

“KILL ONE, HE BECOMES ONE HUNDRED”

Martyrdom as Generative Sacrifice in the Nepal People’s War

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Abstract: In Nepal, war is a sacrifice. The warrior maintains a direct and unique relationship with the divine, since in warfare he makes a sacrificial gift of his own person, the *bali dān*—a gift that results in a ‘noble death’. The warrior can offer the sacrifice or be offered in sacrifice. In Maoist ideology, death loses its character of reciprocity since the interchangeability of victims who die honorably on either side of the battle has been eliminated. The asymmetry of death, the one-sided sacrificial nature of the war, is one of the features that distinguishes the People’s War from those that preceded it. Through Maoist poetry and Maoist warriors’ diaries, this article explores the shift introduced by the People’s War from the figure of the ‘hero’, traditionally attached to the warlike realm, to the new figure of the ‘martyr’, and shows the apocalyptic nature of the Maoist cultural production.

Keywords: ascetic, asymmetry, depersonalization, heroism, martyrdom, People’s War, poetry

Launched in February 1996, the People’s War has, over the course of 10 years, caused at least 13,000 deaths. The Nepalese Maoists have a dual organization, comprising a political wing (the Communist Party of Nepal, CPN [Maoist]) and a military wing (the People’s Liberation Army, PLA), both of which are under the leadership of Chairman Prachanda, a Nepalese Brahman who gave his name to a local adaptation of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism called the Prachandapath, or Path of Prachanda.¹ Although it attaches significance to dialectic, on a theoretical level the Prachandapath often appears as a simplification of Marxism, using binary oppositions such as oppressed-oppressor, proletariat-feudal, and reactionary-revolutionary. In the military realm, the same binary



view has been developed by one of the highest-ranking officers within the PLA, who believes that only two types of war should be distinguished: just wars and unjust wars (Pasang 2003).²

Furthermore, these categories are not well defined and cannot easily be applied to the multi-ethnic, multi-caste, and rather homogeneously poor society of Nepal (if we consider only the hilly part of the country).³ But it seems that the Nepalese Maoist movement combines this Marxist ideology, from which it borrows its vocabulary and many of its ideas (in particular, the scientific nature of its thought and methods and the historic nature of its actions), with a mystic theory that stresses the thaumaturgic effect of sacrifice and its ability to effect political and social transformation. These two combined components provide a means to produce great men—in the first register, the thinkers of the movement, and, in the second, any anonymous peasant, who can attain post-humous and eternal glory through martyrdom or self-sacrifice.

In Nepal in the past, war was equated with sacrifice. This equivalence was made explicit in various practices, such as the conventional understanding that death on the battlefield does not pollute the relatives as death normally does (D. Sharma 2003), or the act of offering the body of slain enemies to a temple, which was observed by a Capucin father in the eighteenth century. The warrior's engagement is still described in present-day Nepal as a sacrificial gift of his own person, or *bali dān*. The warrior's sacrifice is not a substitution as in the Brahmanic theory but an alternative: to offer the sacrifice (to kill) or to be offered in sacrifice (to die). The unknown presides over this alternative, which, in both cases, leads to glory. The relation is symmetrical and, as such, close to the idea of substitution (by which the victims are interchangeable). But with the Maoist ideology, death loses its character of reciprocity: one's own warriors are noble and heroic, while the valor of the opponents is denied or scorned. Whereas the rebel reaches a 'noble death' and becomes an 'eternal martyr', the Royal Nepalese Army soldier or the oppressor is 'eliminated' or 'cleansed', or meets an 'infamous' death.

The one-sided sacrificial nature of the People's War is a striking feature that distinguishes it from previous warfare. However, I would argue that although this asymmetry is actively promoted by both sides as a condition that allows civil war or fraternal killing,⁴ the perception of the conflict is confused, even on the Maoist side. Although they demonize the 'enemy' in an outrageous way in their weekly publications, the Maoists also depict themselves through demonic imagery. Thus, they often portray themselves as the well-known demon killed by the Goddess: every drop of blood that touches the ground gives birth to another demon. The Maoist martyr's blood, similarly, forms blood-seeds (*raktabij*) that germinate in the land and give birth to 100 warriors. Death and destruction are seen as creative in compounded ways.

Within the People's War, sacrifice aims at creating a better world on earth through its generative power of multiplication, which will help realize the 'dreams of the martyrs'. This expectation contrasts with the promise of a personal celestial paradise to those who have offered their lives as martyrs within the Muslim or Christian traditions. The Nepalese revolutionary warriors appear

in many ways as a type of renouncer. They detach themselves (*tyâg garna*) from all the selfish components of life and even from their material bodies, which they offer to the war sacrifice ‘on the altar (*vedi*) of the revolution’. Their renouncement is motivated by altruism. They act for the liberation of the people and for the advent of a better world in a future that they will probably not enjoy. But the Maoist journals also stress the benefits obtained by those who accept voluntary death. Self-sacrifice confers grandeur, shining glory, and an abstract sort of immortality on the fallen. It transforms them into stars that light up the dark world.

At present we do not have a clear picture of the principal motivations that inspire individuals to join the PLA,⁵ but several Maoist authors state that “a real culture of the martyrs has been created” by the People’s War.⁶ In fact, this ‘culture’ is sometimes understood in terms of the agricultural meaning of ‘cultivation’, as the blood of the martyrs is said to “irrigate the culture (*kheti*) of the People’s War” (Rajesh 2002). The idea is sometimes presented as an imperative: the Path of Prachanda that has been planted in the Nepalese soil must be irrigated with the martyrs’ blood in order to grow (B. Sharma 2004). This culture (in both senses of the word) is fueled and constructed in the abundant Maoist literature and in ceremonies, memorial parks, songs, and poems. It is the poetry in particular that I explore in order to understand the symbolic constructions that lead individuals to offer their life in sacrifice and to grasp how a transformation has been effected from the figure of the hero (*bir*), traditionally associated with the military realm, to that of a new figure, the martyr (*shahid*).⁷

Without valorization of military sacrifice, few wars could be undertaken. Its instrumentalization obviously depends on the form of the combat and, in particular, on the mode of recruitment. In the Nepalese revolutionary movement, which has lasted now for more than 10 years without the immediate prospect of seizing power, the horizon of victory and of a possible rebuilding of society seems far away. The Maoists have not been able to mobilize the masses.⁸ A military stalemate, whereby neither side can produce a victory, has been established, and chronic guerrilla warfare prevails. The Maoists present their goals as ‘a remote and luminous horizon’ or ‘a mountain’ that one endeavors to climb toward its unreachable top. Since enrollment in the PLA is based on free will, there must be very strong symbolic motivations to induce recruits to offer themselves deliberately in sacrifice for a cause that is not likely to be successful any time soon. One can hardly give credence to the alternative notion that the rebel villagers are naive, suicidal, or seeking monetary recompense.

The Maoist writings that might aid in deciphering these inspirations tend to be clandestine, and some are not easy to access; nevertheless, significant portions are available on the Internet.⁹ The two main newspapers in Nepali follow the same model, comprising a first part on current events, then theoretical pieces on Malema (Marxism-Leninism-Maoism), and, finally, a more popular section, including reports from the battlefields, extracts of revolutionary soldiers’ diaries, homage to the martyrs, and, invariably, poetry. This last category, in which ordinary individuals express themselves, provides most of

the material studied here. Particular importance is accorded to poetry because of its perceived role in propagating the revolutionary movement. These revolutionary poems are “written with the blood of the martyrs” and “born from the ignited torch of the revolution,” as Pandava Thapa (2004) explains. He then adds: “Literature has a rapid influence on the people. This is why the feelings conveyed in poetry fill people’s life. If it were not thus, as our Chairman says, this type of literature would be poisonous” (ibid.). Stanzas selected by Thapa for their “vivifying” effect include the following lines, addressed by the poet to her martyred sister (ibid.):

The bullets that riddled your chest
made me swear to become bloodthirsty,
and I am focused while waiting on shortening the life of the butchers
who put you to death.

Prominence is given to poems written by close relatives of martyrs and more even to those composed by the fallen. Poetry is understood as a kind of communication between the living and the dead: the messages of (or to) the martyred dead acquire a supernatural force, comparable to the glory of their death.

More than any other form of artistic expression, poetry is a vehicle of emotion in Nepal. In the villages, youngsters frequently open a diary containing this treasury in a very touching way. Though the practice of penning poetry is widespread, I do not exclude the possibility that the ‘popular’ register recorded within the Maoist journals may be pure propaganda, that the texts are perhaps written by a small number of leaders charged with this molding role. It is noticeable that the homage addressed to beloved close kin who have died or disappeared expresses the same determination and always finishes in a very stereotypical way—with a solemn promise of revenge, the fulfillment of which can be executed only by an engagement in the People’s Army. Likewise, most of the published letters of warriors, which were written before leaving for combat, display an astonishing determination and not the least sign of fear.

Alternatively, one can ponder whether the members of the Maoist movement are so conditioned that they all produce the same type of writings and profess the same convictions in the same terms. It is likely that no one will ever know for certain. Yet given the emphasis attached to the role of poetry by the chairman of the CPN (Maoist) and supreme commander of the PLA, it is probable that considerable control is exercised on the public outpourings of the personnel.

However, this issue is secondary to the exploration of the impact of such publications. A newspaper such as *Janadesh* is very widely diffused today, and its sheets cover the walls of many peasant homes in rural Nepal, even those of households that do not seem to be all that revolutionary. One can thus be assured that its contents have a significant effect on its readers. The mystical cosmology of the Nepalese revolutionary universe is manifested in these printed artifacts, and we can reasonably consider that its message reflects—and influences—the spirit that leads to ‘the gift of oneself’.

The Martyred Body

Violence and martyrdom occupy a large place in this literature, which defines nature as well as the history of humanity as violent and war as a means to obtain political power. Although the Maoists present themselves as fundamentally superior to their 'enemies' in terms of military ability, they also view themselves as martyred people. Their violent actions are seen as a legitimate response to the long history of violence inflicted by the state on the people, who form a vast suffering ensemble, suddenly set ablaze. Thus, the martyred body is exalted as the image of those who revolt and, in a metaphorical way, symbolizes the revolution, the motherland, the truth.

Within the deepest darkness,
Truth is screaming,
Truth is crying,
But from its eyes it is no more tears but powder that has started to flow.
Those who seek to stop it, in the name of the supposed affront,
Each day assassinate people,
So that there is now no river or valley,
Which is not soaked with the blood of Truth, and strewn with its bones.
But,
The pools of Truth's blood, the pieces of its bones,
Having turned into bombs, here and there are exploding. (Svalok 2003)

This 'body of the revolution', of which each member forms a part, materializes at large popular assemblies that often take place around the homage to martyrs. These gatherings—at which relatives of martyred soldiers, as well as wounded soldiers and their close relations, appear—are organized by the 'family of martyrs' (*shahid parivâr*) or by the 'association of self-sacrifice' (*balidân sangh*). At these meetings, all listen to the speeches and appreciate the honorable attitude of this core of afflicted people, who are placed in a front row, their faces covered with vermilion powder symbolizing the blood of the martyrs. These living martyrs call for revenge and ask for blood, enhancing the anger of the assembled people. The mothers of the martyrs, in particular, seem to hold the role of *pasionaria*. One speaker, the mother of the martyr Vinita (alias Mandhu Bhattarai), addressed the revolutionary warriors in these terms: "My sons must bring the hot blood of the enemies to me, because it is necessary that I drink some before dying."¹⁰

Family Ties

The martyr forms a creative embryo that is propagated and extended in an inexorable way, because each of his 'blood-seeds' gives birth to new warriors. Within the family of the martyrs, as many texts testify, real kinship links are first of all activated to perpetuate the movement. A poem addressed to her martyred younger sister by Simana Sharma (2003) reveals this theme.

Comrade Shyam,
Your unfulfilled great ambitions,
We will carry them out surely;
We will carry the rifle of your shoulder,
The red flag that you raised with your arm,
We will hold it up,
On the bloody way that you traced,
We will walk ...
All the engagements that you were yet to achieve,
We will carry them out,
And even if it is necessary to die for the country and the people,
We will die.

Interestingly, the sibling kinship is effaced in the poem itself and is revealed to the world only by the journalist who introduces the poem. This subtle mechanism, designed to mark the family tie while highlighting its obliteration, seems to fall under a strategy of depersonalization.

Depersonalization helps widen fraternal bonds to include the whole revolutionary family¹¹ and induces all members to share deep and innermost emotions. At the same time, it encourages the individual not to consider the loss of a close relation in a personal way, but to resituate the loss within a wider context. Thus, when faced with the question, “What were your feelings when you learned the news of the martyrdom of your life companion and central member of the party?” posed by a journalist from *Janadesh*, Niru answered:

It is certain that we are social and material beings and one cannot deny that we have feelings, emotions and aversions. But rather than considering individually my life companion as a close relation of mine, he was an activist cherished by the proletariat ... I do not deny that separation with his material form caused me sorrow ... but when learning the news of his martyrdom, I remembered the 10,000 heroes and heroines who spilled their blood in the People’s War ... and I told myself that without the overflowing of these million drops of blood the Prachanda Path could not have developed. (Darlami 2004)

Like many Maoists questioned in similar circumstances, Comrade Niru does not indulge in any sentimentalism. In their poems or farewell letters, the soldiers themselves often request their kinfolk to refrain from tearful lament and instead to continue the struggle as a sign of homage. In his “Message from the Battlefield,” Ksitij (2004) says:

Father, whatever happens at the end,
do not let tears flow in front of the enemy,
sorrow is our friend ...
rather than tears, anger should come out of your eyes.

At the same time, however, another strand of narrative pays close attention to the sorrow experienced by close kin on the occasion of a martyr’s death. The rhetoric is very stylized in this case, too, with the sorrow being described

at length to show how it is transmuted into energy, anger, and the determination to take revenge. It is in this way, in particular, that martyrdom is said to bring energy (*urjâ*) to the revolution. Take the wounded Kalpana’s account of her reaction to the news of her comrade’s death while he fought with another brigade in the same battle.

When this brother told me that my friend had received martyrdom with the face of a kitten, I received a blow in the chest twice as painful as the one I had received in the hand. During sleeping time ... I had the impression that an enormous weight was crushing me ... I started to have convulsions, I tried to shake my body, but it was not a dream, it was reality. In spite of my convulsions, I heard this news in truth. Out of our two hearts, we had formed one in the last year, so I had the feeling that a large stone had struck my head, that my legs were trapped in mud, and that the sky was filled by enormous black clouds. Was I then asleep or did I walk? Did my friends carry me? I do not know anything of it, but I found myself at the last place where we had spoken, my friend and I. There I searched all around me, but this time was quite completed ... Even if the martyrdom is inevitable, the eyes roll when considering the way by which it comes. But I made his death run into my being and finding myself as a member of the family of the martyrs, I experienced pride.

By his death, his physical body was offered, but it made him survive. This is why ... having transformed my tears into anger, having glued the pieces of my heart with the help of the Thought, I am now walking on the path which he showed ... I will fulfill the dream that he left unfinished ... Having offered my body, like Comrade Yoddha, I’ll know this moment and to mix my blood with his, on this path, bearing bag and rifle, the spirit embellished by the Great Thought, I’ve joined another war expedition. (Kalpana 2004)

The family of the martyrs is much wider than the circle of kinsmen. It includes all of the comrades, and thus the whole of the Maoist Party and Army, composing an assembly of ‘comrades’. One mother of a martyr therefore addressed all the fighters as ‘sons’—a pronouncement that shows how kinship ties are formed by the spilling of blood. Again, one of the top leaders in the PLA, Badal, placed the martyrs (and possibly their families) one generation above the living comrades by constituting the latter as “the progeny (*santân*) of the martyrs” (R. Thapa 2003).

The martyrs’ blood not only gives rise to new soldiers but also is elevated to the status of a holy creative substance, one generating new social or political structures. It brings strength and energy to the revolutionary movement, solidifies the earth upon which the revolution exists, and forms the foundations for the new revolutionary order.¹² As the martyrs are immortal, their blood, which contains their vital energy, is “a never drying blood” (Regmi 2003). Those engaged in the armed struggle incorporate this vital substance by collecting the martyr’s blood (or a handful of earth mixed with it, or a symbolic red powder) and placing it on the forehead as a visible sign of this unification. At this moment, too, one swears an oath to carry the martyr’s weapons and to fulfill his or her ‘dreams’.

The martyr thus not only survives in a spiritual form but also is physically replaced by other warriors. These new recruits adopt a new name, signifying a change of identity when entering into the party. They no longer belong to

themselves after this 'gift'. Despite such symbolic readjustments, once a party member dies, his or her familial links are reiterated in a complicated manner. The martyr's family is accorded a central place at the moment of homage, but the martyrs' mourning rituals are usually, it is said, not performed by relatives. This seeming innovation may be grounded in two facets of past practice: first, death on the battlefield was traditionally accorded purity, and, second, martyrs are likened to ascetics, figures understood to have burned their normal life away and secured immortality.

Comaraderie

Because of strong friendship ties, and also perhaps because it prefigures one's own fate, the loss of a comrade is evoked in extremely touching terms. Similar expressions of determination and feelings of revenge are then aroused. The texts of commemoration (*shahid gâthâ*) give the impression that the sentiment brought up by the experience of an alter ego's death is one way to transform loss and sorrow into destructive energy. At the same time, the publication of these intimate texts communicates this transformation and this energy to others.

The terms and the images employed are similar from one text to another: the "fire of sorrow burns in the spirit (*man*)"; on the chest (*châtî*) "weighs the heavy stone of pain"; the "soul (*âtmâ*) is besieged by separation"; "the cloud of the feelings, burst by the sorrow, makes a rain of tears fall." All of these impressions are said to spark the flame of "fury" and generate desire for "revenge."

How to start to describe the reality of the event? I am besieged by sorrow. In front of my eyes whirl the black clouds of emotion ... I remember the remark of Comrade Prachanda: "[W]ar is science, art and also feeling." In truth, for us the revolutionaries, the feelings are quite related to the science and the art of war. It is perhaps for this reason that it is difficult to manage the sorrow. Physical separation with my friend for life, my partner of war, Comrade Rejina, did not only pain me, it also gave birth to anger in me. Flames burn in my eyes. The tears which run from my eyes act as oil in [the fire of] my thought. Her heroic martyrdom brings energy to the People's War ... I am now disgusted by the enemy and full of a feeling of revenge. The physical body of Comrade Rejina is no more in front of us, we will not see her ever again in her material form, it left this earth. But if her physical body fell, her thought did not fall; rather, by giving her life in sacrifice for the people and the country, she obtained the privilege of inscribing her name in the pages of history. (Rima 2004)

The image of a burning fire within, one used repetitively to describe the sentiments of the soldier ready for war sacrifice, recalls the interiorization of the fire by the ascetic, who incorporates the sacrificial fire at the time of his initiation, the ultimate cremation fire, which forever detaches the individual from normal, mundane life. But the Maoist warrior's internal fire wholly destroys not only the selfish components of the individual, but also the enemies, the rotten regime. As such, it represents the fire of the end of time, or the ultimate warlike chaos before the Golden Age.

Human Weapons, Cast Indestructible

We are the volcano ready to explode,
We are the fire holders, the fire collectors,
Those who have nothing to lose,
But the wide world and all the rights to conquer ...
In us occur the tremors of a daring earthquake,
Our heart is filled with the powder of sorrow and fever
Which presses our spirit and causes the insurrection,
We have a bomb in place of the head. (Gyavali 2003)

At the same time that the body is offered in sacrifice, it thus becomes transformed into a terrible, explosive weapon, one forged in anger and set in iron. Such a martyr is Krishna Sen:

When I
Saw him
I saw iron.
As iron
I saw him hot
I saw him red
I saw him strong
I saw him
Effective as
A bullet. (Sushanta 2004)

Contrary to the 'heroes', the red soldiers are not just equipped with weapons—they are themselves the human weapons of the apocalypse. In this perception, nothing can affect the revolutionary soldier, whose destructive capacity is increased by his mutilation, just as the revolutionary Maoist Army grows from the repression directed against it.

Cut my hands, break my legs
Pull out my tongue, extract my eyes
I won't stop speaking, I won't stop walking
I'll write ever and ever,
I'll rather see better ...
Destroy villages
Make a river of blood flow ...
Blood-seeds will germinate. (Vivash Yatri 2003)

Beautiful Death

In the Nepalese Maoist philosophy, the meaning of human life is principally focused on death: achievements during lifetime and the value of human life are treated as negligible. Repetitively, the reader of Maoist literature is taught that to be born means to die and that self-sacrifice brings a meaning to this inescapable event. It is death that distinguishes the immortals from those whose fate is to be simply 'cleaned' (*saphâya garna*).

Human beings are born and then die ... No one can divert or stop it ... The only difference in death is for what purpose one dies, how one dies and which death brings honor. The one who considers that his personal interest is meaningless and ... who offers himself in sacrifice in the People's War, to this one death confers splendour of honor. Or the one who understood the definition of life and death and who understood that once born, it is necessary to die, only this one can know a splendid (*ojilo*) and elevated (*ucca*) death. In the class struggle for the liberation of the members of the oppressed class, more than 8,000 heroic sons and daughters of Mother Nepal sacrificed their life. The sacrifice and the renunciation of these sacrificed soldiers made it possible to reach the top of Everest ... The great warrior Comrade Rejina, having given up her pleasure and her material well-being, having understood that birth means death, is known by her death in the Great People's War, a death heavier than a mountain, higher than the top of Everest. (Rima 2004)

Thus, as part of their mobilizing strategies, the Maoist leaders propagate the idea that to die right now is not so terrible. The grandeur and heights of a splendid death are hence offered to the most humble peasants in the People's War.

Annually, since February 1996, the CPN (Maoist) also celebrates in a highly symbolic way the 'week of the martyrs', which starts on the day that the first official martyr of the People's War was killed. This great figure happens to be a young schoolboy, who was 14 years old at the time of his death and a Dalit (an 'untouchable'). The youth of this icon and his traditionally depressed caste status may contribute significantly to the popularity of life stories of martyrs.

In Nepal, the concept of martyrdom is clearly dependent on the revolt against an established power and thus on the imbalance in the conflict, one that pits the weak against the mighty. In the PLA representations, the first martyrs of Nepal are those who fought against the powerful Rana government, which they helped overthrow in 1951. In fact, the Maoists seek to federate all of the revolutionary movements under their own banner. Thus, the last day of the 'week of the martyrs' commemorates the peasant revolt of Jhapa, which occurred in 1972, well before the Maoists' own movement was born. In the context of the ongoing People's War, any person killed by governmental forces is conferred this status of martyr, even if he or she was not a member of the CPN (Maoist). As for the members of the CPN (Maoist), they are called martyrs and worshipped as such even if they have died by accident.¹³

Demonic Enemies

The development of this martyrology is made possible by the construction of an asymmetry between revolutionary forces and governmental forces, which is engineered through an emphasis on the enemy's radical alterity. Thus, one strand of representation denigrates the state soldiers by depicting them as cowards who run away, denying them the honorable status of warriors, in contrast with the revolutionary soldiers, who are ready to face the enemy and bare their chests. Another strand of imagery portrays the governmental forces

as mad assassins who kill everyone, from newborn babies up to grandmothers, just for pleasure (Rajesh 2002).¹⁴ They are even denied a human status through such disparaging and ill-omened designations as bloodthirsty lions (Anu 2002), vultures (Rima 2004),¹⁵ dogs, or jackals.

The dehumanization of the state forces is hammered in by referring to them 'demons' (*râkshash* or *dânava*) who drink blood, imbibe intoxicating alcohol, and eat human flesh. They are said to carry out man-hunting (Rajesh 2002), to throw little children into the fire, and to torture their prisoners in abominable ways. In this manner, the People's War is cast as a re-enactment of the war between human beings (*Mânava*) and demons (*Dânava*) (Bhagat 2002).

All of these demonic attributes peak and coalesce within the persona of the opposing side's supreme commander, the king. Since the royal massacre of June 2001 and the coronation of King Gyanendra (Gyane, for the Maoists), the conflict has become sharper. The king's effigy is regularly burned, and the *mise en scène* sometimes includes a collective séance of spitting and firing bullets over his image, after which he is symbolically cremated.¹⁶ Thus, the king has come to represent all the evils of the rotten state.¹⁷

While singing the song of devotion to the nation,
To use a dagger to kill her,
To divert the cultural and natural goods,
While posing as the guardian of nature
Hey, king of the sale of our country!
Even the vultures which will walk upon your corpse will be foreigners.
To give the title of heroism to slaughter,
To stamp on people, perched on Pashupati's bull,
To rape history
And drown truth in the Seti River to get rid of it
Hey, king of the landed properties!
Even the vultures which will walk upon your corpse will be foreigners.
To destroy the beautiful villages,
To have killed those who one envies and to sell their flesh.
While making offerings to the rivers Koshi, Gandaki and Karnali,
To sell their water and to drink blood
Hey, king of the butchers!
Even the vultures which will walk upon your corpse will be foreigners.
In the country of the red men, to display the black snakes' play,
To be delighted by the deaths which occur
In the poor and exploited villages,
Hey, king of the palaces!
Even the dog which will pour tears on your corpse will be a foreigner.
To go hunting in the villages with automatic weapons
And American helicopters
To make economic blockades of the remote and hungry villages
Hey, king of the oppressors!
Even the vultures which will walk upon your corpse will be foreigners.
Automatic weapons will not be able to save your government.
The assembled people will not be able to forgive you

Through the malediction of the bluebottles on your corpse,
Your corpse will not die.
This is why if you have some honor,
For your country, come with a machine-gun,
Come with a Nepal-made night-vision helicopter,
As for us, we will place a stone of the country on your grave!
We will make the vultures of our woods fly on your cadaver. (Subedi 2003)¹⁸

The widespread negation of the enemy's humanity enables the PLA to assert that 'to clean' is not to kill. As in the sacrificial context, murder is denied. Though in both contexts (Brahmanic sacrifice and the People's War) the violence is directed toward the unification of the collective and toward creating a better world, the victims are treated in a reverse way by the sacrificer. In the sacrificial context, the animal is treated as a human (or conscious) being and is asked for its consent before being killed. The victim is fated to obtain a better status through its death. In the People's War, by contrast, the human victim is treated as an animal or demon and is doomed to be eliminated or, like the king in the above poem, to remain forever a decaying corpse, trampled and defiled by the most horrific creatures: foreign vultures, dogs, and bluebottles.

Inverted Values

The asymmetry elaborated within the People's War rests more generally on a global inversion of values, which is expressed in a particularly striking way in poetry and contributes to the morbidity of the Maoist universe. The poems describe at length the bloodiest events, invoking forceful images and delighting in the contemplation of the announced, violent death. Voluntary immersion in this universe develops the steeliness of the revolutionary soldier, who consequently fears nothing. Once the inversion of values is complete and the plunge into the ocean of the revolution has been carried out, no grasp on the individual is possible, as is illustrated in this poem by the female soldier Laksmi Gurung (2003):

I have embraced death
O enemies do not try to set fire to my head,
As I am already ablaze by the sparks of the fire (of revolution)
Do not laugh, by spreading out in front of me thousands of corpses,
Because I am the traveller who crosses the ocean of blood,
Having made a bridge of these corpses.
Do not try to attach me with iron chains,
As I am already tied by the philosophy of equality,
By the thought of justice and freedom.
Do not try to make me beg for life in alms
As I have already embraced death
And I am immutable like the mountain
In my opposition to the class enemies,
Such a war heroine.

Fire, corpses, and chains are the very weapons used by the revolutionary warrior, who thus diverts the forces of coercion, denying them power over body and spirit, which have already embraced death. The process resembles a conversion to symbolic self-martyrdom, which then enables the warrior to face his or her real (or physical) demise, for it has already taken place mentally. Death is interiorized and accepted in advance.

In particular, it is the experience of the alter ego's or comrade's martyrdom that facilitates this plunge into death, this substitution between the dead and the living. While expressed metaphorically in poetry, it is displayed more concretely by the wearing of a mourning scarf (*kaphan*) as a sign of the revolutionary warriors' own mourning, a mark of self-sacrifice, which they assume at the time of their recruitment. And as they don it, they proclaim: "After having offered oneself in sacrifice in the war, it is necessary to fall one day."¹⁹ Death is thus minimized to the extreme. It does not affect the individual in his or her essence; rather, it is just 'the fall' (*dhalna*) of the physical body (*bhautik sarir*).

To be close to death—and more still, to touch it, to touch the corpses—transforms one's perception of it. Death then becomes beautiful and desirable, as are the people whom one still loves in this state, a position expressed by Ganga Shrestha (2003), another female warrior:

Dear death
One might wonder how death can be dear?
How death can be beautiful?
But death can be dear, as no one can believe,
Can be beautiful as no one can imagine.
If you don't believe it
Touch and look at the death of Basu
Touch and look at the death of Ichchuk
There, you'll meet the dream of Communism,
There you'll see the definition of life.

It is in the death of martyrs that the definition of life can be grasped, because it is a worthy promise of life for future generations. If one lives as if dead, one enters the true life by death, contributing to its occurrence in the 'material world'. Consequently, all values are inverted: happiness is misfortune, and misfortune brings happiness; life (under the present regime) is death, and death (in the People's War) is eternal life. This is the basis of the Nepalese Maoist dialectic, subsumed and inscribed within a catchphrase from Chairman Prachanda, "We cry while laughing, we laugh while crying," which is often cited and has inspired many texts in many modalities.

Sorrow is happiness
... Seeing happiness, I am not happy, me,
Because I wish that happiness comes from sorrow
And I do not want to see the sorrow, while enjoying happiness.
Whatever the sorrow that it creates for us,
Our travel will be victorious,

Because sorrow leads us towards the good side.
Material happiness is dangerous for progress,
Internal sorrow shall not affect us,
Because it prevents us from reaching our goal
O friends! (D. Sharma 2003)

As with an ascetic who dominates his material body through austerities, the Maoist warrior shields his body and hardens his mind, thereby rendering both insensitive to the usual sensations. In a significant account, Bahu (2002) describes how the sensations of tiredness, thirst, heat, and fatigue are lost during a war expedition, taken over by feelings of subjugation and fusion of oneself within a huge, terrible, and magnificent army collective.

Subjugation

In this account, Bahu describes the attack on Ghorahi, in which he took part. The march toward this southern location lasted three or four days. From the outset, the revolutionaries had lost their appetites, as well as feelings of thirst, cold, and fatigue. They walked in the sun and did not stop until they finally reached a large pastureland where they were allowed to sleep. Other companies joined them there. Bahu then says that the spectacle of the People's Army is so attractive that he "loses [himself] in its contemplation" and that he has the desire "to lose [himself] in its crowd."

This power of subjugation is expressed in the Maoist poetry in such a participatory way that it can be described as incantatory poetry. It draws the reader into the tale of conflict by letting him or her share the emotion of death, the shock of war. It displays images that evoke violence in its instantaneity in order to actualize it, to make it present, so that one participates in it through reading.

Just at that time, at the time when
The old, collapsing and rotten world is on the verge of falling
And the goods of its Master are carried away by the flames
The sanguinary killers are made insane,
They drink the blood of innocent people, they are taking their lives!!
They rape our younger sisters! They are raping them!!
They empty the mothers' wombs! They are emptying!!
The brothers and the fathers are in the same tomb! They are there!!
The infants will not survive! No, they won't!!
The grandmothers and grandfathers cannot sit on the wall or in a corner of the
courtyard without fear!
They are killed too, they are killed in a disgusting manner!!
A flood of blood ran and is still running!
But,
A better and golden world
A world thirsty for justice, freedom and democracy,
Gradually enflames.
Just at that time, at the time when

The assassins nostalgic for the feudal subjection
Have turned days into nights!
They are eating people alive.
They are raping our mother Nepal.
Some living corpses, having given their assent and their quiet support,
Are awaking the damned souls of the Panchayat. (Bista 2002)

By using repetitive formulas expressed in the present tense and at the moment of action, this poem has a compelling affect. Its density recalls a crisis of panic and entices the reader to bring assistance.

Exultation

Though clearly violent and bloody, the way of life in the PLA is also presented in the poetry as pleasant and joyful. Its goal is magnificent. It aspires not just to a local change of leaders but to the liberation of the twenty-first century, which is to be initiated by the PLA with one of the smallest and poorest countries of the world in its vanguard.

I am the minstrel who strives for the liberation of the 21st century
And walks, mixing his voice with the sweet
Melody uttered by the bloody footprints of the red
Men, on their way for the Great War. (Kadam 2002)

Several texts even dwell on the exultation that takes possession of the revolutionary soldier during marches and attacks, on the grandeur and beauty that is experienced within the People's War and the thought that inspires them.

How pleasant is our life in the Great War
Devoted to the liberation of the people and country
Nothing is individual any more, selfishness has been destroyed,
We walk, with widened spirit, in the tempest.
Our personal goal is to make blood flow for the liberation of the classes,
It is to build a New World after having destroyed this rotten one,
In the dialectic of laughter and tears, the history of happiness and pride.
On the way, the floods of blood strengthen the action, the will.
Highlighting the dream of the martyrs, we reach our goal in our spirit,
We fight as the thunderbolt, playing in the storm,
Our work is the revolution, our house is the Party.
Greater still is the Thought,
Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and the Path of Prachanda are very beautiful.
(Kadam 2002)

All of the Maoist partisans express their preference for the military branch of the movement and tell of their impatience to be recruited into the army. When a *Janadesh* journalist posed the question, "What do you prefer, and why, between the organization of the party and the formation of the army?"

the wounded Pushpa's answer was as follows: "It is not a question of liking the party or the army but of working where it is necessary. However, if I have the choice, I prefer to work in the formation of the army."

The diary of Agrim, a PLA soldier who died in 2004 in the attack of Beni, bears testimony about the very mysterious pleasure of the self-sacrificing soldier:

Eight people of our platoon prepared for a task, we did not know for what and yet we were impatient on the way. Finally we arrived at the border of the district of Rolpa and comrades of other platoons joined us there ... [T]he walk pleased me enormously ... and since I had been integrated into a formation of the army, I had the feeling of being a bird out of its cage which finally flies in the sky ...

I was very happy to be in the assault group ... I looked at the expression of my comrades and in the eyes of each one, I saw a kind of glare (*camak*), in the expression of each of them I saw the anger of the revenge ... I was impatient to plant the flag of liberation in the enemy's chest. (Agrim 2004)

Though Agrim was keen to attend a "great meeting [that] was taking place in Dang," he and his platoon followed orders and attended a medical training session, in which one exercise involved "writing from five in the morning until midnight [till] blisters formed on our hands and they even burst." Agrim, then, was not the master of his own destiny. Indirectly, Agrim and Pushpa reveal the hold exercised over the soldiery by the PLA leadership. Obedience is unswerving, commitment total.

Landscape in Pathos and Revolutionary Mode

In their representations, the partisans' attachment to the movement is not radically different from those interconnections of elements of the landscape, as if adhesion to the revolution was above all a mystic bond between the living and the dead, between human beings, animals, and the world. Poetry underlines this adhesion. It affirms the participation of all beings in the revolution. Thus, Ghayal (2002) asserts: "[T]he martyrdom of Comrade Vikalpa did not only make the people cry, but also the villages and the forests where he used to go." While the whole landscape takes part in the sorrow of defeats, conversely it is delighted by victories, tales of which the mountains retell to the valleys, while the rivers, inflated by joy, announce them to everyone. Bahu (2002) recalls: "The stars threw their light. That night the moon also brought all its brightness to us. Even the moon needed to look closely at our war for justice, and the rivers Rapti and Babai were swollen with joy and made everyone hear the news of the victory of the great people. The sun also replenished a new light of victory."

As related by Bahu, the elements literally took part in the attack on Ghorahi, and many a homage to martyrs uses the trope of a mountain bowing in sadness and respect at the moment when red soldiers died.

On the front, in the blackberry pasture,
The three stars of the east found heroism ...

By a full-moon night,
Even the moon masked its face,
Mount Everest bowed its head. (M. Thapa 2004)

The motherland receives the blood of her own children and cries bitterly. She is disfigured by the violence inflicted on the people. Even the little birds are no longer in the mood for singing.

Today, in the river beds,
More than stones, there are
Human skulls and bones
The patches of innocent blood
Render the beautiful mountains disgusting ...
In the pastures where you played,
The birds of the wood keep silent now. (Chaulagai 2004)²⁰

The revolution itself designs a universe, an imaginary world made up of an ocean of blood that the red soldiers are swimming across²¹ or traversing by using the corpses of their comrades as a bridge. Above is the sky, with all the martyrs turned into stars that light up the revolutionary path in the dark world toward the peak of victory. Located at the east, this inaccessible mountain peak shines, surrounded by a red horizon of the rising sun. The heavenly body itself is dressed in red and raises its rays as a sign of revolt. By their blood and their lights, the martyrs help the travelers approach the summit, as if the level of the ocean of blood was elevating itself with each death and moving toward it. This bloodbath strengthens the martyrs, solidifies the soil, purifies the party, and fertilizes the revolution.

Concluding Remarks

The struggle against the old world is thus presented as an apocalypse, provoked by warriors ablaze with fury, fighters who have sworn to die and multiply until the end. If the Marxist vocabulary is set aside, this cosmogony strongly reminds one of an apocalyptic sect whose aim is to provoke the end of the world in order to promote the advent of a better one.

The red warriors are ascetics: they renounce alcohol, seduction, and material well-being. They sleep, and often live, in the forest. They practice daily corporal austerities and study hard. In one word, they forge iron bodies²² of themselves—incandescent iron bodies fueled by a terrible internal fire of anger. Their goal is to kill the enemy, to clean it from the motherland, to die a ‘noble death’. They are operating a vast purification in which they are the oblations.

The enemies, on the other hand, are associated with all kinds of evil forces. They are the demons fought by the gods, the wicked and powerful Kaurava against the Pandava, or the devil forces that were eliminated by the Goddess. The latter, the Goddess, shares similarities with the red warriors, since she too was born as a terrible red female soldier from the anger of the assembled

gods. Traditionally, the ritual destruction of the evil forces by the Goddess is re-enacted each year by the Hindu king (or his representative) through a sacrifice of buffaloes. This sacrifice differs radically from the Brahmanic type of sacrifice, since the victim does not represent the self but the enemy's forces. This explains why this type of sacrifice is clearly a prerogative of the ultimate tenant of power. It is therefore a kingly model, a Kshātriya modality.

The People's War, interestingly, seems to have combined the two models of sacrifice in its ideological architecture: the Brahmanic and ascetic self-sacrifice to the fire is adopted as the model presiding over the Maoists' side, while the kingly destruction of demonic forces is one facet of their struggle against the rotten 'royal' side. In addition, the Maoists incorporate an image of their own power as one that spreads terror, for they frequently employ the idea of their demonic power of multiplication through the contact of their blood with the earth.

The Maoists have thus adopted the most potent sources of power in the Hindu world and have created an asymmetry in the war realm, a relational pattern that had not previously been known in Nepalese history. This asymmetry transforms heroism into martyrdom. But although it is more developed on the revolutionary side than on the royal one, asymmetry as well as martyrdom is bilateral. The conflict thus presents a symmetrical asymmetry. This new situation is perceived as a social pathology, and the country is said to be 'sick'. For the Maoist poet, it is a necessary evil provoked by the red warriors of the apocalypse in order to prepare the place for the advent of 'paradise on earth', a world cleansed of tigers, vultures, and wolves, whoever they are:

From Mount Sailung at the East,
The Red People, playing the war drum
With red mourners' scarves tied on the heads,
Came on the road ...
From the Cure hills, at the West
Red People blowing the trumpet of revolt and
Carrying rifles on their shoulders
Approached on the plain ...
Lightning flashed across the sky
Seisms shook the earth, it was turned upside down
The bloody ocean took away the butchers in charge of cleaning up the blood.
In the heart of a moonless night lightning flashed
In the middle of the night the sun rose up.
Frightened, the white tiger entered the trap
Everywhere the music of revolt resounded.
In the middle of the battle, the red men started to dance, laughing,
Mount Everest placed vermilion on his head
And shook the oppressed class
Awaking them
And sent them to the battlefield for their liberation
Everest resounded with the People's music of revolution and let the red flag fly
The white wolves
Leaving the earth started to run away
On the earth the red men rejoiced

On the earth the red men celebrated
The terrible rays of the sun
Reduced the man-eating vultures to ashes;
They left the places, left the villages, left the cities
left the palaces and the houses.
The earth was overturned
Rules were re-established
The government was transformed. (Pokhrel 2005)

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Notes

1. For an English-language treatment of the philosophy of the Prachandapath, see *Problems and Prospects of Revolution in Nepal*, a collection of articles by Com. Prachanda and other leaders of the CPN (Maoist) (<http://www.insof.org>).
2. Pasang is the commander of the PLA's western division, which is by far the most active division. In Pasang's (2003) view, war is the natural state of humanity, with 90 percent of the history of humankind being occupied by it, and the remaining 10 percent being devoted to preparing for it.
3. Some aspects of this discussion are dealt with in Lecomte-Tilouine (2004b).
4. Indeed, the governmental side also denies the rebels an honorable status by referring to them as terrorists.
5. On this subject, however, Ramirez (1997, 2006) brings important information. About the songs of another Nepalese ultra-leftist political party (the Masal), see Sales (2003). About the role of war in the Nepalese caste organization, see Lecomte-Tilouine (2004a).
6. The February 2003 editorial of *Janaawaj* 50–51 reads as follows: "The people who commemorate the martyrs have developed a new culture (*nayan samskriti*) in which martyrs' doors and pillars are created, martyrs' photos are exhibited and villages, hamlets, companies, battalions and brigades are named with martyrs' names."
7. The term *shahid* does not appear in the oldest Nepalese dictionaries, dated from the 1930s. Rana's (1936) English-Nepali dictionary is particularly relevant as it contains the word 'martyr' as an entry. However, it is not translated by any specific term in Nepali and is instead explained by a sentence. As far as I know, the oldest Nepali dictionary mentioning the word *shahid* was published in India (Kalinpong and Darjeeling) by Pradhan and Pradhan ([1947] 1961), which suggests that the term was introduced into Nepali from Hindi in the 1940s.
8. On 31 August 2004, the CPN (Maoist) announced the opening of a 'strategic offensive', following its 'strategic defensive' and 'strategic equilibrium'. For some months after the opening of this third period, in which the destruction of the enemy's armed forces, the seizure of power, and the establishment of the rule of the people were planned, no difference

- was noticeable, and no major military operation of the PLA took place. In April 2005, the PLA finally launched a major attack in Khara, Rukum. However, even though it took place in the so-called cradle of the revolution, it was far from successful. Officially, 160 PLA fighters and 3 security personnel were killed.
9. All of the Maoist texts quoted in the present article are readable at <http://www.insof.org>.
 10. See Anonymous (2004a).
 11. In an interview that first appeared in 2000 in the *Revolutionary Worker* #1043, Chairman Prachanda develops this idea as follows: “When one of the comrades is martyred, we vigorously make it a question of pride and historical importance. And the mother and father, the parents of that martyr, will then feel that, ‘Now my one son has died, but there are thousands and thousands of others who are now my sons.’ This is the great feeling ... The whole feudal and individualistic, sectarian culture that has prevailed has been changed upside down” (http://www.insof.org/politics/200200_prachand_interview_a3.htm).
 12. Thus, the People’s government of the district of Jajarkot is said to have been built upon the ‘blood foundation’ (*ragatko jag*) of the 65 martyrs from the district. The same is true for the PLA battalions.
 13. I observed this in April 2003 in Dailekh district, where the CPN (Maoist) organized a meeting in memory of their district chief, who had died as a result of a motorcycle accident.
 14. *The Rising Nepal*, published by the state, reports the Maoist ‘atrocities’ in the same style.
 15. Rima’s (2004) text reads in part: “[T]he glance of vulture of the enemy went on her tender body.”
 16. See Anonymous (2004b) for a report in Doti, Western Nepal.
 17. In assuming absolute power on 1 February 2005, King Gyanendra may have finally adopted the role that has been attributed to him by the Maoists since his coronation in June 2001.
 18. This poem was reprinted in *Janadesh* 14 on 11 February 2005.
 19. “Yuddhama homiepachi ekdin dhalne ta avasya nai ho” (Kunwar 2003).
 20. This poem, entitled “Come Yuyutsu” (referring to a famous general of the Mahabharata who changed sides from the Kauravas to the Pandavas), is a call to the Royal Nepalese Army soldiers.
 21. Many texts employ this image. For one example, see K. Budhamagar (2004).
 22. See B. Sharma (2004), or the following poem by T. Nepal (2002): “War teaches us war,/ the forge of the conflict creates steel,/war purifies the party.”

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