

'From the Outside Looking In': Living beside a People's Liberation Army (PLA) cantonment in far-west Nepal

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This article fills a gap in existing research on the Maoist 'People's War' (1996–2006) in Nepal by considering the implications of the establishment of a People's Liberation Army (PLA) cantonment for those living close by. This article complements the growing literature on the 'People's War' and the implications of the war for everyday lives in Nepal (Hutt 2004, Karki 2003, Lawoti and Pahari 2010, Manandhar and Seddon 2010, Pettigrew 2012 and 2013, Pettigrew and Adhikari 2009, Thapa 2003). Furthermore, while there has been limited research undertaken in and on the PLA cantonments (cf. Ogura 2010), none to date has specifically focused on the implications of living next to one.

More specifically, the perceptions and experiences of the inhabitants of *Kampur*¹ *Kamaiya*² *basti* (settlement), situated adjacent to a PLA cantonment will be explored in this article. The importance of rumours relating to the PLA is a particular focus. Three main periods within *Kampur* will be examined, as will experiences of the conflict prior to the cantonment being established, accounts of life next to a cantonment and finally the implications for the *basti* of the cantonment closing in April 2012. I conclude this article by examining what the legacy of the cantonment is in the lives of those living next to it.

This article provides an account of the 'People's War' and its aftermath from the perspective of those who in most cases were bystanders to the actual conflict. The narratives that are examined below facilitate a consideration of the implications of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) in 2006 and the establishment of the PLA cantonment in

1 The name of this settlement and all the names of research subjects have been changed.

2 The *Kamaiya* refers to both a system of bonded labour and a group within the broader Tharu ethnic group who are predominantly located in far-west Nepal. The *Kamaiya* were traditionally bonded labourers. While this system was abolished by the Nepal government in 2000 some remnants of the system still remain. Following 2000 many *Kamaiya* were freed and resettled in various locations across Nepal. These *Kamaiya* are called *Mukta Kamaiya* (freed *Kamaiya*), who were given a small piece of land (5 *kattha* = 0.3 hectares). The village referred to here is a *Mukta Kamaiya* village.

2007. Ultimately, this article argues that living next to a PLA cantonment has had a range of complex implications, although as I go on to illustrate, this is in a context in which the lives of the two groups of people became increasingly intertwined. This article is based on fieldwork material collected via a range of ethnographic methods.³

Kampur Basti

Shortly after the Kamaiya were officially freed from the Kamaiya system of bonded labour in 2000, over 1000 locations across Nepal were chosen for their resettlement. Kampur Basti in Kailali district, far-west Nepal, is one such settlement, and like many others in rural areas the land appropriated for it was previously dense jungle of little economic worth and limited agricultural potential. Kampur Basti comprises 35 houses slightly set back from the east-west highway, with dense forest on three sides. The highway traverses the entire length of Nepal's flat Tarai, with the Indian border only around 10-12 kms away to the south. A rutted mud track that becomes a muddy river during the monsoon rains leads from the road through the *basti* and into the forest. When the Kamaiya families settled in Kampur, each was allocated a plot of 5 *kattha* of land. More recently (since 2005-6) a number of Dalit and Haliya households (around 15) have been established at the edges of the *basti*.

The land given to the Kamaiya in the *basti* is not very fertile and is insufficient for subsistence, so alongside the food the villagers produce from this land and the rice and lentils purchased with the little income they are able to generate from labouring, the forest is an important resource. Each family has a simple, two-room concrete building with a tin roof. The buildings are poorly constructed and the villagers are not happy with them, as they are hot in summer and cold in winter. Some use them for storage or rent them out to pregnant PLA cadres (as described below) or visiting researchers. All the families have built an adjacent mud hut where they cook, eat, drink and socialise. The sides of these huts are covered with mud reliefs, often depicting the forest and hunting, once more illustrating the importance of the forest.

3 The paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Nepal throughout 2009 complemented by short field visits in 2011 and 2012. Methodologically, it is based on a multi-method approach (principally utilising participant observation, life histories and focus groups) within an ethnographic framework.

The Kamaiya from Kampur

The first time I met many of the villagers from Kampur Kamaiya Basti was on Kamaiya Freedom Day (17th July). It is quite difficult to explain the importance and joy of such an occasion for a group of people who only ten years earlier were in a situation of slavery. The day is a quite wonderful celebration of Kamaiya culture and a collective expression of the joy of having been freed from what were feudal economic and social ties (BASE 1995, Cheria 2005, Chhetri 2005, Giri 2009, Karki 2001, Informal Sector Service Centre 1992, Rankin 1999, Sharma et al. 2002).

On July 17th, the main event took place in dusty sports fields in the centre of Kailali's district HQ, Dhangadi, with tractors and trailers loaded up with people having slowly but surely brought Kamaiyas from all over Kailali district. It was a fortuitous day on which to meet many of the villagers with whom I would live on and off for a year for the first time: this was something that was often pointed out to me by the villagers. That same evening I went on one of these tractors with the villagers for the first time to Kampur Basti. The evening was filled with much eating, drinking, dancing and a celebration of having been freed from the system that had defined many of the villagers' present lives. Older villagers shared their experiences of having been freed and some of the conditions they had lived in prior to 2000. Kampur that evening was filled with an energy and feeling that I find quite difficult to describe. By the time we got to the village it was quite late, so I could not see much other than the dim lights of fires burning in various places with people dancing and singing. It was unlike any other night I would spend in the *basti*, and it marked the beginning of a key stage in my fieldwork.

As this brief outline of Kampur Basti and the Kamaiya living in it indicates, it is located in a marginal place of little apparent importance. This was also reflected during the 'People's War', during which time the village was relatively immune from the worst effects of the war. I consider this in more detail below.

Experiences of the 'People's War' in Kampur (2000-2006)

Initially, during the main period of fieldwork, undertaken in 2009, upon which this article is based, most villagers seemed to think that Kampur was not badly affected by the 'People's War'. However, as time passed I was trusted more and people talked more of their experiences during this time.

I would argue that Kampur had been reasonably badly affected during the conflict. I visited several villages that had had a far more difficult time, while conversely there were places (principally urban) and some Village Development Committees⁴ in which fewer problems occurred.

A battle between the PLA and Nepal Army (NA) had taken place in Kampur during the 'People's War'. This battle was recalled quite regularly by the villagers and was quite well known in the wider area, as a number of PLA cadre and NA soldiers were killed. This was a very difficult time in the *basti* with the battle lasting for one afternoon. Bullets and bombs damaged a number of the houses to the north of the *basti*, although none of the villagers were hurt or injured (as many had run into the forest when the fighting started). However, some livestock were killed during the battle.

This was the only battle to occur in or close to Kampur throughout the conflict and seemed to have a range of meanings for the villagers. It seemed important to some villagers, although not to all. The young men in the village seemed to like to talk about it more often and seemed to exaggerate the significance of the battle for both the PLA and Nepal Army, not least in relation to the number of people who had been killed.⁵ Due in part to their experience of this battle, the PLA were considered in several regards as 'better' than the NA, as they were considered to have done less harm to the villagers in the *basti*. This reflects an ambient support for the PLA in the *basti*, something that is considered in more detail subsequently.

Apart from this battle, on a number of occasions men from the Nepal Army or Police came into the *basti*. These experiences helped to shape the negative perceptions of these State forces during the 'People's War'. At such times, the State forces were looking for Maoists and/ or weapons, although they never found either in Kampur.⁶ These were particularly difficult times with the police (who came more often) sometimes coming in the middle of the night and always being quite aggressive and violent

4 Village Development Committees are the smallest administrative unit in Nepal.

5 All of the four PLA cadres who had been present during the battle in Kampur I was able to interview thought the battle was of little significance within the wider context of their experiences of the 'People's War'. I was unable to interview any NA soldiers who had been present at this battle.

6 These experiences were common to many Kamaiya and Tharu. As the Tharu are largely quite poor, state forces often assumed that they supported the PLA. This was also the experience of many ethnic groups and low castes in Nepal. Ultimately this approach sometimes became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

when carrying out these searches.⁷

These searches significantly shaped the villagers' perceptions of and lack of trust in the state (even in 2012), as they had limited access to other elements that might have had a more positive influence on their lives (such as education or health services). I was told by a number of villagers that a heavily pregnant woman had been pushed to the ground on one of these occasions. Furthermore, some of the male villagers told me stories of their wives and daughters having been treated and spoken to in ways they found quite offensive and difficult.

Gender is critical here to help to understand the specific ways in which these processes happened. There were a range of inappropriate behaviours in this respect although there were no reports of anyone having been raped on these occasions.⁸ In relation to the treatment of some of the women in the *basti*, I was told by some male villagers that it was inappropriate to discuss this with their wives or daughters. This I respected although I did explore the implications for the men affected. It was very clear that this was something that the men in the village found particularly problematic when they recounted their experiences of the conflict, not least because they were often present and forced to watch but were unable to do anything to stop the police treating the women in the *basti*. When one middle-aged man was discussing this with me he became emotional; this was one of the very few times that I saw a man cry as this was not considered appropriate behaviour for men, especially in social settings. Even those men whose wife or daughters had not been directly affected by this police behaviour displayed similar feelings; therefore this was something that had an impact on the entire *basti*.

There are a range of reasons why it was women who were treated like this, while men seemed to experience a different set of abuses, largely involving them being pushed around and on some occasions being beaten up quite badly. This largely relates to masculinity: by mistreating the women in the *basti* the police were attempting (quite successfully) to humiliate the men from Kampur. The behaviour of the police resulted in a substantial subversion of a critical aspect of their masculinity, i.e.

7 Ogura (2007) and Pettigrew (2004) have examined similar experiences in Rolpa and Rukum districts.

8 Something that has been reported in many other instances during the Peoples War: <http://www.inseconline.org/index.php?type=opinionforums&id=25&lang=en>

their ability to protect their female relatives. In the *basti* the more senior men considered sons or other male relatives to be more able to cope with physical threats or violence, and less in need of their protection. I was informed by a number of villagers that the forms of violence perpetrated by the Police were also not uncommon during non-conflict times. However, it was during the People's War that the extent and intensity of such abuses were much higher.

In these situations it was very difficult for villagers to know what official body to report these issues to, because it was actually state bodies committing these abuses. Therefore, they had not been reported to any official body or human rights organisation. However, once a conversation began relating to these experiences it would often go on for some time. This in part related to some of the villagers' expectation that I would be able to help them get compensation or help them highlight their problems to someone else who could help them in this way.⁹ These were expectations that I consistently tried to lower and over time this was less of an influence on the way I was perceived.

Ultimately, the violence perpetrated by the police in Kampur had an important impact on the *basti* that was very different from the impact of the behaviour of the PLA when its members were in the *basti*. On a number of occasions PLA cadres had stayed in the *basti* during the conflict. The villagers had no warning when the PLA would come: they tended to stay for one night, often demanding food, and then moved on to another village. The villagers had no choice but to accommodate the demands of the cadres (which many considered to be unfair), although I heard of no instances in which the PLA were violent towards the villagers. During these times the PLA tried to recruit younger villagers, but their lack of success reflected limited support for the PLA in the *basti*.

The general sentiment within Kampur prior to 2007 was a general (but not universal) support and agreement with the objectives of the PLA and the wider Maoist movement, as this was understood within Kampur. Over a series of interviews and discussions I discovered some knowledge of Maoist ideology within the *basti*, as a consequence of the educational efforts of the PLA and latterly the Young Communist League (YCL).

9 This reflects the rise of a locally specific type of 'compensation culture' in post-conflict Nepal, which will be the focus of a subsequent article.

However, no one in the village had decided to join the PLA and I was told that at no stage had anyone been planning to join, despite the problems outlined above. Additionally, no one I spoke to in the *basti* had at any stage considered joining the Nepal Police or Army. The way this was expressed implied that it was almost inconceivable to join either side of the war, but of the two options joining the Nepal police or army was the less likely, due in significant degree to the ways in which the two sides behaved while in the *basti* during the war.

For the young men in the *basti* the war was a particularly difficult time. Older men were not the focus of so much of the PLA's recruitment effort and consequently were less likely to be targeted by the police and army. I was told by a number of villagers that this resulted in some young men having been forced to migrate to avoid recruitment into the PLA.¹⁰ The times when the PLA stayed in the village seemed quite difficult times: the young men from the *basti* told me that they didn't want the PLA there at all and that, while not as bad as the police, they behaved with a certain type of arrogance. These men felt quite unhappy that another group of men (and some women) could come into their *basti* whenever they wanted and order them around. These feelings of resentment re-emerged when the cantonment was established (as is considered below in more detail), with those in Kampur Basti mentioning that PLA cadres had a certain air of superiority when they came into the *basti*.

The cantonment

As per the provisions of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (which was signed between the Maoists and the then Government in 2006), the PLA were located in 28 'temporary' cantonments - seven main and 21 satellite cantonments (three for each of the main cantonments) in 2007. Each of the main cantonments corresponded to a division headquarters, while each of the satellite cantonments corresponded to a battalion.

Kampur cantonment was a satellite cantonment of the seventh division of the PLA and contained around 800 cadres.¹¹ The cantonment was

10 Migration in this context was something largely available only to young men. Some young women from other villages had moved to urban areas to work as *Kamlari* (female, bonded, domestic workers) but none had left Kampur to do this type of work.

11 This is the figure most often mentioned in interviews, although population estimates ranged from 600-1000.

situated to the north of the east-west highway, which marked the southern boundary of the cantonment. This was of particular importance for the cantonment's inhabitants as the road represented many things, including the possibility of going to other parts of Nepal and India. While sitting in buses passing the cantonment along the highway, passengers always seemed very eager to see inside the cantonment and would often discuss the latest local gossip about the PLA (for example, that a cadre had been in a fight in a local town, or that female PLA cadre slept with many men in the cantonment: such rumours tended to be quite negative). Throughout 2009 I consistently observed people looking into and discussing the cantonment as buses went past, although this level of interest had declined by 2011.

On a number of occasions buses refused to pick up PLA cadres waiting by the roadside, due to rumours in local towns that there were some 'trouble makers' (always described as young men) within the cantonment (something that was consistently denied by the PLA). There were many stories about various problems arising between PLA cadres located in cantonments and communities around the cantonments.¹² This implies some potential tensions between the PLA and the local community, which will be elaborated further below.

The cantonment was located in marginal land provided by the government, although the Maoists ultimately decided where all of the cantonments were located when they were established. This was land that was not farmed or inhabited prior to the establishment of the cantonment, and was of little economic value. Kampur cantonment had been established two years before my first visit in early 2009, by which time it seemed quite well established, with the jungle almost completely cleared. The cantonment was free of litter (unlike the road outside) and seemed to be far better integrated with the surrounding jungle than the *basti* over the road. This was despite the cadre within the PLA not relying on the jungle as much as the villagers from the *basti*.

The government provided electricity and water, although, as in the rest of Nepal, both were only available intermittently. I was told by various villagers that the PLA subsequently decided to provide water to

12 For example, see: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=PLA+man+assaults+girl&NewsID=295787>

Kampur Basti.¹³ Despite the best efforts of the PLA to settle in Kampur and establish a comfortable living place in difficult circumstances, ultimately one could not help but be reminded that it was recently thick jungle and there remained an overall feeling of marginality. Red flags were tied to many buildings and trees throughout the cantonment and in various places there were photos of Mao, Lenin, Marx, Stalin and Prachanda, who were given equal status in many Maoist posters and photographs. Unlike the *basti* there were no obvious signs of religious commitment (as one might assume within an explicitly Maoist space). Despite this, I did notice a number of cadre who more subtly expressed their Hindu religious beliefs through the wearing of certain items of jewellery (particularly necklaces, which could be worn discreetly).

In 2009 I spent time inside the cantonment, interviewing and spending time with PLA cadres (playing chess, volleyball etc.) Over time, I became interested in the interactions between the PLA and those living close by.

Living next to a cantonment (2007-2012)

This section will illustrate that due to the close proximity of the cantonment, the 'People's War' has had a more profound influence on the *basti* since the end of the conflict than it did during the conflict itself. Over the five-year period that the cantonment existed, Kampur Basti and the cantonment become increasingly intertwined with each other.

While Kampur Basti and the cantonment were very close to each other, located on either side of the highway, there was a more much larger and established village composed of an ethnically mixed group of families, also called Kampur, five minutes down the road to the east. However, unlike Kampur Basti, in this village the economy was focused on the business the East-West Highway brings. There was limited interaction between PLA cadres and the inhabitants of the more established village, while cadre could be seen in Kampur Basti daily. There were a number of reasons for this, the most obvious being proximity, but some PLA cadre agreed that the people in the *basti* were more friendly towards them, and are almost entirely Kamaiya, who the Maoists saw as a group

13 This might not have strictly been the case, as there are reports from other communities living close to cantonments received drinking water as a consequence of a German NGO: <http://www.thehimalayantimes.com/fullNews.php?headline=Communities+near+ex-PLA+camps+benefiting&NewsID=359457>

that generally supported their movement.

Importantly, the interactions between the inhabitants of the *basti* and the cantonment were somewhat one-sided. For example, the PLA cadre could go anywhere in the *basti*, but the villagers could not go anywhere they liked in the cantonment. This resulted in curiosity about the goings on in the cantonment among those in the *basti*. Villagers frequently asked me questions about what was going on and what I thought of the PLA, because I was regularly inside the cantonment.¹⁴

Two years after it was established, the residents of *Kampur basti* had mixed feelings about the cantonment being so close by. Initially there seemed to be a consensus that it was not a good thing, particularly amongst the younger men in the *basti*. Furthermore, in 2009 most villagers were ambivalent about the possibility of the cantonment closing, as many did not see it as directly benefiting them. Despite this, there were a number of ways in which some of the villagers benefited, through, for example, increased business at their shops or through renting out a spare rooms to pregnant female PLA cadres. The *basti* received a reasonably regular supply of water as a consequence of the cantonment connecting a number of taps in the village to their water supply. Furthermore, at times of planting paddy and harvest some PLA cadres would come into the village to help, although not all households wanted or accepted such assistance.

The decision taken at the higher levels of the PLA to pass a rule resulting in pregnant cadres not being permitted to live in the cantonments had a number of consequences for *Kampur*. This meant that a number of female cadres moved into the *basti*, and that there was a more regular flow of people coming through the *basti*. There five female cadres living in houses in the *basti* in 2009, and nine in 2012. This was one of the more obvious areas of interaction between the cantonment and the *basti*.

Despite the economic benefits of this arrangement, some villagers didn't want these women in the village at all. The female cadres were in the *basti* because they were pregnant and were not allowed in the cantonment. However, it was clear that they would rather be back in the cantonment where conditions were better and their husbands and comrades were closer. Despite some households taking advantage of the opportunity to host a pregnant cadre, other households refused to do this under

14 This was also an important influence on the ways in which I was perceived in the *basti*.

any circumstances. This was partly a response to various rumours about the PLA – for example, that PLA cadres had HIV/AIDS¹⁵ and therefore some people did not want them close to their children. There were also rumours that the pregnant PLA cadres stole eggs from the *basti*. I was unable to find anyone who had actually had some eggs stolen from them and when I suggested that this could have been another villager and not one of these women, I was told that this was impossible between Kamaiya so it had to be one of the PLA cadres.¹⁶

In my initial interactions with a group of five pregnant PLA cadres, I was told that I couldn't speak to any of them without a senior commander's approval. I had already obtained this, as I knew the commander quite well by that stage, but the women were still unwilling to speak to me. Furthermore, the female PLA living in Kampur uniformly seemed to dislike me and my presence in the *basti*; they attempted to cause a number of problems for me and seemed to be the source of many of the rumours that related to me. For example, there were rumours that I was spying on the PLA cantonment. Furthermore, I later discovered that I was also the subject of a number of rumours emanating from the villagers themselves. Some villagers thought I was a Maoist because I was so interested in the cantonment and had also spent a lot of time there. While this was not generally a problem, such rumours and the women's dislike made it difficult to spend time in the houses in which they lived.

Initially, when it became clear that these women had a problem with my presence in the *basti* I was concerned about it, but over time I realised that it was an interesting response to my being there and I became more interested in this response to me, and why they viewed my presence as a problem. My perception was that they viewed me as interfering and a foreigner (perhaps with imperialist tendencies) with no good reason to be in the *basti*. Unlike the majority of the cadres I met during my fieldwork in Nepal, they did not seem to approve of my research interest in the PLA

15 HIV and AIDS were used quite interchangeably by the respondents who used these terms in relation to PLA cadres, but I didn't hear either HIV or AIDS mentioned in any other context. This reflects an aspect of the 'otherness' of HIV/AIDS prevention programmes and activities that Stacey Pigg (2001, 2005) has examined more widely in Nepal.

16 Unlike researchers working in other similar contexts (for example, around US/NATO bases in Japan, *cf.* Enloe, (2004)), in Kampur *basti* I did not hear of an increase in the number of brothels or prostitution as a consequence of the Kampur PLA cantonment having been established.

and the People's War. Furthermore, these women seemed quite resentful of being in the *basti*, did not interact with the villagers and most days they would stay together in a group. Language was an important barrier because none of the female cadres spoke Tharu, or seemed to know much about Kamaiya culture and customs.

Nordstrom and Robben (1995) call for the analysis of rumours to be made central to the analysis of conflict, as this can provide important insights into the experience and perception of events during times of conflict.¹⁷ In Kampur Basti I heard many rumours about both the PLA and myself and my research assistants from various sources, but mainly from the woman in whose house I lived.

Having spent quite a lot of time in Kampur Basti, I could see how some of the rumours that circulated there were very insightful in relation to how the villagers perceived the cantonment.¹⁸ Many of the rumours related to the PLA and the sorts of people the villagers viewed the cadres to be. A particularly memorable rumour that I was told by several people was that PLA cadre had HIV/AIDS and that I should be very careful when I was near them. I was told that many of the PLA took drugs and that they didn't want them anywhere near their children. Some of the women in the *basti* viewed PLA cadres as a direct threat to their children. Such views were quite common in 2009, but were less frequently shared in 2011 and 2012. This might have been due to a number of factors. Perhaps these initial perceptions had proven to be implausible over time, as the PLA cadre became more integrated into the life of the *basti* and were evidently not unwell, or perhaps the villagers were more hesitant to express such views as a consequence of the greater integration of the female PLA cadre. Furthermore, my relationship with those living in Kampur had changed quite significantly during this period: having spent significant time there in 2009, the sorts of conversations I had were quite different to the ones I had in subsequent years. Despite remaining close to a number of villagers, there was greater distance with some of the villagers with whom I had limited contact in 2009. One of the consequences of this increased distance was that I was less likely to be made aware of these sorts of rumours

17 Rumours have been considered in relation to a number of major events in Nepal's recent history, including the royal massacre in 2001 (cf. Hutt 2001, Whelpton 2005).

18 I would argue that this is equally important during post-conflict situations, especially in peripheral places such as Kampur.

and negative views, if were still held in 2011 and 2012.

Relationships between young men from the cantonment and the *basti*

Despite gradually increasing interactions between Kampur Basti and the cantonment between 2009-2012, young men from Kampur continued to express the greatest concerns about the cantonment. Most of the Kamaiya men from the *basti* viewed the cantonment in largely negative terms; my impression was that they would have preferred it to have been located elsewhere. However, several PLA cadres would visit their pregnant wives in the *basti* and so were often around, which led to friendships with a number of villagers. These were not usually Kamaiya or Tharu cadres but tended to be young Magar men from the hills of far-west Nepal (mainly from districts such as Jumla and Kalikot).

The relationships that did emerge between young men from the two locations were most often evident in the competitive expression of specific aspects of physical prowess and strength via certain manifestations of embodied masculinity.¹⁹ An important homosocial space in which the competition between the two groups of men was quite evident was in a local establishment called the Skype Bar. This had been established close to the cantonment as a consequence of the cantonment having been established. The Skype Bar was an interesting setting in which to observe forms of competition between men, particularly around competitive drinking. This reminds us of Connell's observation that performances of masculinity are largely for other men (2005), something that is particularly relevant in a male-only setting.

I spoke to several men about this bar, which was notorious in both the cantonment and the *basti*, not least because there were no similar places

19 Men's bodies have an important impact on constructs of masculinity, and vice versa, but this can be in ways that complicate and problematise masculinities. Although there are important links between bodies and masculinity, they are not seamless: quite the contrary, as Whitehead (2002: 191) suggests: '...many men fail to achieve a seamless, constant, symbiotic relationship between their bodies and dominant discourses of masculinity.' In relation to the specific context considered here, tensions were quite evident between the often malnourished bodies of Kamaiya men who were trying to perform forms of embodied masculinity that were heavily reliant on strength and physical prowess. Conversely, PLA cadres seemed to have a relatively fewer tensions in this regard.

around and it was frequented by the PLA. Some cadres I spoke to said they would never go to the Skype Bar as it had developed a somewhat notorious reputation for excessive drinking and on occasion fighting. If these cadres drank at all, they preferred to do so while they were on leave, in local towns some distance from the cantonment. Due to the senior PLA cadres' public abstinence from alcohol, the PLA cadres who came to the bar seemed to do so relatively discreetly. Conversely, men from Kampur Basti rarely went to the bar, largely as a consequence of their limited disposable income.

Despite some friendships between PLA and Kamaiya men, some Kamaiya men consistently discussed PLA cadres negatively. They said that when PLA cadres were in the *basti* they behaved with an arrogance that some of the younger Kamaiya men found particularly difficult. This was especially true for 'senior'²⁰ men, who felt that the PLA cadre did not sufficiently respect or acknowledge certain hierarchies in the *basti*. The young male PLA cadres who came into the *basti* were considered the most problematic and challenging, while female PLA cadres did not seem to be of much concern. The presence of male PLA cadres subverted the position and standing of all the men from Kampur Basti, but particularly more senior men. More broadly, this was reflected in areas of competition between the young men from the *basti* and those from the cantonment, although the challenge seemed to emanate more from men in the *basti* than from those in the cantonment.

In a number of conversations with women from Kampur, some slightly different perceptions of the PLA and the cantonment emerged. A number of women talked to me about the *basti* feeling safer in some ways because the cantonment was close by. However, it was difficult to untangle this from the increasing level of security that came as a consequence of the end of the 'People's War'. One woman discussed lower levels of violence and particularly domestic violence in the *basti* after the cantonment was established. I was told that this was a consequence of some of the PLA commanders being women and to the pregnant PLA cadres in the *basti*, in which made the men behave differently towards their wives. However, this was the account of only one research subject, and I was not able to substantiate these changes more broadly with other villagers. This

²⁰ This does not simply relate to age but more to social standing as a man.

illustrates that the cantonment had a wide range of consequences for the lives of those living in Kampur Basti, and that these consequences were experienced quite differently by those living there. For some, the cantonment was an opportunity and something quite positive, but for others the cantonment was a negative influence on their lives and caused disruption to the perception that they had of the quiet and harmonious village that was established in 2000. As a consequence of visiting Kampur over a period of years, I was able to observe a change in the composition of these two groups as gradually more trust was established and more economic benefits seemed to be shared around the *basti*. In 2012 more people viewed the cantonment and the PLA positively than in 2009.

The opening of the cantonment in 2007 was a momentous event in Kampur Basti, a place where little of significance had happened previously. Below I turn to consider what the closing of the cantonment has meant for Kampur Basti and offer some insights into the sustainability of the changes that have been illustrated so far.

The closing of the cantonment

After the cantonment closed in April 2012, a number of interviews were conducted with villagers regarding the process of closing the cantonments and how the village reflected on living next to the cantonment after it had closed. In 2009 and 2011, the respondents had had a range of feelings regarding the cantonment, although over time some of these views had become more positive.

According to the villagers, Kampur cantonment was closed in January 2012 and fully emptied by the end of April 2012. After the PLA left a number of Nepal Army soldiers were stationed in the cantonment, to guard it and ensure no one settled illegally there. Throughout this process the villagers from Kampur Basti had still not been inside the cantonment. Over the six years that the cantonment had been in existence various buildings and facilities had been established within it. These represented a marked improvement on facilities within the *basti*. Therefore, some in Kampur were interested in moving into the cantonment and using it to improve the situation of those from surrounding villages. However, this seemed unlikely to occur, despite landlessness remaining a significant problem within Kailali district.²¹ There were various rumours in the *basti*

21 In 2012 there remained significant numbers of illegally settled Kamaiya in Kailali, who

that Khaptad Multiple Campus was trying to move into the cantonment to use the buildings and facilities there. Should this happen, this would provide various economic opportunities for those living in Kampur Basti. However, given the low levels of educational achievement in the *basti* (in 2009, no villager had passed the SLC), it was unlikely that anyone from Kampur would be able to study at any campus located in the former cantonment.

As the Kamaiya are among the poorest and most marginal groups in far-west Nepal, the respondents, perhaps unsurprisingly, focused on the loss of economic opportunities that the cantonment closing represented. Having a cantonment of around 800 PLA cadres living next door meant that the shops the Kamaiya had established (mainly since 2007) were busy and profitable. However, after the cantonment closed this was no longer the case, and very little trade came from the east-west highway. Also, the initial resistance of some in the *basti* to renting out rooms had declined over time, and the income this brought into the village had been a very useful additional source and diversification of income. Ultimately, as a consequence of the cantonment closing, the *basti* had lost many customers to rent rooms and buy goods.

Furthermore, when the cantonment was closed, the water supply to the *basti* was switched off. As Kampur is such a marginal place there is little chance of it being reconnected. This, combined with the unavailability of additional (and free) labour at times of great demand (mainly planting and harvesting), meant there was unhappiness in much of Kampur Basti that the cantonment had closed.

All respondents were asked if they had stayed in touch with anyone from the PLA following the closing of the cantonment, in order to get a sense of the longevity of the relationships that I had observed between PLA cadres and villagers. The informants I spoke to were still in touch with some PLA friends, but had lost contact with more fleeting acquaintances. Staying in touch with PLA cadres has proved to be quite difficult, as the vast majority of the PLA decided to self-retire and moved elsewhere (this problem was compounded by the limited communication options in the *basti*). While this was not officially confirmed, various informants from Kampur informed me that of the 800 PLA cadres living in Kampur

were still waiting for government-allocated land and support.

cantonment, only 160 had joined the Nepal Army, and the rest were retiring. As a consequence, the social relations that had developed over the years of the cantonment's existence were beginning to fragment, particularly as none of the PLA cadre seemed to be staying in the local area.

Finally, I asked villagers to sum up how they felt about the cantonment closing. The consensus seemed to be one of sadness, for the lost relationships and economic opportunities, and also for the loss of the assistance that the PLA cadres provided the village at times of planting and cultivation. While the range of political views in the *basti* had remained quite consistent during the lifetime of the cantonment (there remained some resistance to the PLA and the Maoist movement more generally, and support for other parties), there was also a consistent acknowledgement of some of the aspects of support that the village had received as a consequence of living next to the cantonment.

Conclusion

This paper has explored experiences of the 'People's War' in a village in Kailali district in far-west Nepal. The establishment of a PLA cantonment close to the village meant that the war had more of an impact on this community after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed. Now that the cantonment has closed, this raises the question as to what (if any) is the lasting legacy of the cantonment on the people who lived next to it. I asked a number of villagers from Kampur this question and their responses can be summed up by one respondent, who told me, 'Kampur Basti was forgotten before, and now it will be forgotten again.'

The three main sections of this paper have shown that the establishment, existence and closure of the PLA cantonment were major events in the lives of those living in Kampur Basti. While this article has shown that there are interrelated pros and cons to living next to the cantonment,²² the establishment and closure of Kampur cantonment appears to be an event that has had a lasting significance in Kampur basti.

My respondents had and have mixed feelings about the cantonment's existence and subsequent closure, but on the whole they were sad when it

22 There does not appear to have been much research published on the implications of living close to an army base in South Asia. The following examples examine the positive and negative aspects of this for local communities close to NATO/US Army and Airforce bases: Cooley (2008), Enloe (2004), Lutz (2001, 2009a, 2009b) Tobe (2006).

closed down. Ultimately, this article has shown that, just like the passengers on the buses going by, Kampur's residents remain on the outside looking in, at the goings on inside the cantonment.

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