and trajectories of developmental progress as common sense among the subalterns. These intellectuals are not members of professional core of development industry, rather they are identified from among the subjects<sup>3</sup> who are trained, incentivized, and exposed to developmental ideas, strategies and languages. As agents of development, they are expected to articulate the livelihood necessities of development subjects into the politics of progress. In this pedagogical process of securing hegemony, subalterns are enrolled into the scheme of development that builds them as subjects expected to appreciate the dominant conception.<sup>4</sup> But as development operates in its double life, the moment of

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<sup>2</sup> Organic intellectual refers to those individuals from within a society who provide the role of intellectual and political “leadership with direction” for Gramsci (1971). Organic intellectuals are central to the organization of knowledge and its political articulation as a manifestation of social change. It is also an internal capacity and a leading force that generates critical consciousness by translating practical circumstances into political ideology (see Hall, 1988; Thomas, 2009; Crehan, 1997 for Gramscian analysis of the idea of organic intellectual).

<sup>3</sup> As development is an intellectual endeavor that aims to change the behavior and thinking, it invests to produce intellectual agents from among the subjects. In peasant society, some of those potential “organic” intellectuals of development are progressive farmers, female leaders, household heads and local teachers.

<sup>4</sup> The master here refers to the power of modernity, capital and Western knowledge system that enrolls development subjects into the scheme of empowerment by defining them as always becoming,

enrollment is immediately followed by the process of subordination or othering. It is in this moment that development generates the possibility of “unintended initiatives,” allowing subalterns to subvert the mastery of the master (see Gidwani, 2008; Li, 2007; Tsing, 2005; Mitchell, 2002; Moore, 2005). As developmental hegemony remains fragile and incomplete, it must be reproduced as legitimate and necessary by reworking its relationship with the subjects. These moments of reconfiguration can become the opportunity for political articulation for transformation.

By examining the possibility of double articulations of developmental empowerment of the Rapti Integrated Development Project in Nepal, this chapter demonstrates how the groundwork built in the previous chapters was consolidated into a rebellious politics in Nepal. How did the development-led transformations [moral economy (Chapter Two), nature (Chapter Three), and the commons (Chapter Four)] in the Rapti region generate consciousness for the emergence of the Maoist revolution? In short, this chapter provides insights on how developmental empowerment developed into a rebellious consciousness in the Rapti region of Nepal. For this purpose, the chapter is divided into seven main sections, including this introduction. The second section provides a vignette to highlight the context and possibility of critical consciousness through the developmental empowerment. The third section develops a conceptual context around relationship between empowerment and politics. The concept of articulation, which is the main contribution of this chapter, is highlighted in section four. Sections five, six and seven provide the detailed empirical story from the Rapti region.

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incomplete and lacking. Development agencies, experts, planners and pedagogical interpellators represent the master.

Finally, the last section concludes by highlighting some theoretical implications in understanding development and rebellious politics.

***Lali Roka – a double icon***

In the afternoon of January 20, 1997, a team of armed police arrested Lali Roka (age 32), when she was returning home from administering polio drops to children in the upper Thabang area.<sup>5</sup> She was tortured and raped for more than twenty-four hours and then killed the next night when she was dragged down to a river, where police shot her in the head. On the way to the river, according to some villagers secretly monitoring the scene, she shouted, “They are killing me because I demanded the justice; please, villagers, keep fighting and be united; you will win one day.” Lali was an illiterate Magar girl, but she was active in women’s groups and led various campaigns against polygamy, alcoholism, gambling and discrimination against women in property rights. The RIDP had identified her as one of the most appropriate candidates for local developmental leadership in Thabang. Her aspirations for change, especially of male domination and exploitation of women in the Thabang area, coincided with the development agendas of the RIDP. In some aspects, both saw Thabang society as traditional and patriarchal, and they saw that the way to overcome such social barriers was by educating, uniting and creating opportunities for women in the region.

In the early 1980s, Lali joined adult literacy classes. She learned reading and writing skills and became the leader of the women’s group in the village. The RIDP

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<sup>5</sup> Anti-polio drops have been widely administered in Nepal for many decades as a strategy of eradicating polio diseases from the area. A volunteer female health worker is identified in each village for this purpose. The volunteer workers get periodic training, but they are not paid salaries. Usually, volunteer workers are selected from the mothers’ groups and from among graduates of the adult literacy classes.

provided loans to her for the production of cash crops through the agricultural development bank. She was flown to Kathmandu, where she participated in a training program that introduced improved varieties of potatoes, vegetables and fruits in Thabang. In addition, the small-scale enterprise program selected her as a potential entrepreneur for commercial production of fashion goods and, therefore, she was invited for a tailoring training for a month. Because she became increasingly recognizable because of her influential personality and leadership, the health department enrolled her in a basic health-training program, including immunization vaccination and midwife support. Development programs started to recognize her as a “model” of change in transforming peasant society and an icon of a development “success story” in the region. As expected, many villagers, especially women, became her followers in implementing various activities in Thabang village.

There was, however, another side to the iconic developmental success story of Lali Roka. Her exploration of and involvement in various development activities strengthened her understanding of the social dynamics in Thabang and beyond. The Thabang School, established in 1960, emerged as a center of various political activities in the region. Its school teachers were from other districts and were usually connected with communist ideologies and parties. As the urban, educated middle class would not want to serve in the rural and remote areas as teachers, it created an opportunity for the left-leaning and perhaps politically committed youth from nearby districts to take the rare chance of employment. The adult literacy program that Lali joined in 1980s hired those local school teachers. Usually, the literacy classes were run in the evening and the teachers were free to design their own syllabi, as the idea was to transfer reading and

writing skills to illiterate villagers rather than following a fixed curriculum. In that period, Thabang was already in the height of contestation against the state, especially after the military operation of 1982.

As a relatively organized and united group, women were providing effective leadership to various local uprisings, such as the anti-brewery campaign of 1974, a ban on polygamy practices, and work against the encroachment of communal forests for establishing apple orchards. In the background of continued struggles, the literacy classes in Thabang turned into a platform for conceptualizing new ideas and understanding other movements in Nepal and beyond. In these classes, Lali not only learned the skills of reading and writing but also used the opportunity to explore national and international revolutionary movements and new ways of thinking about Thabang. By the end of the program, Lali had fully developed her capacity to read political texts, participate in political debates and articulate them in the context of Thabang<sup>6</sup>. Workshops taught Lali about inequalities, especially between men and women. She extended her exposure to various issues and also explored the possibilities and networks within and outside the village.

Samjhana Magar, one of her colleagues and cohort members, remembers those days: “Lali became very active in providing leadership in local organizing and promoting women’s roles in different movements after she was involved in various development

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<sup>6</sup> Russian Cultural Centre, Moscow Press and many other international organizations used to send books about Marxism, communism and revolutionary movements to various parts of the country. Even though the Thabang village did not have a direct access to those texts, the teachers made them and other party publications available to the villagers. Youth clubs formed in rural areas used to function as study centers for the village.

programs” (interviewed on July 22, 2010, in Thabang). The kind of changes that development programs desired in Thabang were articulated politically by school teachers, peasant leaders and female activists such as Lali and Samjhana in the evening meetings, literacy classes, women’s group gathering and party assemblies. Without distinguishing too much between the changes development programs sought to bring and the communist revolutionary imagination, for many years, Lali continuously enrolled herself (and many others from the village) in peasant uprisings (which development aimed to control) and also in community-based, integrated development activities simultaneously.

The women’s group led by Lali Roka was mobilized as a local host for various community-based development activities. In the course of continuous engagement with peasant politics in Thabang, the group transcended its developmental boundaries and started to provide leadership to multiple anti-state movements in the region. Notably, Lali’s group brought polygamy practices to an end in Thabang, creating confidence and consciousness, especially among women, that they were capable of transforming social structures. Lali and her group took part in the cultural campaign of the early 1990s organized by peasant groups and the United People’s Front, which was violently suppressed by the state.<sup>7</sup> The resistance of the campaign by the peasants and youth groups in the region triggered armed confrontation with the police, which later turned into the Maoist uprising. By the time the Maoists declared their armed revolution, Lali was district-level vice chairperson of the women’s wing of the party. Her arrest and subsequent killing were a shock to peasants in Thabang, especially in the women’s group.

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<sup>7</sup> The state implemented an Operation called Kilo Sera Two with the idea of suppressing earlier forms of uprising. Thousands of peasants were arrested, tortured and falsely charged.

Immediately after the killing, eighteen members of the group went underground and joined the armed militias of the Maoist party. Because she was the first woman in the region to be killed by the police since the start of the Maoist movement in region, Lali became a national icon for women's leadership throughout the more-than-ten-year revolutionary period in Nepal.

### **Politics of empowerment**

Development represents the scheme of providing new imaginations and dreams leading to new relationship to the self. In this process, empowerment functions primarily in creating particular subjectivities and imaginations by constantly reproducing desire for changes that maintains hegemonic superiority and subaltern relationship between the master and the subjects to be empowered.<sup>8</sup> However, development is multivalent, and it continuously reproduces its context-specific relevance by anchoring to the social structures and geographies of a place and time that generate specific enabling or disabling effects to the subjects (Gidwani, 2002). Developmental empowerment therefore takes a cultural form by reproducing itself as an intersection of two contrasting systems of thinking<sup>9</sup> – the present as traditional, incomplete and inferior and the modern future as a

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<sup>8</sup> The politics of the discourse of “empowerment,” characterizing it as a pedagogical crusader of creating submissive imagination and extending postcolonial hegemony, has long been critiqued, especially in the post-development tradition during the 1990s (Escobar, 1995; Crush, 1995; Sachs, 1992; Rahnema, 1997). By defining the South as a subject without inner self-determination that also lacks the capacity of imagination, developmental empowerment operates in the realms of thought and subjectivity. Thus, the ideas and trajectories of Euro-Western enlightenment are involved in the life of subaltern subjects by enrolling them into the course of becoming complete men (see Cowen and Shenton, 1996; Hetne, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> The propagation of cultural tension through the process of empowerment is a necessary condition for generating ideological commonsense of developmental change. Empowerment as an instrument of creating new subjectivities generates the visual images of the distinction between the developed and non-developed categories. This process is important step in turning developmental ideas into common cultural practices. It is an alluring process.

trajectory of progress, prosperity and universality (see Pigg, 1992). Nevertheless, this intersection is not a neutral meeting point; rather, it is created through an active articulation of shifting subjectivities and imaginations. The frictional zone<sup>10</sup>, where traditional meets modern, gives political power to the scheme of empowerment in spreading developmental ideology as common sense. In doing so, however, it must always reproduce the feeling of inferiority and incompleteness by exposing existing hierarchies, differences and exploitations. In other words, empowerment must always demonstrate existing social failures before it can lure them to a developmental ideology of progress. It is in these moments that empowerment can encounter slippages in ideas and control, allowing articulation of empowered subjectivities into rebellious political activism.

The post-development critique generally characterizes the idea of empowerment as a depoliticizing mission of Western imperial exploitation and cultural domination (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1990; Shiva, 1991; Esteva and Prakash, 1996; Kothari, 2001). This depiction of empowerment as an instrument of cultural and knowledge domination of Western imperialism is insightful and undeniable. However, the critiques made by post-development scholars glorify the authority and capacity of developmental ideas and the power of Western thoughts (see Pieterse, 1998; 2000; Sheppard et al, 2009; Gidwani, 2002). There is no doubt that the discourses, strategies and institutions of developmental empowerment are driven by imperialist ideas, but the important point for us is to

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<sup>10</sup> To empower is to create a tension between the present vs. the imagined future. This is a frictional zone that is required for reproducing legitimacy of development. In the process of enrolling development subjects into empowerment, they must undermine themselves by embracing the perception that what they have is not enough. Development must reproduce the zone of friction by creating desire of being modern within subalternity.

understand where it fails in generating hegemonic common sense. Empowerment can never fully subsume development subjects into its hegemonic discourse because it can by no means fulfill its own promises, as its relevance relies on the continuous reproduction of subaltern relationships. Moments of subordination can instigate and be articulated any time for counter-hegemonic politics. Understanding these moments of success and failure allows us to visualize the political possibilities of empowerment. As post-development is only part of the total picture, it fails to pinpoint the ruptures immanent to the scheme of empowerment. By articulating political implications of such disjunctures within the ideology of empowerment, we might better explain the possibility of counter-hegemonic politics within the relations of subordination.

Further ethnographic inquiries in this vein demonstrate that developmental empowerment, although aiming to consolidate hegemonic commonsense, generates political possibility by instigating “unintended initiatives” (Li, 2007). This account provides a compelling framework to understand everyday intricacies of developmental ideology in generating political effects among the subjects of empowerment. But, by focusing primarily on “unintended consequences” of development programs, this analysis limits itself to explaining the methodological limitations of developmental empowerment. More important is illuminating the fractured ontology of development philosophy, which could be actively exploited for the political articulation of change.

The two contradictory aspects of empowerment quite resolutely carry the idea of “double consciousnesses” as used by Paul Gilroy, who demonstrates how Western modernity creates double subjectivities among black people, reproducing them as “both

European and black” simultaneously (1993:1).<sup>11</sup> As exemplified in black diasporic studies in the global North, double consciousness represents the tension that is introduced between the traditional and the modern (Du Bois, 1968; Gilroy, 1991; Dayal, 1996). This doubleness generates special power<sup>12</sup> (to black immigrants or descendents of slaves, for these scholars) by creating an “unsteady location simultaneously inside and outside the conventions, assumptions and aesthetic rules which distinguish and periodise modernity” (Gilroy, 1991:73). Developmental empowerment generates very similar frictional zones with double subjectivities of the modern and the traditional that cannot be fully overcome. It is only through the creation of this hybrid location characterized by ambivalences and tensions between “the same and the other” (Gilroy, 1991:75) that empowerment gains legitimacy and ideological power<sup>13</sup> in enrolling and othering the development subjects. The process of empowerment creates a zone of contradictions and the “possibility of reading one’s space and time from the space and time of another” (Dayal, 1996:57). This creates a critical consciousness of the process of “othering” and consolidates counter ideas leading to destabilization and revolt.

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<sup>11</sup> The idea of double consciousness came out as a critique to Hegelian universality or unity. This idea is mainly used in diasporic cultural studies by black scholars.

<sup>12</sup> Gilroy convincingly criticizes the Hegelian idea of the supremacy of thoughts over the arts and practices. In black diasporas in Europe, the double identities provided by modernity gave power to black musicians “to express the direct image of the slaves’ will” (page 74). Such forms of continuous reinvention of premodern practices of music and arts are active and disguised forms of anti-modern reimaginings (Gilroy, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Empowerment regenerates internal power within the frictional movements between two forces. But this power operates as a desiring entity among the subjects. The frictional contradiction created by empowerment is a process of generating such power of modern ideas. Friction is necessary for hegemonic power, therefore there is not one vertical source of power, understood as capillary power in Foucauldian sense as a vertical one-way flow.

Nevertheless, the unavoidable possibility of counter-hegemonic awareness inherent to the ideological structure of empowerment does not translate into political activism by itself without the proactive articulation of emerging consciousness about and constraints imposed by the process of “othering.” In other words, it is only through active political consolidation, articulation and activism that critical consciousness, developed over time, converts into a collective force and political commonsense.

### **Articulation of forces**

“The aim of a theoretically informed political practice must surely be to bring about or construct the articulation between social or economic forces and those forms of politics and ideology which might lead them in practice to intervene in history in a progressive way.”

Hall, 1985:95<sup>14</sup>

Hegemony, in a Gramscian framework, refers to a continuous process of (re)articulation of thoughts, beliefs and interests of dominant social groups so as to proliferate their worldview as a commonsense among subordinated groups (Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1985; Slack, 1996; Hart, 2007). For example, in bourgeois hegemony, the ideas and the interests of the bourgeoisie are reproduced as the totality and a collective trajectory of the society as a whole by articulating the supremacy of capital, elitist discourse of knowledge and hierarchical power structures as self-evolving and inevitable. In the process of generating the counter-hegemonic critical consciousness of the subaltern, a new conception of the world is developed through the articulation of difference, alienation and exploitation. Articulation is crucial because it “circulates the

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<sup>14</sup> “Signification, representation, ideology: Althusser and the poststructuralist debates,” in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2(2), 91–114

blood,” driving change in both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes.<sup>15</sup> However, their outcomes are different such that, in bourgeois hegemony, articulation aims to reproduce subordination by naturalizing the differences, whereas, in counter-hegemonic consciousness, new conceptions of the world are articulated with the ideas of dignity and horizontal solidarity.

Nevertheless, it is always through the active articulation of thoughts, interests and trajectories (in other words, ideology) that the dominant worldview gains consent and legitimacy. In this process, articulation functions as a conscious and deliberate act of cementing disparate and multiple elements into a coherent force and unity-generating common sense of language, thinking and interests around the ideology of the dominant group in historically and geographically specific ways. The developmental hegemony via empowerment is therefore a deliberate political articulation of modernist trajectories, ideas and interests as universal. But, because empowerment is also a process of reproducing the same as different, it inevitably carries the possibility of counter-hegemonic articulation of differences and subordination.

Scholars have mobilized the Gramscian concept of articulation mainly to explain two different but interrelated moments or processes of hegemonic social formation – unity of differences and production of consensual discourses and meaning. First, as a critique of essentialist and economic reductionist approach to social formation, the idea

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<sup>15</sup> Even though the function of articulation, as a methodology of creating particular language and unity of different elements, is similar in both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes of generating consent for building common sense, the outcomes are different. It is not about who becomes dominant in time and place but what kinds of political possibility it generates for whom in society. The counter-hegemonic articulation is not about establishing hegemony of the working class but rather conceptualizing a non-hegemonic society with dignity.

of articulation was mobilized in explaining the possibility of a combination of diverse forces as a complex unity and structured dominance (Althusser, 1969).<sup>16</sup> The differences are articulated into a conjunctural whole reproducing hierarchical unity between the whole and its parts, which normalizes the relations of dominance and subordination (Mouffe, 1979; Slack, 1996). Second, by drawing directly from Gramsci, critical cultural studies scholars expanded the idea of articulation in explaining the processes by which the meaning and expressions of particular interests, trajectories, practices, beliefs and languages are produced as a societal commonsense (Hall, 1985; 1986; 1996). In this sense, articulation is an ideological struggle of a particular social group. As Hall (1996:142) explains, “Articulation enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation, without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socioeconomic or class location or social position.” The essence of the idea of articulation is that class positions or the material conditions are necessary but not sufficient conditions for generating ideological common sense and political unity. In fact, it is through the deliberate and “interpellative” articulation of both material conditions and ideological positions of the subjects that the possibility of a critical commonsense of their historical position and new conception of the world is materialized.

Development is a persuasive articulation that produces both the structure as a complex unity of differences and the meaning and images of the modernist thoughts and

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<sup>16</sup> Mouffe (1979) was the first who used the term articulation in exploring the possibility of nonreductionist explanation of social formation. But it is Althusser who really mobilized the idea of articulation (developing from the Gramscian idea of hegemony in a different way) as a critique to the Hegelian totality and universality of thoughts and provide explanation to the possibility of complex social structure and unity.

interests as the expression of the entire society, reproducing them as a common trajectory. But because developmental articulation is a hierarchical social structure that must maintain the status quo and the relations of subordination (unity in subordination) for its continued relevance, it is always in danger of oppositional re-articulation. The structures and languages enunciated as commonsense can lose their collective power when the differences internal to the system are made transparent and articulated radically toward a collective conceptualizing of a different worldview characterized by dignity and horizontality. It is therefore the idea of articulation as a theory and method that might allow us to understand how differences and subordinations that are made natural in developmental hegemony can rupture the system and unwittingly generate possibilities of critical consciousness leading toward defiance and revolt. In geography, scholars have increasingly started to use this concept to explore the developmental effects and consequences in political processes (e.g., Hart, 2002; 2007). But the specific role of geography and its materiality is still largely ignored in the contemporary analysis of the processes of political articulation of developmental changes in generating both hegemonic commonsense and counter-hegemonic consciousness.

Neither developmental hegemony nor counter-hegemonic consciousness is a spontaneous and unpredictable event. They are orchestrated, deliberately designed and articulated by the respective interests, trajectories and thoughts. It is primarily the organic intellectuals who must take the burden of generating collective consciousness of the new conception of the world through articulation of difference and translation of them into political power. Developmental empowerment unwittingly empowers organic

intellectuals to take on the tasks of political articulation of differences internalized in developmental change.

### **History of political articulation of development in Nepal**

Since the establishment of modern Nepal in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when various principalities and kingdoms were conquered and centralized under the Shah dynasty, the idea of development has been mobilized as the decisive articulating force in Nepali politics. This has been the case for both ruling blocks and also the oppositional political forces for whom developmental ideas are articulated as a necessary condition for reproducing their political legitimacy. Since the beginning, by enforcing Hindu religion-normative politics as common sense in Nepali society, the hegemony of the king and feudal-state apparatuses were popularized as the guarantors of prosperity, peace and progress.<sup>17</sup> The feudal status quo and the monarchical divinity as “the universal truth and consciousness of Nepali people” were continuously reproduced for at least an additional 200 years, especially in conjunction with Western developmental ideas that Nepal encountered starting in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Bista, 1991).<sup>18</sup> Despite the long and successful history of the mobilization of religious beliefs, caste systems and everyday practices in articulating the necessity of the supremacy of ruling ideas, the

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<sup>17</sup> The idea of progress portrayed in Hindu monarchical system was different than the Enlightenment’s conception of the idea of progress denoting the supremacy of European thoughts, trajectories and capital. It was the divine power of the king leading to oversight the social change as ultimate truth. But both ideas had similar political repercussions: supremacy of thoughts and power, although of a different kind.

<sup>18</sup> Hindu priests and upper-caste religious practitioners were the “organic intellectuals” of the system who managed to create socio-cultural conditions that generated acceptance of caste superiority as divine gift or karma of the present life. This naturally gave authority to the ruling block as a natural and inevitable. The hierarchy and authority were articulated politically through religious norms and the imaginative good life in future.

hegemony of the monarchical divinity was always unstable and threatened. The various moments of crisis in their hegemonic status were always followed by another wave of resistance and revolt inspired by different worldviews and conception of the future. This section highlights various moments of how developmental ideas were articulated in securing hegemonic status of the ruling elites in Nepal, yet also opening up possibilities for alternative political activism.

*Pre-1950 Nepal – development of a fragmented strategy of rule*

Even though royal ego, divine feeling and the dream of building an empire of the Shah dynasty motivated the drive for unification of Nepal, the centralized state was rendered necessary for national identity, Nepali bravery and the path to prosperity. The Gorkha King Prithivi Narayan Shah, proclaimed as a victor of the united Nepal, became the absolute power of the country. He developed various statements and methods on how to rule the country and gain prosperity, which later became his book *Dibya Upadesh* [Divine Counsel]<sup>19</sup>, which was popularized as a first doctrine of development for Nepal (see Regmi, 1976). The hegemony of the Hindu emperor was materialized by using military means, as well as extending the “internal determination” (to use Cowen and Shenton’s 1996 words) of the upper-caste ruling block to the autonomous communities and principalities.

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<sup>19</sup> His aim in the book was to show the path of development by instigating self-reliant national economy. He was concerned about the possible domination and control from the expanding British colonialism in the south. His statements were disseminated verbally for many decades and published as a book only in 1830.

The war that Nepal fought against the British East India Company in 1816 and ended with the Sughauli Treaty was perhaps the first direct entry of Western developmental thoughts into the political hegemony of ruling elites. The British envoy subsequently was allowed to reside in the country, and Gorkha military service in the British army was formally established along with trade between the two countries (Burghart, 1996; Liechty, 1997). What followed this development was the major contradiction and factional fight between two groups within the ruling hegemony. After a military massacre of the opponent group, the Rana family took power and confined the Shah King as a ceremonial head of state. As soon as the Rana regime emerged in 1846, it started a series of visits to the United Kingdom and followed with the implementation of various developmental programs, such as establishment of the English medium school in Kathmandu for the ruling families, promulgation of *Muluki Ain* (public code of conduct), building palaces with European architecture, urban planning, military professionalization, bureaucratic restructuring and more effective tax collection (Regmi, 1980; Bista, 1991).

Contrary to the arguments of post-development scholars, who consider the pre-1950 period as an era without “external developmental interventions” or pre-development, the ruling blocks (Rana regime and Shah Dynasty) proactively mobilized the idea of development in geographically specific ways as one of the main strategies for gaining legitimacy and reproducing political power. In addition to securing political patronage from the British Empire, the particular affinity of the ruling regime to the idea of development was driven by their interest in accumulating wealth, imitating Western-style emperor lifestyles and minimizing the internal threat of public uprising. In the pre-1950 period, the regime established trade relations with British companies mainly to

supply timber, spices, mine ores, soldiers and edible products. In return, luxury goods, cars, weapons and equipments were imported from the beginning of such trade connections (Regmi, 1961). The scheme of accumulation deployed by the colonial empire in Indian territories was particularly attractive to the ruling regime, creating absolute desire for modern technologies, ideas and lifestyle.

By mobilizing selective aspects of modernity and development, the regime implemented various programs of establishing educational institutions (only for the ruling caste), farmland acquisition, agricultural development, irrigation, road, mining and bureaucratic expansion of the state for tax collection (Liechty, 1997). Developmental ideas provided justification and authority to suppress the opposition and also reduced the threat of the British colonial expansion from the south. Nevertheless, the pre-1950 political articulation of the idea of development was characterized by “compromise” and “confrontation” between the feudal social order of the Nepali ruling blocks and the influence of the capital-centric modern ideas introduced during the course of interactions with the British rule in India. Modern ideas acquired wide acceptance as a desired strategy for fulfilling the interests of the regime, but at the same time, it also created a threatening environment for both the British influence in the region and national hegemonic elites in Nepal, in response to increased exploitation and domination.

Since the 1850s, every moment of developmental “interpellation”<sup>20</sup> of the Nepali social structure was followed by the emergence and consolidation of oppositional forces

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<sup>20</sup> The Althusserian word Interpellation explains the political development of this period and its connection with the developmental change. The Nepali society was produced as something different with new subjectivities.

against the regime. These forces coalesced and were expressed through various forms of contestation, uprising and public disobedience, which later culminated in a series of uprisings in the 1920s, mid-1930s, the early 1940s and finally the overthrow of the Rana regime in 1951 (see Rawal, 2008; Seddon et al, 1979; 2002). Right after the first introduction of the civil codes, establishment of educational institutions, bureaucratic reform, land acquisition and increased land tax to the farmers during the early 1850s, a wave of peasant uprisings engulfed rural Nepal in 1857. The 1857 uprising was brutally suppressed in both Nepal and India; in fact, Nepal sent more than twenty thousand troops to northern India to suppress the movement.<sup>21</sup> The suppression of one movement created the possibility for another to reemerge in a bigger form. For example, the regime, against the will of its constituency, was forced to abolish slavery in the early 1900s. Such changes were driven by both the influence of developmental idea of being “civilized” and also the pressure from growing slaves’ civil movements.

Peasant uprisings in the 1930s and the 1940s and the urban intellectual movements of the 1940s emerged out of the inspirations and continued articulation of past changes and movements happening within and outside Nepal (Hofer, 1979; Jones, 1976). Peasant uprisings and independence movements in India, Chinese peasant movements and the Bolshevik revolution had some impact on the emergence of these movements in Nepal. But most importantly, the political articulation of the developmental inspiration of the urban, educated, upper-caste youth and their growing

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<sup>21</sup> As Nepal provided a huge military support to suppress the peasant uprising in India, the British East India Company returned a part of the land captured during the 1814-1816 war. That event gave further legitimacy to the authenticity and capacity of the ruling block and also recognition and friendship from the British.

connections with rural peasants and political activists consolidated the multiple forces as a major political threat to the regime (see Wood, 1965).<sup>22</sup> Despite more than a century of successful articulation of developmental, religious, cultural, economic and political forces for establishing oligarchic hegemony, the regime collapsed, and a multiparty system was installed. Development had prolonged hegemony but was haunted by anti-hegemonic remains.

### *Consolidating commonsense – post-1950 Nepal*

In post-1950 Nepal, the discourse of development dominated all other forms of social expression of well-being, emerging as a common sense and the sole indicator of measuring performance and success in every aspect of social life (Piggs, 1990; 1992). It became the one and only goal of the state, and it spread into the feeling and everyday practices of people by creating a complex web of social, economic, educational, cultural and psychological processes. Development was promoted as a collective thread and a universal mission of the state, international agencies, national and local institutions, cultural practices, political forces and individual behaviors. In fact, it was popularized as a national religion or mantra of achieving growth and prosperity. Through the storms of a “developmental campaign”<sup>23</sup> with the leadership of the state and international

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<sup>22</sup> Sanskrit and also western philosophies have been taught in Kathmandu since the early 1900. But most upper-caste youth travelled to Banaras (India) for higher education, where they grasped the idea of modern development and change that were applicable to Nepal. As they were active in Indian politics, they immediately joined Nepali ongoing movements as a leading force, especially for the urban uprising.

<sup>23</sup> The campaign was like an “industry” with massive investment of intellectual, financial, social and political resources in generating a common belief that Nepali social formation was “backward” and the only way to bring about a prosperous future was by adopting a developmental path in their everyday practices. This assertion made the ruling block powerful and also provided a general sense to the people that something better was coming in future.

development agencies, it was expected that the threat of communist ideological influences would be prevented.

In this period (between the 1950s and 1990s), “the ruling bloc” of the country<sup>24</sup> mobilized the desire and ideology of development in four main ways to strengthen its political position and also gain national and international legitimacy and relevance. First, between the early 1950s and the 1970s, international development primarily focused on infrastructure facilities such as roads, electricity, industrial complexes, irrigation canals, dams, buildings, warehouses and schools. The promotion of that basic infrastructure not only provided the foundation for the flow of capital but also demonstrated the modern ways of living and created tremendous desire for developmental changes in every section of Nepali society. Second, the development priority between the 1960s and 1980s was to establish industrial production sites and promote commercialization at national, regional, communal and family levels by providing loans and also technologies and skills. These moves provided a great push to the ruling block, especially in concretizing the scheme of accumulation throughout the country and establishing commercial networks. Most importantly, it created desire among the urban youth and landless peasants to migrate to industrial locations for employments.

Third, due to the growing concern from local “beneficiaries” that their voices were not heard, community-based and integrated development models were mobilized in the early 1970s. They articulated self-reliant economic practices and decentralized

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<sup>24</sup> In this period, the ruling block comprised of higher-caste elites, capitalists, landlords and educated, urban upper classes under the patronage of the revived Shah king. The royal regime took power in 1961, and it remained as a central hegemonic force until it collapsed in 2006 after the successful completion of people’s movement. The factionalism, confrontation and leg pulling for power within the block were prevalent, but whoever came to power maintained the same status quo.

planning by also maintaining the hegemonic status of the ruling blocks. These activities established the idea of development as a universal norm for everybody above and beyond local politics. It was presented as an apolitical (beyond the purview of politics), overarching social trajectory, and, through this articulation of social changes and trajectories, the developmental hegemony continued to be reproduced as desired idea for both ruling blocks and the rural subjects. Finally, developmental ideas were enmeshed in Nepali politics in such a way that both the ruling blocks and the beneficiary subjects, especially the rural peasants, became the subjects of Western hegemonic thought.

Development never achieved its goal, however, of containing the possibility of popular uprising, revolt and an anti-hegemonic conception of the world. The developmental changes, especially infrastructure, education and economic practices, questioned the existing feudal hegemony to justify their importance and relevance. In the process, these events provided an opportunity to talk about the root causes and connections of development subjects' condition of underdevelopment, which at the same time generated the inspiration and dream for further changes beyond the limits of developmental ideas themselves. Especially since the 1970s, development activity in the service of ruling blocks in Nepal also left signposts for the emergence of anti-hegemonic consciousness demanding politically articulated ideas of justice and equality. For example, the road projects of the 1960s and 1970s played a significant role in connecting growing discontent throughout the country, especially the urban centers and the Terai area in the south. The road connection also facilitated migration from the hills to lowland areas, creating the possibility of alternative political interactions among the migrant communities. School teachers were a leading force in articulating local developmental

changes informed by the communist ideologies, whereas in urban areas it was the student movements, especially of the 1970s and 1980s, that created the foundation for the democratic movement of the 1990s.

The community-based empowerments of the 1980s justified their necessity by demonstrating the inadequacies and lack of progress in rural communities, especially among the peasants. In the process of creating its own logics and superiority of thoughts, local social structures such as caste discrimination, gender division of power and the inefficiency of the feudal system of production and political representation were rendered symptoms of backwardness. Even though such information was provided to stage the development agenda as an apolitical local issue, organic intellectuals such as school teachers, migrant workers, local leaders, peasant groups and political activists provided alternative viewpoints. The massive peasant uprisings of the 1980s and 1990s, mainly in the western part of Nepal, had direct connections to these processes. Such changes were articulated differently in different parts of the country but started to merge together in the form of the Maoist revolution in 1996.

*Table 3: Major political events and developmental articulation in Nepal*

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1760s:	Unification of Nepal as a modern state by the Gorkha King, which was seen as national pride for development and resistance to the British
1790s:	“ <i>Divya Upadesh</i> ” [divine counsel] of King Prithivinarayan Shah came to surface as a development doctrine of the time
1814-16:	War against the British expansion to the north, which ended in the Sughauli treaty in 1816, allowing a British envoy as a first Western diplomat in the country
1850:	Nepali prime minister visited the United Kingdom for six months to learn about various development ideas, such as urban architecture, professional military, legal system, taxation, trade and state

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	bureaucracy
1852:	Introduction of a new tax system, land surveys and extension of royal family ownership to communal lands ( <i>Birta</i> system)
1857	Peasant uprisings along the Indian border against state tax, eviction from the farmlands and clearance of the forests
1958	Massive military mobilization against peasant groups; the state termed them a “sin” against prosperity
1870s	Rice promotion campaign with the slogan “Rice for the Rule”
1890s	Mining (iron ore) was declared a national priority
1917	First modern college was established in Kathmandu
1920	Sati system was abolished, and it was symbolized as a modern endeavor
1921	Slavery was abolished (after a series of uprisings and disobedience movements)
1930s	Massive student uprisings in Nepal (also Nepali students in Banaras, India)
1930s	Irrigated farming and land management/measurement programs were introduced in Kathmandu and Terai areas
1940s	Armed revolt against Rana regime throughout the country
1949	Communist Party of Nepal was established
1952	Collapse of Rana regime and establishment of multiparty systems
1952	Arrival of international development, and the P4 program was signed
1957-58	Countrywide peasant uprisings against landlords and increased tax on land
1960	East-West Highway Project launched as a development and military measure of containing peasant uprisings
1961	The king imposed an absolute monarchy and Panchayat political system, terming it a new model of developmental state
1970s	Nepal became the hub of international development “industry,” comprising more than seventy percent of the national development budget
1971	Nationwide peasant uprisings followed by bloody oppressions
1980	Students and teachers led urban uprisings
1980s	Campaign of one school and one health post in every village – a developmental response to growing uprisings
1980s	Community-based development and extension of market mechanisms

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	in villages
1990	People's Movement of 1990 and establishment of multiparty system
1990	Declaration of Nepal as a WTO member and free-market approach to development
1992-93	Peasant uprisings in western Nepal, especially in the Rapti region, followed by Operation Romeo
1996	Maoist Revolution started in Nepal

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By exploring the ethnographic insights of the impacts of the RIDP in the Rapti region, especially in Thabang village, the rest of this chapter provides details of how a rebellious commonsense emerged among the peasants as a prehistory of the revolution.

### **Thabang School – locus of peasant consciousness**

As soon as the *Mukhiya*, the local tax collector, was dethroned in 1958 and the Peasants' Association, along with the leadership of Burman Budha, took over the village affairs, Thabang peasants approached government offices in 1959 and demanded establishment of a primary school. The long rivalry between the *Mukhiya* and the peasant group ended by transforming Thabang into a new “village republic,” where previously usurped peasant lands were redistributed and the taxes were either reduced or exempted for the low-landholding peasants. The *Mukhiya* wanted to cleanse all “dirty” practices and behaviors from the community so that the Thabang area could be developed as a “modern” and “civilized” village. Even though the modernizing attempt of the *Mukhiya* triggered the village uprising, leading to his deposition, the newly formed peasant council immediately embarked with plans for the school, yet another modern idea of education and knowledge.

Historically, Thabang peasants had pursued oral learning systems for centuries, transmitting ideas, histories and learning through speeches, stories, music and many other forms of intergenerational communication. But the contact that the peasant leaders established with the communist activists in prison after the scuffle with the *Mukiya* in 1954 became a milestone in generating new ideas, including the school.<sup>25</sup> Without knowing much about the communist party, the peasants followed their suggestions of continuing their struggles against the landlords. The idea of school was promoted as a means of lifting the peasantry out of feudal domination and discrimination. Similarly, by bringing in experience and learning from the British military service, the ex-Gurkhas were effective in communicating the necessity of modern education for their children. Along with these forces, Nepal was just entering into the development programs of the 1950s, for which providing education by establishing schools in rural areas had become the national priority. The idea was to educate rural peasants, not only to enroll them into the scheme of development but also to stem the threat of communist ideologies.

At the vanguard of modern development, the Thabang School functioned as the locus of articulation of the economic and political changes in generating critical consciousness and rebellious politics in the region. The school represented a success of the transition of power and also the beginning of a new era among the Thabang villagers. In consultation with the villagers, the head of the village, Burman Budha, appointed an

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<sup>25</sup> Burman Budha and his compatriots attacked the Mukhiya to depose him from the power. But the Mukhiya used the state police to imprison them for more than one month where they met very influential community leaders of the time, including Mohan Bikram Singh and Khagulal Gurung. They became the source of the ideas for a Peasant Council and remained as ideological resources for many years. Khagulal Gurung, who also ran for parliamentary election in 1960 from Rolpa constituency, provided the concrete support for the school. He kept sending teachers from other districts, who became valuable resources for the newly politicized peasants, for many years.

ex-Gurkha army soldier as school headmaster. The idea of the school was highly applauded by the state, which provided a minimum salary for the teachers involved. As Burman Budha remembers, “The government officials believed that the school would teach these troublemaking Magar peasants about how to follow the government rules. They thought that we were making trouble because we were illiterate.” But in fact, the school taught “a rebellious literacy, stronger than before,” as Santosh Budha, a Maoist leader from Thabang, summarizes (interviewed in June 2010, Thabang). The school taught the children during the day, and at night the adults joined the classes. Khagulal Gurung, a communist leader who Burman met in prison in 1954, remained in contact with the Thabang villagers. He kept sending teachers from various other districts who would teach both day and night classes, from young educated political activists informed by communist ideology.<sup>26</sup>

The articulative significance of the Thabang School can be drawn from two examples that might provide us with deeper insights into how the school operated as one of the decisive ideological apparatuses of the village and became the locus of rebellions in the region:

Example 1: Santosh Budha and Samjhana Magar, who come from poor economic backgrounds and large family structures (joint families) of Thabang village, graduated from the school in the late 1970s and the early 1990s, respectively. Because of the death of his mother at an early age, Santosh started school when he was fourteen years old. He was the first child to go to school from his family of eleven. His family was quite active in the various village-level uprisings during the 1950s and 1960s but not connected to other regional and national politics. As a

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<sup>26</sup> Teachers who arrived to teach in 1960s, such as Khiman Singh Gurung and Deepak KC, worked as a source of ideas for local political organizing and also connecting with other movements at regional and national levels. They worked for two to five years but remained in contact for a long time afterwards. Currently, both of them are active ideologues in the Maoist Party in the Rapti region.

bright and enthusiastic child who came from a family involved in local struggles, Santosh immediately caught the teachers' attention as a potential candidate for extracurricular activities and outreach of cultural performances. The teachers also persuaded him to invite his sisters and brothers to join the adult literacy classes. In due time, they became part of the active militias of the movements. Santosh became an active messenger between the teachers and the peasants in the village. He started to travel to other villages and district headquarters, representing the school on behalf of the student union and other educational programs, where he developed connections with other teachers and activists. As soon as he graduated, he started to work as a primary school teacher at the same school. At that time, he started to lead movements against police oppression. He led the cultural campaign against the Romeo Operation of the state in 1994, which later turned into an armed peasant uprising, leading to the emergence of the Maoist revolution in the region. He served as a regional commander during the revolution and was also a member of parliament in 2008 (based on interviews with Santosh Budha in June 2010).

Samjhana Magar started her education when Santosh Budha was a teacher in the school. Santosh gradually got her involved in singing "people's songs" and taught her the history of village uprisings in the same way it was taught to him by his teachers when he was a student. She started to perform in cultural programs and later joined the Lali Roka group, through which she became active in promoting women's literacy, empowerment, rights to property and political representation. She received some training locally about women's groups, saving credit and adult literacy. She became a thread for connecting her extended family to various development programs, as well as political activities. She was involved as an active leader in the cultural campaign organized in the early 1990s, which led her to become a rebel leader in the Maoist revolution. She is currently serving as a central member of the women's wing of the Maoist party (Interviewed in January 2011).

Example 2: Comrade Pasang, who became chief of the Maoist Party's Peoples Liberation Army, comes from Rangsi village south of Thabang. He joined the school in his village in the early 1970s, then moved to the district headquarters (Libang) after he finished his primary education. In Libang, he was influenced by the activities of the student union, where he slowly entered into the circle of political activists. The famous student movement of 1979 drew his attention, and he became active in organizing at the school. His family was worried about his safety during the student strike of 1979, so he was moved to Thabang to study and live with relatives. Thabang School became the instigator and intellectual base of his revolutionary political life. "The school planted seeds in my mind, and the Thabang community acted as a fertile ground for the growth of my revolutionary thoughts and inspirations," he said in front of the jubilant crowd in Thabang in February 2011 as a guest of the celebration of the sixteenth anniversary of the Maoist revolution. While in school, he acted as a contact person between Thabang and his village. As soon as he graduated, he moved to his village and started to work as a primary school teacher. He remained active politically and started to organize peasants the same way as it was done in Thabang. Peasant uprisings in his village

became more serious when they joined Thabang and other movements after the massive cultural campaign of the early 1990s. He was charged with many false accusations and therefore went underground before the armed uprising emerged. He took military leadership during the revolution. The Thabang School extended its reach beyond the village and produced someone such as Pasang.

Teaching and discussing political issues and ideological texts once a week in night classes was established as a practice from the beginning. As the school grew to upper-level classes, the number of teachers also increased, arriving almost exclusively through the contacts of communist activists from other districts. The teachers' movement of the early 1980s created teachers' unions, providing Thabang School with greater access to other villages. As a well-established school in the region, it gained a high level of trust and reputation throughout the entire district. Given their high regard in the community, teachers were entrusted with additional roles, such as adult literacy, by the RIDP. But at the same time, local movements in the region actively sought the teachers' support in organizing regional political awareness through cultural campaigns. The arrangements of the night classes coincided with the program of adult literacy funded by the RIDP. The adult literacy program made the already running night classes, where most of the political organizing and ideological discussions took place, more regular. The school played a significant role in the progressive cultural campaign that was organized in the early 1990s as a protest against state repression.

In articulating local structural changes at the ideological level and creating the conditions for the emergence of the Maoist movement from the Rapti region, the Thabang School played a significant role in three main ways: First, it produced a number of local cadres in the region who were conceptually and practically informed regarding

the ideas of revolutionary change and communist parties.<sup>27</sup> The long and coordinated involvement of the teachers, not only as employees of the school, but also as political activists who were successful in articulating local constraints and possibilities in building political consciousness among the peasant communities, cannot be understated. Second, the school acted as a thread for local intellectual activities by providing a venue for meeting, discussion and gathering, as well as for covering up local political activism under the banner of school programs. For example, most of the cultural programs, including revolutionary songs, plays, and performances, were developed and practiced within the school curricula. Third and most importantly, Thabang School was truly a locus for various other movements, especially in the Rapti region during the 1980s and 1990s. The frequent transfer of teachers from Thabang to other villages and the migration of students to Thabang from its surroundings created networks of ideas and organizing throughout the region. The government's attempts to transfer teachers frequently to other areas to dilute their political linkages had the opposite effect, instead generating possibilities for connecting with other activists. In the process of establishing networks, it was successful in drawing resources from international development agencies and also from the public into the region.

As a locus of intellectual activities in the region, Thabang School produced the region as a relational space for connecting local and national politics. It articulated the instances of domination, exploitation and oppression to establish a new consciousness. It

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<sup>27</sup> Many commanders of the Peoples' Liberation Army were the graduates of this school. Local organizers and the peasant activists were trained in the night classes and adult literacy programs for many years. There were more than seven members of parliament representing the Maoist Party from the Rolpa district who were directly or indirectly connected to the school.

was never on the frontline of the fight but always remained as a source of inspiration for those who were on the frontlines. The establishment of the school turned out to be one of the most effective initiatives of the Thabang peasants, where within less than four decades a successful Maoist revolution emerged.

### **Intellectual work of RIDP**

The Rapti Integrated Development Project (RIDP) was an intellectual intervention in multiple aspects of rural livelihoods, seeking to transform the Rapti people into facilitators of standard developmental trajectories. It was the continuation of the basic premises of the Point IV program of the 1950s, which sought to transfer Western skills and knowledge to the peripheral world as an effective mechanism for attaining developmental goals. Following the same philosophy, the RIDP was deeply invested in producing trained, empowered and skillful peasant communities who would then lead the everyday practices of modern development in the Rapti region without any obstacles (Mihaly, 1965; RIDP, 1980; 1995). In the period between 1980 and 1995, the RIDP alone trained more than eleven thousand farmers in various aspects of development (see RIDP, 1990; 1995; USAID, 2001). Such schemes of transferring knowledge and skills were designed to produce empowered and skillful subjects at multiple levels, establishing hierarchies of knowledge and authority in every community. Unexpectedly, however, such schemes for producing new subjectivities undergirded the consolidation of rebellious consciousness among the Rapti peasants. This section highlights some of the insights into how the RIDP unwittingly articulated the alternative political possibilities via the programs of empowerment in the Rapti region.

Providing different qualifications and skills to different types of farmers, the RIDP's training and empowerment packages involved developing local extension agents (paraprofessionals), program facilitators, community leaders, progressive farmers and empowered and skillful individuals (RIDP, 1985; 1995).<sup>28</sup> The idea behind developing a layered system of training and empowerment programs in RIDP was to establish a self-disciplined mechanism of circulating ideas, knowledge and practical skills in such a way that the hierarchy of the system operates as a natural cycle integrated into community practices. Training programs ranged from a brief awareness campaign to multi-modular packages, depending on the level of responsibilities that one was expected to fulfill. For example, the job of the local extension agent was to generate awareness among the communities and families, whereas the progressive farmers were expected to create demonstration plots of the newly introduced crop varieties.

The main idea of these training schemes was to transform the existing knowledge system, social bonds, norms, values, hierarchies and everyday practices of the peasant communities in order to cultivate new developmental imaginations. In fact, the RIDP's rather limited investments in physical infrastructure such as roads, irrigations, buildings, seeds, machineries and farmlands were intended to be examples of selected modern development activities, as a mechanism of producing interpellated subjectivities. These activities, which justified the entire processes of creating new subjectivities and helped

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<sup>28</sup> The criteria for selecting participants varied tremendously according to the position and responsibility one was expected to fulfill. Someone with a formal education and influential personality was qualified as a potential extension agent, whereas landlords with bigger landholding were selected as progressive farmers. The incentives provided to the participants during the training played a major role in who were selected for which positions. The poor farmers ended up being double subjects of the RIDP, while the new "intellectuals" emerged in the upper hierarchies of the skill-transfer ladder.

cultivate the mental image of the “developmental world,” were the main intellectual interventions of the RIDP.

*Table 4: Training provided by RIDP to development professionals (1981-1986)<sup>29</sup>*

<i>Training components</i>	<i>Training period (person/month)</i>
Agriculture extension and training	623
Livestock development	637
Renewable resource management	185
Agricultural banks and loans	194
Agricultural marketing	90
Irrigation and rural infrastructure	147
Rural industrialization	168
Education/adult literacy	210
Institutional development	427

*Source: Project documents and evaluation reports of the RIDP (1980; 1987; 1995)*

In institutionalizing mechanisms of subject formation, the RIDP simultaneously focused on creating and strengthening the capacity of institutions as a second and perhaps stronger component of the intervention. The idea was to extend governmental control over the Rapti region and establish effective channels of communication between the villagers and the development apparatuses, such as national institutions, technical experts, bureaucrats, capital investors and development planners (Cooper et al., 2001). Following the priorities of the Point IV programs, which sought to stem growing communist influence in rural areas, international development agencies, including USAID, initiated several Village Development Programs (VDPs) in the 1950s and 1960s. In terms of development, these programs defined rural Nepal as “virgin land” or a “blank slate,” requiring a complete transformation (Mihaly, 1965). As the agents of change and

<sup>29</sup> One of the priority objectives of the RIDP was to develop strong developmental apparatuses in Nepal by providing skill-oriented technical training to development professionals, who could lead development activities effectively at local and regional levels. They were government officials, NGO workers, teachers, contractors and service providers who were sent to various places such as Kathmandu, India and the United States for several months to acquire specific technical knowledge related to RIDP’s objectives.

development in these areas, the VDPs trained more than 1,400 technical experts and planners by the end of the 1960s (USAID, 2001). However, the RIDP prioritized the need for a comprehensive approach to intellectual intervention, focusing on the production of not only the technical manpower but also the collective forces of bureaucrats, the private sector, policy makers and civil society institutions.

During the 1980s, the focus of the project shifted to training policy makers, elected officials, social activists and representatives of political groups. This might be understood as a step toward creating a developmental common sense. As Bum Kumari Budha, a member of parliament in the 1980s from the Rapti region remembers, “We participated in many training programs in Nepal and abroad, organized by the project, where they taught us what development was and how that should be done.” Echoing her experience, a local government representative recalls his days: “I participated in many training programs organized by the project as one of my main jobs at that time; there used to be training on something organized almost every month. It was in fact a good source of income for me.” (Interviewed in April 2011, Kathmandu).

*Table 5: Training provided by RIDP in the Rapti region (1981-1986)<sup>30</sup>*

<i>Training components</i>	<i>Training period (person/days)</i>
Agricultural extension facilitators	23,654
Lead farmers promotion	23,910
Livestock development facilitators	4,041
Para livestock technicians (farmers)	2,350
Forest management	7,210
Agricultural loan mobilization	2,506
Savings and credit groups	13,090
Irrigation management	5,000

<sup>30</sup> These trainings were provided to lead farmers, community leaders, local extension workers, women’s groups, middlemen, commercial producers, local teachers and youths. They ranged from a few-daylong empowerment training to skill-based training for several weeks or months.

Rural industrial production <sup>31</sup>	33,800
Leadership development (community)	16,160
Teachers training (for adult literacy)	2,600
Adult literacy classes <sup>32</sup>	>5,000 graduates

*Source: Project documents and evaluation reports of the RIDP (1980; 1987; 1995)*

As a final push to create a fully functional national ideological apparatus for developmental change, the RIDP invested massively in promoting the roles of private investors, consultant firms, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and capital investment during the 1980s and early 1990s (RIDP, 1990). The idea was to strengthen the capacity of NGOs and private investors so that they could establish a direct line of communication with peasants and foster a harmonious relationship in rural areas. This was meant to be an effective means of transmitting ideas, strategies, resources and everyday methods of achieving developmental changes effectively (USAID, 1995). Most of the training programs during that period focused on developing entrepreneurship and rural industries, putting emphasis on the ideas of decentralization and self-help. The project targeted all three components of the national system of developmental apparatuses – government bureaucracy, national policy makers, and the private sector and civil society. In doing so, they were successful in gaining additional power, legitimacy and control over the lives of rural peasants, and they could satisfy their own interests while also fostering the conditions for developmental hegemony.

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<sup>31</sup> The RIDP's main goal was economic growth and employment, and therefore it promoted rural industries, which were mainly household-based production units such as cotton crafts, woolen crafts, leather products, blacksmiths, carpentry, bamboos, cash crops, fruits, food processing and decorative goods.

<sup>32</sup> The adult literacy classes were run in the evening for two hours, six evenings a week. Classes were held for four to six months per batch, depending on the performance of the literacy groups formed in each village.

The two-layered system of intellectual interventions, composed of the local and national apparatuses introduced by the RIDP in the Rapti region, remained intact after the completion of the project. The system was effective in creating developmental common sense and relations of subalternity by institutionalizing skill-transfer training, empowerment and modern ways of thinking and behaving. Nevertheless, through these processes, the intellectual interventions generated a number of intended and unintended consequences in peasant communities. One of the important consequences of this process was that it further destabilized and challenged the already contested feudal hierarchies, power domination and exploitation, by openly exposing some of the constraints of the existing social systems and extending the networks of peasant communities within and outside the region.

The story of Comrade Lal, who originally comes from a village in the southern part of the Rolpa district and now lives in Thabang, illustrates this process:

With the support and inspiration of the RIDP facilitator, a group of like-minded students, including Lal, formed a youth club with the idea of promoting health, sanitation and literacy in the village. The group received training, where he learned what the bottlenecks for a better life in the village were. “The *Rapti Ekikrit*, the RIDP, was an eye-opener for us to understand developmental barriers in our village,” says Lal. He started to work as an extension agent and a village-level paramedic. He thought he was going to bring many great changes to the village. But his course of life changed after he met an underground communist activist in the 1980s. The activist, who was a teacher in the district headquarters, met him when he was traveling to different villages as an extension

worker. The teacher was very impressed by his commitment, skills, enthusiasm and interpersonal relations. He was invited to participate in various meetings of the peasant groups in the coming years, where he realized that the peasants were deeply unhappy about their exploitation, especially by the landlords, moneylenders and state police. It was at that moment when he realized that the loan scheme of the RIDP and programs for rural industries, commercial production and cash crops were not benefiting the peasants, even though the RIDP was fairly popular because of its adult literacy, women's group and health and sanitation programs. The inspiration for change developed by the RIDP led him to join the Maoist movement. He is currently the head of the development wing of the party in the region. Lal says, "Many people who were trained by the RIDP joined the movement. But not everybody; some supported the government. But training was crucial for us to make our political decisions. When the eyes are open, they don't see only one thing." (Interviewed on June 11, 2010, Thabang).

Even though such programs of empowerment raised voices against the feudal social structures and governance of the region, they primarily aimed to justify the necessity of developmental change by introducing the idea of linear progress and prosperity. At the same time, these programs tremendously increased peasants' expectations and allowed participants to openly discuss ways to transform society. The sheer number of participants in training and empowerment was so huge that it created a foundation to turn new ideas into common sense. But, methodologically, empowerment had to demonstrate what was lacking and insufficient in the lives of the participants, and it motivated them to look for other options for solidarity and struggle. Additionally, the developmental ideological apparatuses at various scales created a confrontational status

quo between the providers and recipients of empowerment. In fact, the starkly visible differences between the actual subordinated positions of the local “militias of development” and the national development facilitators and expatriates further reinforced the already contentious relationship between the state and peasants in the Rapti region.

The intellectual interventions of the RIDP were constantly redefined to keep up with the rebellious politics and subjectivities in the Rapti region. Organic intellectuals, especially school teachers, community elders, peasant leaders, group organizers and literate and empowered development workers, used development for the interpellation of revolutionary ideas, producing rebellious subjects to spread growing contestation between the state and peasants. The state’s brutality during the 1980s drove these articulating moments. In this period, the regional disciplinary apparatuses, including the police, military, court, administrative authority and elite political representatives, were mobilized for years to suppress the sporadic peasant uprising and anti-state sentiments throughout the region.<sup>33</sup> For development workers and beneficiaries, the empowerment processes made them aware of the possibility of changes and generated tremendous enthusiasm. At the same time, through the active political articulation of those changes, they also became persuaded by the idea that the means of securing those goals was via capital and a changed mode of production.

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<sup>33</sup> This took the form of a massive military operation in 1982 in Thabang: Filing false charges against activists and leaders throughout the region in the 1980s and 1990s, mobilization of local gangs against peasant gatherings and political activities and continuous police repression by establishing police posts in remote areas were some of the stark forms of direct repression in the Rapti region.

Women's empowerment was the main focus of the RIDP because they were not only identified as historically dominated in patriarchal Nepali society but also considered as effective, persuasive and honest carriers of developmental changes.

For example, the story of a village in Dang district explains how a women's group turned into a rebellious force:

Shanti Chaudhari was first invited to join the literacy group in the 1980s, and later she became active in saving and credit groups and a community forestry user group. Only women were encouraged to manage these groups, with the idea of demonstrating that women were as effective as development leaders as men, particularly in promoting village literacy, entrepreneurship and resource management. This model was used to showcase the successful community-based development programs in the Dang area. Shanti and her team received training in leadership, women's rights, entrepreneurship, transparency, empowerment and market linkages. The groups' performance was highly lauded, providing additional political power to the women's groups in village matters. As Shanti remembers, "The open discussions about patriarchal domination in family and community also led them to think about patriarchal state, exploitation by the contractors and also the lack of change in our livelihoods." The groups' meetings were where they used to talk about ongoing political processes and the difficulties they were experiencing in the village. "We fought against the *Kamaiya* system, bondage labor, and later worked as underground militias of the Maoist movement," one of the members recalls (group discussion in December 2010, Dang). The village became known as "the Maoist village."

The interpellation of rebellious subjectivities within peasant communities was the outcome of the articulation of both the rising expectations of the empowered developmental subjects and the growing exploitation of peasants by the state, landlords and capital in the Rapti region. In this process, the adult literacy classes took a lead, providing a forum for intellectual discussions and planting the seeds of alternative conceptions of transformation. Additionally, professional community groups, such as women's groups, progressive farmers' groups, community forestry groups, seed associations, saving and credit groups and livestock groups, were created to perform specific aspects of development, also playing a central role in the rebellious articulation of change. Despite the huge success of the RIDP in empowering the peasants to embrace developmental ideas and trajectories, it could not stop the emergence of the Maoist movement in 1996, which was what the project had aimed to do since its conception.

### **Journey from *Kamaiyas* to Maoist rebel**

The growing uprising of the *Kamaiyas* in the southern plain areas of Rapti contributed substantially to spreading the Maoist movement in the Terai belt. The Tharu peasants, as explained in Chapter Two, are the dominant ethnic group in the plains, and they were historically marginalized and exploited as *Kamaiyas* (bondage labors) for decades by the landlords. Even though the RIDP was not vocal in raising the issue of *Kamaiyas* under the framework of human rights and indigenous movements, as many other organizations did in the late 1990s<sup>34</sup>, it was involved in creating alternative jobs,

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<sup>34</sup> The *Kamaiya* system became a human-rights issue and a shame to modern development in the 1990s. Numerous national and international organizations, including the International Labor Organization, the Human Rights Commission and international donor communities, intensified their pressure to abolish the

income-generating activities, literacy classes and the production of hybrid seeds, so that the conditions for bondage labor would be abolished (see Fujikura, 2001; Rankin, 1999). But most importantly, the community-based organizations established to achieve these developmental goals became the foundation not only for the abolition of the *Kamaiya* system but also for spreading the Maoist movement among Tharu peasants throughout the region. The series of uprisings against the landlords that began in the 1950s grew into massive defiance and public uprisings during the 1990s, leading to the end of the *Kamaiya* system in 2000.<sup>35</sup> As a part of the resettlement schemes, many European organizations initiated various developmental activities, especially empowerment training, skill transfer, self-employment, production of cash crops and commercialization of forest products. The recently freed *Kamaiyas* found these programs appealing in their struggles for liberation from the direct physical control of the landlords, but they continued to suffer from lack of means of livelihood, social dignity and respect. The ex-PLA members reveal that, as a strategy of continuing their struggles for livelihood and dignity, many of them joined the Maoist revolution in the 1990s.

In the Tharu language, *Kamaiya* refers to those individuals who are hardworking and would perform physically challenging work, especially land tilling, clearance and cultivation. Since the 1950s, the landlords who migrated from the hills had exploited them as bondage laborers by the name of *Kamaiyas* (see Chaudhari, 2010; Fujikura,

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system by introducing legal measures and also generating developmental opportunities for the *Kamaiya* families.

<sup>35</sup> After a one-month long picket of the Singh Darbar – the Prime Minister’s office in Kathmandu - by hundreds of *Kamaiyas* and continued protests in the districts by the *Kamaiya* families for several months, the government was forced to announce the ban on the *Kamaiya* system in Nepal. It promised to provide land and compensation for their resettlement. More than 200,000 *Kamaiyas* who came under the scheme of development were freed.

2001, Dhakal, 2000; Robertson and Mishra, 1997). Not all *Tharu* families were *Kamaiyas* of the landlords, but many of them were forced to work as sharecroppers after their lands were confiscated in the name of recovering property from the loan defaulters. In most cases, the landlords devalued their properties below the total amount of loans, and, in return, families were asked to pay back the loans by working as bondage labor for the landlords. But once the families were forced to work as *Kamaiyas*, they were never released, under the pretext that interest on the loan grew to more than the value of what they offered as bondage labor. The state facilitated that process as an effective measure to achieve a complete subjugation of *Tharu* peasants who had been historically staging various protests and uprisings in the region. Nevertheless, as revealed by community elders, those *Tharus* who were outside the *Kamaiya* system continued their struggles against the state and the landlords through defiance, noncooperation, alcoholism and innocence, which occasionally erupted as sporadic armed revolts.

One of the *Tharu* leaders who led the uprising of 1961 in Dang valley remembers, “We used to guard our lands in a group where everybody was armed with knife, stick and stone. We kicked out some of the land grabbers away from our area, but later they used the police against us. They reported us as dangerous communist guerillas; in fact, we just wanted our land.” Despite these resistance movements, the number of *Kamaiyas* continuously grew throughout the Terai belt, especially during the 1970s.

A *Tharu* peasant highlights the fact that the *non-Kamaiya Tharus* continued their system of extended family group living at a higher rate than before. It was a strategy of protecting themselves from the encroachment of the landlords and the state. In pursuing

multiple strategies of struggles, the Tharu families adopted alcohol drinking as an excuse for violent resistance. As one of the elder *Tharu* peasants says, “We increased our alcohol consumption tremendously in the 1960s so that the non-alcoholic, upper-caste landlords would be afraid of us” (interviewed on August 10, 2010, Dang). Such informal strategies of resistance were understood as their naïve positions and symptoms of backwardness in the discourse of development in the 1970s. As a comprehensive intervention in the region since the 1970s, the RIDP implemented various income-generating activities among the non-Kamaiya Tharus mainly in the Dang Valley. The Kamaiyas were not target beneficiaries, as they were fully controlled by the landlords. But the non-Kamaiya Tharus were in strong solidarity with the Kamaiyas *via* cultural practices, marriages and the reconnecting of kinship lineages. The landlords believed (probably falsely) that such practices were not threatening to their control.

With the entry of the non-Kamaiya Tharus into the developmental programs in the early 1980s, the RIDP started an empowerment campaign only for Tharu communities in the Dang Valley. The RIDP entered into the area by forming a youth club in Dumri village, primarily to implement adult literacy classes and spread ideas of cultivating high-quality vegetable, fruit and cash crops (see Fujikura, 2001). According to Fujikura (2001), an influential young man, Dilli Chaudhari, led the organization, which, with the support of the RIDP’s developmental programs, started to mobilize youth for various development activities. Those who were mobilized also used to participate in local-level, sporadic confrontations with the landlords. Through their connection to Kamaiyas, the issues of freedom and livelihood started to emerge as points of discussion in local gatherings for development activities. Even though the club continued to implement the

RIDP programs for a few years, the local youths were not fully contained by developmental ideas alone. As a result, they expanded the organizational structure of the club, developing it as an advocacy NGO that covered Tharu peasants of more than six districts with more than 130,000 active members by the early 1990s (Fujikura, 2001).<sup>36</sup> As soon as the NGO expanded its reach to the entire Tharu community, the *Kamaiya* liberation became its main agenda. Massive financial support was poured in through this organization, as it was seen as the most effective institution to reach to the Tharu communities. *Kamaiyas* started to come out onto the streets, rallying for their freedom, which eventually led to the collapse of the *Kamaiya* system. *Kamaiyas* were freed by the end of 1990s.

The story did not end there. Dilli Chaudhari and the entire BASE leadership, who also were indirectly affiliated with the Congress Party of Nepal, were fully integrated into the national and international development ideas. Anti-communist ideology was strongly rooted in their political beliefs and, therefore, they started promoting various rehabilitation schemes for liberated *Kamaiyas*, with the support of international donor organizations. The developmental schemes of rehabilitation and empowerment could not stop the growing aspirations of the recently freed *Kamaiyas*, however. Previously active peasant leaders and Tharu activists reemerged as a new force of organic intellectuals, who started to articulate the recent events in order to generate ideas for further political engagements regarding achieving means of livelihood, dignity and indigenous identity. In the process, the liberated *Kamaiyas* acquired both the confidence for further social

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<sup>36</sup> The youth club was later changed to the status of NGO, called Backward Society Education (BASE) in 1990.

transformation and possibility for collective political practices and solidarity. As one ex-Kamaiya who was also a Maoist militia said, “We saw that we were able to break the chain from our one leg, and then we decided to hammer on the other chain so that our both feet would become free” (interviewed on January 21, 2011, Dang). The Tharu peasants, especially the ex-Kamaiyas, strongly raised their voices to regain control over the land, water and forest resources. Freed but landless *Kamaiyas* joined the Maoist revolution as a strategy of establishing their rights and autonomy over the resources. Without any transition, the liberated *Kamaiyas* emerged as a decisive rebellious force in the southern plain area of the Rapti region.

## **Conclusion**

Developmental empowerment cannot eliminate the possibility of critical consciousness and revolutionary subjectivities. It must destabilize the social structures of the present to legitimize certain ideas and trajectories as universal with false promises about the future. The promises have to be false because development cannot be a desiring idea without reproducing the relations of subalternity. It makes the subjects feel inadequate and puts them in a state of becoming in order to generate their desire to become full beings. But these moments of destabilization, along with politically proactive re-articulation of such false promises by organic intellectuals, can generate the possibility of a new politics and a common sense of radical transformation. The emergence of the Maoist movement in the Rapti region of Nepal was one of the culminating moments of the history of the continuous articulation of change occurring at multiple levels. As demonstrated in this chapter, organic intellectuals, especially the local teachers, peasant

leaders and communist activists, continuously opened possibilities for the revolutionary movements. They did so by actively articulating the political relationship of the four major changes in the Rapti region: socio-economic conditions of the peasant communities, ecological subordination, commercialization of the commons and changing relations of domination and subordination. Development instigated and accelerated these changes, especially after the 1950s.

The conceptual insights of this chapter about the emergence of the Maoist revolution in Nepal in the 1990s has three main implications in understanding fissures in developmental ideology and the possibilities for subaltern politics. First, the idea of development inherently carries two contradictory forces representing double movements of developmental changes expressed through the simultaneous enrollment and othering of subalterns. This framework allows us to identify the enabling and disabling moments of developmental thoughts, trajectories and methodologies, especially by revealing the slippages, fissures and contradictions in its hegemonic processes. Second, the material and discursive conditions amenable to counter-hegemonic politics are not enough for instigating actual political activism; rather, it requires a conscious and active articulation of these conditions to generating a new conception of the world as commonsense. Both development and subaltern politics are the articulations of each other's political strategies. This framework reveals this internally intertwined relationship by exploring the conditions and moments of their co-constitutive existence. Finally, one must understand the ideological apparatuses and their functions to explain hegemonic and counter-hegemonic politics. Central to the emergence and spread of the Maoist revolution in Nepal were training and empowerment schemes of development interventions on the

one hand and the revolutionary roles of the schools, community centers and family networks on the other.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

What kinds of futures do we wish to inhabit, and how can we translate these imagined futures into the politics of the present? These questions can provide us with a framework for understanding the present and imagining the future. When struggles are articulated for generating alternative conceptions of the world around us, new political possibilities emerge. Even though imagined futures do not guarantee a desired change, they unsettle the present. Therefore, imagining is a political process of generating new possibilities. Development is a process of generating particular imaginings of the future as inevitable and even natural by constantly reproducing a particular relationship, position and consciousness as necessary ingredients of the present. In other words, development aims to control the present by unsettling the present lives and enrolling them into imagined futures. It must unsettle the present and maintain hierarchies and differences to reproduce its own conditions of existence. But these moments of rupture can operate as fertile ground for alternative imaginations, if they encounter other articulating forces that instigate political possibilities for transformative social changes. As this dissertation has demonstrated, development inherently carries both possibilities and, therefore, it survives with a double life that can instigate new politics.

In this concluding chapter, I summarize the main findings of this dissertation by elaborating some political implications of the idea of the double life of development. In each successive chapter, I have demonstrated that, at times, developmental changes can become a *hyper-political instrument* rather than an “anti-politics machine.” These

politically charged moments do not emerge independently (they require political translation) but always remain a possibility because of the subordination and differences inherently inbuilt in developmental hegemony. Knowing these moments of possibility requires “historicizing the events and the processes.”<sup>1</sup> This historicization requires understanding how the political conjuncture of multiple forces unfolds and how such historical processes generate conditions of possibility for a particular political articulation. Geography is central to these processes of unfolding, and therefore the prehistories and their relational connections to spatial specificities determine the political possibilities and counter-hegemonic effects of development.

### *Rebellious Development*

Development can be rebellious. It generates the conditions of possibility for rebellion not only by spurring resistance against the conditions of exploitation and oppression but by also generating negative consciousness of the process of “othering.” Let me be clear: Not every uprising requires development for it to emerge, and not everything development does generates rebellion. But counter-hegemonic possibilities are always present and inherently inbuilt in the historical material processes of development. As shown, particularly in chapter five, these elements can congeal into a political force if they are articulated into a broader political spectrum of resistance and

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<sup>1</sup> Gramsci’s idea of “absolute historicism” provides an effective framework to understand the historical conjuncture of development in generating different political possibilities in different place and time. In absolute historicism, the idea is that nothing should be reduced to empirical observation of the present (discourse, desire, production), but it should be understood as a historical process of coming to being (see Thomas, 2009). Althusser (1969), however, critiques the Gramsci’s idea of absolute historicism as a legacy of Hegelian totality, with the danger of denial of multiplicity and hierarchical unity.

movements. Development can also liberate people from some conditions of oppression by providing new ways of thinking.

One of the insights of this dissertation is an understanding of the co-constitutive relationship between developmental hegemony and relations of subalternity.

Developmental hegemony does not develop from economic changes alone. To reiterate Arnold's (2000) argument, hegemony operates through the power of ideas and colonization of minds. Therefore, the framework developed in this dissertation opens up a possibility of analyzing the relationship between development and subaltern politics beyond an economically determinist view, providing attention to consciousness, cultural and ideological dimensions. This might also explain the complexities in separating the "ruling class" from "subaltern groups" because, in developmental hegemony, subalterns become a part of the "social constellation" but in a subordinate role (see Hall, 1997). As a desiring machine, development generates consent for domination through the common sense of dominant groups rather than sheer dominance of elite classes. In this process, the local is constantly discouraged or effaced, and the external is validated or legitimized.

Subalternity involves both economic and cultural aspects of subordination at ideological, as well as material, levels. It is not the relations of subordination as inferior in social rank but the positionality of exploitation economically and culturally, indicating development's subjects that are yet to be found, empowered and advanced toward the path taken by already developed society. As the case of the Rapti region of Nepal demonstrates, subalternity is an outcome of a persistent denial of the role played by development's subjects and their enrollment with subordinated position. It is internal to

development processes. The framework of the double life of development allows us to understand how development produces the others as different and seemingly “autonomous” subjects for integrating them into the universal with the relationship of subordination.

### *Rethinking peasant politics*

In orthodox explanations, the peasants’ conception of the world and their social positioning are generally identified as the blockades of history and the symbols of stagnation marked by subjugation, fragmentation and a lack of enthusiasm beyond basic survival. In enlightenment thought, the peasantry is understood as ambiguous, subservient and irrational, lacking the capacity to think and operate under Reason, and therefore requiring a systematic disciplining and transformation toward rationality and progress. In Marxist tradition, peasants lack the productive dynamism and, therefore, they are indifferent from each other (lack of communities), fragmented in thinking, and subjugated to and exploited by the ruling class.<sup>2</sup> In this account, a dynamic revolutionary force of the proletariat is essential to provide leadership to the peasants and liberate them from the conditions of exploitation, fragmentation and backwardness.

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<sup>2</sup> In mainstreamed Marxist explanation, the peasants are considered subordinated to the proletariat working class as incapable selfish and isolated mass. See especially Marx’s “The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” and Lenin’s “What is to be done.” Marx termed the peasants as “sack of potatoes,” highlighting their revolutionary potential but incapable in leading by themselves. Lenin provided the role of political leadership to the proletariat as vanguards of the revolution, to mobilize revolutionary potential of the peasants. The Marxist account of the peasantry is still dominated by the idea that peasant movements are sporadic and episodic reaction to the exploitation, rather than long-term revolution. However, the sustained and powerful revolutionary uprisings especially in the global South have always been led by the peasants, and this trend is rising, especially after the massive neoliberal encroachment of peasant lives by the market and the state.

Development has created qualitatively different and new political environments, subjectivities, theoretical conditions and everyday possibilities. As this dissertation has shown, the peasants do not reside outside the purview of development, and they are also not just fragmented, heterogeneous rebel subjects, but rather they can be organized rebellious forces that can generate revolutionary power in different times and spaces. These shifting political dynamics and social structures demand new ways of thinking and conceptualizing peasant politics and revolutionary forces. Subalterns are the majority of the global populations, and they have been experiencing a rapid degradation in their social, economic and political lives because of increased environmental vulnerability, dispossession, marginalization and social domination. In this process, development has reworked social structures and relations of production, complicating subaltern categories such as peasantry, proletariat factory workers and “tribal” groups (*adivasis*). But the ever-increasing social revolt and popular uprisings have been staged and sustained mainly by these complex identities of peasants, tribal groups and unemployed youth, who were traditionally understood to be “conservative” and “materially unfit” for the revolutionary leadership and consciousness.

Such blurring of the boundaries is a result of combination of multiple forces, such as a large-scale peasant migration for seasonal work within and outside the countries (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 2003), successful diffusion of developmental desire and persuasion in rural areas (Pigg 1992), “rural industrialization” for cheap labor and raw materials (Hart 2002, Arrighi 2007), commercialization of the common resources and integration of small peasantry into industrial production and circulation (Li, 2010). As a result, complex and overlapping social categories, material conditions and production

relations have emerged, demanding a new political theorization of revolutionary practices. The shifting boundaries of the categories of subalterns, peasants and proletariat workers demand a new conceptualization of the revolutionary movements in the backdrop of the developmental reworking of post-colonial societies.

Considering the lack of active leadership in Italian politics, Gramsci once characterized the peasants as:

“always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only "permanent" victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately. In reality, even when they appear triumphant, the subaltern groups are merely anxious to defend themselves’.” (Gramsci, 1971:55)

By highlighting a relational positionality and conditions of subjugation, Gramsci demonstrates the precarious nature of subalternity, in which subordinated positions are maintained by continuously enrolling the interests, desire, common sense, anxiety and discontent of the subalterns into the structure of hegemonic domination. But this explanation imposes too much emphasis on the political organizing of the urban working classes and their efforts in generating new radical consciousness for breaking the conditions of subordination. The conjunctural unity among subalterns is more apparent than understood, especially in peasant society.

### *Writing prehistories*

Prehistories show how processes unfold and arrive at a conjuncture. Futures are the historical unfolding of the past. Prehistories not only provide a framework of understanding how certain political conjunctures are formed but also allow the

articulation of ideas into common sense. Writing prehistories of particular events or processes, however, is not about discovering new subjectivities or translating “pre-political” fragments into “authentic” historical texts. It is rather a process of understanding how multiple conditions and societal elements emerge and congeal into a collective force at present. Prehistories help us to understand the methods, reasons and players involved in generating the present possibility. When an event unfolds, the historically involved fragments may lose their separate identity; it is only through collective appearance that their inner essence is speculated. Recovering those fragments is essential not only to understand the history of the event (such as the Nepali Maoist revolution) but also to expedite the future course and possibilities.

As a way of summarizing the importance of writing prehistories of movements such as the Maoist revolution of Nepal to understanding the present situation, we can relate to Gramsci’s idea of historicity in unfolding political ideas. He says:

“Ideas and opinions are not spontaneously "born" in each individual brain: they have had a centre of formation, of irradiation, of dissemination, of persuasion—a group of men, or a single individual even, which has developed them and presented them in the political form of current reality.” (Gramsci, 1971:192-93)

Rebellious ideas and practices developed over a long period of time, consolidating various forces and elements, which took the form of Maoism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century in Nepal. Through the exploration of the history of peasant uprisings and micro-political processes in the Rapti region, this dissertation has highlighted some insights into how abstract political ideas are translated into everyday praxis and idioms. These prehistories not only reject evolutionist accounts that portray peasant rebellions as primitive, but they

also deny the claim that revolutions always emerge from urban areas and that working classes are the vanguards of change. For example, in Nepal, urban intellectuals and working classes were enrolled into the movement as it grew, but the Nepali Maoist revolution was a consolidated unity of diverse agrarian uprisings with deep political histories. Therefore, writing prehistories is not a documentation of what happened in the past, but a recuperation of subaltern politics with a new understanding. Many prehistories of movements around the world are waiting to be (re)written and translated into new understanding of the politics. But again, writing them from the margin could be more generative of the processes.

#### *Towards Gramscian geographies*

Spatial analysis is integral to Gramsci's historicist approach to political practice. Gramscian ideological and political "infrastructure" mainly builds around the ideas of hegemony, common sense and articulation, which collectively generate the central milieu of politics and are unthinkable outside the geographical relations and spatialities. Recognizing the political importance of Gramscian geographical axes, political economists have recently increased their attention to Gramsci's approach to philosophy, economy and politics (Jessop, 2005; Wainwright, 2008; Gidwani, 2008; Morton, 2007; Hart, 2002; Gill, 2003; Mann, 2009). Extensions of Gramsci's framework in exploring geographies of revolutionary politics (such as Nepali Maoist uprising) might allow us not only to better understand the conditions of possibility of such political conjunctures but also extend Gramscian politics itself.

Ahistorical approaches to social events and processes carry the danger of reducing political meaning to the narrow and immediate reading of economic “base” and “superstructure” (see Thomas, 2009), whereas aspatial formulation of these processes denies the possibility of contingent universality (or the unity of multitude), retrospectively convoluting with the idea of universal totality (of the Hegelian Spirit). Gramscian geography could provide a framework to avoid these theoretical pitfalls by developing a different position, which might be called *historico-spatial* approach to political economy. As Gramsci’s wide variety of writings directly aims to generate political possibilities that deliberately alter subaltern lives, geographical relationships provide an important condition necessary for political activism. Hegemonic projects are spatial, and the relations of domination and subordination are driven by geographies of production, differentiation and also contestation. Geography stands as a centripetal force in providing the historical material unity of the fragments and generating new counter-hegemonic consciousness and political conjunctures.

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