'The muck of the past': revolution, social transformation, and the Maoists in India*

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This article analyses revolutionary social change by exploring how people attempt to create a radically different future by taking action in the present, and the challenges that beset this transformation. Examining the relationship between the future, the present, and the past, the article takes the case of the spread of armed underground Maoist guerrillas in India to ask two questions: First, why does India hang on to this form of utopianism when the rest of the world appears to have abandoned it? Second, how and why does the 'muck of the past' influence the production of a radically different future? In answering these questions, this article suggests that for both processes of radical social change and our theories of them, we need to reinsert our analyses of politico-economic conditions into our ideologies of social change.

> Both for the production on a mass scale of ... communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is, necessarily, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a *revolution*; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class *overthrowing* it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the **muck of ages** and become fitted to found society anew.
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> Marx & Engels 1846 [1970]: 94-5, original italics, bold added

Anthropology has spent much time thinking about the present, and the past in the present: that is, the extent to which the past has affected and is reflected in the present. The future has also increasingly troubled scholars (see, e.g., Guyer 2007; Maurer 2002; Munn 1992; Zaloom 2009). But the question of how people create a radically different future in the present through revolutionary action, and the challenges that beset this, the subject of this Malinowski Lecture, demands greater attention.[1]

Towards the end of his life, Malinowski was deeply concerned about the future. Disturbed by Hitler's National Socialism, he lectured on the disastrous consequences of totalitarian regimes for humanity. At the time of his death, he was writing *Freedom and civilisation* (1947), laying out the dangers to democracy and freedom in modern societies. Their advanced political organization, he argued, always came with the potential to abuse power for the benefit of the few and the denial of freedom for the many. In

contrast, freedom in its form *par excellence*, for Malinowski, was found in the earliest cultures – primitive or tribal societies – which as yet had no concentration of power, no rich or poor, no monopolies in wealth, no people who were oppressed, no exploitation. It is perhaps, then, hardly surprising that although troubled about the future under the shadow of the Second World War, Malinowski paid little attention to whether the Trobrianders had a concept of a different possible future. Fixing dates for the future played an important role in the practical necessities of the Trobrianders: for instance, gardening yams (Malinowski 1927). But Trobrianders' concern for a radically different future was maybe not necessary if, as Malinowski saw them, they were already free.

Perhaps this paucity of concern with the remaking of a radically different future in the present is a manifestation of the fact that our informants were not as perturbed about conceptual horizons as they were about the past in the present. This is not entirely surprising if history was seen to evolve with the past repeating itself in the present, in a homogeneous or empty time; or if, as was the case with the Melanesian Karavaran people and their cargo cults, time and transition were episodic – the individual was not thought to be creative, to be capable of making history (Errington 1974: 257). Indeed our informants may not have had a notion of time except for a genealogical one beyond which everything was tradition and myth (Evans-Pritchard 1939). Or, like the Balinese, they may have seen social life as taking place in a motionless present (Geertz 1973: 404). Maybe, though, many of our accounts depended on analyses which saw societies as 'cold', as undifferentiated, timeless, and static, defending themselves against radical social change which was itself too 'hot' to touch (Lévi-Strauss 1966).

To be sure, revolutionary social transformation did make an appearance, if slight, in the history of anthropological theory. From the 1960s, anthropologists who were influenced by Marxism motivated this interest.[2] Eric Wolf (1969), most famously, was concerned with how historical forces created the conditions of peasant wars in Mexico, Russia, China, Vietnam, Algeria, and Cuba. He argued that the spread of capitalism undermined traditional social institutions, and that the resulting psychological, economic, social, and political tensions mounted towards peasant rebellion and involvement in revolution. Moments of such rupture also figured in a literature on millenarian or prophetic movements (see, e.g., Fuchs 1965; Worsley 1957). But, as with the literature on resistance and protest which developed in the 1990s, this interest in millenarian movements and peasant wars focused above all on reactive measures: people's response to rapid and oppressive social change.

Though rarely addressed in anthropological theory, the circumstances under which people could actively change the world in which they lived was the underlying concern of Maurice Bloch's (1977) Malinowski Lecture. Exploring the problem of the past *and* the present in the present, Bloch argued that our analyses of social change are too confined to the terms used by people and thus cannot explain how it is that we can change those terms. He therefore called for us to examine a second system of cognition that is more universal to us all, which reveals strong similarities between cultures: our practical interface with nature. It is this encounter with nature, through labour in the productive process, which carries the seeds to realize exploitation and thus challenge social structure, argued Bloch.

Two years later, in his Malinowski Lecture, Talal Asad (1979) pointed out that Bloch's analysis could not show how people in direct contact with the same nature come to have very different concepts within the same society, and how they are able to engage in ideological arguments about the basic transformations of the social conditions in

which they all live. Asad criticized anthropology for placing too much emphasis on the role of ideology – as embodied in the categories, actions, and discourses of given cultures – arguing that ultimately the societies we work with are transformed not by some essential human concepts, ideology, or culture, but by the changing political and economic conditions which impinge on them (Asad 1979: 624).

Despite this important debate in the late 1970s, Asad turned to Foucault, and Bloch's move to cognition left behind his earlier concerns for radical social change.[3] Later, a range of ethnographic studies emerged on post-revolutionary contexts (most often termed 'post-conflict') or events building to revolutionary change. However, with some notable exceptions (see Don Donham's exemplary 1999 study), a focus on people actively seeking to bring about revolutionary change once again took the back seat in anthropology. The effect was that Joel Robbins (2010) recently felt he could claim that anthropology has mostly been a science of continuity, dedicated to showing the force of cultural reproduction not change.[4] Forgotten are the debates of the 1970s on radical transformation, and Robbins once more has placed ideology foremost on the theoretical agenda of change in anthropology, arguing that the motives for cultural change must be analysed in terms of the culture that is transforming.

Our lack of attention to attempts at shaping radically different visions of the future in the present is perhaps a reflection of a more general disillusionment with concepts of utopia as being untenable. From the mid-1970s, the notion of the utopian – a vision of a future with radically new values and forms to conceive a human community fundamentally questioning the presuppositions of present-day society – was virtually in suspension in many parts of the world (Anderson 2004).

On the one hand, we had the idea that 'there is no alternative' to capitalism, that we have seen the 'End of History',[5] that a single global system, the free market, can impose itself on the most diverse cultures and cure all their ills (Eagleton 2011). People were persuaded that this regime was eternal, there was nothing beyond its horizon (Singer 1993), that the future was simply more of the present – better than the present, but comfortably continuous with it (Eagleton 2011). On the other hand, we had an increase in dystopic and even anti-utopian thought, familiar in science fiction, with a passion to denounce and warn against utopian programmes (Jameson 2005). This was an idea premised on the central message of George Orwell's *Nineteen eighty-four* or *Animal farm* – that social movements or programmes entail an inevitable desire for corruption and lust for power.

State socialism as part of a march to a new society has few defenders now. However, in the last decade, underground armed Naxalite or Maoist guerrillas in India – organized as a Marxist-Leninist party[6] – have intensified a more than forty-year-old violent struggle to seize power of the Indian state as part of an international movement to develop communism. These Maoists see themselves as a class struggle, an armed revolution of the exploited peasants and working classes, for a classless society. The Indian state considers them the country's most formidable internal security challenge. Alleged to be affecting more than three-fifths of the subcontinent,[7] officially banned as terrorists in 2009, the Maoists are currently subject to unprecedented counterinsurgency measures with several thousand security forces surrounding their strongholds.[8]

The presence on our news channels and in our broadsheets of Maoist guerrillas in India is surprising in a context where organized transitions to communism – as in the Soviet legend and Mao's vision of China – seem to have virtually collapsed in the rest of the world. It is surprising in a time when in many parts of the world class struggle

appears to have been replaced by ethnic or identity politics.[9] It is surprising when the revival of communism in Euro-America is taking place through anarchist-inspired movements promoting direct action that will somehow overturn the system (Graeber 2013), and away from organized party politics. And it is surprising when those lone but influential philosophers resurrecting Maoism, like Alain Badiou, have turned their commitment to Maoism into waiting in the margins for some miraculous 'event'.[10] In the process, communism is rendered to the purposes of mere speculation about 'the communist hypothesis', a hypothesis unburdened by past experiences and theories of revolution, socialist states, and parties (Badiou 2008; 2010). In this context, the Indian Maoists act as a forceful reminder of the final lines of Marx's (1845) 'Theses on Feuerbach', 'Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it' (original emphasis).

If this international milieu sets the Maoists in India apart as a political struggle, so too does the national milieu. This movement for radical equality has persisted in the land of *Homo hierarchicus* – what has often been described, albeit controversially, as the quintessential example of a society organized around the principle of hierarchy as found in caste. Strangely, in these dystopic times of the West, or in the dark ages of the *Kali Yug* of India in which any change is consigned to an age of decay,[11] for the Indian Maoists the future is not bleak. For more than four decades they have held on with conviction to the hope of producing a better time to come. Moreover, in the process of the revolution, in founding society anew, they have attempted to re-create that future in the present by trying to get rid of the 'muck of the ages', the muck of the past.

In this lecture I analyse the case of the Indian Maoists to emphasize the significance of the dialectical relationship between ideology and the politico-economic forces of history in our theoretical analyses of radical social change. I do so by asking two questions.

The first: Why does India hang on to this form of utopianism when the rest of the world has abandoned it? How and why has Maoism persisted in India? I will answer this question by considering the convergence of the vanguard of the movement (mainly high-caste Hindu men) with the rank and file joining the underground forces today (mainly Adivasis, India's tribal populations). I will argue that the persistence of a movement committed to radical equality exists in India in part because of the subversion of the ideological significance of the figure of the Hindu renouncer for the goal of communism. I will also argue that this ideological force is sustained by a particular politico-economy which has severely marginalized Adivasis and has meant the Maoists have been able to provide a home away from home for the rank and file who are joining their armies today.

The second question I ask is: What are the forces that are persistently undermining Maoist political mobilization? This is a question about how and why the 'muck of the past', the 'muck of ages', to evoke Marx and Engels (1970 [1846]), influences the production of a utopian future. In the case of the Maoists, I show that an inability to take into account the material changes encouraging class differentiation in their guerrilla zones undermines their production of a better future.

This case, I argue, calls for us to reinsert the political and economic forces of history into our theories and praxis of social change. Radical social transformation needs to be understood through the conjuncture of culture or ideology *with* the material forces of history.

My arguments are based on ethnographic research conducted since 1999 in the hills and forests of central and eastern India, to which the guerrillas have retreated from the

caste-divided agricultural plains in the last twenty years. I have lived in remote parts of the country – in the state of Jharkhand – as an anthropologist for more than four and a half years. My last long-term spell of field research was conducted with the anthropologist George Kunnath and lasted eighteen months from September 2008 to April 2010.[12]

Radical social change: ideology and political economy

So, first, who are these people who maintain this tenacious commitment to a radically different future? Why, when the odds seem to be stacked so high against them, have they persisted for more than forty years in India? To answer these questions, I must give you a very brief social history of the Indian Maoists.[13]

In the late 1960s, reflecting the more general fervour of protest – of opposition to the Vietnam War, the students' and workers' uprisings in May '68 in Paris, the various anti-colonial struggles – university students and intellectuals in India joined hands with radicals who had split off from the mainstream parliamentary communist parties to engage in violent uprisings in the Indian countryside. Peasants were mobilized to attack landlords, cancel old debts, burn records, and forcibly occupy land. The struggles are commonly traced back to an uprising in the West Bengal village and Community Development Block of Naxalbari, from which the revolutionaries get their popular name, Naxalites. As they spread, the Chinese Communist Party celebrated the uprisings as the 'Spring Thunder over India'.[14]

Massive police repression ensued in the 1970s. Many of the revolutionary movement's leaders were killed or incarcerated, and factionalism followed within the ranks. However, from the late seventies, as activists were released from jail, the revolutionary communists regrouped in various parts of the country. They formed Marxist-Leninist parties to continue underground armed struggle to overthrow the Indian state. They once again attracted middle-class and higher-caste students from the colleges and universities of the metropolitan centres – Calcutta, Delhi, Patna, Hyderabad, Warangal – who went to the villages with a programme of revolution. Drawing inspiration from Mao's Chinese programme, they analysed the Indian economy as semi-feudal and semi-colonial,[15] developed a strategy relying on peasants,[16] and sought to establish base areas in the countryside from where protracted armed struggle could advance and capture the cities to seize power. In the decades which followed, the movements spread and shrank, factionalized and united. However, in the first decade of the new millennium, the largest groups of India's most radical communists came together under the banner of the Communist Party of India (Maoist) to escalate their war against the Indian state.

In the long course of the struggle, many died and some left the movement. However, it is those highly educated students of the 1980s, 1970s, and sometimes even 1960s, from middle-class and clean-caste families, who are leading the CPI (Maoist) and its People's Liberation Guerrilla Army today. In the 1980s, in the landlord-dominated plains, these leaders had mobilized Dalit or untouchable landless labourers and middle-caste peasants in furious anti-feudal struggles.[17] In the 1990s, police repression pushed the party into the forests and hills of central and eastern India, and many of the Dalits and middle castes left.[18] The revolutionary leadership found the new terrain settled predominantly by India's Adivasi or tribal people. Since the 1990s, it is primarily these forest dwellers – extremely poor, largely illiterate men and women who rely on subsistence farming, hunting-gathering, and wage labour – who have joined the rank and file of the movement.[19]

To understand the persistence of a movement committed to a radically different future in India, we must analyse first the revolutionary leadership, who have been underground for more than twenty, if not thirty, years. This is important because while many cadres have come and gone in the different phases of the movement, it is these leaders who have remained to guide the new crop. It is on the conviction of their commitment – in the face of all the adversities of life underground – that the armed struggle for communism has spread and stayed in India. Second, we must understand why this leadership and its message have been appealing for the people who have joined the movement – I focus here on the Adivasis and other low castes who are swelling the rank and file of their People's Liberation Guerrilla Army today.

The vanguard

To turn to the leadership, or vanguard, first. Meet Gyan,[20] who is in his fifties and in jail. But I would like to introduce you to him when he was 17. From an upper-caste lineage that once owned large tracts of land, his family lived what was locally considered a lower-middle-class life-style on his father's government engineer salary. His friends had always thought he was a bit different. They teased him for being uninterested in girls and proclaiming celibacy. They laughed when he would not cross a line of ants without chanting mantras in case he mistakenly stepped on one. They chided him for endlessly poring over Vedic texts and sitting on the Ganges' banks, gazing for hours on end into the sun, waiting to be enlightened by God.

Gyan was already on the Hindu path of renunciation, of liberation from the endless cycle of rebirth, of escaping the regeneration of the self, time, and cosmos (Parry 1994), when he met an influential teacher at university. Amidst hours of discussion, the teacher gave him his first tasks of distributing a pamphlet on 'the death of God' among fellow students, listening to the problems of slum dwellers at the edge of the city, and introduced him to Marxism. Soon after, from one track to renunciation in which he could not harm an ant, Gyan moved to another, which necessitated carrying a .303 rifle, and joined the communist revolutionaries. The nuances of Gyan's turn to communism have their own story (I choose here only those aspects of the story that Gyan told me which I think cannot harm him or his associates). Moreover, knowing and telling the stories of clandestine activity in this context – as one of the world's most powerful counterinsurgency operations is underway – is challenging, to say the least. But the point I wish to make is that Gyan's story is not unique, and that of the few Maoists we met who were the most senior leaders responsible for organizing the movement, I am aware that a significant proportion had once been on the Hindu path to renunciation. This trajectory is important not because of the literal translation from renouncer to revolutionary. Rather, it is important because of what the possibility of renunciation in the Hindu cosmos – that is, the figure of the renouncer – suggests for the production of committed political subjects. To be clear: I do not wish to suggest that Maoist leaders were all once renouncers. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the ideological significance of the figure of the renouncer for the making of dedicated communist revolutionaries.

India in fact has a very long tradition of putting renunciation to use for political purposes. In the contemporary era there are two significant traditions calling on renunciation. One is fairly well known, the *pracharaks* or saints of the extreme Hindu right-wing Sangh Parivar (the family of organizations of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh) (Anderson & Damle 1987: 82; Jaffrelot 1996: 40-3). The second, which is revealed

perhaps for the first time through the narratives of men like Gyan, is that of the Maoists. Though Gyan and his friends would deeply dislike my analysis, what I wish to argue here is that it is the ideological underpinnings of Hindu renunciation which, I think, *in part* explains why India preserves class struggle.[21]

While their numbers are small, the figure of the renouncer has played a very special role in the Hindu cosmos, setting it apart from all other ascetic and religious institutions (Dumont 1970: 184-6). Any person (from any caste or gender) can become an ascetic (see Khare, 1984, for instance on untouchable renouncers), although generally it is men of clean-caste origin who are found renouncing.

At one end of the spectrum there are monks in ochre robes with shaven heads or semi-naked figures with ropes of uncut, matted hair living austerely only on alms and meditating hours on end alone, as described by Christopher Fuller (1992: 17). At the other end there are Jonathan Parry's flesh-eating, excrement-consuming, prostitute-fornicating Aghori ascetics of Banaras (Parry 1994). These ascetics seek to acquire the transcendental knowledge that will liberate them individually from time and the endless cycle of suffering and rebirth. The effect of this theology is that the ascetics proclaim radical equality in which there is no distinction between the Brahman and the Untouchable.[22]

In contrast to individual ascetics, organized groups of renouncers have long been noted for their search to create a parallel society, whether it is the peasant monks described by William Pinch (1996), the Nagas of Dirk Kolff (1971), or the Gosains explored by Bernard Cohn (1964). Romila Thapar (1978) has argued that these groups of renouncers, existing since as far back as post-Vedic times, were neither attempting to negate society (as in the individual ascetic who isolates himself totally), nor seeking to alter it radically. These were individual renouncers joining entire groups who opted out of society in order to create a parallel society.

I suggest that the Indian Maoist leaders can be seen as part of this long tradition of renouncing groups in Hindu society. The difference, of course, is that the parallel societies of Hindu renouncer groups had a tacit recognition of the futility of changing the larger society (Thapar 1978: 62) – they marked dissent not by a desire to change society, but by standing outside of it to create an alternative system. In contrast, I suggest that when renouncing merges with the ideology of communism it can lead to groups, as in the case of the Indian Maoists, who see themselves as part of changing not only an Indian, but also a global, community.

The parallels between the Maoists and these renouncer groups are stark. In turning their commitment from Hindu renunciation to communist revolution, men like Gyan subverted the search for equality via an individual's autonomous escape *from* this world into a commitment to transforming radically the bonds of social existence to attain equality for everybody in the here and now. The lone Hindu renouncer denied hierarchy by repudiating the opposition between the pure and the impure and represented the equality of those who were liminal (Parry 1994: 263). In contrast, these revolutionary leaders sought to transform the whole of society now so that their liminality became the norm and not the exception. Rather than icons of individual liberation in the transient world, the Maoist leaders became liberators of the whole of society in this world, creators of a world of radical equality in the present. Through the process of their emancipation as political subjects (cf. Rancière 1995), they worked towards developing a society within the Communist Party in which the human community would subsume the individual him- or herself.

Indeed, becoming a Maoist necessitates the idea of a radical transformation of the person and his or her social relations.[23] It involves the idea of a total break with the past for the creation of the utopian future in the present. In this kind of evental transformation, in fact, the revolutionary leaders are representative of the quintessential subject of Badiou's event, constituting themselves as subjects of that truth, as militants for their cause. They represent Badiou's (2001) vision of ethics in their selfless devotion to the cause, their fidelity and commitment to that truth, a task which they see as compelling and transcending all petty, private concerns or personal deprivations. Gyan often commented that it was their collective responsibility in the party to work towards this truth which would liberate all of society. In this process he saw himself as performing a historical role set out for him for the progress of society as a whole, sacrificing himself as an individual to the cause of making history.

To become this subject of evental change, the first task of those seeking to be ideal Maoists is that on joining the party, they declass themselves by giving up their worldly possessions, ownership of any form of property. This means cutting off all ties with families. It is in the new social relations within the Communist Party, in conjunction with and through the self-realization of others, that the new subject is born. There is no salary; basic needs are met by the party – food, clothing, books – though comrades must practise austerity and refrain from 'worldly' pleasures. A new name is given to each comrade, which, aside from obvious security advantages, is part of the birth of the classless, casteless revolutionary subject. The new men or women are now the subjects of history, involved in an open-ended project of their own self-development and that of others around them, based on the revolutionary values of voluntarism, selflessness, and public service.

Declassification is part of the praxis of the revolution, in which the ideals of the future society are promoted through 'living by doing'. Leaders try to break down the division of labour, which they feel nurtures the development of private rights in property and the development of the propertied classes. They make a conscious effort to undermine the division of mental and manual labour in the party. It is expected that everyone (regardless of class, caste, gender, and position) will take turns or rotas in cooking, digging out pits in the earth for make-shift toilets, erecting temporary camps, lifting heavy loads, engaging in sentry duty, but also leading education and physical training classes for those junior to them.[24] The hope is that new social relations will be forged between people in the party that supersede the caste, class, and gender divisions of village societies and become the basis for further revolutionary mobilization.

Crucially, revolutionaries need to subordinate any form of individual interest to the interests of the party and the people, sacrifice everything – including family – for the cause, so that eventually there will be no cleavage between particular and common interests. The ultimate sacrifice, the paradigmatic act in the birth of the revolutionary subject, is, of course, the willingness to give up your life for the cause, the sacrifice of the self.[25]

In the *Kali Yug* or Dark Ages, the current Hindu epoch which situates all change in a repeated cycle of degeneration and decay, asceticism is prescribed as a surrogate for sacrifice as both are intimately associated with abandonment (Parry 1994: 190). For the future of the Maoists, however, asceticism is replaced by the sacrifice of the self for the collective production of a new society.

Contrary to André Béteille (1986), who argued that the relationship between individualism and equality is contingent, by subverting the goal of renunciation as an escape from this world, India's communist revolutionaries, prioritizing their self-sacrifice, become creators of the ideal world in this world, eliminating the dependence

of equality on individual autonomy. They thus become the emancipated subjects of a radical equality which is beyond equality as equivalence based on a measurement of equal individual rights.[26] The revolution, then, is not just a march towards a notion of radical equality that underwrites their utopia, it is not just an act which precipitates the project of communist emancipation, but it is a constitutive act of that emancipation itself.

The implications are rather startling. In contrast to the Durkheimian tradition, which represents the world of the sacred as replicating a social order which is inviolable, Jonathan Parry has suggested that in order for a world to be immune to change, the sacred domain must in part be constructed as an antithesis to the world of everyday life, and that the former therefore suggests possibilities which are profoundly unsettling to the latter (Parry 1994: 271). On the one hand, Hindu renunciation serves to legitimate hierarchy by being an escape from it, an antithesis to it; equality is attained only by those who leave it. On the other hand, what we see here in the case of the revolutionaries is that the figure of the renouncer also carries the seeds to undermine the hierarchical ordering of society profoundly, to challenge it fundamentally.

If, as in the case of the renouncer turned communist, those on the Hindu path of renunciation realign their commitment to the goal of attaining equality by liberation *from this world* to liberation *within this world*, then the ideological underpinnings of the renouncer in the Hindu cosmos can enable the production of radical equality in this world. The paradox of the situation is that whereas the classic Indian renouncer extinguishes the future by leaving the world, the renouncer turned revolutionary is committed to creating a new future in the present. 'Traditional' India is often seen as the most privileged instance of hierarchical ordering. However, what I suggest here is that the subversion of the long tradition of renunciation to communism also enables India to produce the contemporary world's most pertinent example of the fight for the principle of equality.

The rank and file
If the ideological force of renunciation gives the revolutionary leadership its conviction, what enables the sustenance of this conviction? In the forests and hills where the revolutionaries have held their strongholds for the last fifteen to twenty years, their Maoist ideals of radical equality have made them appealing to the Adivasi inhabitants.

Here, Adivasis have a long history of being considered by all other outsiders (especially state officials) as the lowest of the low in status. They have faced severe discrimination and have been treated as *jangli*: that is, wild, savage, and barbaric (Shah 2010*a*). Their regions have been long neglected by the developmental Indian state, treated as solely spaces of extraction. These are the regions which contain India's richest mineral reserves, now attracting the world's largest multinational corporations, but which were also the source of railway sleepers for colonial expansion (cf. Sivaramakrishnan 1999), and wood for the building of British military ships and of the antique furniture coveted in much of middle England.[27] The state here came as a rapacious outside agency forcibly appropriating Adivasi lands and forests for commercial purposes of forestry and mining in processes of primitive accumulation. It tried to settle the predominantly hunting-gathering populations for revenue collection and introduced exploitative contractors and money-lenders (Devalle 1992; Rothermund 1978). The result is that the colonial and Indian state here has been experienced predominantly through the brutality of the police and forest guards, and mediated by the equally brutal high-caste outsiders it brought. It is, then, hardly surprising

that, with significant parallels to James Scott's (2009) societies fleeing from the state, Adivasis here, under a series of exploitative regimes, have sought to keep the state away from the intimacies of their everyday life (Shah 2010a).[28]

Sustained by this politico-economic context, the Maoist message against the Indian state addresses a long history of Adivasi desire to keep the state away (Shah 2010a). Thus actions such as the Maoists reclaiming the forests for the people by bombing the state forest rest houses, burning forest jeeps, and chasing out the officers, coupled with Maoist replacement of outside contractors with locals, and raising the wages of forest product collection, have been extremely influential in gaining Adivasi support. If these challenges to the state are important for Maoist local credibility, so too are their ideals of radical equality, which have predisposed the revolutionaries to treat the Adivasis with respect and dignity. Unlike all other outsiders who came to these areas, the Maoists gained the trust and respect of the Adivasis because they embarked with the principles of treating them as equal human beings.

It is perhaps, then, hardly surprising that over time, defying the arguments of greed or simple material grievance that are dominant in theories of revolutionary mobilization (see Shah 2013a), the most common reasons why Adivasi youth joined the guerrillas was because of the relations of intimacy that developed between the revolutionary party and the people, enabling the underground armies to become an alternative family in the area, a home away from home. The young men and women who came to live with the guerrillas and join their armed squads in these regions most typically came because they were escaping various household village tensions: a fight with a parent, a prohibited love affair, an arranged marriage. Many Adivasis travelled with the guerrilla squads for some time and returned back to the villages, some repeating the process several times. A few stayed longer, left their village homes to commit to the revolutionary party, and slowly rose up the hierarchy. After more than two decades of the Maoist presence in these regions, kinship relations weaved in and out of the villages and the party, blurring the boundaries between the revolutionaries and the people.[29]

I do not wish to remove the possibility that Adivasis (like Khare's [1984] untouchable ascetics) can also be drawn to the Maoists by a variant of the renouncer's ideology. Indeed, historically there have been a range of millenarian-type movements in the Adivasi forests and hills led by figures whose style is significantly inflected by that of the Hindu renouncer (Shah 2014). However, my evidence suggests that the ideological underpinnings of the renouncer have not been the main attraction for the Adivasi rank and file, in part because the Maoists have wanted to keep at a distance any kind of appeal to their cadres that looks like it is religiously inspired (Shah 2014).

The effect is that, on the one hand, the leadership – the renouncers turned revolutionaries – are attracted to and driven by a compulsion of radical transformation, a break with their past. On the other hand, most of the rank and file of the contemporary movement – the Adivasi cadres – feel comfortable moving with the underground armies because the revolutionaries and their ideals present relative alignment with, and not radically different alternatives to, Adivasi social relations, which are sustained by the particular politico-economic histories of extraction in the area. The tradition of renunciation in the Hindu cosmos, which has given the revolutionary leaders their conviction to shape a different ideal of the future, is thus maintained by its relationship with the particular material conditions in which it finds itself. To run ahead of myself, these politico-economic forces of history, while at one level sustaining the movement, can also, as I will show, lead to its unravelling.

The muck of the past: ideology at the cost of political economy

Utopian politics depends on inserting the fine wedge of an emancipated future through radical transformation into the heart of the present. It represents a link between the present and the future, a point at which the two interact. For any project of radical transformation, a different future has to be forged from this particular present and most of the present is made up of the past. To what extent, though, to turn to my second question, can the Maoists in the revolution 'succeed in ridding themselves of all the muck of the past' – to paraphrase Marx and Engels –'and become fitted to found society anew?'

One of the toughest demands of breaking with the past is that of renouncing one's kin. Apart from the emotional bonds, family links are important because those outside the underground party provide essential support such as safe houses for recuperation, storage of essentials, and sometimes the provision of food. If kinship ties are important to sustain the struggle, they are also dangerous because they depend on relations of reciprocity which are to be superseded in the new sociality of the movement: a sociality beyond the distinctions of kin.

Even those who have undergone the most radical of transformations, the renouncers turned communists, who in all other aspects 'declass' themselves for a classless society within the party, may at times find it hard to resist prioritizing the expectations and needs of their families above those of the ideals of the struggle. It is this inability to break with families that often leads to their individual fall. For instance, after more than thirty years underground, other leaders analyse that it was Gyan's weakness to attend to the needs of his wife, who was outside the movement, that led him beyond the safe confines of the guerrilla zones and into the city, where he was arrested.

Kinship ties are part of the muck of the past that will inevitably haunt the advent of radical social transformation. With close parallels to the confession of sin (Harris 2006), the Maoist rituals of criticism, self-criticism, and rectification are crucial to the formation and re-enactment of revolutionary subjectivity; they are part of an ongoing battle to get rid of the muck of the past. These rituals re-enact revolutionary ideals on the premise that revolutionary conversion is a permanent or 'endless' process (Badiou 2003: 63), constantly renewed in the confession and denunciation of individualistic behaviour.

But to focus only on the existence of tensions between particular circumstances and the project of radical transformation is to miss the significance of why the conflict between the two is salient at specific historical moments. This, I will show, requires a politico-economic analysis – the changes in processes of production and reproduction – which the Maoists, set on their analysis of the semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism of the Indian economy, have largely left behind (cf. Lerche, Shah & Harriss-White 2013; Shah 2013*b*).

Although breaking with the ties of kinship is a problem that faces all revolutionaries, it has acquired a particular importance in recent years. As I have argued earlier, the elective affinity between the Maoists and the Adivasis, a result of the conjuncture of revolutionary ideals of radical equality and politico-economic forces, has meant that the Maoist squads have easily become a second home. In recent years, however, family and kinship are not simply a contradictory or conflicting domain of loyalty and commitment to radical transformation, but are also the site through which a new process of class differentiation is being experienced in the guerrilla zones. These processes, which lead to upward mobility for some, entail very different ideals of the future to those which are promoted by the revolutionaries.

How is class differentiation taking place here? As in many parts of the world, capitalist development in agriculture has not initiated the classic processes of polarization.[30] However, though there is little to support the case for the Maoists' insistence on an analysis of semi-feudalism in these guerrilla zones, there have been a number of significant changes in the forces of production and reproduction (Shah 2013*b*).

One is that the cumulative effect of the expropriation of land, demographic pressure, and integration into commodity relations has meant that the majority of households in the region struggle to reproduce themselves today. They are compelled to combine subsistence farming and hunting-gathering with wage work and petty production. A second significant change is that a very slow process of class differentiation is being initiated amongst Adivasis by the state encouraging capitalist accumulation – a development taking place outside of agriculture in these guerrilla zones (Shah 2013*b*). The expansion of education combined with some affirmative action policies by the state has meant that although literacy rates are still incredibly low, a few households have government jobs which bring in a monthly salary, or have acquired bank loans to start up small trades. These jobs, trades, and, increasingly, government development and procurement contracts are no longer simply the preserve of the outsiders who for decades maintained control over the state. Whereas once their ancestors sought to keep the state away (Shah 2010*a*), some of the new generations of Adivasis and other lower castes are slowly seeking a share of the pie and diversifying their means of reproduction beyond subsistence farming and wage labour (Higham & Shah 2013).

The muck of the past, in the form of these forces and relations of production, is shifting in the region. The effect of these material forces of history is to produce class differentiation, which is experienced in the party through the continued ties with village kinship relations. The inability to break with village social relations becomes particularly challenging in the changing political-economic context of the forces of production.

Of the many who have joined the Maoists, a few are increasingly concerned about improving the status of their families away from a future of working with nature: the hard labour of digging the fields, foraging in the forests, and carrying heavy loads that faced their parents. For them, siphoning off the revolutionary party's tax of state development schemes, forest contracts, and mining operations becomes one way of mobilizing resources, of accumulating capital, for the upward mobility of their families. The party is for all, but these processes dangerously threaten to undermine its universal message by turning its assets into a kind of private fief.[31] Propelled by these processes of class differentiation in the area, the danger that besets the revolutionary party is thus a kind of 'privatization of the commons'.

Take, for instance, the case of Amitabh Oraon. Eulogized as one of the bravest, most loyal, and most formidable warriors of the Maoist People's Liberation Guerrilla Army, he was a senior platoon commander when I met him. However, one dark night, Amitabh burned his olive green uniform, and left the party with fourteen men and some of the best weapons that the party had painstakingly looted from the police (one AK-47, three self-loading rifles, one light machine gun, one INSAS rifle, and five .303s). He formed a gang out to kill the Maoist leaders, with a mission to terrorize the villagers into opposing the guerrillas, and seek his fortunes with the guns.

Representing a common trajectory of the ways in which splinter or factional groups are formed, he gave birth to one Maoist faction that would rule through guns and extortion.[32] Groups such as this are devoid of ideological underpinnings, participate in elections, and are viewed as gangs by the vanguard of the CPI (Maoist).

Amitabh's defection was a shock to everyone. The Maoist leaders were distraught; there had been high hopes for this revolutionary in the making. He had joined the movement when he was only 16 and was one of the most trustworthy of the younger generations. The immediate incident which led to his departure was a dispute between Amitabh and another platoon commander which involved a long-standing jealousy of status and power between the two. But it later transpired that for several months Amitabh had in fact been embezzling party funds for a lavish second wedding and a house for his new bride.

Those who have parted ways usually leave quietly. But Amitabh's defection was particularly upsetting to the Maoist leaders, who, though always concerned about his lack of 'political education', had failed to notice the changes that had 'corrupted' him to such an extent that he formed a gang in opposition to the party to seek his riches.

Soon, however, they were compelled to rise beyond their feelings of betrayal – Amitabh had become the party's greatest threat in the area, suspected to be supported by the state in his defection. The region's guerrilla forces were mobilized for his elimination. After several close military encounters with Amitabh's gang, which resulted in not much more than a few minor injuries – and those, too, not in battle – it was ironically the emerging individualism of village sociality promoted by processes of class differentiation which came to the rescue.

The Maoists recruited a person who had been dismissed from the movement some years before – on grounds of corruption – to infiltrate Amitabh's gang. What Amitabh did not know when he accepted this man into his group is that the Maoists had deployed the infiltrator because of the personal hatred and envy they knew he held for Amitabh's success and rise within the party. Indeed the very principles of individualism that prevented Amitabh from becoming the ideal revolutionary subject and which fostered his defection were the ones which ultimately led to his annihilation.

Amitabh's defection was so serious that it was beyond remedy, but the elimination of individual interests is an ongoing challenge within the Maoists. The most common subject of self-criticism and rectification that faces the party now is corruption. Party cadres have been accused of personally profiting from the transfer of levies collected by the party from state development schemes and outside contractors,[33] which are meant to be redistributed for public interest – to buy 3G phones or Hero Honda motorbikes; to turn their modest mud dwellings into two-storey brick-and-mortar houses; to improve the economic status of their families.

What the Maoists are unable to tackle is that these charges of corruption cannot simply be addressed through processes of self-criticism and rectification. The private use of party resources meant for the public good is emblematic of the profound changes of emerging class differentiation, a process that the revolutionaries are unin-tentionally even party to in these areas.

In this context of changing relations of production, the Maoists seem to be working against the grain of history, and their constant attempt to reform revolutionary subjects leads easily to betrayal by these subjects, and ultimately the formation of infiltrators, covert agents, and informants which enables the Indian state to arrest and kill the revolutionaries.[34]

Conclusion

Focusing on the case of the underground armed Maoist guerrilla insurgency in India, in this lecture I have been concerned with how we theorize the attempts of people

seeking to create a radically different future by taking revolutionary action in the present. This important agenda once made a small mark in the history of anthropological theory but is now too easily forgotten. In the turn to ideology and culture within anthropological theory, I have sought to reinstate the relationship between ideology and the politico-economic forces of history in our theories of cultural change.

My analysis of the Maoist guerrilla insurgency suggests that the renunciatory Maoists have taken insufficient account of the quotidian world of the productive processes around them, even if their emancipatory world is undermined daily by these very processes. The transformations in politico-economic conditions leading to changing relations of production haunt their emancipatory future because the Maoists – remaining committed to an analysis of India as a 'semi-feudal' and 'semi-colonial' country almost as if it were ritual – have not accommodated for them.[35]

This muck of the past – the changes in political economy – haunts our events, projects, and programmes of radical transformation. In this case, the Maoist revolutionary struggle risks being trapped by the very utopia that is supposed to bring emancipatory transformation for all. The danger is that theories of social transition which remain confined to ideology risk becoming mere ritual. This is the threat of prioritizing the creation of the utopia itself at the cost of the quotidian analyses of the material challenges facing the production of that utopia. The politico-economic changes of history cannot be subordinated to timeless structures.[36] The point, it seems, is that fantasies of the future need to be linked with the prosaic material workings of the present in order to analyse and resolve the contradictions in the present which prevent radical transformation from coming about.

So, in tying these themes together, how do we account for people attempting to create a radically different future and the challenges that beset the transformation, the questions I began with? The case of the Indian Maoists shows us the significance of the conjuncture of ideology *and* the material forces of history. Here an underground armed communist movement, which seems antique to the world today, has persisted with such strength in India because of both the subversion of the ideological significance of the renouncer in the Hindu cosmos and the politico-economic context which sustains it.

I have also argued that radical social transformation is always haunted by the 'muck of the past'. In particular we need to account for the politico-economic changes of history that alter class relations (and kinship through class). Ignoring these material forces of history, and prioritizing ideological representations, in the end risks undermining the force of ideology. Here, the paradox is that a movement that has an emancipatory agenda in the name of class is most undone by class. The point, it seems, for both processes of radical transformation and our theories of them, is that we need to reinsert our analyses of political economy into our ideologies of social change.

NOTES

[1] Indeed, Thomassen (2012) has recently argued that Worsley's (1961) claim for the absence of analysis of rebellion or revolution-in-the-making still stands in anthropology.

[2] The social experience of dramatic change was also the concern of the Manchester school (Gluckman 1958; Mitchell 1956 [1899]). A brief but significant attempt to theorize social change was made in the 1970s and early 1980s by anthropological structural Marxism (cf. Nugent 2007 for a review). However, arguably, much of the theoretical force of these ethnographies did not move significantly beyond structural functionalism. Parry, for instance, argues of Maurice Bloch's *Marxism and anthropology* (1983),

> What, surprisingly, did not appear to trouble him [Bloch] was that much of this work – Terray (1975) is a good example – sets out to demonstrate that in this kind of world 'classes in themselves' were unlikely to become 'classes for themselves' conscious of their interests in opposition to those of other classes. Since in Marxian theory it is class conflict that provides its dynamic, that leaves such societies stranded by history. Marxian tools are made to serve structural-functionalist ends: the analysis centres on the way that they reproduce themselves (Parry 2007: 350).

[3] In a critical appreciation of Maurice Bloch's life works, Jonathan Parry (2007: 354) has argued that representations which were the product of political economy in Bloch's earlier essays later reflect constants in the human condition, human nature in general. Like Asad's (1979) earlier critique, Parry is concerned that the danger to anthropology in focusing on these essential conditions is that the 'subject will drift even further away from a proper concern with political economy ... and with the structure of society' (2007: 360).

[4] The original Malinowski Lecture, as delivered, had a more elaborate critique of Robbins's (2010) turn to left philosophers like Badiou to explain radical change in a context devoid of political concerns. I felt it unnecessary to develop the arguments here.

[5] This is a defining feature of post-Thatcher times (Fukuyama 1992) and a period in which we have also seen a sabotage and commoditization of utopian thinking (Anderson 2004).

[6] They are thus Marxists who have accepted Lenin's contributions to revolutionary Marxism, in particular the significance of the seizure of power for and by the proletariat, via a party, for the building of a socialist society. Marxism is here a revolutionary class praxis, action by the party working on behalf of the working classes, organized on the principles of democratic centralism, and with the aim of bringing revolutionary theory and political organization to the exploited masses. Organization by the party is key and differentiates Marxist-Leninists from those who have argued for the spontaneous activity of the working classes, or that socialism can be achieved by evolutionary means.

[7] Twenty-one of India's twenty-eight states are allegedly under Maoist influence (*http://blogs.reuters.com/india/2013/05/29/who-are-indias-maoists-and-why-they-are-in-the-news/*, last accessed 24 February 2014). Such figures of coverage change frequently and I believe are prone to extensive exaggeration for different reasons from government, media, and Maoist sources alike.

[8] Coincidentally, as we began our extended field research, in the summer of 2009, the Indian government launched a military offensive, dubbed Green Hunt, of an unprecedented scale to eliminate the Maoist guerrillas. In June 2009, the central government issued an all-India ban, declaring the Communist Party of India (Maoist) as a terrorist organization under Section 41 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Extensive military operations against the Maoists are ongoing as this article goes to press.

[9] For Latin America, see Gledhill (1997); Hale (2002); Petras & Veltmeyer (2009). The NPA in the Philippines declined in the 1990s. Nepal's Maoists are now discredited by their Indian counterparts for having adopted the parliamentary route after 2006. It is interesting to note that the most pertinent question for the Nepali constitution-making process was that of ethnic federalism.

[10] Curiously, in reviving the dream of a world free from the law of profit and private interest, many left thinkers, from Žižek (2003) to Agamben (2005), have turned recently to Saint Paul. Saint Paul is recorded sometime in the year 33 or 34 AD to have undergone a radical rupture from Judaism in his conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus. Although a self-proclaimed Maoist (Badiou 2010: 262), Badiou rejects organization by a party as the harbinger of change, sidelines revolutionary or reformist models of a planned transition towards a desired utopian future, and prioritizes instead an analysis of the arrival of radical change in the form of an unexpected event. Saint Paul's sudden conversion becomes here a device for left thinkers to imagine how an individual can, through a leap of faith, commit to becoming a communist without engaging in organized change: revolution.

[11] The Hindu theory of time advocates four endlessly repeated epochs, a changeless order. Duration and change are recognized within this scheme, but placed within a timeless frame of repeated epochs. The *Kali Yug,* the fourth epoch, in which actual historical time unfolds, is the degenerate age (Pocock 1964).

[12] A whole range of ethnographic techniques were followed (life histories, interviews, archival research, household surveys, etc.), among which participant observation was crucial.

[13] The best history till the late 1970s is that of Sumanta Banerjee (1980).

[14] See Mohanty (1977) for an analysis of the impact of the Chinese pronouncements on the Indian revolutionaries.

[15] This, of course, is an analysis that has been much criticized. For my own critique of the Maoist analysis of semi-feudalism in a guerrilla stronghold, see Shah (2013b).

[16] They were also to form alliances with those labelled the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie.

[17] The best accounts of this mobilization in Bihar are from Bela Bhatia (2000), George Kunnath (2012), and Prakash Louis (2002).

[18] The Dalits had mainly been involved in the mass overground organizations and rarely in the armed cadres.

[19] It is important to note that the Maoist move to these forested hilly areas was on sheer tactical grounds for better terrain for guerrilla warfare and not, as is often mistakenly thought, because of the attractions of an exploited tribal peasantry. In the forested areas, there are also Dalits and some higher castes and Muslims. Although the Adivasis and Dalits join the Maoist armies, it is extremely rare to find the middle or high castes or Muslims joining the rank and file. These latter groups consider the labour of carrying arms beneath them, though they will get involved in supporting the movement as couriers and contractors.

[20] I use pseudonyms for all names of people encountered during field research.

[21] Sudipta Kaviraj (2008), in some interesting reflections, notes that though Indian Marxists do not wish to emulate or continue 'brahminical' traditions of cognitive practices, some of their practices of 'Marxism in translation' appear to be strangely 'brahminical'. Rajarshi Dasgupta (2013) goes further in an insightful revisionist reading of communist politics in India, exploring the ways in which the body-politics of asceticism is constitutive of the self-making of communists in the subcontinent, despite the fact that most communists cannot tolerate holy men.

[22] By inaugurating the individual who can attain equality *outside* of this world, the renouncer enables the maintenance of the very hierarchy *in* this world that he renounces, subverting the hierarchy of that system of strict interdependence in which the individual is ignored (Burghart 1983; Dumont 1970; Fuller 1992; Parry 1994).

[23] However, of course, the guerrillas have a range of supporters and sympathizers in the countryside and the cities who are not Maoists, or 'professional revolutionaries', as the Maoists call them.

[24] Leaders themselves work by setting an example and are impressive for the range of skills they display on a daily basis: diagnosing and treating common ailments (including malaria); wiring light fittings; erecting make-shift tables; teaching and writing political articles; cooking for hundreds of people; as well as stitching uniforms and hairdressing. The Maoists are, of course, guided here by Marx and Engels' analyses, whereby, with the development of the division of labour, a man's deeds become prescribed to him; they become an alien power opposed to him, enslaving him instead of being controlled by him, so that each man would be assigned a particular, exclusive sphere of activity which was forced upon him and from which he could not escape – he would become a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic and he must remain so. (The gendered language in the preceding sentence reflects Marx and Engel's original text: Marx & Engels 1970 [1846]: 54.) In contrast, in the new relations in the party, the Maoists are seeking to establish that vision of a communist society where nobody would have an exclusive sphere of activity but each person would become accomplished in any branch he or she desired, because society would regulate general production, making it possible for a person to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, without ever becoming a hunter, fisher, shepherd, or critic. These processes often involve an active subversion of village norms: so, for instance, men cook and women carry arms.

[25] The death of a martyr regenerates the principles of the revolution (cf. Bloch & Parry 1982; Lecomte-Tilouine 2010; Suykens 2010). In fact the resurrection of the sacrifice of those who have died for the cause has an entire week devoted to it each year – martyr's week – one of the most important rituals within the guerrilla squads.

[26] It is useful to recall here Marx's perspectives on equality as based on the principle of equal individual rights, which he saw as a bourgeois right:

> Right by its very nature can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable by an equal standard only in so far as they are brought under an equal point of view, are taken from one definite side only, for instance, in the present case, are regarded only as workers and nothing more is seen in them, everything else is ignored ... To avoid all these defects, rights instead of being equal would have to be unequal (2010 [1875]: 9-10).

Marx's perspectives on justice are perhaps most lucidly analysed by Norman Geras (1985).

[27] These processes met with a series of local rebellions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (cf. MacDougall 1985; Shah 2014; Singh 1966; 1982).

[28] Note the difference with tribal areas influenced by the Christian Missions, where, from the late 1800s, there was a concerted effort to educate Adivasis to make demands of the state. It is interesting that the two guerrilla strongholds of the Maoists in India are not in areas with a substantive history of missionary involvement. In the Maoist strongholds, the difference with Scott (2009) is that societies did not run away into the hills to escapte being governed, but under a highly extractive state presence in the hills the Adivasis sought to keep the state away.

[29] This analysis is dependent on ethnographic research in a Maoist stronghold in the state of Jharkhand. We do not have comparable detailed ethnographic research in the other major Maoist stronghold in the neigh-bouring state of Chhattisgarh, but I believe that the insights of journalists (e.g. Choudhary 2012) show that there were significant parallels until the emergence of the state-sponsored vigilantes called Salwa Judum, who perpetrated brutal massacres which left entire villages with little choice but to go to the Maoists or live in the roadside camps constructed by the security forces.

[30] The agrarian transition was supposed to deliver polar classes of 'free labour' and capitalist farmers, but the question of the persistence of a peasantry drove Lenin's analysis of *The development of capitalism in Russia* (1956). For a lucid comparative analysis of the different paths to agrarian transition in the USSR, England, Prussia, America, France, Japan, Taiwan, and Korea, see Byres (1986). India has perhaps seen the richest debates on the development of capitalism in agriculture, the modes of production debates of the 1970s and early 1980s, the best reviews of which are those of Thorner (1982) and Harriss (1980). I do not have space here to address a full-scale political economy analysis of this guerrilla zone (a subject of Shah 2013b), but the transformations of these hilly and forested regions are rather different to those of the plains, which the 1970s debates focused on.

[31] This is, perhaps unsurprisingly, a problem similar to that which, as Peter Brown (1981) describes, was faced by the Catholic Church in the Dark Ages when instituting the message that the church was equally for all.

[32] See Shah (2009b) for an analysis of a comparable factional group, the Jharkhand Liberation Tigers.

[33] These are processes that I have elsewhere called 'markets of protection' (Shah 2006), but if we are to take the Maoist political project seriously, they should be seen as taxation (Shah 2010b). The state schemes which are taxed are those considered useless for the people and destructive for the struggle (like roads which anyway get washed away because they are so poorly built, community buildings which are never used in these areas – except as places to dry rice, etc.: cf. Shah 2009a). The 'taxes' are used by the Maoists for redistribution to the people: in the form of health, education, agriculture, defence. From the Maoist perspective, these systems of taxation are necessary only for this stage of the struggle – if a base area is formed, the Maoists will directly control the processes of production and redistribution, making such taxation superfluous.

[34] In contrast, whether wittingly or not, it seems that the Hindu right, in working in line with these processes of history – co-opting rather than undermining the transition of subsistence farmers and wage-labourers to become petty producers, contractors, and traders seeking to rise up the caste and class hierarchy – have an easier project of transition for their utopia (see also Shah 2013a).

[35] They remain confined by another example of muck of the past: an almost religious commitment to analysing India – akin to pre-revolutionary China – as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial country that demands revolutionary strategy in the form of a protracted people's war from the country to the town (Communist Party of India (Maoist) 2004). It is very difficult, even for those leaders who wish to challenge this analysis, to make a case for a different one. The risk is that one's commitment to the cause is called into question and the only real choice is to leave the movement. In this situation, the burden of the thousands of martyrs who have sacrificed their lives in the last forty years weighs heavily on the party's emancipatory project. Even those renouncer turned communists who are frustrated with the party's inability to work with the changes in the economy they are faced with remain committed to the party; leaving to begin a new project of radical transformation risks betraying all those who have died for the cause.

[36] See also the parallel insights emerging from Parry's (2004) analysis of how 'a great transformation' has radically transformed the world of his older informants in the industrial city of Bhilai in central India, where the sheer scale of the changes they have witnessed has had a profound implication on their lives.

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« La crasse du passé » : révolution, transformation sociale et maoïstes en Inde

Résumé

L'auteure analyse le changement social révolutionnaire en étudiant la manière dont les gens tentent de créer un futur radicalement différent en agissant au présent, ainsi que les défis de cette transformation. En examinant la relation entre futur, présent et passé, l'article aborde le cas de la propagation de guérilleros maoïstes clandestins armés en Inde et s'en sert pour poser deux questions : d'une part, pourquoi l'Inde reste-t-elle accrochée à cette forme d'utopisme que le reste du monde semble avoir abandonnée ? D'autre part, comment et pourquoi la « crasse du passé » influe-t-elle sur la fabrication d'un futur radicalement différent ? Pour répondre à ces questions, l'article suggère qu'aussi bien pour le processus de changement social que pour nos théories le concernant, nous devons resituer nos analyses des conditions politico-économiques au regard de nos idéologies du changement social.

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