Why Women Rebel: Combat Experience and Gender Empowerment of a Maoist Guerrilla in Nepal[1]

-Rumela Sen

Why do women take up arms to join an insurgency against the state? Hua Mulan, the beloved Chinese folk hero adapted into a Disney movie on girl power, went to war in place of her ailing father. She spent several years in the battlefield disguised as a man without being found out. As the story goes, Mulan broke many boundaries and challenged many social conventions to become the fictional role model for many young girls. But we do not know if her wartime experience empowered her to break free of existing gender stereotypes in Chinese society? Did she set the tone for gender equality for other women in society? The question continues to resonate many centuries later in the Maoist movement that opened up spaces for women to participate in an ambitious project of bringing about a revolutionary political transformation, both in Nepal and India. Conflict research, however, has mostly side stepped these questions primarily because it treats wars as masculine enterprise where women, if at all visible, are predominantly either victims of wartime sexual violence, grassroots peacemakers or mothers, wives and widows of heroic men (Carpenter 2016; Haeri and Puechguirbal 2010).

In the absence of enough individual testimonies of women rebels, the preponderance of the idealized female war victim has permeated the policy world, including postconflict reintegration agencies charged with Disarmament, Demobilizaton and Reintegration (DDR). The DDR policies tend to identify women in conflict zones as "females associated with the war," "war widows", "abductees" "dependents," "sex slaves", or "camp followers". Their reluctance to

[1] Invited book chapter in Contemporary Gender Movements in South Asia: Space, Conformity, and Dissent edited by Nandini Dhar and Raouf Peerzada, Bloomsbury Press. (forthcoming, 2019)

recognize female combatants as soldiers has serious consequences: reintegration of male combatants is treated as a policy priority crucial to post conflict peace and stability, while reintegration of women is relegated to a social concern (Cohen 2013; MacKenzie 2009; Wibben 2010). Reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, various UN aid agencies, international peace keeping missions perpetuated the discourse of women and children as the most vulnerable victims of conflict, in India (Narula 1999) and Nepal as well (Manchanda 2004). But women can also be perptrators of violence, like in the Maoist army in India and Nepal, in the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka or in B(Lijphart 1971)oko Haram suicide campaigns in Nigeria. This paper presents the testimony of Devi Khadka, an insurgent woman in Nepal, fills a gap in the conflict literature, and it shows why women take up arms, how they fight, and what the consequences of their participation are both for the society and their own futures. The obvious drawbacks of a single case in one geographical region is that its scientific status is dubious, given that science is a generalizing activity and the findings here have limited generalizability to women in armed groups in other parts of the world. But when research resources are relatively limited, intensively focusing on a single case can help generate hypotheses that can be tested subsequently. This case was selected not because of the author's interest in the case per se, but with an interest in generating theory of women's participation in insurgency. In addition, as noted by scholars before, the development of comparative politics is hampered by an appalling lack of information about different political systems in the world, and this paper serves as a basic data-gathering exercise on insurgent mobilization and post-conflict Nepal (Lijphart 1971).

The interview, which lasted a little over four hours, took place in July 2018 in a lounge style room in a hotel in Kathmandu that was picked by the interviewee. Khadka spoke in Nepali, sometimes clarifying in broken Hindi, or rephrasing her thoughts if I had trouble understanding

some parts of her account. I had recorded the interview with her permission, and took notes through the interview as well. I transcribed the interview myself, and also had a native Nepali speaker transcribe it independently.[2] Khadka's is a typical story of a highly motivated-and highly persecuted-'revolutionary'. When just in her teens, she was the founding chair of the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Women's Association (Revolutionary). In 1997, she was arrested and 'disappeared' for 28 days. She then spent four months in police custody where she was repeatedly gang raped until she lost track of time. Two years later she became a PLA commander, first for Dolakha and Sindhupalchok, and then Dolakha, Okhaldhunga, and Solu Khumbu. She rose swiftly through the ranks to become the Maoist Dolakha district secretary in 2002, and eventually became a Maoist Member of Parliament (MP) for Dolakha. From 2011 to 2013, she served as a Minister of State for the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works. She is among the select group of 9 women who rose to the highest levels in the Maoist organization. The Maoists in Nepal have given much play to the heroic defiance and the unbroken spirit of Khadka, who despite being gang raped by the police for days decided to fight the state again. Her example was used to instil grit, determination and revolutionary fervour among new recruits. (Gautam et al., 2001:233–9).

Although a lot has been written on why men rebel (Gurr 1970; Lichbach 1998), we do not know if women's motivations for joining armed groups are same or if they are systematically different from those of men. Why did so many women, more so in Nepal than in India, join the Maoist movement in the first place? Secondly, it is widely believed that by participating in an armed conflict, women break many barriers of patriarchy that want to confine them to domesticity. What are the processes and mechanisms through which invovement in Maoist

[2]I'm grateful to Naresh Gyawali for introducing me to Devi Khadka, as well as to Dinesh Pant for transcribing the interview in English. My fieldwork in Nepal was supported by my postdoctoral fellowship in the department of political science, Columbia University.

politics, given that it was steeped in a revolutionary promise for a better, more just and more egalitarian future might reconstruct gender identities? Does the sheer feat of picking up weapons, wearing military fatigues and slaying enemies automatically empower women to break gender stereotypes or are there other underlying mechanisms through which involvement in wartime political and military actions shape the life choices and outcomes of women rebels? Thirdly, how are the postconflict lives of rebel women different from those of other women who never joined rebel armies? What does that tell us about the legacy of womens' participation in an armed uprising, both at the level of society at large and individual women rebels? In addition, why do some extremist groups recruit women and others do not? Are groups recruiting women predisposed to gender equality? Does presence of women alter the character, culture and hierarchy of militant organizations? Finally, how is women's role in rebel armies similar or different to that of male comrades? Are they assigned similar roles, and punished or rewarded the same way as the men?

Background Research

These questions are born out of my fieldwork in conflict zones over the past ten years. While investigating how rebels quit Maoist army in India, I have met and interviewed many rebel women in the Maoist guerrilla army, both in India and Nepal. There are three categories of response that I have generally received in response to my abovementioned questions on their motivation to join and their process of empowerment . First, on the question of why women take up arms against the state, the motivations are often similar to those of the men. Women rebels, like their male counterparts, have shared stories of intense persecution by the rich and the mighty, expropriation and cultural marginalization. But gender often intensified the magnitude of oppression, or added new dimensions to it, as highlighted in this chapter. Women rebels in

Telangana in South India, for example, shared that they experienced unprecedented freedom, agency and leadership opportunities by participating in the Maoist project of revolution. Some reported that they felt empowered knowing that they were contributing towards shaping a better future. Others in Nepal saw in the 'People's War' an opportunity to escape from myriad forms of gender-based oppression like forced marriage, domestic violence, dowry or polygamy. Thus the rebel women I spoke to did not perceive the choice to choose insurgency over domesticity and as an exceptional, brave or risky adventure. Instead active participation in the war was the optimal choice that offered them more opportunities and freedom than their own families. The Maoist party in both India and Nepal recognized women's right to choose their spouses, allowed them to choose abortion or claim inheritance, which many women I spoke to found revolutionary and liberating in and of themselves.

In Nepal, international media coverage of striking images of indigenous rebel women, dressed in battle fatigues and carrying guns drew attention to Maoist claims that female combatants made up more than a third of their military wing .[3] Maoist leaders, both in India and Nepal, have consistently highlighted that as a radical, progressive leftwing group shaped by Mao's vision of women holding up half the sky, they are especially keen to recruit women in an effirt to challenge the fedual and patriarchal gender norms prevalent in the conflict zones. However, socially defined gender roles and expectations are not easily uprooted.[4] On the question of comparing women's role in rebel armies with those of their male comrades, there are many allegations of sexual harrassment of women cadres by the men within the party, and in the

[3] For example, in an interview Hisila Yami claimed women constituted 30-45% of Maoist movement in Nepal https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5387419

[4] An anecdotal evidence came from another interview in Nepal, whena former Youth Communist League (YCL) leader admitted that he chose to marry the most shy and quiet ('sharmila' and "shant', in Nepali) among the women rebel, defying party recommendations of higher ranked women commanders. He clarified that he found the other rebel women too aggressive, hardened by battle experience. During the same interview the YCL leader also highlighted how proud he was of women's participation in the Maoist movement.

military wings. Despite claiming 40% female representation in the movement, Nepal Maoists had only 2 women represented in the 27 member Politburo and the same two women were also included in the 39 member Central Committee (Pyakurel 2006).[5] The military wing did not have a single woman at the rank of Division Commander where military decisions were made. Hisila Yami, known also by her *nom de guerre* Comrade Parvati, was one of the two women in the Maoist Politburo and Central Committee in Nepal. According to Yami, women rebels in Nepal grappled with complex power hierarchies and ingrained gender stereotyping, which led inevitably to traditional divisions of labor remaining largely unchanged within the Maoist party. For example, men monopolized the 'mental work and relegated women to everyday drudgery work.' In addition, women's issues were rarely handled by the Maoist male leadership but relegated to women themselves. Special programs for women often did not get implemented. Therefore, there remained for many women a deep sense of ambivalence, uncertainty and insecurity about their roles and positions within the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) and wider Nepali society—this became highly pronounced in the post-conflict and reintegration period (Yami 2006). Very few women had voice and visibility in the peace negotiations in Nepal since 2005. Women were sidelined from the discussions of the rehabilitation and integration process of combatants and the committee looking into the question of reintegration did not include a single female combatant.[6]

During an interview with this author in 2018, a senior leader of Nepal Maoists also highlighted why he was very critical of posing the women's question in isolation from the more

[5] Hisila Yami and Pampa Bushal were the two women in the Politburo and Central Committee of the Maoists.

[6] However, in the April 2008 elections to Constituent Assembly, nearly 3500 women contested elections, comprising around 35% of all candidates. Women obtained 30 seats through the FPTP elections (12.5% of total seats) and 161 seats in the PR elections (48% of seats), and six women were nominated by three parties to comply with the one-third quota. In the Maoist coalition government, however, women took only 4 of the 24 ministerial positions. Between 2013-2017, proportion of women in the National Parliament remain 30%.

fundamental questions of class inequality. He argued that treating women's participation as a feminist issue was a bourgeois malady unknown to the marginalized rural women in Nepal who take up arms because they know instinctively that they needed to fight the fedual establishment in its totality in order to demolish patriarchy. Although he did not dismiss the issue of power relationship between men and women as trivial and personal, he argued that a separate inquiry into women's participation in revolutionary movement is unnecessary because it creates an illusion of shared interest among rich and poor women in Nepal when there is none. This reminded me of another conversation with a Maoist ideologue in India back in 2014. My transcripts show that this spokesperson of Indian Maoists also argued that only the urban, educated, middle class, upper caste women harped on lack of women's representation among the top Maoist leadership, fracturing the Left unity with their divisive gender politics.

In neighboring India too, women rebels in Telangana in South India, despite their enthusiastic particiption, have been confined to marginal roles in the movement. During my ethnographic fieldwork among former Maoists in Telangana during 2013-14, several women combatants in Telangana also admitted to me that although the sexual division of labor lessened over time with men also participating in cooking and cleaning, women guerrilas found it difficult to rise through party hierarchy beyond district level. Despite profuse rhetorics on women holding up half the sky, it is hard to overlook the complete absence of women in the intellectual or military leadership. Three former women combatants in Telangana in three separate ocassions also alleged that Maoist leaders had a strong preference for women revolutionaries taking a back seat and keeping the home and hearth running, while their husbands claimed the limelight in the public discourse on revolution. Thus the revolutionary vocabulary was replete with terms like 'veeramata' (mother of a martyr) and 'veerapatni' (wife of a martyr), where women achieved

glorification only via their service, sacrfice and surrender to their sons and husbands (Kannabiran and Kannabiran 1997; Vasantha Kannabiran and Kannabiran 2004).

There are many first hand accounts of Maoist rebels in Nepal, which provide rich inspirational accounts of heroic struggles of men and women against myriad social oppression and political marginalization.[7] But they often read almost like fairy tales: women, previously lulled into passive acquiescence by patriarchial oppression, wake up to all new autonomy, agency and equality by the touch of the magic wand of insurgent participation. But these stories of magical transformation of spoons, spatulas, saris , sindur and other shackles of domesticity to liberating instruments like guns and battle fatigues do not shed light on the mechanisms of empowerment or the concrete observable implications of such empowerment. In other words, what are the concrete indicators that distinguish empowerment from lack of it? Are all conflicts equally empowering of women rebels? Does gender empowerment vary across conflict contingent on the ideology of a particulalr movement or does it vary across individuals, empowering some rebels and not others? How do we distinguish empowerment of rebel women from absence of empowerment in others? Moreover, in cases where objective indicators of empowerment of rebel women are identified, can we trace the process step by step back to their participation in the armed rebellion?

During the summer of 2018, with an aim to answer some of these questions, I began a series of interviews with rebel women in Nepal, that I wanted to compare with earlier interviews I had done with rebel women in India. These interviews are all loosely structured open-ended life history format interview, during which I gently nudged interviewee towards the three broad

[7] Chapamar Yuvatiko Diary (Diary of a Guerrilla Girl) by Tara Rai was widely recommended to me by the bookshops in Kathmandu. But Maoist leaders I spoke to dismissed it. Comrade Pratibha's Samarka Smritiharu (Memories of the War) also recounts personal experiences of a woman from students union to Maoist army, from 1997 to 2005, with rich account of various obstacles faced by women in Nepali society.

questions that I wanted them to address: (a) why they took up arms; (b) if and how their participation in an insurgency empowered them.; (c) if that empowerment outlasts conflict and spills over into postconflict social relations and political institutions

Methodology

For this project I chose interviews over surveys or focus groups as the preferred method of data collection. There is an overwhelming preference for surveys in conflict research in political science, primarily because surveys allow a larger sample size, which allows for statistical analyses and more generalizable conclusions. However, large n surveys, mostly administered through third parties, have their own limitations. As a researcher interested in understanding social outcomes in terms of micro foundations — in terms of the beliefs, incentives, and strategic choices of individuals— interviews allowed me to directly and deeply assess the roots of individual actions and attitudes instead of hypothesizing about them. Interviews with Maoist rebels provided a direct window into identifying the cause and effect their participation in insurgency.[8] While surveys can be more effective in testing theories, the causal mechanisms unveiled in one-on-one face to face interviews can become a basis for constructing general theories.

Moreover, interviews are better suited to reduce social desirability bias than surveys (Mosley 2013; Tansey 2007). For example, if asked whther combat experience made them more empowered or less, rebel women would feel pressured to choose 'more empowered' and hide feelings of powerlessness, self doubts and low self worth, which long, loosely structured, intimate, open ended conversations are more likely to detect than surveys allow for or care about. I was more interested in capturing these nuances in the empowerment of women via insurgent

[8] With regards to note--keeping, I audio--recorded the interviews with the participant's permission as well as took notes. The final recordings were then transcribed and crosschecked with my handwritten notes.

participation than in generating various aggregate measures of what proportion of women had a positive combat experience in an insurgency. By allowing open-ended questions and followup additional queries, probing more deeply into the actions and attitudes of respondents, interviews allowed me to gather a much deeper set of responses than surveys, particularly when dealing with senstitive topics like wartime sexual violence or particpation in unlawful, violent activties. Follow-up clarification questions were particularly enlightening when the respondent appears to hold contradictory views, or when the phenomenon of interest is complex and senstitve, with strong possibilities of social desirability bias.

A lot has been written on the emotional and power dynamics between an interviewer and interviewee (Dickson-Swift et al. 2009; Fusch and Ness 2017; Hoffmann 2007; Kleinman, Copp, and Henderson 1997; Norum 2000) , and this power balance also shifts within a single interview. Open-ended interviews demand especially challenging emotional labor, since the interview is not constrained to a narrow set of questions but often developed into areas that I as a researcher did not anticipate. Besides interviews require empathy and understanding the perspectives of our subjects, which is also inherently challenging. As an interviewer, I was the agenda setter; but as an initiator of contact and seeker of knowledge, I lacked certain power vis-à-vis Khadka. I introduced myself as a student of civil conflicts and post conflict social order in India and Nepal and positioned myself as underinformed compared to her. I was there to learn from her, she had the knowledge and experience that I clearly lacked. This was done to not only empower my respondent, but also permit me the freedom to ask what might seem stupid questions. This allowed me to ask follow up questions and encouraged Khadka to articulate what would seem obvious to her and otherwise not mention worthy.

Communicating effectively my relative ignorance and willingness to learn from my respondents has been particularly important to my work since no one was compensated for participating in my study; I had to rely on their willingness to give me their time and cooperation. This limited how assertive I could be during the interviews. I could not make my respondents feel so uncomfortable that she might cut short the interview or discourage others from interviewing with me in the future. Access is a key problem in conflict research, and reputation builds quickly in the field.

The strongest methodological objection to interviews is against snowball sampling, the biases it introduces and the question of generalizability based on a biased sample. However, the most important issue in this research is access. A fine, well-designed sample is useless if the subjects do not want to speak with the researcher. Although access is a question of sampling, concerns about unrepresentative sample can be addressed if we consider what systematic errors will also be introduced if researchers only get access to certain types of respondents and not others. In fact, a significant strength of interviews is that unlike surveys, where researchers know nothing about those sections of mass public that remained uninterviewed, researchers can calculate an estimation of non-response bias.[9] For example, it is widely accepted that 40 - 50% of Maoist militia were women, of which 35% were squad members, 20-30% were at platoon level, and 9 women were above that at the highest levels of Maoist organization in Nepal (Yadav 2016). After the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the United Nations Mission in Nepal

[9] This interview was part of a larger project comprising a series of interviews with other women cadres of the Maoist armies in Nepal and India, which aims at gathering information from a representative sample of rebel women with an aim of making more generalizable claims.

identified that 3846 (24%) of 15756 combatants were women, which is much less than the Maoist estimate but represents the target population for my project on rebel women in Nepal.[10]

A representative sample of rebel women in Nepal, therefore, must ideally include more women squad members than platoon members and proportionately fewer of the women at the highest level.[11] The purpose of a representative sample is to reduce the systematic error introduced by the degree to which those who cannot be contacted or refuse to be interviewed differ in traits or attitudes from those who are successfully contacted and interviewed. Devi Khadka clearly belongs to the minority of highest-ranking Maoist women rebels, with significant name recognition in Nepal. Her experience is not necessarily representative of the ordinary squad members in the Maoist army. Knowing about the other similarly high-ranking women among Nepal Maoist, however, those who were not interviewed are not systematically different from the interviewee. Therefore, at the very minimum, this conclusions from Khadka's interview is generalizable to those rebel women who rose to the highest ranks in Maoist army in Nepal. The next section traces the pre-conflict hardships, conflict experience, and post-conflict challenges of a Maoist rebel woman in Nepal. The intimate testimony traces her motivations to join the insurgency, records her enthusiastic participation in violent acts, elaborates her reasons for doing so, records her rejection of gender norms and foregrounds her post conflict political career, which sheds light on some of the mechanisms and processes of gender empowerment and postconflict social order raised above.

Testimony of a Rebel

[10] It is worth noting that not all Maoist women are militants, and the CPA excluded the political activists. But this study is particularly interested in women who took up arms, and therefore takes 3846 rebel women as the target population.

[11] The purpose of a representative sample is to reduce the systematic error introduced by the degree to which those who cannot be contacted or refuse to be interviewed differ in traits or attitudes from those who are successfully contacted and interviewed. In other words, in order to answer my three questions on rebel women, I need to ensure that my non-respondents (those rebel women from the population that I do not interview) differ little from the traits and attitudes of my respondents.

This section structures the long, intimate interview in seven parts. The first part on early childhood also highlights the feudal socioeconmic conditions in rural Nepal in the early 1980s. The second part on becoming a Maoist records some of the longterm factors that contributed to her choice of isnurget career. The third part is a testimony about how the state weaponzied rape against women rebels like her. The fifth part, the briefest of all, goes into how she coped with the trauma of intense physical, sexual and mental trauma. Next she recollects how she struggled with ther trauma, until she finally bounced back into life with a successful military career.The seventh part includes her assessment of gender empowerment through combat experience, both for her personally and also for the society at large. In deciding how to slice up the long intimate interview, I relied on my interpretation of what were the turning points of her life. To finalize that I saw seven distinct phases in her life, I went back to the audio of the interview in Nepali and recorded how she distributed her time among various issues. In addition, I relied on my own transcription of the interview from Nepali to English the week after the interview, and used my own running notes that I took during the interview to add more context ot it.[12] In addition, I also had the interview transcribed into English by a native Nepali speaker.[13] Based on this triangulation of evidence, the rest of this paper contains the perspecitve of a Maoist woman rebel in her own words..

Early Childhood: Feudal Nepal

[12] In my notes taken during the interview, I recorded my comments on how her voice, composure, attitude varied between different parts of the interview, where she paused longer and where she did not, what issues came up more than one and so on. I mapped these comments on the English transcription of the interview.

[13] In order to retain the emphases and nuances in her testimony as intact as possible, I went back to the audio recording of the interview and rechecked the two independently done transcripts. The emphases italicized in the interviews are all Devi Khadka's.

Devi Khadka, also known by her party name Ashmita, was born in a Kshteri family in a predominantly Kshetri village[14], in the Dolakha distrtict in the mountaineous region of Nepal[15], at the foot of Mt. Gaurishankar, east of Kathmandu valley. Most families in the village, including her own, earned their livelihood primarily from animal husbandry and subsistence farming. They spent half the year in farming in *besi* (plain of the foothills), and the rest of the year they reared cattle in *khark* (pastureland and jungle).[16] Khadka is the 13th of fourteen sibblings and the youngest daughter among eight. Khadka called her rural upbringing deeply patriarchal, where *kul* and *kanyadaan* rituals made girls education a taboo.[17] All her seven sisters were married off before the menarche. The rest of her testimnoy mentions several times that her parents and neighbors were very uncomfortable that she was not married off when the time was right, blaming this sin for all the tragedy of rape and torture that had befallen on her .

The earliest childhood memory that Khadka shared dated back to 1981-82 (2038 B.S.). Even though it happened over 35 years ago, she went into extraordinary details and took a lot of time to lay out the various aspects of this incident. The central character of this story was one Dal Bahadur Khadka, who was the rich and powerful feudal lord in the district. He wanted to get his son married to a daughter of one Chhatra Kumari Karki who lived in her village. Chhatra

[14] Kshetri are Nepali speakers of Khas Rajput community. Descending from the old Gorkhali aristocracy, they are a caste of administrators, governor and military elites in medieval Khas Kingdom and Gorkha Kingdom.

[15] The website of Dolakha district in Nepal rightly claims "You can not write the history of Nepal without writing a lot about the history of Dolakha." http://ddcdolakha.gov.np/ne-brief-introduction/

[16] The operational system of Kharka (pasture) management is based on local customs, where the Mukhiya (village head) mediates rotation of the three main pastures of the community, allocating timing and duration for grazing the animals in each pasture according to the season. The pasture situated at the highest altitude is open during summer; the mid-altitude pasture during spring; and the lowest altitude pasture during winter. The priority for grazing is based on the traditionally recognized user rights.

[17] The ritual of Kanyadaan, literally donation of a maiden, in Hindu tradition is considered the biggest achievement for any family man, the greatest 'daan' or gift of all. It is based on the belief that women need to be under lifelong male guardianship – under her father's guardianship when unmarried, under her husband's when married and finally under her son's when old and widowed. Educating girls was a taboo, and even dangerous because it increased the likelihood of widowhood.Social sanctions were imposed on upper caste Hindus who failed to marry the daughter off before menarche, which often amounted to losing their caste privilege (kula bhrashta). An unmarried daughter is still considered a father's greatest failure, even a sin, in many Hindu families.

Kumari was a 25 year old widow, who had 2 sons and 3 daughters. The village elders who acted as her guardian agreed that Dal Bahadur was rich and powerful and this matrimony would secure the future of a fatherless girl. Chhatra Kumari agreed to marry her 13 year old eldest daughter to Dal Bahadur's son. However, within a year, Dal Bahadur tried to rape the 13 year old girl and when she resisted, stripped her naked and assaulted her with stinging nettle (sisnu) before sending her back bruised and naked to her mother's village. Everyone in the village found this inhuman and unacceptable, but violence against women was not entirely unheard of in the villages.

Unfortunately Dal Bahadur's attrocities did not stop there. He used his power and network with officers and bureaucrats to forge Chhatra Kumari's signature and swindle her out of her land and property. Devi Khadka emphasized that he wanted to assert his masculinity and power to teach Chhatra Kumari, who was a widow, a lesson for seeking intervention from village elders. Devi Khadka's older brother Gyanu was among the few in the village who could read and write, and he explained how Dal Bahadur cheated the widow out of their family home with forged legal documents. The standoff between the villagers and the feudal lord escalated rapidly, and Dal Bahadur refused to back off even at the insistence of the local Panchayat (village local government). The moral outrage in the village finally erupted when Devi Khadka's older brother Gyanu led a mob to surround and blockade the feudal lord's mansion and Dal Bahadur Khadka was killed in the clash. The police arrested her mother and her brother for Dal Bahadur's murder.

Devi Khadka's family was relatively well off with their own land holdings, animals and a house. But the court cases that followed forced them to sell almost everything. The family bribed the district judge and managed to reduce her mother's sentence to six months, but her brother was awarded life imprisonment. Despite spending about sixty thousand Nepali rupees, which

was a lot of money in those days, her brother languished in jail. Devi Khadka shared her memories of going to jail to put tika (vermillion smear) on her brother's forehead during Dashain (most important Hindu festival in Nepal, celebrated in September-October). In 1985, five days after one such visit, her brother was murdered in jail and a letter came home asking the family to collect his dead body.

Devi Khadka had her eyes fixed on the wall across from her when she described how she could still hear the heart wreching sound of a conch blown middle of the day. She remembered that she was playing outside with her younger brother (Bishal is now an incumbent member of parliament) when she heard the conch blown. In Nepal, conch is blown both for deaths and marriages, but the happy conch tune and the sad one are different. Devi khadka was a young girl, and did not know the difference. She was told that the conch was blown because her brother was going to get married, when, in fact, he was murdered that day. Khadka emphasized that even more devastating than finding out about her brother's death, was the façade of lies that people in her family and village used to gloss over reality. She added that make-believe lies were used not only to hide her brother's tragic death but to deny and accept meekly all other attrocities that people suffered in the hands of the rich and powerful.

> My brother Gyanu's death in custody was *never* investigated. Why was he killed? Why did Chhatra Kumari and her daughter suffer so much? As I grew older, I could not stop constantly mulling over these questions in my head, until one day, I must have been around eleven, when my other brother Rit Bahadur said he found answers. Rit Bahadur came back from his boarding school that year with this nugget of wisdom: he said that as long as the rich had hegemonic control over the state political and financial power such attrocities would continue. He was always very smart and I trusted him *completely*. He explained that only if the poor and dispossessed banded together to violently seize state control from the dead hands of the rich bourgeoisie in bloody protracted battles can they seize state power and change things permanently.
>
> He read *a lot* of books and everyone respected him. Rit Bahadur even convinced some village elders that if the righteous and the just among them came together and seized power, they could do enormous good for the rest of the village. He

> showed me the books that would prepare them for this struggle. I was so in awe of him. I wanted to help him, except I was illiterate.

Devi Khadka described how she recruited her younger brother, Bishal, who went to the village school, to teach her how to read and write. She did not go to school. She was entrusted with the task of walking her brother to the school, but she could not enter. No one approved of a young girl of eleven learning letters and numbers, when she was expected to get married. She found it almost insulting that her little brother could read and write, and she was not considered smart enough to do that. Khadka doggedly taught herself how to read and write and emphasized that her life would have looked exactly like all her sisters and her other girl friends had she not fought against everyone to become literate. Her brother Rit Bahadur became her greatest support system.

> Only later when I read *Nari Bandhan Ra Mukti* (roughly translates as *Subordination and Liberation of Women* by Modnath Prashrit), I realized that I am not cursed for learning to read and write as everyone said. I have committed so sin. I was, in fact, liberated.

Becoming a Maoist: Longterm Causation

In early 1990, Rit Bahadur was the coordinator of *Janaandolan Sanyojan Samiti* (People's Movement Coordination Committee) of Dolakha district, which successfully challenged the Panchayati regime in Nepal.[18] Devi Khadka was in her early teens, and she was involved in village level women's literacy drives, specifically in *proudh shiksha karyakram* (informal education) teaching women basic reading and writing in Nepali. By 1996, Rit Bahadur, who also became a village teacher, decided to become a party whole timer and promised to be back soon and take her with him too. Two months after he went underground, the village was rife with

[18] The Panchayat System of party-less governemnt was formulated by King Mahendra after overthrowing the first democratically elected government and dissolving the parliament in 1960. The Nepal Congress and the United Left Front launched a popular movement against panchayati regime in February 1990, supported by India and other European countries, which force the King to formally end it by April 1990.

rumors that he was identified leading a small group that stole gelatin, used in making explosives, from the public works department that used it for road building. Khadka added with a glint of both irony and smile, that as anxious as her parents were about this news, they were more worried that Devi Khadka was still unmarried. They relied on Rit Bahadur to find a groom for her, but now they were heartbroken that he had already forsaken his family for the revolution and could no longer be relied upon for this crucial task. At this point, Khadka could barely hide her deep disappointment with her parents, who then decided to marry her off against her wishes. They found her a groom, and set the wedding date despite her dogged refusal to marry a stranger. She hoped desperately that her brother would rescue her, she described feeling powerless and vulnerable as the wedding day approached. Finally she decided to take matters in her own hand. She pretended to submit to her parents' wishes, and a day before the weeding asked to go to the local market for some wedding shopping. Her parents, convinced that she was finally back to her senses, released her from her 'house arrest'.

> I planned to run away and never come back. Nobody understood me. I still remember I was wondering aimelssley in the local market, when a vendorwho sold boiled yarn told me that my brother Rit Bahadur and his comrades are on their way to rescue me. My heart jumped in joy. My brother finally came! He took me with him. He cancelled my wedding, and explained everything to my parents in a letter. But, you know, if he did not come that day, I would have run away anyway. I decided that marriage was not for me. I guess I formally became a *Biplapi* (revolutionary) on my wedding day.

In the Party: Wartime Sexual Violence

After escaping arranged marriage, the party gave her the responsibility of organizing women, which she did disguised as a *Tuki* NGO worker.[19] She was also the party courier (messenger), who collected and delivered letters and provisions. In her own words, she was still the village

[19] Here Devi Khadka refers to Rural Development Tuki Association, Dolakha, which is a Nepali NGO working in Nepal since many years.

girl, meek, shy and subservient. Everyone thought she was best suited for these roles. She led womens' literacy drives and organized women against domestic violence and child marriage for many years, and about five years later she was nominated the president of All Nepal Women Association (Revolutionary) of Dolakha. As soon as it became official that she was in the Maoist organization, an arrest warrant was issued against her and she went underground. But on October 27, 1997 she was arrested. She was 'disappeared' by the Nepali government for 28 days [20], during which she was relentlessly tortured, raped repeatedly by so many men that she not only lost count, but also lost track of day or night. She was arrested not for what she did, but because the police wanted information regarding the whereabouts of her brother Rit Bahadur and his comrades.

> They transferred me to Kavrepalanchok district, Dhulikhel. They first hung me upside down, and beat me mercilessly. Every time the beating paused, they would ask me about my brother Rit Bahadur. I wouldn't say a word, and they started beating me again. They showed me a dead body with its face smashed, claimed it was my brother's. I refused to believe them. Then they offered to stop beating me if I took responsibility for the murder of Krishna Prashad Sapkota, which I refused again. They made many other offers: I had to sign a statement blaming my brother for duping me into joining the Maoists. They even asked me to write that I would marry a policeman.
>
> When they did not get their way with torture and all other offers, the DSP of Kavrepalanchok, Madhav Thapa, threatened me that maoist rebels like me, my brother forced his men to leave their wives and train in anti-guerrilla warfare. Therefore, it is only fair that he would unleash his men on me and let them 'enjoy'. That night he did exactly that.
>
> They took me to a room somewhere between Dhulikhel prison and the canteen, and many policemen raped me one after another. I don't how many of them attacked me and for how long.
>
> When I gained back my consciousness next morning, I heard the sound of conch blown. I was reminded of the sound of conch I heard as a little girl when my brother Gyanu Khadka was murdered in custody. My heart sank. I was so devastated. I could not save another brother of mine from the police.

[20] The Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Nepal estimated that about 1400 people were made to disappear during the 1996-2006 conflict,

> I could hardly process the physical and mental pain that I was in. I remember hoping that I would just die. I also remember that my clothes were all torn and dishevelled. Instinctively I wanted to fix it. But I was tied to a chair. I was bleeding, and I remember I could feel blood running down my legs.

While Khadka spoke with a calm composure about the sexual violence against her, her eyes glistened when she emphasized, with a faint smile, that she never revealed anything about her brother and their comrades. She found out later that the conch sound came from a temple, and her brother was alive. A policeman told him. He also whispered in her ears that he was from her home district (Dolakha) and that the police was planning to kill her in a fake encounter. Khadka recollected that this policeman adressed her as 'bahini' (sister), but in the fear and panic, she also felt a sense of relief knowing that her miseries would finally end. In her words, she felt ready to die. She was about twenty.

A few days later, her captors took her to the jungle, but instead of killing her, they just placed the gun on her shoulder and fired random shots that startled her every time.

> Later on some other policemen, who looked like they were high ranking officers, came to meet me. They expressed their sympathy, offered tea and gave me some biscuits to eat. I remember them shaking their heads and saying 'this is too much'. As soon as they left, I was transferred to Charikot jail. Later I learned that Padma Ratna Tuladhar and Mukti Pradhan, who were well known human rights activists but secretly also affiliated with the maoist party, spoke to Nawaraj Silwal about my release. In that sense I am grateful to Nawaraj Silwal. I was in Charikot jail for 3 months, when my brother Rit Bahadur was also arrested. Ironically, a CPN(UML) cadre betrayed him and leaked his information to the police. After everything I endured to protect him, someone just betrayed him for money. Soon after Rit Bahadur was arrested, I was released because a writ petition of habeas corpus was filed on my behalf. [21]

Coping with the Trauma

[21] 1940–2018) was a Nepalese politician and human rights activist. A resident of Kathmandu, he played an instrumental role in bringing the Nepali Maoists to mainstream politics from armed struggle. Nawaraj Silwal was the former DIG of Nepal Police and serving as the Member Of House Of Representatives representing the Nepal Communist Party.

Khadka confessed that she did not have very clear memory of what she did and where she went immediately after being released from prison. She remembered wanting to go home to her mother, but she was afraid that the stigma of rape was intense in rural Nepal and her parents might reject her. They did not, and, in fact, they accepted her in stoic silence. She went to meet her brother Rit Bahadur in jail. He recognized that her mental health was fragile and she was struggling to cope with the trauma rape and torture. He borrowed a hundred rupee note from a policeman, wrote down the name of a contact person in Kathmandu and implored her to go immediately. She spent 95 rupees to buy a train ticket to Kathmandu, and on landing there, spent 5 rupees to call the contact person her brother recommended. Penniless and alone, she landed in a rehabilitation centre that was called CWIN (Child Workers in Nepal)[22]. After several months, she finally felt normal.

A Fearless Maoist Soldier: Proximate Causation

This was 1998, and Operation *Kilo Sera II* targeted many Maoist activists.[23] But she noticed that the ordinary people in her district were much more supportive of the Maoists, who did not hide anymore. In fact, people bypassed the state and the police brought cases of domestic violence and other infractions of law to the Maoist courts. Five days after she left the Kathmandu facility for her home in Dolakha, she got involved in her first armed operation for the party. She was apprehended by the police along with her younger brother Bishal and other comrades. Khadka reminisced that she was caught because all the medicines she took in the rehabilitation center made her slow and obese. But she managed to escape along with her brother, while one of their

[22] Devi Khadka said that she was not sure what exactly the Rehabilitation center was called, but she received medical treatment and counselling there along with other victims of torture, that allowed her to bounce back from the overwhelming despair and lack of direction that she felt.

[23] Operation Kilo Sera II, sanctioned by Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, was a search and kill operation by the Nepali Police in 18 districts in Maoist controlled areas. Police operations such as Romeo Operation, Kilo Shera-2 and Jungle Search Operations (1998-99), Silent Kilo Shera-3, Delta and Chakrabihuya Operations (2000-May 2001) in the Maoist areas often alienated civilians, contributed to develop anti-government feeling in ordinary people and increased Maoist recruitment.

comrades was martyred. After the escape she hid in jungles for 3 days, and finally reached her village to recuperate. Her younger brother Bishal 'disappeared' and everyone feared he was killed. Khadka recalled how she was slut shamed in the village, and her family faced social boycott because she was a raped, polluted, woman. Her parents became more and more reluctant to accept her. She overheard her father blaming her mother for not marrying her off early enough. Her mother, in turn, wished she was dead before she brought shame to the entire family. Depressed and tormented in her own house, with her nearest family wishing she was dead, Khadka contemplated and finally attempted suicide. She could not go through with it, but she felt that something in her was broken and permanently damaged.

> I left home feeling the intense need to do something meaningful. I returned to the party and sought out the most violent, vicious, and bloody of the assignemnts that most men did not want. I was like a mad heretic seeking out more risk, but nothing seemed to meet my need for for life threatening danger just to feel alive day to day. I would volunteer to plant a bomb, to lead men crossing high security *nakas* (checkposts). I had no love for life, and no fear of death. I kind of hoped that I will be killed one day soon. But instead my daredevil stunts caught the attention of party bosses. I became known as an eccentric maverick, and the party promoted me as the platoon commnder of the only women guerrilla squad at that time. I led my women's squad in two high stake actions, and the central leadership of the party praised my leadership skills, my courage and dedication. With time, the positive attention from my comrades and the party leadership assuaged my self pity and intese self loathing. I immersed myself in more work.

Khadka found her self confidence improving as her efforts to encourage progressive measures like more women's participation in PLA, more reading programs for rebel women, 4 days break for women soldiers during their menstrual cycle every month and so on. When the party offered the PLA soldiers a monthly stipend of 500 rupees, she demanded and then successfully procured an additional 200 ruppees the women rebel in her squad. She argued that women needed to spend more for personal hygiene and items like sanitary napkins and undergarments were unreasonably

expensive. Devi Khadka said she was most proud of herself when she was recognized alongside the likes of Dharmasila Chapagai in regional (Purbanchal, meaning East) meeting. [24]

She was also proud of leading a women's movement to ban open use of alcohol (roxie) that lead to alcohol-induced domestic violence. Khadka emphasized that they tried to ban alcohol produced by multinational corporations.[25] In 2000-2001, even the Nepal government led by Sher Bahadur Deuba talked with the Womens' wing instead of party leaders and vouched to control the sale of alcohol. With this the womens' wing got much acclaim in the party as well as among ordinary people. Khadka also mentioned other programs she led locally to control polygamy, child-marriages, domestic violence. All was well until about 2058 BS (2001/2 AD), after which everything went downhill as the party became more and more powerful locally.[26]

> Until then the party strictly disciplined cadres and workers. But soon after the people's government (Maoist parallel government) was formed, many opportunists entered the party. As the guerilla warfare intensified, I saw with my own eyes how the truly ideologically devoted comrades became a minority in the party. It was as if the party and the movement was just a spectacle of street protest. Anyone could join the protest and became a Maoist. No more long process of political training, reading, discussions, military training. Everyone was a revolutionary.
>
> This infiltration had many repercussions. One was the murder of my brother Rit Bahadur Khadka in 2001-02. I was told that he was killed by army. He was military commissar of Purbanchal and also central committee member of party. He was opposed to an armed operation which happened in the Chainpur front in Sankhuwasabha, which later failed and about 150 PLA were martyred. Some people in the party thought he sabotaged the operation. They got him killed. After everything we went through together… But I will find out what happened. All the Dolakha leaders who knew my brother for years were bitter and angry. I did not

[24] Dharma Sila Chapagain is a Nepalese politician, belonging to the erstwhile Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). In January 2007 she was nominated to the interim legislature of Nepal on behalf of the CPN (Maoist).

[25] A top Maoist leader in Nepal during an interview, however, summarily dismissed the anti-Roxi movement by women as counter revolutionary and unsanctioned by the party. He was opposed to the zealous Hindu upper caste moral policing against alcohol, which is part of indigenous life and culture.

[26] Through out the interview Devi Khadka (others in Nepal) used the Bikram Sambat Nepali patro. The current Nepali Year in Nepali is Nepali calendar 2076 Bikram Sambat. Nepali Calendar is approximately 56 years and 8 and months ahead of the English Calendar known as Gregorian Calendar or AD.

> want the party to suffer. I took upon myself the responsibility of finding my brother's murdered. I will, one day. [27]

Postconflict Society and Politics

As Devi Khadka expressed her undying love for the Maoist Party and her abiding faith in the ideology, she struggled to conceal her intense disenchantment with what she called the party's inability to to distinguish between the just and unjust, between right and wrong. But she also recognized that, like her, there were many others who gave too much to the party to give up hope and lose faith in the party. As a result, it was a reflection of this popular trust in the party that ensured the victory of the party in the first constituent assembly election. But since then the party lost we lost all the election. In Khadka's words, the Maoist party, as it gained popularity and power, it lost its integrity and sacrificed its core ideology.

> Some party leaders refused to compromise at all and some others compromised too much. I was with pragmatism. But it is the corrupt, self serving mid level leaders that entered politics for self aggrandisemnt that ruined the party. I couldn't leave the party because I didn't want to be leave. After giving my whole life to Party, where will I go! But now I am not sure what the future holds. The Maoist party united with the CPN(UML), the same revisonist pseudo communists we used to fight. I think party should find its voice and character, and bring back the emphasis on grassroots mass mobilization with a clear stand on progressive politics on issues of gender, identity and federalism.[28]

At this point I asked if, in her estimate, the Maoist movement in Nepal brought some permanent social and political changes. Did gender relations, caste relations change as a result of the conflict? She did not hide her dejection when she made the following statement:

---

[27] For the official homage by The Eastern Command of Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) to Rit Bahadur Khadka see, http://www.bannedthought.net/Nepal/Worker/Worker-08/HomageToRitBahadurKhadka-W08.htm

[28] For a brief note on the rightward turn of the Nepal Maoists, see https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/01/26/nepal-shifts-rightwards-after-the-revolution/

> Our constitution is progressive, but our politics is not. We wrote beautiful things in the constitution, but how do we bring those words to life! We changed laws. We overthrew the monarch! It was remarkable. But the kitchens and courtyards in the villages of Nepal look the same. Some people benefited from the revolution. But most people just lost everything. Their day to day has not improved. So many people, disilllusioned and heartbroken, just left the country. They went to Malaysia, Dubai. A lot of remittances are coming back to the villages. There's too much foreign money , and too much foreign interference in everything.
> The social change we brought just became temporary. For instance alcohol related violence against women is on the rise. I see all our work coming undone. But the leaders who initiated these changes are themselves not following Maoist principles anymore. The inter-caste marriages the party encouraged are also falling apart. I think a lot of people got married into other castes to impress the leadership, to win favors. One of the causes was also fear. Once the Maoist army demobilized, we gave up guns and the people are not afraid of the Maoists anymore. Real social change withstands the test of time, and such change happen only if there is a change in the consciousness of people. It is a really difficult challenge.
> It is very difficult job to accomplish.

Khadka admitted that she has been taunted and teased for her own intercaste marriage as well. She considered herself lucky to have found her husband, particualry because she never thought she could marry anyone. She was very aware that if her friends and family could target her, despite her fame and status, for her intercaste marriage, the ordinary women cadres in intercaste marriages went through much more misery and humiliation. The 33% representation for women was a major victory[29]. Khadka also admitted that in many cases women have gained increased respect and decision-making power within the household. She employed a common sense measure to check the changes in gender relations in post conflict social order.

> Our old customs and traditions prohibited men and women from entering certainplaces. For example, men were not expected in kitchens, women were not allowed in politics. Do we see women in political spaces weilding power? Yes. Do we see men sharing the burden of domestic

[29] Nepal reserves for women 33 percent of positions in all of Nepal's state institutions, including the legislature, under Article 84(8). The constitution from the very initial stage ensures the rights of women as a fundamental right (FR) under Article 38. This is already a step ahead of many other constitutions, including those in South Asia.

> work? (laughs) Men used to think that women could not think, we were useless cattle,and as such had no right to have our voice heard. Not anymore. When I speak, men listen. I have the authority of experience. They all know I carried guns. A lot has changed. This is one benefit of the war, if wars can have benefits.

Conclusion

Thie primary contribution of this chapter is documentation of a rebel's perspective on recruitent, combat experience, and the impact of conflict on social and political order in Nepal. Understanding a rebellion from the viewpoint of participants is inherently powerful. Devi Khadka's testimony also provides evidence for understanding how sexual violence is employed as a weapon of war against soldiers, possibly more frequently against women than against men.

Khadka's account of her early childhood in Dolakha district sheds light on the deeply feudal power relations in rural Nepal in the 1980s. This account adds empirical content and nuances to the widely accepted assumption in conflict literature that preexisting social and political conditions determine the outbreak and nature of civil conflict. It is important to note that in her village, where her farming family and the corrupt feudal lord belonged to the same Kshetri caste, class emerged as the master cleavage. The entrenched feudal practices, gender inequality and the nearly homogenous ethnic makeup of the rural district of Dolakha made class polarization much sharper than places where crosscutting class and ethnic cleavages undermined each other incessantly. While her early childhood draws attention to the longterm reasons and sets the context for her joining the Maoists, the second part of her testimony (Becoming Maoist) highlights the more proximate reasons for why women rebel. What stands out in this section is that like other women who join rebel or electoral politics in India or Nepal, Devi Khadka had the active support of a male family member, which in her case was her brother's.

When men rebel, the literature often glorifies it as an act of courage and sacrifice. In my interviews with Maoist combatants in Nepal and India, most rebels submit that they took up arms to improve their lives. Devi Khadka's testimony also shows that she perceived her act of joining the Maoists as a liberating act, rather than a risky one. She faced threats of a forced marriage and feared that she had committed blasphemy by merely becoming literate. Compared to that, the insurgency offered more of a promise for better future than a spectre of death.

This interview also shows how the Nepali state used torture and rape against political prisoners. It shows how trauma affects combatants in civil conflict, pushing her into military action where she sought out the bloodiest of campaigns, secretly hoping she would die. Her testimony also provides evidence that ordinary people in conflict zones live one foot in the insurgency and one foot in the state. Some policemen raped her, while other policemen saved and protected her. Some policemen's wives sheltered her. Human rights activists had personal networks with the police and administraters, which they use to save rebel political prisoners. This is the gray zone of state-insurgency interface, where Maoists expect their support will gradually increase among ordinary people straddling between the state and insurgency. In places where insurgents gain upperhand, this grey zone disappears, and becomes pro-rebel parallel government.

Devi Khadka, understandably enough, was reluctant to talk much about her trauma and how she coped with it in the rehabilitation center, which is evident in the brevity of that section in this paper. But she mentioned many times that she came so close to death that she was not afraid of death, which made her a successful military leader. She admitted that she was lethal, brutal and bloody as a rebel leader, and she found the violence liberating. In fact, it is her success in the guerriilla army that gave her a sense of purpose, and gradually helped her crawl out of

deep despair. This dispenses with the ambiguity that often surrounds women in conflict, and relegate them to civilian rather than military status in postconflict negotiations.

This interview does not generate any conclusive evidence on empowerment via combat experience and on the impact of violence on individuals and society. Has conflict changed concepts of masculinity (what it means to be a manor of femininity (what it means to be a woman) in Nepal? Do the values with which parents educate their girls and boys change as a result of a war? On these questions, I concluded that Khadka felt personally empowered, as evident in the act of choosing a husband outside her caste or in the authority and confidence with which she speaks and conducts herself. In her own words, "I would be an illiterate mother of six in some village. I could never have the confidence to talk to you as an equal, woman to woman. I have come a long way. My sisters did not."

As a researcher, the biggest challenge lies in ascertaining whether a testimony such as this represents a true representation of facts, and what parts are just hopes, aspirations, exaggerations, misconceptions, or deliberate misrepresentation. But this applies to survey and statistical analyses as well, where readers need to rely on the researchers interpretation and coding of responses. Useful as the stories are for filling in details on events often missing in official accounts of civil conflict, it is probably correct to assume that the farther back in time the incident occurred,the more exaggeration and distortion may have been introduced into the story. Therefore, this interview in isolation can not be the basis of generalizable conclusions on the conflict in Nepal. However, it highlights many avenues of furher research, triangulating data from other interviews and from other research methods like surveys and statistical analyses. Based on this interview, I am convinced of the the importance of embedding gender analysis in a

political and social context, and of seeing gender as an analytical lens through which wider social relations can be understood, which can be valuable for future research.

Bibliography

Carpenter, R. Charli. 2016. *"Innocent Women and Children": Gender, Norms and the Protection of Civilians*. Routledge.

Cohen, Dara Kay. 2013. "Female Combatants and the Perpetration of Violence: Wartime Rape in the Sierra Leone Civil War." *World Politics* 65(3): 383–415.

Dickson-Swift, Virginia, Erica L. James, Sandra Kippen, and Pranee Liamputtong. 2009. "Researching Sensitive Topics: Qualitative Research as Emotion Work." *Qualitative research* 9(1): 61–79.

Fusch, Gene E., and Lawrence R. Ness. 2017. "How to Conduct a Mini-Ethnographic Case Study: A Guide for Novice Researchers." *The Qualitative Report* 22(3): 923–41.

Gurr, T. R. 1970. "Why Men Rebel." *Princeton (NJ)*.

Haeri, Medina, and Nadine Puechguirbal. 2010. "From Helplessness to Agency: Examining the Plurality of Women's Experiences in Armed Conflict." *International Review of the Red Cross* 92(877): 103–22.

Hoffmann, Elizabeth A. 2007. "Open-Ended Interviews, Power, and Emotional Labor." *Journal of contemporary ethnography* 36(3): 318–46.

Kannabiran, Vasanth, and Kalpana Kannabiran. 1997. *Looking at Ourselves: The Women's Movement in Hyderabad*. na.

Kannabiran, Vasantha, and Kalpana Kannabiran. 2004. "Women's Rights and Naxalite Groups." *Economic and Political Weekly* 39(45): 4874–77.

Kleinman, Sherryl, Martha A. Copp, and Karla A. Henderson. 1997. "Qualitatively Different: Teaching Fieldwork to Graduate Students." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 25(4): 469–99.

Lichbach, M. I. 1998. *The Rebel's Dilemma*. Univ of Michigan Pr.

Lijphart, Arend. 1971. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *American political science review* 65(3): 682–93.

Loomba, Ania. 2018. *Revolutionary Desires: Women, Communism, and Feminism in India*. Routledge.

MacKenzie, Megan. 2009. "Securitization and Desecuritization: Female Soldiers and the Reconstruction of Women in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone." *Security Studies* 18(2): 241–61.

Manchanda, Rita. 2004. "Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Radicalizing Gendered Narratives." *Cultural Dynamics* 16(2–3): 237–58.

Mosley, Layna. 2013. "Just Talk to People? Interviews in Contemporary Political Science." *Interview research in political science*: 1–28.

Narula, Smita. 1999. *Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's" Untouchables"*. Human Rights Watch.

Nielsen, Kenneth Bo, and Anne Waldrop. 2014. *Women, Gender and Everyday Social Transformation in India*. Anthem Press.

Norum, Karen E. 2000. "Black (w) Holes: A Researcher's Place in Her Research." *Qualitative Sociology* 23(3): 319–40.

Pyakurel, Uddhab P. 2006. “RESEARCH NOTE WOMEN IN ARMED CONFLICT: LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM TELANGANA PEOPLE’S STRUGGLE.” *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 33(2): 237–48.

Roy, Mallarika Sinha. 2010. *Gender and Radical Politics in India: Magic Moments of Naxalbari (1967-1975)*. Routledge.

Tansey, Oisín. 2007. “Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing: A Case for Non-Probability Sampling.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 40(4): 765–72.

Wibben, Annick TR. 2010. *Feminist Security Studies: A Narrative Approach*. Routledge.

Yadav, Punam. 2016. *Social Transformation in Post-Conflict Nepal: A Gender Perspective*. Routledge.

Yami, Hisila. 2006. *People’s War and Women’s Liberation in Nepal*. Purvaiya Prakashan.