

BEYOND RECOGNITION: ETHNOLOGY, BELONGING, AND THE  
REFASHIONING OF THE ETHNIC SUBJECT IN DARJEELING, INDIA

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This dissertation examines how ethnological knowledge conditions the possibilities of rights, recognition, and belonging in the nation-state for the peoples of Darjeeling. Fueled by longstanding anxieties over their place in India, ethnic groups have increasingly turned to ethnology to reconstitute themselves as acknowledgeable communities. These techniques have proven instrumental to these groups' quests for recognition as Scheduled Tribes of India, and to broader efforts to bring ethnic-based sovereignty to Darjeeling as either a separate state or a 'tribal area' as per the Indian constitution. The effects of these ethnological initiatives, however, extend well beyond recognition. In time, they have fundamentally reshaped the political, social, and subjective contours of 'identity' itself. This dissertation accordingly focuses on the dynamics by which the people of Darjeeling have taken up—and taken on—normative ethnological forms to achieve their twinned objectives of ethnic revitalization and formal recognition from the Government of India.

The research is based primarily on ethnographic and historiographic work conducted in India in 2006-7. Historically, it interrogates: (i) the (post)colonial pasts through which ethnology came to structure modern systems of recognition in India; and (ii) the local, affective histories of Darjeeling, which engendered these communities' desires for recognition. Ethnographically, the analysis angles into the present via a multi-tiered approach involving: (i) work with the ethnic associations and

political outfits stewarding ethnic makeover in Darjeeling, (ii) a village-based study of the effects of these movements on everyday life, and (iii) an ethnography of the state anthropologists who were tasked with formally recognizing these groups.

Through this design, the research ventures a critically historical and phenomenological understanding of the myriad subjects of ethnological knowledge today. Constituting a broader case study in ‘found’ anthropology, then, these findings accordingly raise timely questions about the particular kinds of anthropological knowledge being circulated, produced, and practiced in the social world beyond the academy. Specifically, this research asks how ethnological knowledge continues to (re)structure the contemporary—in both Darjeeling and beyond—in new, if seemingly old, ways.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Townsend Middleton was born in Savannah, GA, in 1977. He obtained his B.A. in Anthropology from the University of Virginia (1999). In 2002 he completed his M.A. at the University of Chicago in the Masters Program in the Social Sciences, before matriculating at Cornell, where he trained from 2003 to 2010, advancing to candidacy in 2006 and completing his Ph.D. in May of 2010.

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Recent years have seen emerging ethnographic interests in the Darjeeling region. I, accordingly, have been fortunate to cross research paths with several recent researchers in the area—all of whom have proven wonderful colleagues. In our past and ongoing collaborations, Sara Shneiderman has shared her wealth of knowledge on the Himalayan region and its peoples. To Sarah Besky, I owe a deep thanks for sharing research materials and ideas about the ever-evolving dynamics of Darjeeling politics. Barbara Gerke, Chelsea Booth, Thomas Schor, and numerous others also provided memorable company and academic conversation at various points of my time in Darjeeling.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AINSCA	All India Nepali Scheduled Castes Association
AITBA	All India Tamang Buddhist Association ( <i>Akhil Bharatiya Tamang Bouddha Sang</i> )
ASI	Anthropological Survey of India
BCW	Backward Class Welfare Department
BDO	Block Development Office
CC	Central Committee member
CRI	Cultural Research Institute (of the Government of West Bengal)
DGHC	Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council *the governing administration of Darjeeling
DICA	Department of Information and Cultural Affairs (of the DGHC)
EIC	East India Company
GJMM	Gorkha Janmukti Morcha/Gorkha Jana Mukti Morcha (Gorkha People's Liberation Front) *the party founded by Bimal Gurung in October 2007
GJMS	<i>Gorkha Janjati Manyata Samity</i> (Gorkha Tribal Recognition Committee) *an umbrella organization of the 'left-out' (non-ST) communities
GNLF	Gorkha National Liberation Front *the party founded by Subash Ghisingh; the primary agitator in the Gorkhaland Movement; the ruling party in Darjeeling from 1988-2008
GS	General Secretary
ITDP	Integrated Tribal Development Projects
LHEA	Lekh Hitkari Ethnic Association (of the pseudonymous ethnicity, the 'Lekh')
MoS	Memorandum of Settlement
OBC	Other Backward Classes
PTG	Primitive Tribal Groups

RGI	Office of the Registrar General of India
ST	Scheduled Tribe
SC	Scheduled Caste
TBG	Tamang Buddhist Gedung
TCD	<i>Tamu Choj Dhin</i> (Darjeeling Gurung (Tamu) Welfare Association)
TRI	Tribal Research Institute

## PREFACE: NOTES TO THE READER

### **Transcription and Translation.**

This research was conducted in Nepali and English. Given the subject matter of my work, these languages frequently intermingled during my conversations with the people of Darjeeling—not merely for the sake of mutual intelligibility, but also because English anthropological terms are now in widespread circulation throughout Darjeeling. For instance, people often used the English term ‘culture’ and its Nepali equivalent *sanskriti* interchangeably. Likewise, people would switch back and forth between ‘identity’ and its local synonyms *astitwa/chinhāri*. *Jāt* was often ‘caste’; *dharma* was often ‘religion’. ‘Tribe’ increasingly became synonymous with *adivasi* (a term used throughout India and Nepal meaning ‘autochthonous or original inhabitant’) and/or *janājāti* (which loosely translates as ‘indigenous nationality’ or perhaps ‘ethnicity’). The variegated circulation of English anthropological terminology proved an important facet of my research, but the frequent intermingling and substitution of English and Nepali made for difficult transcription. To make the translated portions of this text more reader-friendly, I have opted to translate them fully into English (adding Nepali terminology where relevant) rather than try to depict the complicated linguistic interplay that so many of my conversations entailed.

I have transcribed Nepali words according to Turner’s *Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language* (1931/2001), with certain modifications. To comply more with phonetic pronunciation, Turner’s ‘c’ is here ‘ch’; his aspirated ‘ch’ is here ‘chh’. Turner’s ‘ś’, ‘ṣ’, and ‘s’ are here rendered simply ‘s’. For proper nouns such as the names of organizations, I have used the given organization’s own renderings. With commonly transcribed terms such as ‘Dasain’, I have followed conventional transcription without diacritics. Where necessary, I have

pluralized Nepali terms by adding an ‘s’, as is done in English. Non-English words are italicized when they first appear, and again if they have not appeared in many pages.

My research assistant provided invaluable assistance in helping me translate and transcribe the many hours of digital voice recordings I collected during the course of this research. I, however, accept full responsibility for any and all linguistic shortcomings of the work presented here.

### **Citations.**

All primary sources (archival files, periodicals, etc) are referenced in full in the footnotes. Secondary sources are only cited in the footnotes, with full bibliographic information available in the Bibliography that follows the Conclusion of the dissertation.

### **Pseudonymity.**

My research protocol has been to render all individuals and sensitive places pseudonymous. Thus, for instance, the name of the village where I lived in Darjeeling has been rendered by a pseudonym, as have all of its residents. However, some public officials and figures, due to their unavoidable (and unabashedly public) notoriety, are here depicted by their proper names. Ethnic organizations and government departments are presented by their official names.

Throughout this research, I worked with numerous ethnic groups. Wherever possible, I have tried to accurately portray the given group by using their common ethnonym. However, because many of the groups I worked with currently have Scheduled Tribe applications pending with the Government of India, and because much of my attention focused on these processes of recognition, I have, when

necessary, either omitted the ethnic group's name or used a pseudo-ethnonym. The 'Lekh', with whom this thesis begins, is necessarily one such case.

## INTRODUCTION.

### THE AGE OF ETHNOLOGY

#### **Exempli Gratia.**

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006 a team of anthropologists arrived in Darjeeling, India to conduct research on several ethnic groups. I was not one of them. They were civil servants of the Government of West Bengal—the Cultural Research Institute (CRI), itself a subsidiary of the Backward Class Welfare Department, to be exact. They had been sent to Darjeeling to perform an official ‘Ethnographic Survey’ to determine the eligibility of ten ethnic groups seeking to become Scheduled Tribes (ST) of India. Much like the other ethnicities that constitute the ‘Gorkha’ community of the hills,<sup>1</sup> these groups had recently applied to become STs—a designation that affords affirmative action benefits, what in India are known as reservations. And like these other groups, attaining ST status was to be the crowning achievement of their ongoing ethnic renaissance.

The day of their arrival, the anthropologists held a closed-door meeting with local ethnic association leaders to outline the week’s proceedings. Each ethnic group was to take the research team to a ‘model community’ of the association’s choosing, where they would be given one day to demonstrate their ‘tribal’ traits. The ethnographic data would be recorded and brought back to Kolkata where it would cross-checked with the written application materials furnished by the applicant groups, as well as with available scholarly and governmental literatures on the groups in question. The CRI would then draft an official Ethnographic Report, which would be

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<sup>1</sup> For the reader familiar with the history of the British Empire, the term ‘Gorkha’ may have a familiar ring. *Following* conventional spellings, I use ‘Gorkha’ to refer to the Nepali-speaking community of Darjeeling—itsself made up of numerous ethnicities of Nepali origin. ‘Gurkha’ (with a ‘u’) refers to the legendary Nepali troops of the British Indian army. I discuss the problematic slippage of these terms in Chapter II.

circulated through the government where it would play a pivotal role in determining whether or not these groups would be conferred ST status. Having been briefed, there was only one thing left for the ethnic leaders to decide and that was which group would be studied when. They drew straws.

At 8pm that night, a small van slipped out of town to begin a long journey through heavy monsoon rains. The road would go from bad to worse as the van plied through the darkness, slowly making its way to a remote corner of the district. Inside rode several leaders of the Lekh Hitkari Ethnic Association (LHEA).<sup>2</sup> They were on their way to the distant village of Laharā Gāū, the ‘model community’ they had selected for the next morning’s Ethnographic Survey. (They drew first.) The van would stop several times en route to pick up others to help with the preparations. News of the Lekh’s draw had already been relayed from the central offices in Darjeeling to the branch leaders in Laharā Gāū. Work was therefore already underway organizing the requisite displays. Together, these association leaders and the villagers of Laharā Gāū would work through the night preparing for their moment of recognition.

Back in Darjeeling town, a leading Lekh intellectual woke at 5am in order to put the final touches on a memorandum that his organization was to submit to the government along with their ethnographic presentations. The document bore the title “A Prayer for Inclusion of All the Unit Tribes of GORKHA Tribal Community into the Scheduled Tribe Status- with a fresh set of proofs and the causes why this should be done.” Written on behalf of not only the Lekh, but all “left-out” [read non-ST] communities of the hills, the 30-page essay laid out the tribal qualities of these groups in great detail. The “fresh set of proofs” called upon native and western

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<sup>2</sup> The ST applications of all the “left-out” communities are still pending (and promise to be for a long time). To protect the identity of these groups, I have chosen in such instances to use pseudonyms. ‘Lekh’ is accordingly a pseudonymous ethnonym. Fully translated into English ‘Lekh Hitkari Ethnic Association’ would be ‘Lekh Welfare Ethnic Association’.

anthropologies, colonial ethnologies, and census data to bolster its claims. It furthermore cited a litany of ancient texts (including the Mahabharata and the Puranas) in tracing out the primordial, authentically ‘tribal’ history of these groups. The memorandum argued that these communities did not migrate from Nepal, as is commonly held, but in fact were true “sons of the soil”—true *adivasis*—of India.<sup>3</sup> Blending anthropology, history, and a dose of political vitriol, the document claimed definitively, “The Gorkha community as a whole [and thus the ethnicities within it] has been and is a purely tribal community having a definite tribal, socio-cultural, and distinct tribal ethnic background.” Failure to recognize the left-out communities as Scheduled Tribes would thus be a “great political blunder and a constitutional crime”—one that would lead to “inevitable unrest” and “chaos” in the hills. This being the case, the memorandum put the onus of recognition squarely on the state’s shoulders—albeit in the most personal terms, viz:

“So, now your honourable self has the duty to properly represent our community’s worthiness to fulfill all the criteria to be constitutionally scheduled as a Tribe. So that the people will not lose the faith in the government but get strengthened in the belief that our government is the one who gives impartial and equal opportunity to all the people and the citizens of the country, specially so to the sons of the soil and is truly working along the lines of fulfilling the just dreams and the rights of the citizens of India.”

The memorandum concluded by “anticipating a prompt and just decision and action from your side on this burning and seriously sensitive matter.”

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Despite the urgency of the situation, by 8am the memorandum is not yet complete. Minutes after the hour, I arrive to the cramped LHEA offices to find the

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<sup>3</sup> Reliable historical sources and popular understandings in Darjeeling maintain that these groups migrated from Nepal following the British acquisition of Darjeeling from Sikkim in 1835. British sources from that time reported the primary inhabitants to be the Lepchas and Bhutias—each of whom were granted ST status in the original list of Scheduled Tribes (1950). The Lepchas are considered the primary autochthons of the region. I discuss this history later in the Introduction.

author seated amid an array of opened books, scribbling his final revisions. His colleagues bid me welcome in whispered hellos, letting me know he is not to be disturbed. The frantic pace at which he works belies the smooth figure he cuts with his fine suit and tie, oiled back hair, and laptop bag at his side. His eyes dart from one book to another, cross-referencing sources, then back again to the memorandum. He makes a slight change. Someone checks the clock, as beads of sweat begin to stand up on his nose. It is getting late. If he and his colleagues are to make it to Laharā Gāũ in time, they must leave now. So he waits for the whiteout to dry, then pencils in one last citation.

Minutes later, three suit clad men hurry out of the office with the completed memorandum in tow. Knowing I am an anthropologist, they have invited me along for the day, so I do my best to keep pace as they navigate their way through the crowded bazaar in search of their hired van. We find it idling nearby, and quickly climb in to begin the same arduous journey that their colleagues made the rainy night before. As the van sputters out of town, the men inside can only hope that their written representations correspond with the preparations made by their colleagues in Laharā Gāũ. The day demands a perfect similitude between what their memorandum says and what their people do, and thus everything must be in order. After all, they *will* be tested.

Because, at that very moment, somewhere along the same road plies a government-hired jeep heading for the same model community. Inside ride the government anthropologists armed with clipboards, criteria, and questionnaires. The ethnographic data to be gathered will be a determinative factor in whether the Lekh become a Scheduled Tribe (ST), thereby qualifying its members for the reservations and affirmative action benefits that, ostensibly, might lift them from their ‘backward’

condition. Having sweated out the final draft of their document and left just in time, the ethnic leaders believe they are one step ahead of the anthropologists.

As the ethnic leaders' vehicle lurches down the heavily eroded road, conversation meanders from theories of primordial ethnic history, 'tradition' and 'culture' to related concerns of 'backwardness' and ethnic 'uplift'. The subject matter is eerily familiar to me, yet, as per my training, also problematic. They are keen to hear my thoughts, and being their guests, I weigh my words carefully, mindful of all that hangs on the day's events. Finally, after three grueling hours, we arrive at a small hamlet straddling the now dwindling road. Gathered is a community bedecked in their most traditional attire—men to one side, women to the other—waiting to perform, waiting to convince whomever that they are proper 'tribal' subjects. As the van parts the throng of people, uneasy faces peer in. Just then one of the suit-clad men inside looks out and declares with relieved satisfaction, "Ahhh... you see. There is a *tribal* community!"

Within minutes the government anthropologists arrive and the community springs into action transforming this hillside village into a veritable anthropological lollapalooza. Folksongs waft across carefully arranged 'primitive' artifacts. Women dance and serve 'indigenous' foods. Drums roll, as shamans shake and hover erratically over their full array of ritual paraphernalia. There is exorcism and sacrifice, even blood drinking, not to mention bows, arrows, and troops of adolescents howling savage cries into the thick monsoon skies. All the while, the LHEA leaders, clad in suits and armed with cell-phones, roam the perimeter orchestrating the encounter. These men make sure the anthropologists are looking in the right direction at the right time and speaking only with the right people. They peer over the anthropologists' shoulders, sneaking peeks at their ethnographic notebooks so as to be sure that the data is being properly recorded. If necessary, they pull aside the anthropologists to clarify

any ‘misunderstanding’. Since these association leaders are far more educated than the residents of Laharā Gāū, they serve as interpreters, translating the Bengali of the anthropologists into the Nepali of the locals and back again. In the heat of the ethnographic moment, they often intervene to speak on behalf of the locals, displacing their agency for the ‘good of the constituency’. With so much at stake, they must provide the perfect representation of the ‘tribal’ subject.

The encounter is loud and chaotic, yet the anthropologists set to their work in a mechanical procedure befitting their bureaucratic duties. There are requirements to be fulfilled, criteria to be checked, interviews to be conducted, forms to be completed, and data to be gathered. They have their own research agenda. At times, it meshes with the script put forth by the ethnic leaders. At other moments, tempers flare as the anthropologists express their contempt for their gaze being steered this way and that.

Somewhere in the middle of this delicate tussle of attention are the subjects of Laharā Gāū. Hand-selected by the *ṭhulo mānches* (big men) of the LHEA, they have been placed under the anthropological looking-glass of the Indian state—specimens, as it were, of the purportedly ‘backward’, ‘isolated’, ‘distinct’, ‘primitive’, and certifiably ‘tribal’ culture of the Lekh. Yet many of these villagers are only vaguely aware of the stakes of their performance and the conceptual forms that they supposedly evince. At the center of it all, and yet somehow at a remove from the know, they are held forth as the embodiments of the ‘tribal’ ideal-type. Neither wholly of the class of the particular nor the general but somehow both, they are to serve as the ethnological *example*<sup>4</sup>—figures in which there is no agonism between the empirical

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<sup>4</sup> I am working here with Agamben’s consideration of the ‘example’, about which he writes: “In any context where it exerts its force, the example is characterized by the fact that it holds for all cases of the same type, and, at the same time, it is included among these. It is one singularity among others, which, however, stands for each of them and serves for all. On one hand, every example is treated in effect as a real particular case; but on the other, it remains understood that it cannot serve in its particularity. Neither particular nor universal, the example is the singular object that presents itself as such, that *shows* its singularity.” See “Example” in Agamben 1993: 10-11.

and the conceptual. As per the logics of recognition, they *are* the living, breathing ‘tribals’. In them, the empirical and conceptual dimensions of knowledge collapse. Through them, ethnological knowledge realizes its singular veracity.

—E.g. “Ahhh...you see. There is a *tribal* community!”

### **Rethinking Anthropology.**

This dissertation seeks to tell a different story—or rather a set of stories—of a people and a kind of knowledge. The *kind* of knowledge that concerns me here is anthropological knowledge, or, more specifically *ethnological* knowledge. That there should be a relation between an ethnic people and ethnology has become something of a truism in today’s world. Western, academic ethnology has by now made the rounds in pursuit of the last of the unstudied ‘ethnicities’, ‘tribes’ and the like. But this is not the brand of anthropology that I am immediately concerned with in this thesis—although certainly it is implicated. My concerns lie elsewhere: in the offices of ethnic associations, in the corridors of the state, in struggles for autonomy, in village tea stalls, and in the experiences of everyday life in Darjeeling. In these realms, particular paradigms of ethnological knowledge have gained extraordinary traction. In India especially, certain logics and practices of ethnological distinction cannot be extricated from the very political possibilities of communities. They have become normative—at once loaded with history, possibility, and seemingly unarguable socio-political sanction. Today, these paradigms continue to creep into the lifeworlds of contemporary subjects, reconfiguring socialities and subjectivities along the way.

This research focuses on these linked social, political, and subjective lives of ethnological knowledge. I analytically locate these dynamics within a broader problem-space of ‘found’ anthropology. In contradistinction to the academic discipline of anthropology, I define *‘found’ anthropologies* as those forms of anthropological

knowledge being circulated, produced, and practiced in the social world beyond the academy. As this thesis will show, many (but not all) of the paradigms that have become central to modern identity formation and its recognition in Darjeeling have their origins in disciplinary pasts. Once the professed domain of academic anthropology, particular classificatory schemas, logics of ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’, and techniques of knowledge production, have now taken on a life of their own. In Darjeeling, they are to be ‘found’—as it were—co-mingling with, contesting, and oftentimes overwriting alternative schemas of socio-cultural life. Focusing ethnographic attention on the actual people who wield this kind of knowledge, as well as those who become its objects, this research explores the social processes through which particular forms of anthropological thought and practice—namely those of the ethnological variety—are articulated and translated across various discursive and sociological levels.

Pursued accordingly, *anthropological knowledge* comes into view not as the sole provenance of an academic discipline, but rather as *a general field of knowledge production*—at once heterogeneous, uneven, and inclusive of a range of subjects (academic and otherwise). Comprising this field in Darjeeling are civil servants, politicians, ethnic association leaders, everyday citizens, and the occasional academic anthropologist like myself—all of whom arrive at the subjects of Darjeeling with their own political, social, and epistemic commitments. Honoring *their* participation within this general field of knowledge production, this thesis pushes the bounds of what is to be recognized as *anthropological*. Doing so, it advances a more deprovincialized understanding of anthropological knowledge than is conventionally accepted within the academy. Deprovincializing anthropological knowledge means here: creating a space for engaging with the diverse knowledge-agents and knowledge forms that constitute this broader field of anthropological knowledge. Equally, it means coming

to terms with the specific strands of anthropological thought that, for better and for worse, shape the contemporary.

Recent decades have seen an explosion of interests within academic anthropology. Today the discipline has become a veritable mosaic of attentions, techniques, and specializations. Beyond the academy though—and in Darjeeling specifically—, the spectrum of anthropological knowledge looks radically different. It is, after all, not just any form of anthropological knowledge that has captured the imagination of the people of Darjeeling and conditioned their entry into India's liberal order. Instead it is *ethnological* knowledge that has almost singularly (re)set the terms of 'identity' and its politics in the hills. Today particular paradigms of ethnological and neo-ethnological thought quite literally rule the day in Darjeeling. To understand how this has come to be, we must probe what might be deemed the 'ethno-logics' of late liberalism in India. Elizabeth Povinelli sets for us a powerful analytic example along these lines. But it will not be enough to question only the "intercalation of the politics of culture with the culture of capital," as she writes.<sup>5</sup> If we are to understand how and why ethnology has risen to prominence in Darjeeling, we must question also the very epistemic constitution of such concepts as 'culture', 'ethnicity', 'identity', etc and the ways that these ideational forms do (and do not) map to the local, affective histories of the given populations. As the following chapters will show, it is from this conjunction of history, affect, and the logics of late liberalism that ethnology has made its uncanny return in Darjeeling.

From an academic perspective, the predominance of ethnological thought in places like Darjeeling may seem a stark contrast to the plurality of intellectual attentions within academic anthropology today. Yet, there is, I believe, an important and alternative history of 'anthropology' to be gleaned from the dynamics at hand.

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<sup>5</sup> Povinelli 2002: 17.

The anthropological practices and logics of ethnic association, ‘tribal’ certifiers, and everyday citizens in Darjeeling ask us to ponder an altogether different proliferation of anthropological knowledge over the past several decades than the one expressed in the mosaic that is current academic anthropology. The reckoning at hand concerns, rather, the ongoing pluralization of the agents of anthropological knowledge and the domains where it is to be found. Deprovincialized accordingly, it is necessarily *within* this unbounded, heterogeneous, and uneven field that my ethnography finds its ‘object’ and stakes its claim.

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The project of ‘finding’ anthropology gains a particular footing in contemporary India, where the collusions of the academic discipline and governance run deep. Since the pioneering work of Bernard Cohn on ‘colonialism and its forms of knowledge’, there is now a well-charted history of the discipline of anthropology in India (and indeed throughout much of the postcolonial world).<sup>6</sup> Cohn argued convincingly that anthropology functioned as an investigative and enumerative modality of British rule over the subcontinent.<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Dirks went a step further in deeming the British Raj an ‘ethnographic state’.<sup>8</sup> In time, other scholars would take up this ‘know and rule’ argument, fleshing out the entanglements of anthropology and governance in various ways. These studies have set important precedents for the work I take up here. By effectively taking anthropological knowledge as an object of historiographic analysis, they have shed valuable light on the discipline of anthropology’s troubling legacy in India and beyond.

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<sup>6</sup> Historiographies of the colonies and of the discipline have exposed the problematic collusions of western anthropology and colonial governance with great acumen. See for instance: Asad *et al* 1973; Bremen & Shimizu *et al* 1999; Cohn 1987, 1996; Dirks 2001, 2004; Dudley-Jenkins 2003; Haller 1971; Pels & Salemink *et al* 2000; Pinney 1991; Uberoi, Sunar, & Deshpande *et al* 2008; Young 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Cohn 1996: 5-13. See also related chapters in Cohn 1987.

<sup>8</sup> Dirks 2001, 2004.

These skeletons in a discipline's closet are perhaps easier to recognize than the ghosts among us today. Excellent studies on the proliferation of ethnicity over the past 60-odd years have recognized the residual effects of colonial categories and ethnologies in the identity politics of today.<sup>9</sup> Through these studies we can begin to understand the historical baggage that categories like 'race', 'tribe', 'caste', and 'ethnicity' bring with them into the present—where for better and worse they have come to be vested with exceptional social and political potential. Tracing the social life of these categories—and for that matter, 'culture'—the problematic pasts of academic anthropology are not easily put to rest.

Other academic disciplines have come to terms with similar phenomena. Prasenjit Duara's aptly titled *Rescuing History from the Nation* signals as much.<sup>10</sup> In India specifically, Sudipta Kaviraj has argued that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time when "history breaks out everywhere". As Kaviraj explains, it was then that, "History becomes the great terrain of politics. Because history is a way of talking about the collective self, and bringing it into existence."<sup>11</sup> Today, there is something similar afoot in Darjeeling—only it is anthropology—and ethnology, in particular—that has become the knowledge of choice for talking about the collective self and bringing it into political existence. This particular form of anthropological knowledge has quite literally "broken out everywhere." In Darjeeling, this entails more than the opportunistic use of categories like 'race', 'tribe', and 'ethnicity' to announce a community and its claims upon the nation-state. It entails more than 'culturalism', 'indigenism', and related tropes of ethno-political mobilization. The 'outbreak of

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<sup>9</sup> On India, see for instance Chakrabarty 2002 (Chap. 6: Governmental Roots of Modern Ethnicity); Chatterjee 1993, 2004; Dirks 2001; Washbrook 1982. Important studies conducted along these lines elsewhere include: Ranger 1982; Binsbergen 1985; Fardon 1987; William 1989, 1991; Trouillot 1991, 1995; Malkki 1995; Werbner & Ranger *et al* 1996; Munasinghe 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Duara 1995. Along similar lines, see Munasinghe's "Rescuing Theory from the Nation" (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Kaviraj 1995: 108.

anthropology’ in Darjeeling involves decidedly ethnological *practices* aimed at, and often carried out by, ethnic subjects themselves.

Importantly, the people of Darjeeling often refer to this kind of knowledge practice as ‘anthropology’ or its Nepali equivalent (*mānavsāstra*). Tellingly, the English term is more common. Even if we were to blind ourselves to the striking similarities between these academic and non-academic ways of making knowledge about ‘culture’, ‘religion’, ‘ritual’, ‘tribes’, ‘castes’ and all the rest, even if we were to jettison the overt histories of anthropology on the subcontinent, the ‘native voice’ makes its own case for a deprovincialized understanding of what constitutes anthropological knowledge.

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To date, the social sciences have yet to thoroughly question how communities are turning anthropological lenses upon themselves. Postcolonial critiques of colonial governance and ‘its forms of knowledge’ have shed important light on the genesis of these classificatory schemas and the enduring trace of anthropological pasts in modern systems of recognition. Yet at present, we have little sense of how groups are taking up disciplinary knowledge as a means to unlock the potential vested in these systems. Recent work on indigenous rights movements and Native heritage projects have provided a toe-hold of sorts, by questioning the types of knowledge produced and mobilized by these movements.<sup>12</sup> Methodologically, the trend here has been to work backward from the knowledges produced—be it from the testimony in indigenous land claims, the exhibitions in Native museums, or the literatures of ‘native’ intellectuals.

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<sup>12</sup> For studies that engage these types of questions to varying degrees, see, on indigenous rights movements: Beteille 1998; Clifford 1988; Field 1999; French 2009; Hale 2006; Kapila 2008; Kuper 2003; Li 2000; Povinelli 2002: 188-233; Turner 1991. On Native heritage projects and questions of autoethnography, see Clifford 2004; Ericksen 2002, 2004; Handler 1996; Philips 2003. Along related lines, Jean and John Comaroff’s recently published book, *Ethnicity, Inc* (2009), raises a series of important questions about the modular corporatization and commodification of ethnicity across the globe.

My concern is that by overlooking the real-time dynamics of knowledge production, this approach is likely to miss the very real politics of representation, authenticity, and exclusion that shape such renderings of communities.<sup>13</sup> In Darjeeling, removing from view or otherwise manipulating those who do not comply with the normative prescriptions of the ‘authentic ethnic’ or ‘tribal’ subject has become an integral component of communities’ quests for Scheduled Tribe status specifically, and ethnic revitalization more generally. In these politics of representation, we encounter one of the more troubling facets of ethnic renaissance in the hills.<sup>14</sup> What is needed more generally than in the study of indigenous rights movements, Native heritage projects, and the like is focused ethnographic attention to the ineluctably *social* dimensions of ethnological knowledge production among aspiring communities.

Along these lines, dynamics of ‘found’ anthropology’ call upon the ethnographer to study *outwardly* issues that have typically been associated with the inward, ‘reflexive’ gaze.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this is one of the project’s unique promises. The kinds of anthropological knowledge practiced by and upon the people of Darjeeling—whether at the hands of ethnic associations or government anthropologists—make clear the socio-political impacts of epistemic choices. And not unlike the project of academic anthropology, they are shot-through with various forms of material, political, and representational power. The question thereby becomes not how ‘we’ as academic anthropologists manage the tensions between conceptual schemas and the vagaries of socio-cultural life, but how ‘they’ do so. As the people of Darjeeling seek

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<sup>13</sup> Dombrowski 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Kirk Dombrowski has raised a similar point in his thoughtful critique of James Clifford’s work on Native heritage projects in Alaska. Noting how Clifford passes over the social dynamics through which these ostensibly ‘collaborative’, ‘multivocal’ knowledges of the ethnic self are constituted, Dombrowski argues that to ethnographically engage with these social facets of knowledge production is “to take seriously the fact that the articulation of a particular cultural vision requires the indirect, often unwilling cooperation of some whose role may be simply to drop off of the ethnographic radar.” See Dombrowski in Clifford 2004: 23.

<sup>15</sup> The iconic works along these lines are, of course, Hymes’s edited volume *Reinventing Anthropology* (1972) and Clifford & Marcus’s edited volume *Writing Culture* (1986).

to remake themselves pursuant to normative ethnological forms, how they do (and do not) negotiate the agonisms between conceptual and empirical form has become a matter of profound consequence.

Instrumentalist theorists of ethnicity would rightly point out the political utility of these anthropologies of the ethnic self.<sup>16</sup> As the aspiring ‘tribals’ of Darjeeling know well, (re)presenting the ethnic self in particular ways is essential if they are to secure the material and political advantages of positive discrimination. Demonstrating compliance with the ‘tribal’ ideal-type has become a gateway to liberal rights and recognition for these groups. But to think beyond the political instrumentality of the resulting anthropologies of the ethnic self: what remains to be sufficiently questioned is how exactly these auto-referential knowledge forms are reworking communal and individual socialities and subjectivities. The deployment of ethnological knowledge in Darjeeling is now about more than mobilizing and representing a population group for political purposes. It is also fundamentally about discovering, knowing, and re-making ethnic communities and the individual subjects who, in theory, comprise them.

As this dissertation intends to show, ethnological knowledge has come to shape far more than minorities’ prospects of positive discrimination. It has reworked how people interact with, and conceive of, one another. It is here at the level of the everyday—of sociality, subjectivity, and even embodiment—that I believe we find the deepest reaches of this knowledge form. No longer confined to the realms of description and ideal-types, particular paradigms of ethnological distinction have become prescriptive of what constitutes a viable ‘ethnic’ subject—whether a community or an individual. In many ways, ethnological knowledge has begun to recondition people’s very ways of being-in-the-world.

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<sup>16</sup> A. Cohen’s models of ethnicities as ‘interest groups’ are relevant here (1974). I engage the literatures on ethnicity in the following section.

From an academic perspective, these dynamics may be fascinating, unsettling—even uncanny. The ways in which the people of Darjeeling have taken *up* and taken *on* particular paradigms of anthropological thought and practice prompt a critical rethinking of anthropology’s traditional relationship to its object. They, in turn, ask that we redraw the lines of what constitutes anthropological knowledge and where it may be found. Refiguring anthropological knowledge as an object of ethnographic attention here becomes not only analytically viable, but also timely. Whether carried out in Darjeeling or elsewhere, the study of ‘found’ anthropology provides an opportunity to think carefully, and *ethnographically*, about the different kinds of anthropological knowledge being mobilized in the world writ large, as well as their imminent possibilities and impossibilities.

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Along these lines, the aforementioned Ethnographic Survey provides a working example of what I am calling ‘found’ anthropology. Certainly, the practices of the CRI research team were anthropological. After all, these were civil servants trained in anthropology and related social sciences carrying out established research protocols. Yet if we look to the other side of this ethnographic encounter, we find that the representational practices of the Lekh Hitkari Ethnic Association (LHEA) were also anthropological. These ‘tactics of the studied’, as it were, developed in specific response to the system of recognition at hand—itsself an assemblage of ethnological categories, logics, and institutional practices born out of anthropology’s history on the subcontinent. The tactics of the LHEA were thus anthropological not so much in the transcendental sense of Man making knowledge about Man, but in the disciplinary sense. We need not look further than the array of scholarly books laid out before the Lekh intellectual as he frantically inked his final revisions before the Ethnographic Survey to appreciate the involution of academic knowledge in this subject matter. In

their presentations to the Indian government and to their own constituents, ethnic association members draw heavily upon academic literatures to (re)present and remake the recognizable, authentic ethnic subject. Academic anthropology carries exceptional authority on both sides of ‘tribal’ recognition. Aspiring STs and state anthropologists alike model themselves, their anthropological practices, and their arguments on these received knowledges, reaping great credence from the authority vested in these formalized, expert realms of anthropological knowledge.

In India, drawing a line between these formalized realms of knowledge and public, informal classificatory schemas proves exceptionally difficult. Through time, particular disciplinary paradigms have come to saturate governmental policy and popular imagination. Later in this dissertation, I explore the co-mingling of these formal and informal realms through a history of ‘tribal’ recognition on the subcontinent. Ethnographically though, as Dominic Boyer points out, “What is still largely missing in the contemporary research on social identities and alterities is focused ethnographic attention on the complex of institutions and practices that mediates the cross-fertilization of everyday categories of cultural difference and expert knowledge of cultural difference.”<sup>17</sup> In light of Boyer’s point, the current dynamics of ‘tribal’ recognition—and in particular that of the Ethnographic Survey—become exemplary objects of ethnographic attention. Turning the ethnographic lens upon ethnographic interface itself, we can begin to appreciate how bodies like the LHEA mediate between governmental classificatory schemas and those of everyday life in Darjeeling. Although such mediation can be instrumental in bringing rights and recognition for aspiring minorities, this confrontation of formal versus everyday knowledges has engendered profound political, social, and subjective tensions among the people of Darjeeling. These tensions beg ethnographic attention in their own right

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<sup>17</sup> Boyer 2001: 460-1.

The Lekh's bid for ST status is but an aperçu of the salience of ethnological knowledge in Darjeeling today. The chapters that follow promise a deeper analysis of the ways in which this form of knowledge continues to shape life in Darjeeling.

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For academics, these findings are certain to challenge conventional understandings of 'anthropology'. Stalwarts of the discipline may rightly contest the recognition of these knowledge practices as 'anthropological': surely, there is more to what 'we' do and who 'we' are as professional anthropologists than is to be found in Darjeeling. I concur. Academic anthropology's spectrum dwarfs the ethnological fixation of Darjeeling. And even within the academic sub-field of current ethnology, the means of knowledge production differ in profound ways with those I 'found' in Darjeeling. However, such arguments will be hard-pressed to make a convincing case without detailed analysis of the epistemic similarities and differences of their anthropologies versus those of non-academic subjects. Here we ought to consider also the divergent social and political contexts of our respective knowledge productions. The exigencies of recognition have proven largely generative of the particular epistemic commitments with which the people of Darjeeling have made themselves the subjects and objects of the anthropological gaze. By design then, this research—and the project of 'finding' anthropology more generally—is about coming to terms with the diverse social, political, and epistemic grounds of anthropological knowledge in the world today.

As I can attest from my own research experiences, one of the more eerie questions facing ethnographers of 'found' anthropology is the degree to which semblances of the disciplinary self are to be found lurking in the other. These affinities can provide a convenient point of ethnographic entrée, as subject communities may be eager to have a professional anthropologist in their midst. However, in places like

postcolonial India these affinities can be exceptionally problematic. As the history of ‘tribal’ recognition illustrates, the similarities between academic and ‘found’ anthropology are not, after all, coincidental, but rather the offspring of historical homology. Given the rich, yet problematic history of the discipline on the subcontinent, India has therefore proven an acute context in which to study ‘found’ anthropology. As I discovered early in my work, elements of the discipline were present in the ‘field’ long before I arrived to conduct this research. Enquiries elsewhere may expect to find different anthropological pasts alive in the present.

Ethnographically engaging with these ‘species of the familiar’ in no way entails the ceding of a critical edge.<sup>18</sup> To the contrary, questioning ‘found’ anthropologies through systematic research may actually sharpen our ability to distinguish between the various kinds of anthropological knowledge being produced in the world—including our own. In this regard, the project offers what Ricoeur has famously called a “comprehension of the self via the detour of the comprehension of the other.”<sup>19</sup> Perhaps through this reckoning, grounds will be found for a discrete and decidedly academic identification. Either way the exercise should be worthwhile. In the meantime, the people of Darjeeling have their own ideas about what anthropology is and what it can do for them.

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“Towns, you must come to the Ethnographic Survey,” a high-level bureaucrat, and himself an ethnic association leader, told me exuberantly just days before the government anthropologists were to arrive, “All of the ethnic groups will be there demonstrating their cultural traits. You just come. I will get you in. You are an anthropologist. You must come! It will all be there for you served up on a platter!” [holding up both hands as though offering a platter to me].

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<sup>18</sup> As Freud notes, the uncanny is “in some ways a species of the familiar.” 2003 (1919): 134.

<sup>19</sup> Ricoeur 1969: 20. Translation available in Rabinow 1977: 5.

To a certain extent ‘it’ was. What unfolded during the Ethnographic Survey was an ethnological extravaganza. The array of authentic ‘tribal’ traits, unique ‘culture’, the tell-tale signs of ‘animism’, ‘primitiveness’, and ‘backwardness’ served up by the aspiring ethnic groups were the type of data that would—and indeed did—flood ethnographic notebooks. By design, it was an ethnologist’s dream. And yet, so much of that consummately ethnological stuff that made its way into the notebooks of the government anthropologists, into the memorandums of supplicant ethnic groups, and into the displays of their constituents is presented somehow differently in the pages of this dissertation. For many of the people with whom I worked—some of whom call themselves ‘anthropologists’, but most of whom do not—I wonder if this dissertation shall even be recognizable as anthropology. Where is the ‘culture’, the ‘custom’, the ‘animism’ and all the rest that they showed me? Where is the anthropology that their sources showed them? I fear that the differences between my anthropology and theirs may seem unbridgeable in their eyes.

I do not see it that way. I am as interested in our similarities, our historical homologies, and our shared concerns as I am in our epistemic differences. These were the commitments that guided me through my study of the anthropologies of others. At once haunted and fascinated by the eerie familiarity of my own subject matter, this research became for me an extended encounter with the uncanny. What follows marks the beginning of a open-ended coming to terms with various forms of anthropological knowledge that are to be found ‘out there’ in the world. And so for the myriad anthropologists and anthropologies I encountered in Darjeeling, Kolkata and beyond, it is my hope that this work may help shake up the notion of what anthropology is and can be. Should this be the case, then their encounter with my anthropology shall adequately mirror my encounter with theirs.

## **Problems of the Literature.**

The attentions of this research were developed in concert with the dynamics of Darjeeling, where ethnological knowledge has become integral to the pursuits of rights, recognition, and a secure sense of belonging within India. That said, this study of knowledge and belonging has also taken shape in dialogue with particular research concerns within the social sciences. Insofar as my research attentions emerge from—and speak to—particular bodies of literature, it is worth briefly sketching the academic roots of this study's concerns.

It has becoming something of a rite of passage for students of ethnic identity to familiarize themselves with the Primordialist, Situationalist/Instrumentalist, and Constructivist theories of ethnicity. These respective schools of thought have each argued for the primacy of various facets of ethnic identity: the Primordialists have emphasized the traditional and affective solidarities of ethnic communities; the Situationalists/Instrumentalists have pointed to the strategic, circumstantial nature of ethnic ascription; while the Constructivists have stressed the social and conceptual processes of ethno-genesis.<sup>20</sup> The debates are well chronicled and exhausting—some

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<sup>20</sup> The body of literature on ethnicity is too expansive to allow a comprehensive survey here. The following denotes exemplary studies from the various schools of thought. On the primordialist view of ethnicity, see Shils 1957; Geertz 1973; and Isaacs 1975. On situational and instrumental ethnicity, see Barth *et al* 1969; A. Cohen 1974; R. Cohen 1978; Fox, Cimino, & Aull 1981; Glazer & Moynihan 1975; Horowitz 1975; Keyes 1981; Nagel 1994; Nash 1989; Okamura 1981. On the constructed nature of ethnicity, see Anderson's work on imagined communities (1983) and seriality (1998), Hobsbawm and Ranger's edited volume on 'invented tradition' (1983), and Fardon (1987) and Roosen's (1989) work on 'ethnogenesis'.

I should reiterate that none of these works rests perfectly within its respective classification. For instance, while Geertz's argument of the 'integrative revolution' points to the primordial ties of traditional communities (linguistic, racial, religious, cultural, etc), it is nevertheless the emergence of the nation-form (particularly with decolonization) that reworks the terrain of ethnic identity and its politics to produce the proliferation of ethnicity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (Geertz argues that it is the integration of these primordial forms into the arena of the nation-state that spawns the rampant proliferation of ethnicity and ethnic politics.) Thus while Geertz posits a primordialist essence to ethnicity, its modern emergence is nevertheless circumstantial—thereby blurring the distinction between Primordialist and Situationalist camps. Likewise, Weber's thoughts on ethnicity cannot be placed within any one of these distinctions. Weber emphasizes the situational conditions of ethnic identification, but notes that it is often primordial-like attachments to linguistic, racial, and cultural markers that serve as fodder for classificatory distinction. Whether or not these forms are contrived

might even say exhaustive. (As a professor of anthropology once responded to me when I told him of my research interest: “Hmmm...and what new could you possibly say about ethnicity?”) The exclusionary rubric through which the debate has come to be known is neither extremely helpful in navigating the literature on, nor the phenomena of, ethnicity. One simply cannot find a case of ethnicity, or a theory of such, which doesn't entail crucial overlaps among these rhetorical divisions. To tarry on these divisions would be to miss the contributions these literatures have left us.

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and/or constructed is of less concern for Weber; in either case they may prove generative of the subjective cohesions of political communities (1998).

It should also be noted that the Primordialist, Situationalist, and Constructivist schools of thought are by no means internally uniform. Important debates have emerged from within each camp—some of which bear directly upon my research in India. Take, for example, Barth's seminal study of ethnic boundaries (1969). Barth and his colleagues focused on the social processes through which ethnic boundaries are maintained. In this regard, it is a classic Situationalist study. However, the Barthian approach has been significantly critiqued from within the Situationalist/Instrumentalist ranks. A. Cohen (1974) rightly contested the taken-for-granted status that ethnic distinction enjoys in Barth's analysis. The boundaries are always-already there to be maintained, irrespective of the given situation within which they are evoked. Not only are they taken-for-granted, they are seemingly a-historical. Cohen argues furthermore that Barth and his colleagues subsequently fixate on the empty 'vessel' of ethnic identity at the expense of the cultural and affective content of its form. A. Cohen and others (Eriksen 1992; R. Cohen 1978) would go on to note that while Barth's analysis may have been situational in an inter-ethnic sense, it neglected the influence of other factors (ideological, historical, etc) that impinge upon the dynamics of ethnic ascription.

Gradually, anthropology developed greater interest in broader contextual considerations of ethnic identification—an intellectual shift noted by R. Cohen (1978). The nation-state's role in effecting ethnic identity drew increased attention (Balibar 1991; Brass 1985; Fox, Cimino, & Aull 1981; Glazer & Moynihan 1975; Herzfeld 1997; Munasinghe 2001, 2002; Rothschild 1981), as did the mediating role of ethnic elites in shaping the contours of ethnic politics (Brass 1976, 1985; Colson 1968; Fardon 1987; Fox, Cimino, & Aull 1981; Gutierrez 1999; Lomnitz 2001; Washbrook 1982). Pushing the study of ethnic identity toward a critical consideration of the politics of classificatory moment, Brakette Williams's work on the ideological conditions of identification and recognition refigured the relations of nation, culture, and ethnicity (1989, 1991). Questions over how the nation manages purity/impurity, histories of domination, and criteria of human difference began to be explored by scholars such as Liisa Malkki (1995), Viranjini Munasinghe (2001, 2002) and others. With the debates having shifted from the earlier models of primordial cohesion, boundary maintenance, and 'interest groups', the discussions of ethnicity took a somewhat darker tone. Gilroy's work on 'ethnic absolutism' is indicative (1990) of the growing skepticism. See also Appadurai 1999. Concerns over multiculturalism and hybridity (Bolland 1992; Brah & Coombes 2000; Gunew 2004; Munasinghe 2001, 2002; Puri 2004; Williams 1989; Zizek 1997) and the politics of recognition (Taylor 1992; Povinelli 2002) began to expose the paradoxical circumstances of various liberal orders. Particularly the emerging concern with recognition shed crucial light on the conditions imposed upon populations seeking rights and recognition as a recognizable community—ethnic or otherwise. No longer merely a question of how, why, and when ethnic groups choose to identify themselves, the study of ethnicity now came to question how the very possibilities of identification were always-already conditioned by greater systems of material, political, and symbolic power. Throughout this dissertation, I engage more fully with specific facets of these literatures when and where relevant. Citations provided here are exemplary only.

While I will steadfastly disagree with those who claim there is ‘nothing new to say about ethnicity’, the overly inscribed lines of the Primordialist-Situationalist-Constructivist debate have, I also believe, hampered the emergence of a more dynamic set of questions. Here I will concur with Arjun Appadurai’s claim that, “It will no longer serve to look at ethnicity as just another principle of group identity, as just another cultural device for the pursuit of group interests, or as some dialectical combination of the two. We need an account of ethnicity that explores its modernity.”<sup>21</sup> Taking up the linked questions of ‘found’ anthropology and belonging, this study aims to provide one such account.

However, in examining some of the most cutting-edge practices through which populations are refashioning themselves into recognizable ‘ethnic’ subjects, this study does not sever its ties to earlier debates. To the contrary, it emerges largely from a particular dissatisfaction with their analytic occlusions. One of the problematic after-effects of the storied debates between the Primordialists, Situationalists, and Constructivists is that they have left us lacking in approaches capable of exploring the *constitutive links* between the affective, contextual, and conceptual conditions of ethnic identity formation.

Seeking out these constitutive links, the questions I raise in Darjeeling are threefold. First, how have anxieties over belonging in India, coupled with exigencies of ‘tribal’ recognition, precipitated the recent turn to anthropology as a means of reconstituting the ethnic self? Second, how have normative paradigms of anthropological distinction, along with affective longings for rights, recognition, and belonging, conditioned these minorities’ entry into Indian political society? Third—and perhaps most profoundly—to what extent can governmental recognition and the epistemic practices of anthropology generate new senses of belonging within the

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<sup>21</sup> Appadurai 1996: 139.

nation-state, within one's community, and even within one's individual self? Through these questions I pursue a more dynamic, more dialectical, understanding of the 'modernity' of ethnicity in the Darjeeling hills.<sup>22</sup>

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In his celebrated work *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson opined, "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."<sup>23</sup> At that point in his career, Anderson was mainly interested in the 'style' of the nation. *Imagined Communities* subsequently concentrated on the histories through which it became possible to "think the nation". Later, Anderson turned his attention to the rise of what he would call 'unbound and

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<sup>22</sup> Questions of ethnicity and 'identity' have been central to the existing literature on Darjeeling. Most of this has focused on the historical constitution of the 'Gorkha' community in Darjeeling leading up to and through the Gorkhaland Movement of the 1980s. The study of Nepali-Indians (in Darjeeling and beyond) has largely been pioneered by Tanka Subba and A.C. Sinha, whose work has been instrumental in establishing the groundwork of the history and politics of these groups throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and particularly the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Subba 1985, 1989, 1991, 1992, 2003, 2009; Sinha 1981, 1983, 1993, 2009). Roderick Chalmers has provided excellent work on ethno-linguistic identity formation and the constitution of the public sphere in Darjeeling in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century—although most of his research to date is unpublished (Chalmers 2002, 2003, 2009). Michael Hutt's seminal article, "Being Nepali Without Nepal: Reflections on a South Asian Diaspora" (1997) paved the way for understanding the populations as part of a Nepali diaspora—a term that by his own admission is somewhat problematic given the histories at hand. Studies of the Gorkhaland Movement include: Lama 1996, 1999; Magar 1994; Samanta 2000; Sarkar 2000; Timsina 1992. Of late, other scholars have become interested in the identity question in Darjeeling, but most of these studies, again, have focused on the issues surrounding Gorkhaland (see for instance, Nepal, Nepal, Sinha, & Subba *et al* 2009). Ample attention has not yet been directed at the post-Agitation identity politics of Darjeeling. A notable exception would be Sara Shneiderman's cross-border work with the Thangmi of Nepal and Darjeeling (available primarily in her recent dissertation, "Rituals of Ethnicity: Migration, Mixture, and the Making of Thangmi Identity Across Himalayan Borders," 2008), as well as a brief overview article on ST recognition in Darjeeling and Sikkim published by Shneiderman and Turin in 2006, (see also Middleton & Shneiderman 2008). My research owes a considerable debt to all of the scholars who have helped develop the study of Darjeeling. The research presented here pushes the scope of Darjeeling Studies to engage with some of the most recent, and I believe fascinating, efforts to establish a secure sense of 'identity' and belonging in India.

For the most part, my study's attention does not cross the border into Nepal. While I maintain that the dynamics I consider must be understood primarily within the context of postcolonial India, there are certainly links and compelling comparisons to be made with recent politics of identity in Nepal. Arjun Guneratne's (2002) work with the Tharu of southern Nepal affords a comparative look at how other groups whose heritage spans the Nepal-India border are laboring for rights and recognition in Nepal and India. Studies such as Fisher 2001; Gellner *et al* 2003, 2007; Hangen 2007; Tamang 2008 provide further reference on projects of ethnic revival and contemporary ethnic politics in Nepal.

<sup>23</sup> Anderson 1983: 6.

bound serialities’, within which fell the problem of ethnicity.<sup>24</sup> Ethnicity, he argued, was a classic case of ‘bound seriality’. Ethnicities came to be imagined as recognizable, clearly delineated, indivisible, totalities. Ethnicity, in other words, became a ‘style’ in which communities came to be imagined. Importantly, Anderson rooted this ‘style’ to systems of modern governance and the material histories of capital. As he writes:

“We are all only too aware of how incessantly people speak, not merely of ‘seeking’ ‘roots,’ but of ‘exploring,’ ‘finding,’ and alas, ‘coming close to losing’ their ‘identities.’ But these searches, which rhetorically move inward towards the site that once housed the soul, in fact proceed outward towards real and imagined censuses, where, thanks to capitalism, state machineries, and mathematics, integral bodies become identical, and thus serially aggregable as phantom communities.”<sup>25</sup>

Critiques of colonial knowledge and governmentality have tended to uphold this general line of thought.<sup>26</sup> In fact, a great deal of postcolonial theory has revolved around the question of epistemic dominance—with arguments explicating both the power and limits of colonial knowledge forms in shaping colonial and now postcolonial life.<sup>27</sup>

In the context of South Asian studies, Anderson’s emphasis on modular styles of ‘community’ has proven especially contentious. In a seminal response to *Imagined Communities*, Partha Chatterjee famously argued, “If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to

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<sup>24</sup> See *The Spectre of Comparisons* (1998), particularly Chapter I.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid: 44.

<sup>26</sup> In India, see for instance: Cohn 1996; Dirks 2001; Kaviraj 1992. Generally speaking, much of this postcolonial critique has developed through the optics of Foucault’s conceptualization of knowledge-power and governmentality. Foucault 1979; 1980. See also Scott 1995.

<sup>27</sup> Seminal works include: Fanon 1967; Said 1985; Chatterjee 1986; Mitchell 1988; Guha 1989; Chakrabarty 2000.

imagine?... Even our imaginations must remain further colonized.”<sup>28</sup> In response to Anderson, Chatterjee charted what he called the outer domain of nationalism—that of the economy, statecraft, etc—versus the spiritual ‘inner’ domain, where the “‘essential’ marks of cultural identity” reside. The inner domain, Chatterjee argues, is where, “Nationalism launches its most powerful, creative, and historically significant project: to fashion a ‘modern’ national culture that is nevertheless not Western. If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being.”<sup>29</sup> With a masterful stroke of analytic ambivalence, Chatterjee argues that while nationalism in India may inevitably be a “derivative discourse”, national identity nevertheless finds its own form.<sup>30</sup>

In subsequent works, Chatterjee would go on to elaborate his argument for the (relative) autonomy of community and ‘identity’. This included a similar response to the publication of Anderson’s second major work, *The Spectre of Comparison*.<sup>31</sup> As Anderson’s modularity argument morphed from ‘styles’ of national community into questions of ‘bound and unbound serialities’, his emphasis on the emergence of normative, conceptual forms of community remained, however, largely the same. Once again, Chatterjee took issue with Anderson’s formulations of these ostensibly global epistemologies of identity, as well as his claims of an attendant spread of “profoundly standardized conceptions of politics.”<sup>32</sup> Chatterjee argued that these modular forms of community and politics exist only in the abstract realm of “empty homogenous time”. But, as he notes, “People can only imagine themselves in empty homogenous time. They do not live in it... The real space of modern life consists of heterotopia... Politics here does not mean the same thing to all people. To ignore this

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<sup>28</sup> Chatterjee 1993: 5.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>30</sup> On nationalism as a derivative discourse, see Chatterjee 1986.

<sup>31</sup> Chatterjee 2004 on Anderson 1998.

<sup>32</sup> Chatterjee 2004: 6.

is, I believe, to discard the real for the utopian.”<sup>33</sup> Chatterjee’s argument carries with it an appreciable ethnographic imperative. Leveraging ethnography against the universalist claims of Anderson, Chatterjee beckons us into the fray of modern life, where we are to recognize populations producing their own kinds of community, their own forms of identity, and their own kinds of politics—even if ‘derivative’ of normative discourses and real forms of governmentality.<sup>34</sup>

The debate between Anderson and Chatterjee has left an indelible mark on the study of identity in South Asia. The arguments have in many ways polarized academic discussions over how Western knowledge-power, governmentality, modernization, and the circulation of global capital has and has not shaped notions of community and identity in places like India. Generally speaking, the debate has been fruitful, if unnecessarily polarizing. In a moment I will explain why I think it is necessary to find space for both of these arguments. But before charting a possible way out of this stalemate, let me note two more specific concerns. First, while Chatterjee is right in questioning Anderson’s assertions of global epistemologies of identity, ethnographic engagement with ‘real’ subjects does *not* in and of itself relegate modular forms of community to the realm of ‘empty homogenous time’ from whence Chatterjee would have us believe they came. To the contrary, ethnography may actually affirm the ontic, social existence of these abstract, ‘modular’ forms among ‘real’ subjects. Plunging into the lifeworlds of Darjeeling, we find ‘modular’ identity forms to be present and impressed with palpable socio-political sanction. The prescriptions of ‘tribal’ identity are a case in point.

This brings me to my second point. By artificially dividing the world into the ‘utopian’ realm of ‘empty homogenous time’ versus the realm of the ‘real’, we are

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*: 6-7.

<sup>34</sup> Much of Chatterjee’s recent writing has worked to rethink the notion of ‘political society’. His model of ‘political society’ is of special importance to this study. I discuss it in detail in Chapter I. See Chatterjee 2001, 2004, 2004a.

unable to see how the evocation of universality itself becomes a mechanism of class, political, and intellectual inequalities. In Darjeeling, the champions of ‘tribal’ identity and ‘ethnic’ rebirth reap considerable credence from the ostensible universality of these anthropological paradigms. Typically well educated, wealthy, and politically adept, these ethnic leaders are able to operationalize ethnological discourses and practices that may strike the common man as quite literally foreign. This is to say nothing of the power that inheres in the government’s reckoning and administration of human difference. Though espoused under the pretenses of universality, these respective programs to ‘uplift’ and transform the ethnic subject are actualized through obvious relations of local, regional, and national power. In such circumstances, universality itself may function as a potent alibi for the reproduction of historically entrenched systems of power. In this way, ‘modular’ forms of community are pressed upon ‘real’ subjects—individuals who sometimes do, but more often do not, have the capacity or will to stand up to these normative prescriptions. Contra the optimistic suggestions of Chatterjee, ethnography here brings us face to face with a darker side of ‘identity’ and its politics in the modern world.<sup>35</sup>

These specific concerns point to a greater challenge: namely, how to account for the imposition of modular forms of community, while simultaneously attending to the inherent potentiality, contingency and creativity of modern identity formation. There is, I believe, considerable *ethnographic* space for doing so. Darjeeling provides a working example. On the one hand, the carrot and stick dynamics of positive discrimination have transformed life in the hills in undeniable ways. At the same time, people’s empirical, embodied, and emergent ways of life continue to challenge and

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<sup>35</sup> Chatterjee would himself likely recognize these dynamics as the ‘darker’, less known side of political society (2004: 75-6). As will become clearer in Chapter I, many of these issues may be fruitfully pursued through Chatterjee’s model of political society. My ethnographic engagement in Darjeeling, however, has proven to be a more sobering methodology than as presented by Chatterjee in *The Politics of the Governed*. That said, I second his call for ethnographic engagement with emergent identity forms and their politics.

perturb the anthropological prescriptions of community and ‘identity’ in significant ways. To stress either one of these contending forces would be to miss their fraught interplay in the lives of the people of Darjeeling. Rather than argue either for or against the imminence of modularity, a more promising way forward is to focus on the tensions that arise when modular, ostensibly ‘universal’ forms of community are brought to bear on the lived realities of contemporary subjects. The tensions that arise concern not only the disjunctions between conceptual and empirical forms. When pressed upon the social world, modular forms also meet pre-existing schemas of socio-cultural life that contest these normative prescriptions with varying capacities. Such tensions lie at the core of ‘tribal’ recognition and ethnic renaissance in the hills. How they are negotiated has proven largely determinative of the political, social, and subjective consequences of these movements. Developing an awareness of these tensions and their social effects has therefore been central to the design of this study.

Through the optics of knowledge and belonging, this research re-engages the ‘identity’ question in fresh light. While this study is situated at the intersection of the anthropology of knowledge and the anthropology of identity, here ‘identity’ comes into view not as the mystified, felicitous unity of modern communities, but instead as a figment of inherently fraught and uneven processes of subject formation. In this regard, Derrida’s intervention into the debates over ‘identity’ is particularly instructive. By pointing out that, “No, an identity is never given, received or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures,” Derrida steers our attention away from the problematic notion of ‘identity’ and toward the knowledge practices of identification.<sup>36</sup> For the purposes of this study, this shift

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<sup>36</sup> Derrida 1998: 28.

couldn't be more important: it refigures the very issue of 'identity' as an apt problem for the anthropology of knowledge.<sup>37</sup>

Pursued accordingly, this study focuses not merely on the styles in which communities are imagined, but also on the practices through which modern communities are fashioned. As I shall show, anthropological knowledge has become integral to these *fashionings*. In its 'found' forms, though, anthropological knowledge seldom moves only in the spirit of thick description; in places like Darjeeling, it has become *prescriptive* of what it means to be a viable ethnic subject. Grappling with the fascinating (if unsettling) questions of 'found' anthropology is therefore necessary if we are to arrive at a new understanding of not only the problem of 'identity' in the hills, but also its pending solutions.

### **Histories of Hybridity and their Undoing.**

Ethnic renaissance and the quests for 'tribal' status have emerged out of—but also in many ways turned against—the history of 'identity' and its politics in Darjeeling. When Darjeeling passed into British hands in 1835<sup>38</sup>, the region was reported to be sparsely inhabited by two ethnic groups—the Bhutia and the Lepcha.<sup>39</sup> If the British were to realize their designs of transforming the rugged topography into a hill-station sanatorium (and some years later, into a tea producing region), they would require far more labor than these groups could provide. The British found an ideal labor pool in neighboring Nepal, where thousands of 'sturdy hillmen' proved ready and willing to leave the feudal conditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century Nepal in order to sell

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<sup>37</sup> I explain my approach to the anthropology of knowledge later in the introduction.

<sup>38</sup> The Raja of Sikkim deeded Darjeeling to the East India Company in 1835. Prior to that, the territory had briefly come under control of an expanding Nepal at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only to be returned to Sikkim (through the British) via the Treaty of Segauli (1815/6) and the Treaty of Titalia (1817). On the unification of Nepal and its effects on eastern Nepal and into Darjeeling, see Pradhan 1991; Whelpton 2005: 57.

<sup>39</sup> The Lepcha are commonly held to be the region's truest indigenes. The Bhutia are a mongoloid group that appears to have migrated out of Tibet in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

their labor in the emerging markets of Darjeeling.<sup>40</sup> Particularly with the advent of Darjeeling's tea industry in the 1850s, droves of migrants from Nepal flooded across the border to work and eventually settle in Darjeeling. Through time, these groups established themselves as the region's majority, thereby putting a Nepali signature on this cultural landscape.<sup>41</sup>

Yet despite tacit encouragement by the British, the legality of the Nepalis' migration was dubious at best, as was their status as British subjects. They were subsequently given work, land, and shelter, but never were afforded the kind of security and rights they longed for. From the start, their dwelling in India was liminal. Linguistic, cultural, and racial distinctions only further set them apart from the Indian others they encountered in Darjeeling and the plains below. Marginalized on territorial, nationalist, and ethno-racial registers, the people of Darjeeling have historically been painted into a figurative and quite literal corner of the nation. (See Figure 1.) Uncertainties over of 'identity' and national belonging have developed accordingly.<sup>42</sup>

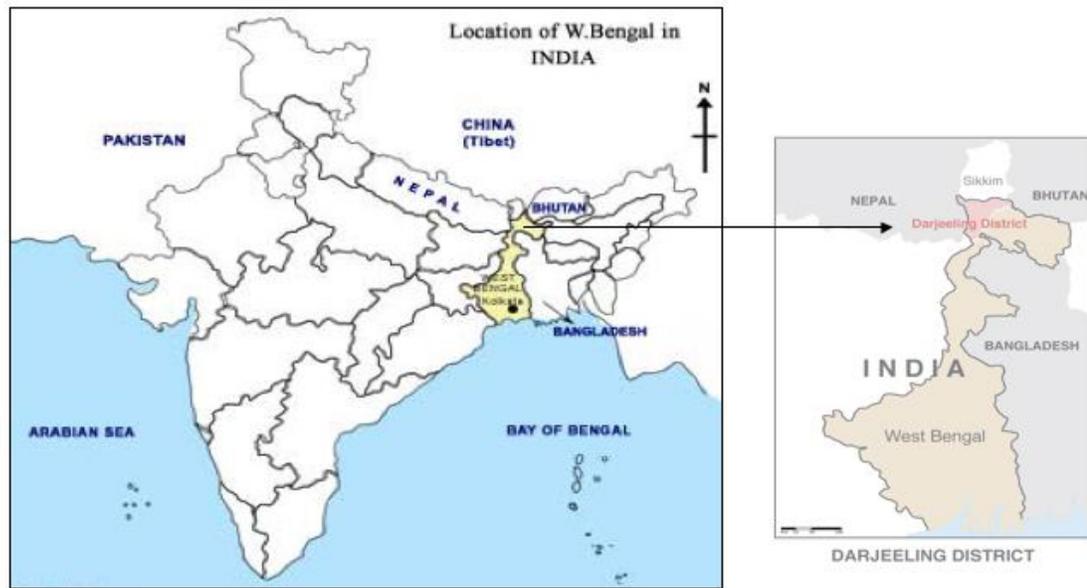
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<sup>40</sup> On the factors driving the 19<sup>th</sup> century migration from Nepal to Darjeeling, see Hutt 1997: 109-113; Pradhan 1991; Samanta 2000: 20-22; Sinha & Subba *et al* 2003: 14-17. Also relevant here is Holmberg & March's (1999) work on forced labor regimes in Nepal. I examine these dynamics of migration in greater detail in Chapter II.

<sup>41</sup> We know little about the demographics of Darjeeling prior to 1835. Because the region was briefly a part of Nepal toward the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and into the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup>, and also due to the fluid nature of Himalayan trade, there was in all likelihood a smattering of representatives of other ethnic groups living amongst the Lepchas and Bhutias. The pre-British history of Darjeeling has become a major concern of ongoing historical revisionist projects in Darjeeling, as was apparent in the aforementioned memorandum's claims that all Gorkhas are 'sons of the soil'. To date, these revisionist claims to autochthony lack compelling evidence. And moreover, they contradict the family histories of migration shared by the public more generally. Though the pre-British period remains hazy, census figures tell us that by the 1870s there were well over a hundred tea gardens in the area, and the Nepali population had grown to almost 40,000. By the turn of the century, the number of Nepalis in the Darjeeling district had swelled to 152,000. Consolidated census data available in Samanta 2000.

<sup>42</sup> Left map: Copyright Compare Infobase Pvt. Ltd. 2005;

Right Map: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0f/Darjeeling\\_District\\_Map.gif](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0f/Darjeeling_District_Map.gif)



**Figure 1. Map of South Asia and Darjeeling, West Bengal.**

Importantly, when groups such as the Tamangs, Gurungs, Khas, Limbus and others began migrating to Darjeeling, they did so with relatively discrete socio-cultural and linguistic traits. They were, as modern academics would have it, distinct culture bearing ‘ethnic groups’. Yet once settled in Darjeeling, these populations began to mix and amalgamate in unprecedented ways. Gradually, these groups began to ‘lose’—as they now say—much of the linguistic and socio-cultural distinctiveness of their ancestors and ethnic contemporaries in Nepal. The inter-ethnic conditions of colonial life, however, proved fertile ground for hybrid social forms. Nepali quickly became the lingua franca among these communities, and slowly a conglomerate ‘identity’ began to take form. First articulated as that of the ‘hillmen’ and later organized under the banner of the ‘Gorkha’, this newfound identification reflected at once the organic processes of hybridity developing on the ground, and these groups of Nepali heritage’s need for a unified, political voice in India.

By 1917, the Hillmen’s Union (representing the Nepali, Bhutia, and Lepcha communities of Darjeeling) were justifying their quests for self-governance on the

grounds of the shared geographic, racial, historical, religious, and linguistic traits of the hill peoples. “No real affinity exists between the peoples of this Himalayan and sub-Himalayan region and those of the plains of Bengal,” they argued to the British Indian government, “The evolution of our political life should be towards a distinct local government of our own.”<sup>43</sup> Subsequent organizations like the Hill People’s Social Union (est. 1934), and the All India Gorkha League (est. in Darjeeling in 1940) would take up the cause in later years, sustaining the arguments of the socio-cultural distinctiveness of the Nepali-Indian<sup>44</sup> community of the hills and their political readiness for self-governance.

In the postcolonial era, the championing of a hybrid identity gained steam, as inter-ethnic solidarity deepened and political frustrations mounted. In the 1970s, the Akhil Bharatiya Nepali Bhasa Samiti (All Indian Nepali Language Association) began a protracted movement to have Nepali recognized in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution as a national language of India. The movement would eventually succeed in 1992, but only after a telling rebuke in 1976 by then-Prime Minister Morarji Desai, who publicly rejected the bid, noting callously, “Nepali is a foreign language spoken by foreigners in India.”<sup>45</sup> Though Indian citizens by law, Desai’s comments, once again, exacerbated the people of Darjeeling’s anxieties over belonging in India.

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<sup>43</sup> The prevailing historical narrative of ‘identity’ in Darjeeling generally posits the formation of the Hillmen’s Union as the first step on the road to the Gorkhaland Movement. These popular historiographies have tended to flatten the history of identification, at once failing to recognize the contradictory claims that pepper the archive, while cobbling the various appeals to self-governance into a teleological narrative. My archival findings suggest a more contentious and contradictory history of identity politics in Darjeeling. The narrative provided in this Introduction is intended as but a brief examination of the historical backdrop to the contemporary dynamics addressed throughout this thesis. Sources pertaining to this history are listed in an earlier footnote.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Nepali-Indian’ does not connote a transnational identity. The ‘Nepali’ in this hyphenated construction instead distinguishes these communities more along the lines of culture, language, and heritage. The term is used in Darjeeling, as is ‘Indian Nepali’; however, people prefer the term ‘Gorkha’. All of these, of course, entail problematic slippages, which I take up in Chapter II.

<sup>45</sup> On the language movement in Darjeeling, see forthcoming dissertation by Chelsea Booth, Rutgers University.

The trajectory of the hybrid Nepali-Indian identity—or what was increasingly coming to organize under the banner of the ‘Gorkha’—came to a head in the 1980s, when the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) launched a guerilla-style insurgency to achieve a separate state of Gorkhaland *within* India. Spearheading the ‘Agitation’ was the eccentric and charismatic young leader, Subash Ghisingh. Playing upon the people’s longstanding doubts over their own ‘identity’ and belonging in India, Ghisingh and his GNLF cadres promised “nothing short of a separate state” in their quest for a homeland for the people of Darjeeling. “Consider our situation,” Ghisingh pleaded to the nation in a 1986 edition of *Frontline*:

“Morarji Desai [when he was Prime Minister of India (1977-9)] described us as foreigners and said were welcome to go back to Nepal. According to Nepal, we are *Prabashis* (domiciles). Such irresponsible talk is possible because we do not have a home. Hence our demand for Gorkhaland in an area which has historically been our land, which we brought into India.... We Indian Nepalis who have nothing to do with Nepal are constantly confused with ‘Nepalis’, that is, citizens of Nepal, a foreign country. But if there is Gorkhaland, then our identity as Indians belonging to an Indian state will be clear.”<sup>46</sup>

Ultimately, Gorkhaland was never achieved. After three years of violence, a conciliatory reward was granted in the form of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), a supposedly semi-autonomous local administration that was to remain within the state of West Bengal. Ghisingh assumed the helm of the DGHC, but the luster of the makeshift Gorkha administration was short-lived. The anxieties over belonging remained, as did the people’s desires for rights, recognition, and a secure sense of ‘identity’ in India.

In the wake of the traumatic failings of the Gorkhaland Movement, individual ethnic groups like the Tamangs, Limbus, Gurungs, and others began seeking alternative routes to rights and recognition in the nation-state. These they found in the

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<sup>46</sup> *India Today*. 66 October 31, 1986.

Government of India's affirmative action system for Schedule Tribes. Throughout the 1990s, bids for Scheduled Tribe status catalyzed a sweeping ethnic renaissance among these groups that has continued into the 2000s, significantly re-figuring the socio-political possibilities of 'ethnicity' along the way. Significantly, this shift away from the composite 'Gorkha' identification and *to* notions of discrete 'ethnic' or 'tribal' communities has entailed more than political opportunism. While the movements for ethnic revitalization and Scheduled Tribe status are overtly shaped by the exigencies of positive discrimination, to reduce these movements to political instrumentality would be to miss their experiential impacts. The ethnic associations, political leaders, and various other champions of ethnic rebirth spearheading these movements have demanded people transform their cultural practices, and even their patterns of sociality. These intended transformations of socio-cultural life are part and parcel to these movements' political aims. For individuals, the shift in the preferred 'style of identity'—as it were—has subsequently come to involve a whole suite of political, cultural, and unavoidably social considerations.

Crucially, this turn toward individual ethnic revitalization and ST status has cast these re-emergent groups at odds with the prevailing history of 'identity' and its politics in Darjeeling. Whereas identity politics throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century was dominated by the hybrid, composite identity of the 'Gorkha', ethnic renaissance—and ST recognition in particular—has called for hybridity's undoing. To realize these goals, aspiring groups like the Gurungs, Lekh, and others would necessarily have to extract their 'lost', discrete identities from what was in effect an already-melted melting pot. By its very nature, that endeavor would tear at the seams of the Gorkha community writ large, and the histories of hybridity from which it spawned.

## **The Sixth Schedule: A Second Front.**

These histories of hybridity have made the quests for ethnic rebirth and ST status inherently fraught affairs—both in a conceptual and socio-political sense. The circumstances grew all the more perplexing when, in 2004 Subash Ghisingh began publicly discussing the possibility of the region becoming a ‘tribal-area’ as per the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. A qualified form of ethnic-based sovereignty, the Sixth Schedule was originally designed for the ‘tribal’ populations of India’s northeast. It allows for existing ‘tribal’ political institutions to be incorporated into autonomous District Councils with powers to regulate forest and property rights, social customs, and local administrative structures (for instance, the appointment of headmen and chiefs).<sup>47</sup> Were Darjeeling to become a Sixth Schedule area it would remain within the state of West Bengal, but it would enjoy greater autonomy to govern itself—and, for the people of the hills, this was its greatest promise.

By 2005, bringing Sixth Schedule status to Darjeeling had become the primary political agenda of Subash Ghisingh and his ruling party, the GNLFF. In December of 2005, Ghisingh, the Government of West Bengal, and the Centre signed an “In Principle Memorandum of Settlement” (MoS) declaring their mutual intention along these lines. But the details of the plan were not yet finalized. Increasingly it became clear that there were significant obstacles to be overcome were this form of ‘tribal’ sovereignty to dawn upon the hills. Most pressing was the fact that to date, Darjeeling’s population was just over 32% ‘tribal’—that is, officially recognized STs.

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<sup>47</sup> On the Sixth Schedule, see Articles 244(2) and 275(1) in *The Constitution of India*. Antecedents to the ‘tribal’ based exceptionalisms of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules include: the *Scheduled Districts Acts of 1874*; *The Government of India Act of 1919* (Sec. 52-A(2) that established ‘Backward Tracts’; and *The Government of India Act of 1935* (Sec. 91 & 92) that demarcated ‘Excluded’ and ‘Partially Excluded Areas’. These acts based the need for special forms of governance on the purported aboriginal, frontier, and/or ‘backward’ conditions of the said areas. Importantly, Darjeeling has traditionally fallen within this ambit of exceptionalism. Darjeeling was declared a Scheduled District under the 1874 act, a ‘Backward Tract’ in the 1919 act, and a ‘Partially Excluded Area’ under the 1935 act. A useful synthesis of these policies, as well as those pertaining to Scheduled Tribes may be found in Ghurye’s *The Scheduled Tribes of India* (1963).

If Darjeeling was going to be granted Sixth Schedule status, that number, it was presumed, would have to be increased dramatically.

This was where individual ethnicities' bids for ST status and the prospects of the Sixth Schedule—the two fronts of 'tribal' becoming, as it were—converged. On the first front, individual ethnic groups were actively pursuing their goals of ethnic rebirth and ST recognition. This front was constituted by individual ethnic groups and the ethnic associations stewarding their ST applications. The second front—that of the Sixth Schedule—concerned the designation of the region (not the people) as a 'tribal area'. Propagated by Ghisingh's administration, the DGHC, this front focused on making the region 'tribal'. It therefore pertained to the general Gorkha public. The relationship between the two fronts was never exactly clear, but commonsense held that the Sixth Schedule hinged on more individual ethnicities attaining ST status. Likewise, the Sixth Schedule accentuated the desires for ST status, as non-STs feared being 'left out' of the special provisions to be provided for STs in the soon to be 'tribal area'. Developing on two fronts simultaneously, by 2006 then, making Darjeeling more 'tribal' had become the order of the day.

Interestingly, just twenty years earlier (in 1986) Ghisingh had scoffed at the idea of Sixth Schedule claiming, "We are not tribals...Such a status is bestowed upon people who are uncivilized, very backward, whose men go around naked and whose women go bare breasted. But we are advanced people. We are civilized. Look at me, I wear a three-piece suit and shoes."<sup>48</sup> At the time of this rebuke, Darjeeling was in the throes of the Gorkhaland Movement. As the leader of the GNLF, Ghisingh made it clear that the Sixth Schedule was an unacceptable, insulting compromise to the people's desires for a separate state.

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<sup>48</sup> *Frontline* Aug 9-22, 1986. This and other primary sources from the Gorkhaland Movement available in Lama's compendium, 1996.

Two decades later though, Ghisingh and the GNLF had yet to deliver the autonomy they promised. What is more, the Gorkha community was beginning to atomize as its constituent populations ventured their own politics of identity (viz: the individual ethnic groups' bids for ST status). This being the case, Ghisingh performed an about-face on his earlier statements regarding the 'tribal' character of the hills. With the signing of the MoS in 2005, the propaganda machine of the GNLF heralded the Sixth Schedule as a boon for the people of Darjeeling. But the proposal faced numerous complications. Raising the percentage of STs in the area from the current 32% mark would take time. The Tamangs of Darjeeling, for instance, struggled for 22 years to attain ST status, which they were eventually conferred in 2003 along with the Limbu.<sup>49</sup> The applications of the Gurungs and Rais had been pending since the 1990s. Many more had been submitted only in the last several years. Further complicating matters was the fact that Darjeeling lacked any traditional form of 'tribal' governance, itself a prerequisite for Sixth Schedule status. Despite the initial enthusiasm that surrounded the proposal, the Sixth Schedule appeared to be a classic cart before the horse situation.

There were complications at the national level as well. Conferring Sixth Schedule status on the dubiously 'tribal' contexts of Darjeeling would require time-consuming bureaucratic labor, political legwork, and very loose interpretations of the Constitution's parameters. The members of the state and central governments that I interviewed spoke of the government's growing reluctance to doll out any more 'tribal' recognitions—whether in the form of the Sixth Schedule or ST status. There were already over 700 Scheduled Tribes of India, and there were rumored to be more than 1000 communities with ST applications pending. The politics of 'tribal' recognition were, moreover, becoming increasingly volatile.

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<sup>49</sup> The Tamang and Limbu of West Bengal were written into the Constitution as Scheduled Tribes (ins. Act 10 of 2003).

In 2007, the Gujjar agitation swept across Rajasthan and beyond, leaving 26 dead in its wake. Frustrated by unrequited demands for ST recognition, Gujjar protesters met grave ends as police opened fire on the crowds. The violence soon struck a communal chord, causing more casualties as Gujjars clashed with Meenas, a dominant ST community opposing Gujjar demands for ST status. In November 2007, the issue erupted again in Guwahati, Assam, when a mob turned on adivasis demanding ST status after the protesters went on a vandalizing rampage. When order was finally restored, hundreds lay injured in the streets with at least two dead. The carnage was the latest in a litany of troubles stemming from the policies of reservation in India.<sup>50</sup> Insofar as these instances once again thrust the problems of ‘tribal’ recognition to the fore of national attention, the prospects of a back-door deal to quickly schedule the aspiring STs of Darjeeling and thus push through the Sixth Schedule, seemed less and less likely.

In the meantime, Ghisingh ramped up his efforts to convince not only the Government of India, but also the people of Darjeeling themselves of their ‘tribal’ character. He turned to his own administration to realize his anthropologically influenced political visions. Predictably, it was the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs (DICA) that became the primary agency of Ghisingh’s anthropological agenda.

To give but one example: on the occasion of Bhadra Purnimā 2006, DICA organized a massive celebration of the Darjeeling’s shamanic traditions. (At the time these were being cobbled together under the banner of the ‘*bon*’/’*bonbo*’ tradition— itself a confounding use of the term.<sup>51</sup>) Annually, it was a tradition for the various

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<sup>50</sup> Passage sampled from Middleton & Shneiderman 2008.

<sup>51</sup> The terms ‘bon’, ‘bonbo’, and ‘bombo’ are sources of great confusion in Himalayan Studies. In Tibet, ‘bon’ is typically understood to be a pre-Buddhist religion entailing more shamanic and/or sacrificial qualities. Today, bon still thrives in cultural Tibet, where it has a rich monastic tradition—not unlike the four other schools of Tibetan Buddhism proper. Ethnic groups such as the Gurungs and Tamangs of northern Nepal classify certain shamanic figures as bonpo and bombo respectively; however, the

shamans of the area (*dhāmis*, *jhankris*, *mātās* and others) to gather at various temples to celebrate their craft; drums would be heard stirring from various holy spots around town; and shamans would occasionally be seen moving through town in their ritual attire. Traditionally then, it was a scattered, relatively low-key celebration of shamans and their craft. This year, however, the circumstances demanded a more spectacular celebration. Political pressure and the considerable resources flowing from the coffers of the DGHC ensured it would be so.

As the site of their unequivocal display of the ‘tribal identity’ of all the region’s peoples, DICA commandeered the town square known as *Chow Rasta*. A stage was decorated in the classic animistic décor of natural foliage. A large performance area was cordoned off with rope at the center of Chow Rasta, just in front of the stage. Plush chairs were brought in for the VIPs (the local administration would be out in full-force). And a P.A. system was set up with enough power to rattle windows across town.

The spectacle was observed by thousands, as shamans (many of them present at the behest of the GNLF) recited their chants, pounded their drums, and shook violently to the power of the gods that possessed them. As tourists, journalists, and the greater public took in the sights and sounds, DICA officials watched over the event with a careful eye. Proper orchestration was imperative. To conclude the festivities a high-ranking DGHC official (and GNLF party member) took the stage to say a few

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specific links to the bon tradition are hazy in both a historical and contemporary sense. What is particularly interesting about the current articulation of ‘bon’ in Darjeeling is the way in which the term is co-opted as a way to represent the self as primitive, pure, and distinct from the major religions of Buddhism and especially Hinduism. (I explore the reasons for this distancing in Chapter III). Insofar as it has not been a traditional term used in Darjeeling, its current invocation was a source of widespread confusion among the populations of Darjeeling. For a helpful overview of bon in Tibet, see Samuel 1993; Lopez 1998, 1998a and Kvaerne 2000 in Karmay and Nagano’s edited volume *New Horizons in Bon Studies* (2000). On bonpos among the Gurung, see Mumford 1989. On Bombos among the Tamang, see Holmberg 1989,

closing words. Making the claim that all of Darjeeling's people (i.e. all "Gorkhalis") were 'tribal', his message to the public warrants a lengthy quotation:

"Our way of life, and our ways of worship are related to nature, so through this bonbo festival, we know this. Our Gorkhalis' dharma is the bonbo dharma. These days we have drifted from nature and from our bonbo dharma. This bonbo festival of ours here today gives us our identity (*chinhāri*)... The rituals and practices that you have witnessed here today give us our identity as tribals (*adivasi janājātiya chinhāri*). Our Mr. Subash Ghisingh has ensured that we understand and learn our customs and traditions and our identity; he is teaching us these things with this program. So what is important is to get research done on our *bijuwās*, *ojhās*, and *jhankris* [traditional healers, sorcerers, and shamans]. We would like to tell the intellectuals to take up this research and tell us about them and their existence in different places... We should research these matters. We have drifted away from our identity. We have to know ourselves. We haven't been able to recognize ourselves. We haven't been able to recognize ourselves as tribals.. (*Hāmīle hāmī āphailai chinna sakeko chhainau. Hāmīle hāmī janājāti bhanera hāmīle āphai chinna sakeko chhainau.*) That is why the Sixth Schedule is a great opportunity for us to understand our identity and our customs and traditions...All along we have adopted the traditions and customs of other communities due to which reason we have lost our own identity.... Now, the Sixth schedule will definitely give us an opportunity to protect and preserve our culture and tradition. We need to help each other. We need to get deeply into this. There are great mysteries hidden within, and these mysteries are to be revealed. (*Yesmā thulo rahāsya lukeko chha, ra yo rahāslai khuṭyāunu...*)We must make efforts in this direction. In this context, this bonbo festival, our ethnic identity, the different festivals which we have been celebrating all are great opportunities provided to us by our *mahāmahim* [supremo, i.e. Ghisingh]. For this we thank him and would also like to announce the conclusion of this festival."

With regards to the research interests of this dissertation, the speaker articulates key facets of the salience of anthropological knowledge in Darjeeling: the familiar language of lost 'identity'; the lure of positive discrimination; the lingering questions of syncretism amid systems of recognition that privilege singularity; the overt call to research and knowledge as a means to revealing the "mysteries hidden within"; and the unabashed politics of socio-cultural understanding. But in reviewing these pronouncements of why and how "we must know ourselves," what is more striking is

the speaker's peculiar message that "We have not been able to recognize ourselves." And more than that, "We have not been able to recognize ourselves as *tribals*." Here he captures what may well be the crux of ethnic renaissance in Darjeeling—namely, the ability and/or willingness of subjects to recognize themselves in normative anthropological forms. As he put it, it was not just a matter of recognizing the self, but recognizing the self as 'tribal'.

This has proven to be something more than a matter of discourse. Ethnic associations and the local administration have deployed decidedly anthropological practices in order to advance their programs of ethnic revitalization. Ethnographic delegations have probed the interiors of Nepal in search of the 'pure' (*suddha*), 'authentic and original' (*maulik*) culture of their ancestors. Intellectuals and study-teams have combed through secondary-source materials. Libraries have been constituted. Documentaries have been shot. Essays have been written. But crucially, these anthropological techniques of self have not been deployed solely for descriptive purposes. They have also been implemented with the sometimes-heavy hand of socio-cultural prescription.

The DGHC and various ethnic associations alike have turned to social-cultural engineering to fashion their constituents into the form of properly recognizable ethnic (or better yet, 'tribal') communities. Cultural purification programs have aimed to eradicate the syncretic trace from socio-cultural life—particularly that of Hinduism, which is now framed as an oppressive, corruptive historical influence. Rules of authentic ritual practice have been administered. Dress codes have been mandated; performances of 'ethnic culture' (*janājātiya sanskriti*) demanded; and unorthodox traditions tacitly degraded, if not attacked outright. All of this with palpable social and political sanction.

In no sense of the word have these endeavors been ‘academic’. They are instead social and deeply political—at once the fodder of the press, the grist of local politics, and the subject matter of everyday debate on the street. Marshall Sahlins may be right that ‘culture’ is indeed “the word on everybody’s lips,”<sup>52</sup> but in Darjeeling the inroads of anthropological knowledge go much deeper. Particular paradigms of anthropological knowledge—viz: ethnological paradigms—have now penetrated the most political, social, and subjective spaces of life. As they have taken root in the lifeworlds of the people of Darjeeling, these logics and practices of ethnological thought have reconfigured not only how notions of the self, other, and ethnic difference are known; they have reconfigured the very ways that ethnic difference is made and lived.

It is these inroads that concern me most in the chapters that follow.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Design of the Research.**

Two preliminary research visits to Darjeeling established the groundwork for this study. The first inquiries were conducted in the summer of 2004. At this point, ethnic renaissance was well underway in Darjeeling. With multiple ethnic groups seeking ST status and ethnological knowledge in high demand, it was immediately clear that something was afoot on the horizons of ethnic possibility. I made a second

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<sup>52</sup> Sahlins 1993: 3.

<sup>53</sup> As I make clear in Chapter I, my anthropology of knowledge concentrates on knowledge in its epistemological construal (ala Kant). However, in investigating the production and social life of epistemic forms, my main *ethical* concern lies with the way particular epistemic forms and practices are coming to affect more social and embodied aspects of life in Darjeeling. In later chapters I will have more to say about the various philosophical construals of knowledge (ranging from Aristotle to Kant, Heidegger and Taylor) and their place within this ethnographic study. Let me note briefly here how I am using several terms. ‘Epistemology’ is used in the traditional sense of: the study of how we know what we know through knowledge. I use ‘epistemological’ in reference to Kant’s construal of knowledge as a system of cognitive-discursive, representational forms. ‘Epistemic’ is used in the sense of: in relation to knowledge. Thus, when I speak of ‘epistemic commitments’, I am referring to the ‘rules’ and logics through which people construct knowledge of the world. ‘Epistemic qualities’ accordingly refers to the characteristics of a given knowledge form.

trip to Darjeeling in December of 2005 to attend *The Second International Tamang Conference*. Having recently attained ST status, the Tamangs of Darjeeling played host to thousands of Tamangs from across India, Nepal, and beyond. Honored guests included politicians, notable ethnic leaders, native intellectuals, and the western anthropologists. The latter was principally constituted by David Holmberg and Kathryn March, who were treated as virtual celebrities for their lifetime of work with the Tamangs of Nepal. The gathering entailed more than the celebration of Tamang culture and achievement, though. It was also a working session. On Day Four for instance, Tamang leaders took the stage to field written questions submitted by the audience about proper Tamang socio-cultural practice. One by one, these cultural experts fielded the queries, rendering there and then the singular details of authentic Tamang ethnic practice. These intercalations of anthropological expertise and socio-cultural life provided an apt prelude of what was to come as I headed into more extended ethnographic engagement with the circumstances in Darjeeling.

The main fieldwork for this study was carried out over fifteen months of research in India in 2006 and 2007.<sup>54</sup> During this time, I relied upon an ever-evolving mix of ethnographic and archival techniques, which split my time at roughly a 2:1 ratio. Archival work was conducted in: *The West Bengal State Archives*, *The National Library of India*, and the *Asiatic Society* in Kolkata; *The National Archives of India* in New Delhi; and *The India Office Records* at the *British Library* in London. My ethnography consisted of a three tiered approach designed to track the circulation and practice of anthropological knowledge across diverse socio-political strata.

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<sup>54</sup> Extended fieldwork began in May of 2006. A short research visit to Nepal was made in November of 2006, and I spent much of the winter of 2007 in Kolkata (although I made frequent visits back to Darjeeling). I returned to Darjeeling for the Spring of 2007. I left India in May of 2007, stopping off in London for two weeks of archival work, and then returned again to India in September, spending several weeks in the National Archives of Delhi. The remainder of the Fall, I spent in Darjeeling, finally concluding my fieldwork late in November of 2007.

On the first tier, I engaged with several ethnic associations that stood at the fore of ethnic revitalization in Darjeeling. Working with these organizations in their offices and in the ‘field’ where they interacted with their constituents, I concentrated on the techniques used to refashion, represent, and when necessary engineer socio-cultural practice in order to attain the twinned goals of ethnic awakening and ST recognition. This work cast me into the social world of the wealthy elites, politicians, bureaucrats, and public intellectuals who typically comprise the leadership of these organizations. These men were in a sense the culture makers of ethnic ‘identity’ and its politics in the hills. But as I soon came to discover, the work of these ethnic associations was nested within complex networks of local politics. The agendas of these ethnic associations (particularly their bids for ST status) were becoming increasingly entangled in the prospects of the Sixth Schedule. This being the case, I quickly realized the need to engage with the local administration and its tactics of socio-cultural regulation. I was subsequently able to gain access into the anthropological inner-workings of the DGHC—primarily through work with the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs (DICA). Overall, this work with DICA and various ethnic associations focused largely on the politics of public culture. However, this tier of research is best understood not so much as an ethnography of the public sphere in the Habermasian sense,<sup>55</sup> but rather as an ethnography of ‘political society’, as has been charted by Partha Chatterjee in his recent work.<sup>56</sup> This was a field of operation in which the ideals of democratic participation, communication, equality,

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<sup>55</sup> Habermas 1989.

<sup>56</sup> With his notion of ‘political society’ Chatterjee has sought to reframe the classical distinction between civil and political society. Political society, as Chatterjee frames it, “involves what appears to be a constantly shifting compromise between the normative values of modernity and the moral assertions of popular demands. Civil society then, restricted to a small section of culturally equipped citizens, represents in countries like India the high ground of modernity. So does the constitutional model of the state. But in actual practice, governmental agencies must descend from that high ground to the terrain of political society in order to renew their legitimacy as providers of well-being and there to confront whatever is the current configuration of politically mobilized demands.” (2004: 41). I engage more fully with Chatterjee’s notion of political society in Chapter I.

and citizenship give way to the hard realities of class, politics, popular demands, and the perduring logics of ethnological classification in postcolonial India. These were the effected conditions through which ethnic possibility would necessarily be attained in the hills.

To gauge how these programs of ‘ethnic uplift’ were reworking the dynamics of everyday life, I lived in a tea-estate village throughout my time in Darjeeling. My goal in doing so was to understand the ways that ethnological cum political agendas were pressed upon and negotiated by average people, and how these people, in turn, came to appropriate, embody, or resist such objectification. The village of *Bidhuwā Busti*<sup>57</sup> proved an apt site to research these matters. Situated about an hour’s walk from Darjeeling Town, the village abutted the tea estate where many of its inhabitants worked. It was far enough removed from town to pose recognizably different socio-economic conditions, yet also close enough to afford ample (and for some, like myself, almost daily) interactions with the thriving public arenas of Darjeeling Town. Internally, the village consisted of about 60 homes, divided roughly equally between Tamang and Gurung families.<sup>58</sup> Important to my work was the fact that the dominant ethnic organizations of both the Tamang and the Gurung (and with whom I was working in Darjeeling Town) were especially active in the village. From this setting, I sought to understand how ethnic revitalization was being experienced at the local level. This second tier was accordingly designed as an ethnography of the everyday.

Though unplanned, a third ethnographic tier emerged out of the aforementioned Ethnographic Survey of 2006. The Survey itself offered its own unique ethnographic perspective—specifically, the chance to take the ethnographic interface between the Government of India and the people of Darjeeling as an object

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<sup>57</sup> A pseudonym.

<sup>58</sup> Though dominated by Gurungs and Tamangs, the village was home to several families from other ethnic groups.

of my own analysis. But the event also served as a point of entry into the world of state anthropology. Upon the invitation of the government anthropologists, I became a frequent visitor to the CRI offices in Kolkata, from where I was able to observe their handling of the cases of the aspiring STs with whom I was working in Darjeeling. Through this ethnography of the state, I chronicled the social production of anthropological knowledge within the Indian government, along with the post-production life of this soft-science in the hard world of public policy. Carried out concurrently with my work in Darjeeling, this ethnographic work provided a balanced look at the politics of recognition as they developed from both sides of the interface between the Indian government and the people of Darjeeling.

### **Knowledge: an unconventional ‘field’.**

Coupled with my archival work, this three-tiered ethnographic approach made for a somewhat unorthodox field site. The ground that I covered in this research—much of it steep and seemingly far afield—was largely dictated by the attentions of the research. Rather than delineating the frames of my inquiry in concert with the professed boundaries of any given ‘ethnicity’, I chose to work across communities and sociological strata (as is indicated by my three-tiered ethnography). Deploying ethnographic and archival methods at multiple levels, I tried to avoid relying upon concepts like ‘ethnicity’ and ‘identity’ as heuristic requirements of my research.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Along with Judith Butler, I believe it is worth considering if and how the social sciences, along with reifying particular classificatory categories such as ‘race’, ‘tribe’, and ‘ethnicity’, have contributed to a greater reification of the idea of ‘identity’ itself. She writes, “Above all, we might expect from the consideration of identity a sense of cultural specificity, and we may turn to identities to deliver that specificity in order to counter certain false and exclusionary generalizations of ‘man’. But here we tend to run into another quandary, for it seems that what we expect from the term *identity* will be cultural specificity, and that on occasion we even expect *identity* and *specificity* to work interchangeably.” Given that it is now commonplace within academic anthropology to understand ‘culture’ as inherently contingent, negotiated, and dynamic, this ‘interchangeability’ should prove untenable. The challenge as Butler frames it is thus to get beyond “identity as a heuristic requirement”. I return to these issues in this dissertation’s Conclusion. Butler 1995: 441, 446.

Instead, I sought to know if and how particular paradigms of anthropological thought have come to constitute the very problems themselves. This became simultaneously, a historiographic and ethnographic concern.

This line of questioning posed a number of methodological and epistemological problems—not the least of which was the issue of terminology. English terms such as ‘culture’, ‘tribe’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘religion’, and ‘identity’ enjoy widespread circulation in Darjeeling. Moreover, these terms are frequently used interchangeably with their Nepali equivalents. Throughout my research, the people of Darjeeling frequently substituted ‘culture’ and *sanskriti* for one another. *Dharma* was often ‘religion’; just as *jāt* was often ‘caste’. ‘Tribe’ increasingly became synonymous with *adivasi* (a term used throughout India and Nepal meaning ‘autochthonous or original inhabitant’) and/or *janājāti*. In both Nepal and Darjeeling, *janājāti* (as opposed to *jāt*) has become the term of choice to designate the various non-caste ethnicities of the region. In Nepal, it is typically translated as ‘indigenous nationality’. However, it is used in Darjeeling more along the lines of ‘ethnicity’. That said, over the course of the bids for ST status and the Sixth Schedule, *janājāti* increasingly came to mean, in particular, ‘tribe’.<sup>60</sup> (For instance, ‘Scheduled Tribe’ was frequently referred to as *anusūchīt janājāti*.) ‘Identity’ was most commonly referred to as *astitwa* or *chinhāri*, though the English term was used as well.<sup>61</sup> These terms were frequently coupled with the term *janājāti* to yield *janājātiko astitwa* or *janājātiya chinhāri*, which in Darjeeling best translate as either ‘ethnic identity’ or ‘tribal identity’ depending on the context.

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<sup>60</sup> In her recent work on ST recognition amongst the Gaddhi of North India, Kapila focuses on how the meaning of the category ‘tribal’ shifts as it moves from anthropological, official and popular discursive realms. On this specific point—and regarding ST recognition in India more generally--Kapila’s work presents a useful comparison for the dynamics I address in Darjeeling. See Kapila 2008.

<sup>61</sup> A less commonly used local equivalent for ‘identity’ was *pahichān*. *Astitwa* connotes something more along the lines of ‘essence’ or ‘essential identity’, whereas *chinhāri* (like the verb *chinnu*: to recognize or distinguish) connotes ‘identity’ in the more mundane sense of ‘identification’.

Although I have tried to avoid using ‘ethnicity’ as a framing device for my methodology, I do use the term in this thesis. When and where I use ‘ethnicity’ or ‘ethnic group’ (such as in the statement, “The individual ethnic groups that comprise the composite Gorkha community...”), I follow traditional emic articulations in Darjeeling whereby ethnonyms like ‘Tamang’, ‘Gurung’, and ‘Newar’ have served to connote lineage-based social units. When they first migrated from Nepal, these groups more closely fulfilled the idealized form of an ethnicity as a distinct, culture-bearing social unit. However, due to the histories of hybridity charted earlier, these groups have since ‘lost’ much of their socio-cultural distinctiveness. While the Barthians among us might harp upon the classificatory utility of ‘ethnicity’, for the people of Darjeeling the crux of cultural revitalization and ‘tribal’ recognition remains: how to fill the empty ‘vessel’ of ethnicity with the kind of socio-cultural content that modern recognition demands.<sup>62</sup> This would require exceptionally fraught negotiations of local, embodied histories on the one hand, and normative paradigms of ‘identity’ and recognition, on the other.

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Ethnological knowledge comes at, and emerges from, the subjects of Darjeeling at various angles and in multiple registers. Tracing these trajectories of influence and emergence has proven an inherently variegated endeavor. It has led me: from the logics of 19<sup>th</sup> century labor migration to the perduring affects of social precarity in the tea-estates; from the checkered history of colonial classification to the most current practices of the postcolonial ‘ethnographic state’; and from the ideal-types of academic and juridical writings to the people of Darjeeling—the real-types, as it were, in this ‘age of ethnology’. The chapters that follow try to capture some of the

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<sup>62</sup> Barth notes, “Ethnic categories provide an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems.” (1969: 299) Though this may be true in a general sense, the politics of identity and recognition in Darjeeling suggest more formulaic—and indeed normative--standards of what that socio-cultural ‘content’ should be.

complexity with which anthropology, and ethnology in particular, has affected life for these people. By necessity, the fields of inquiry are varied and multi-sited.

It is tempting—and not without analytic gain—to think about these findings through the terms of knowledge-power, biopolitics, governmentality, and the like.<sup>63</sup> But these Foucauldian understandings also involve important degrees of analytic loss. The difference is largely a matter of the scale at which we evaluate the salience of anthropological knowledge in the world today. Viewed from on high, modern systems of recognition like those of India appear not unlike a grid of intelligibility or a regime of anthropological truth.<sup>64</sup> These classificatory schemas function in many ways as a modality for knowing and regulating populations. For the people of Darjeeling, they have largely set the terms of ethno-political possibility. However, *and this is methodologically crucial*, when we enter into the fray of ‘found’ anthropologies, we find contexts teeming with contingency and contradiction. Especially at the level of the subject, there is no singular story to tell of how individuals are finding relation to forms of anthropological knowledge in Darjeeling—only stories. To argue otherwise would be to join a problematic chorus of fundamentalist presumptions about the singular ways knowledge can—and must—affect people’s ways of living.

My approach to the study of knowledge owes much to the Marxian tradition of the sociology of knowledge—specifically that of Karl Mannheim, who showed the necessity of understanding the nuances of epistemic forms within the socio-political contexts of their production.<sup>65</sup> However, I have tried to incorporate into this methodological outlook an attention to the more phenomenological dimensions of

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<sup>63</sup> I address these Foucauldian ideas at greater length in Chapters I, III, & IV. On knowledge-power, see Foucault 1980, 1983; on governmentality, Foucault 1979; on biopower and biopolitics, Foucault 1978; 1988; 1994.

<sup>64</sup> Foucault 1980.

<sup>65</sup> Mannheim 1952, 1955. The bases of the Marxian sociology of knowledge are to be found in *The German Ideology*, and select passages of *The Grundrisse* (1978).

knowledge.<sup>66</sup> In Darjeeling, this means (a) evaluating the systems of recognition within which these communities are ensnared while (b) retaining a sensitivity to the experiential dynamics through which individuals are becoming both subjects and objects of anthropological knowledge production. To take a certain disciplinary liberty with Marx's aphorism: the circumstances in Darjeeling remind us that while modern communities may make themselves and their own anthropology, "They do not make [them] under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past."<sup>67</sup> This thesis accordingly seeks to explicate certain angles and registers through which anthropological knowledge conditions the possibilities of the subject in Darjeeling, while simultaneously honoring the intriguing ways that subjects themselves are taking up anthropological paradigms as ways to represent and remake themselves.

While I believe the optic of 'found' anthropology sheds fresh light on the fabled 'identity' question, there are certain things that an attention to knowledge simply cannot tell us about life in Darjeeling. Through this optic we may be able to decipher how these knowledge forms have reshaped what it *means* to be an ethnic subject in the hills, but a sole attention to knowledge can offer us little understanding of how it *feels* to be a subject—'ethnic', 'tribal', 'Gorkha', or otherwise. To offset this methodological deficiency, something else is necessary. This is why I have taken a

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<sup>66</sup> Here I am influenced in different ways by the phenomenologies of Alfred Schutz (1967) and Frantz Fanon (1967) among others.

<sup>67</sup> Initially, it would seem that Marx is talking solely about the *events of history* with his aphorism: "Men may make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please..." (1978/1852: 595). But when we read further we see that 'history making' in this sense also involves the articulation of historical consciousness: viz-- "And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things...they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from *them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time honoured disguise and this borrowed language.*" (emph added: 1978: 595.) Here we may infer a certain entwining of (what in English, we might call) 'history' and 'historiography' within Marx's mention of 'history'. On the one hand, he is referring to the *events of history*, but the making of that history, he explains, is inexorably entwined with the historical *knowledge/consciousness*. This entwining may be productively translated into the circumstances of contemporary Darjeeling, where man is currently trying to remake the ethnic self and his/her anthropology under specific conditions and terms 'transmitted from the past'.

special interest in the question of social belonging. In formulating this multiattentional method,<sup>68</sup> I take my cue from the people of Darjeeling, many of whom hail ‘anthropology’/’*mānavsāstra*’ as a conduit to newfound senses of belonging within one’s community, within the nation-state of India, and even within a rediscovered notion of the ethnic self. To borrow words from the speaker quoted earlier, anthropological inquiry has become a way to understand the “mysteries hidden within.”

As they are trumpeted throughout the hills, these logics of ethnic transformation are alarmingly simple. My findings suggest exceedingly more complicated dynamics at play. For some, anthropologies of the ethnic self have spawned the most radiant sensations of ethnic rebirth. For others, gut wrenching disdain. The phenomenological variance depends largely on how individuals find relation to what is ostensibly ‘their’ anthropological depiction. Importantly, how subjects do (and do not) ascribe to these depictions of the ‘authentic’ ethnic or ‘tribal’ subject involves more than the epistemic qualities of the knowledges proffered. In other words, it is not merely a matter of whether or not the representation adequately portrays the self. People’s allegiance to one vision of the ethnic subject over another also concerns the political capabilities of these anthropological renderings, and the experienced social pressures through which they are impressed upon the given individual. While many speak of finding themselves through these knowledges, for still many others the compulsion to recognize the self in normative anthropological forms has proven inherently fraught, confusing and alienating. Recalling the insight of the young Marx who warned that objectification is itself the practice of alienation,<sup>69</sup> we may see this ‘age of ethnology’ in Darjeeling to be as marked as much by the promises of rights, recognition and belonging, as by varying degrees of alienation.

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<sup>68</sup> On multiattentional methodology, see Boyer (2010).

<sup>69</sup> Marx 1843 (1978): 52.

Importantly, it was Fanon more than Marx who most poignantly expressed the deleterious effects that classificatory schemas can have on one's ability to produce themselves in ways they see fit.<sup>70</sup> For Fanon, the racialized classificatory systems imposed upon him were a source of deep alienation. They constrained his very being.<sup>71</sup> Thinking through these critical insights of Marx and Fanon, it is important to consider how knowledge systems—especially those concerned with the objectification of Man—can serve as a means to produce the self, while simultaneously engendering feelings of alienation, unhomeliness, and non-belonging for those who fall under their sway. Moving these concerns into the contexts of Darjeeling, the challenge that this research methodology sets for itself is therefore: how to account for the real political, social, and subjective promises that ethnological schemas have offered (and in some cases fulfilled) for the people of Darjeeling, while simultaneously remaining sensitive to the inevitable distortions, disavowals, and constraints that these knowledges continue to level upon people's ways of being-in-the-world.

As an ethnographer with my own humanist concerns for anthropology's effects on the world, I believe that there is no single, appropriate starting point for a compassionate critique of the dynamics 'found' in this study, only multiple starting points. These lie with the people of Darjeeling and the diverse ways they are finding relation to their own anthropologies.

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<sup>70</sup> Fanon 1967. Chapter I offers more discussion of Fanon and Darjeeling.

<sup>71</sup> Fanon's self-described "psychoexistential" approach was overtly concerned with the question of human's being-in-the-world. Charles Taylor echoes these ideas in writing of how a people's sense of self can "suffer real damage, and real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, mode of being." 1992: 25.

## **Outline of the Chapters.**

Each chapter of this dissertation offers a particular way of understanding the salience ethnological knowledge in Darjeeling. They do not form a linear argument or narrative, but instead angle into the contemporary with specific analytic attentions.

To begin, Chapter I: *The Ethnologies of the Governed* takes a closer look at the dynamics of ethnic renaissance in the hills and how ethnological knowledge has become integral to these movements. Along with providing an overview of the general dynamics in Darjeeling, the chapter fleshes out the problem of ‘found’ anthropology. In this regard, the chapter is foundational. Here I explore the anthropological demands placed upon minorities seeking rights, recognition, and social belonging in India, and, in turn, how the anthropology of the ethnic self has emerged as a political technology of communities. Importantly though, there are limits to how these knowledge techniques effect the ethnic subject. By taking a more phenomenological look at how subjects effectively ‘live’ these prescriptive knowledges, the chapter demonstrates the contingent ways ‘found’ anthropology has come to influence subjectivities and social practice in Darjeeling.

If the first chapter analyzes the exigencies of recognition in modern India, Chapter II: *Anxious Belongings* moves along a different dimension of social life in asking *why* anthropological knowledge has become so meaningful to the people of Darjeeling. Here I explore the affective histories of these groups, where transnational migration, enduring marginalization, and even the most recent events have long denied them a secure sense of being-in and being-of the nation-state of India. These anxieties of non-belonging have, in turn, fueled these groups’ quests for rights and recognition. Historical and contemporary events show the issue of ‘identity’ to be an exceptionally charged issue in Darjeeling. By raising the question of affect—and in particular, anxieties about belonging—this chapter seeks to understand the nature of that charge.

Affect emerges here as something other than knowledge. It is *beyond* knowledge—that is, beyond the semiotic, semantic, epistemic, etc. However, as is made clear by the histories at hand, these dimensions of social life do not operate in isolation. Their relationship is mercurial, but mutually constitutive nonetheless.

Focusing on questions of knowledge and belonging respectively, Chapters I and II establish the principle optics of this research. Chapters III and IV form a second pairing. At once historical and ethnographic they further explore the dynamics of this ‘age of ethnology’ in Darjeeling.

Chapter III: *Durga and the Rock* tacks between the present and the past in an effort to rethink the history of ‘tribal’ recognition in India. There is little doubt that the category has its roots in colonial governance. But its current articulations ask us to think twice before positing a monolithic understanding of colonial knowledge and its residual effects on the contemporary. Retraining our eyes to questions of knowledge and affect, we see that colonial anthropology was fraught with doubts and epistemic anxieties about the abilities of anthropological taxonomies to accurately know and enumerate India’s diverse peoples.<sup>72</sup> These misgivings continually upset the enterprise of colonial anthropology—at once undermining it and instigating its ever-evolving forms. Importantly, the category of the ‘tribal’ was at the center of these epistemic concerns. In its governmental form, the category today is far more ossified than it ever was in the colonial era. As this chapter shall show, this has much to do with the anthropological persuasions through which India was refashioned—in both policy and mind—as an independent nation. To understand the specifics by which ethnological distinction has become a platform for liberal rights and recognition in modern India we must therefore critically engage the dynamics of *post*colonialism and its forms of

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<sup>72</sup> Here I take a cue from Ann Stoler’s recent work on colonial knowledge and epistemic anxiety. Stoler 2009.

knowledge. Only then can we appreciate the seemingly peculiar ways that the category of the 'tribal' has come to affect life in Darjeeling.

Chapter IV: *Across the Interface of 'Tribal' Certification* shifts attention to the front edge of anthropology's legacy in India. Taking as my ethnographic object the Ethnographic Survey of 2006, this chapter ventures what I shall call a meta-ethnography of the state. Moving back and forth across this ethnographic interface between the Government of India and the people of Darjeeling prompts a timely rethinking the proverbial meeting of the 'anthropologist and the tribals'. For the communities under investigation, the Ethnographic Survey was a climactic day. It is presented in likewise accord here. Indeed, the dynamics of 'tribal' certification recapitulate many of the themes developed throughout this thesis. That 'tribes' could be *certified* at all, I shall argue, is a possibility unique to the anthropologically-effected present in India. It begs extended consideration of the inherently social and unquestionably political contexts of ethnographic knowledge production. Here I am concerned as much about what happened during the Ethnographic Survey as I am with what happened after. Tracking the post-field production and subsequent circulations of state anthropology through the government raises unsettling questions about the nature of the postcolonial Indian state and the dubious fate of anthropological knowledge in the stark corridors of governance. These findings ultimately raise broader, more reflexive questions about the capabilities and uses of various kinds of anthropological knowledge in the world today.

The dissertation concludes with some open-ended thoughts on what all of this might mean for the discipline of anthropology and for the people of Darjeeling. As uncanny as it may be, 'found' anthropology offers us the unique opportunity to think ethnographically, historically, and reflexively simultaneously. Coming to terms with not only the social life, but also the troubling perpetuation of certain paradigms of

anthropological thought in Darjeeling, provides a chance for anthropologists—all of us: academics, civil servants, ethnic leaders, and everyday citizens—to work through the ways that anthropological knowledge is conditioning the possibilities of modern day communities and individuals. Looking ahead, the lessons at hand also ask us to think critically and creatively about how anthropology (however conceived) might serve as a means to recognize and forge a more humanist future.

For now though, the anthropological present.

## CHAPTER I.

### The Ethnologies of the Governed:

#### On the Terms and Possibilities of the Ethnic Subject in Darjeeling.

##### Introduction.

Since the Gorkhaland Agitation of the 1980s, ethnic politics in Darjeeling have taken a marked turn. The Gorkhaland Movement premised itself on a ‘Gorkha’ identity shared by the various Nepali-speaking ethnicities of the region. However, in the wake of the Agitation’s failure to achieve a separate state of Gorkhaland, the composite Gorkha community began to atomize. Individual ethnic groups increasingly sought alternative ways to secure rights and recognition within the Indian nation-state. With historically rooted anxieties about belonging in India unquelled and the traumas of the Agitation fresh at hand, these communities found potentially viable legal channels in the form of India’s reservation system for Scheduled Tribes (STs). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, individual communities began mobilizing for ST status.<sup>1</sup> These newfound forms of engagement with Indian political society<sup>2</sup> galvanized

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<sup>1</sup> In 1950, when the original list (The Constitution Scheduled Tribes Order) was published, four communities (Bhutia, Lepcha, Sherpa, Yolmo) out of the approximately 20 ethnicities that make up the Gorkha community were afforded this designation. In 2003, two more (the Tamang and Limbu), were written into the Constitution as Scheduled Tribes (ins. Act 10 of 2003). And by 2006, all remaining ‘left-out’ communities were actively seeking recognition as officially recognized ‘tribes’ of India. These included: Gurung, Rai, Magar, Sunwar, Khas, Damai, Kami, Sarki, Thagmi, Newar, Bhujel, Thakori.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this chapter, I work with Chatterjee’s recent formulations of political society (2002, 2004). For Chatterjee, the classic models of state versus civil society hold up only as ideals in places like India. Most citizens of India, he argues, are only ambiguously members of civil society, which, following Hegel and Marx, Chatterjee sees as fundamentally bourgeois society. He claims that while such a civil society exists in institutions and small demographic portions of India, the rest take up overtly political relations to the state. These politics of the masses, Chatterjee argues, spawn from governmentality. Here democratic politics in India comes into view as the ‘politics of the governed’. Following Gramsci, Chatterjee sketches political society as zone of mediation between civil society and the state, through which populations seek rights and justice, and effectively negotiate how they are to be governed. Classic texts on civil society, the state, and political society include Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government* (1690) Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* (1991) and Marx’s *The German Ideology* (1978). On Gramsci’s notion of political society, see *The Prison Notebooks* (1971). On governmentality, see Foucault 1979.

a budding ethnic renaissance among these groups. These ethnic makeovers took form through unmistakably *ethnological* concepts and practices. This was due in no small part to the fact that these communities' entry into political society was conditioned by, indeed was contiguous with, the 'tribal' ideal-type. To reconstitute themselves as acknowledgeable ethnic communities, these groups increasingly turned to colonial ethnology, academic anthropology, and to ethnological techniques of self to meet the requisite demands of recognition. In turn, ethnological self-concern reached unprecedented heights. For these aspiring minorities, efforts to know, (re)present, and remake themselves pursuant to normative paradigms of 'community' became instrumental politically *and* subjectively as these newly constituted knowledges of self initiated sweeping sensations of ethnic rebirth among their constituents.

In this chapter, I ask how ethnological paradigms and practices condition the political, social, and subjective possibilities of the contemporary ethnic subject in Darjeeling. Continuing this dissertation's concern with 'found' anthropologies, I examine the dynamics through which ethnic groups come to practice—and at times, impose—ethnology upon themselves. In doing so, I 'find' ethnology at the heart of ethnic revitalization in Darjeeling. The circulation of ethnological knowledge among these communities cannot be divorced from formal and informal systems of recognition in postcolonial India. For the aspiring minorities of Darjeeling, the ethnology of self has become an invaluable mechanism for navigating the exigencies of Indian political society. In a certain regard, these ethnological techniques are an innovative response to governmentality—or as Partha Chatterjee would have it, they constitute a facet of 'the politics of the governed', a tactical way "to give the empirical form of a population group the moral attributes of a community."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chatterjee 2004: 57.

Sustaining this line of thought, this chapter unravels the entwinings of state and ethnic subject formation in order to demonstrate how ethnological knowledge shapes ‘identity’ and its politics in postcolonial India. However, I argue that any attempt to understand this phenomenon solely through the lenses of governmentality is destined to provide only a partial understanding of the currency and credence of ethnology in Darjeeling. What is called for *in addition* is a more phenomenologically attuned engagement with the social and subjective dynamics of this knowledge form in the lives of everyday subjects. For it is here, at the level of sociality and subjectivity, that the interface between the conceptual and the experiential unfolds. As I aim to show, such an approach at once confirms the penetrative depths of normative paradigms of ‘community’ (especially those sanctioned by the state), yet also challenges any unilateral models of subject formation. By honoring the complex contingency of ethnic subjects, this ethnographic study shows ethnic rebirth in Darjeeling to be indeed political, but always much more. The question for the people of Darjeeling, and for this study, then is the degree to which ethnological knowledge practices can remake the contemporary ethnic subject as one endowed with rights, recognition, and a sense of belonging to oneself, one’s community, and the Indian nation-state.

### **Ethnic Rebirth.**

In a dirt-floored schoolhouse on the Singtom Tea Estate, fifteen Tamang villagers have gathered for their monthly ethnic association meeting. It being Sunday, the day of rest on the estate, their neighbors are likely down the hill watching the week’s football match, or perhaps tucked away in a plantation watering hole sipping locally made *raksi* (liquor). Yet, as they do once a month, these Tamangs again have made their way from surrounding villages to deliberate the nuances of Tamang

‘culture’ (*sanskriti*) and its ongoing revitalization. Inside the small corrugated aluminum building these men and women sit at crudely fashioned wooden desks too small for adults. At the front of the classroom, facing them, sits an older gentleman wearing a pin-stripped suit, a pressed cotton shirt and polished leather boots. He is an elite Central Committee (CC) member of their ethnic association, the All India Tamang Buddhist Association (AITBA). As a CC member, his periodic visits to local branch meetings such as this represent an integral part of AITBA’s vastly successful apparatus of ethnic mobilization. Stretching across India and beyond, AITBA’s organizational structure, political wherewithal, and cultural acumen have made it the flagship organization of ethnic rebirth in the hills. Though visibly uncomfortable, the CC member commences the meeting in business-like fashion. It mustn’t run late. After all, his car and driver are waiting.

As is the general rule in these meetings, the highest-ranking member begins with a formal opening-statement. Accordingly, the CC member embarks on a longwinded introduction. Once he is finished, protocol is thwarted, however, as local members raise complaints about the association’s entanglements with local politics. For the past year, the political boss of the Darjeeling region, Subash Ghisingh, himself a Tamang, has accused AITBA of dividing the conglomerate Gorkha community through their go-it-alone programs of ethnic ‘uplift’.<sup>4</sup> Ghisingh’s verbal assaults and

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<sup>4</sup> Ghisingh leveled direct criticism at AITBA and more veiled threats, even going so far as to allude to the possibility that groups like AITBA, who he claimed were trying to ‘communalize’ the Gorkha peoples, were linked to the Pakistani Intelligence Agency. His most direct threat came on Feb 23, 2006 when he was speaking of the ethnic mobilizations of the Tamang and the presence of Asok Bhattacharya (West Bengal Urban Development Minister and adversary of Ghisingh) as their guest of honor at their recent ethnic convention; “Asok Bhattacharya is finished as he too had donned that headgear [of the Tamangs],” said Ghisingh. In a veiled threat to the Tamangs, he said, ‘If the people get excited and attack you [AITBA members], I don’t know. Surely you remember that we had the Gorkha Volunteer Cell and the 14-inch khukuri [knife] during the agitation’. Passage quoted from “Ghisingh sees hat trick in culture shift” in *The Statesman*, Feb 24, 2006. Other articles charting Ghisingh’s critiques of AITBA include: “GNLF talks tribal rule” *The Statesman*. Jan 2, 2006; “Tamangs Defy Ghisingh Identity Whip” *The Telegraph*. Feb 6, 2006; “Lochar goes on despite Ghisingh” *The Statesman*. Feb 6, 2006; “Chowrasta Chatter” & “Tamang raise Ghisingh hackles” *The Statesman*. Feb

veiled threats have cast AITBA and its members into an awkward relationship with the ruling GNLFF party. The CC member tries to stymie the villagers' complaints, but is unsuccessful. They quickly segue into concerns about AITBA's controversial cultural regulations, and the emergence of a rival faction known as the Tamang Buddhist Gedung, which was founded upon more tolerant principles. (Not coincidentally the Gedung was founded by members of the GNLFF).<sup>5</sup>

In response, the CC member tries to appease his audience by stressing the importance of a unified political and cultural front. He and AITBA speak from experience. It took them two decades to secure Scheduled Tribe status for the Tamang community.<sup>6</sup> Their quest included *bandhs*<sup>7</sup>, hunger strikes, and 77 delegational visits to Delhi alone. To achieve ST status, the association initiated extensive cultural engineering programs to revitalize the 'pure', 'original' form of Tamang culture. These focused primarily on the elimination of Hindu elements from their socio-cultural repertoire and the accentuation of uniquely Tamang, Buddhist attributes. Thus for instance, popular holidays of Hindu origin like Dussehra (Dasain, Durga Puja) and Diwali were banned among AITBA's constituents.<sup>8</sup> Those who violated these

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24, 2006; "Tamang ire at Ghisingh" *The Telegraph*. Feb 25, 2006; "Hill Tamangs Blink First" *The Telegraph*. April 3, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> The Tamang Buddhist Gedung (TBG) was founded in 1994 to provide an alternative to AITBA. A smaller faction was founded in Kalimpong on Dec 4, 2006 known as the Gorkha Tamang Gedung. Though only consisting of 43 families at its time of inception, the statements of the chief guest, Mr. Mani Kumar Ghisingh, signal the contention within the Tamang community: "They [AITBA] are adopting foul policies by crushing the ethnic beliefs of the masses. We have equal rights to follow any faith.... The Tamangs have been terrorized with fines ranging from Rs 501 to Rs 10,001 if found celebrating Dussehra. This is ridiculous." Passage quoted from *The Statesman* Dec 5, 2006. To date this small faction has yet to achieve much stature. Instead, it is AITBA and the TBG that dominate the intra-ethnic politics of the Tamang.

<sup>6</sup> AITBA's first memorandum for inclusion as a Schedule Tribe of India under Article 342(a) of the Indian Constitution was submitted to the Centre on November 24, 1981. The bill establishing their inclusion as STs passed Parliament on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2002. They were officially scheduled shortly thereafter via Act 10 of 2003.

<sup>7</sup> *Bandhs* are strikes mandated upon the general population, which shut down all infrastructure and economic facilities. They are common throughout South Asia.

<sup>8</sup> Such holidays were banned by AITBA since 2001, spawning perennial controversy. "Durga Pujā boycott triggers row." *The Statesman*. Oct 4, 2003; "Tamangs split over Dasain celebrations." *The Statesman*. Oct 7, 2003; "Diwali splits Tamang Community." *The Statesman*. Oct 24, 2003; "Tamangs

mandates were socially ostracized, and in some cases even fined. Augmenting these austere measures, AITBA committed itself to recuperating the ‘lost’ attributes of Tamang culture by sending ethnographic delegations to Nepal, establishing Tamang language training programs, providing authentic Tamang dress, and implementing cultural awareness programs of various kinds. These endeavors proved instrumental to their ST certification in 2003 and to their sustained ethnic revitalization.

As he pontificates on the inseparability of political solidarity and cultural singularity, the CC member makes a strong case: for unity, Tamangs must have one culture. This is precisely why the association has implemented such strict rules as to what is proper cultural practice. Those who are still unsure of Tamang religious practice (*dharma sanskār*), language (*bhāsā*), script (*lipi*), tradition (*paramparā*), attire (*bhesh-bhushā*), festivals (*chāx*) and folk culture (*lok sanskriti*) may refer to the plethora of DVDs, books, magazines, and notices put out by the association documenting what it means to be a true Tamang. Who is it, he asks the meeting, that has brought the ST status to the people? Who has re-awoken Tamangs’ sense of identity? What has the Gedung [the rival association] accomplished? They are but a small local faction. We are All-India! We are international! Who brought thousands of Tamangs from all over the world to Darjeeling for the International Tamang Convention (December 2005)? Look, this man here [gesturing to me] came all the way from America for this great event! Culture should be a source of pride, not tension, he reminds them. May they thus set their differences aside.

The conversation carries on for some time, ultimately ending with the CC member’s standard invitation for the villagers to form a delegation and visit the central offices with their concerns. The villagers express doubts whether they will be given an audience. Then, realizing the meeting is running over, they quickly shift to local

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split over Lochar Celebrations.” *The Statesman*. Dec 12, 2003; “Tamangs debate over Lochar.” *The Statesman*. Nov 29, 2005.

matters. On the docket: an invitation for all local Tamangs to worship in the newly constructed Gurung *gomba* (monastery) in the neighboring village.<sup>9</sup> To which a spry 70-year-old gentleman proclaims with sarcasm, “So they have built their own Gurung *gomba*. This is all very good. But what? They bring in Tamang lamas to do the pujās and then invite us, the Tamangs, into ‘their’ *gomba*? Before the Gurungs weren’t even using lamas!” This more authentic-than-thou reproach elicits considerable laughter among the group. As they move on to other local matters, the CC member recedes from the conversation. The moment the last announcement is made, he grabs his coat and sneaks away.

Afterward, when the CC member returns to town via car, several others and I begin a long walk back down into the recesses of the tea estate. As we descend past the momo shops and liquor stalls that line the steep road, our numbers dwindle until it is just myself and my friend Pemba, an ardently born-again Tamang. Pemba has invited me to accompany him as he makes his rounds through the tea estate, and therefore we do not stop as we pass through the village of *Bidhuwā Busti*, where we both live. Passing the tea weigh-station at the center of *Bidhuwā Busti*, where the average day ends for so many of our neighbors, we leave the ‘coolie lines’ of the village and plunge into the geometric greenery of the tea fields below. As we stroll down through the tea fields, Pemba points out a footpath that once led to his natal village. He explains to me that his home there was razed during the GNLf agitation of

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<sup>9</sup> The Pema Choeling Gurung Buddhist Monastery (inaugurated in 2006) was built by a local branch of the Gurung ethnic association, the Tamu Choj Din. Similar to the Tamangs, the *gomba* was part of the Gurung’s respective ethnic renaissance. Hailed as the first ever ‘authentic’ Gurung *gomba* in Darjeeling, the construction of the temple evinced a similar shift from Hinduism to Buddhism, which also tied into the Gurung’s quest for ST status. Gurung leaders have been repeatedly advised by their sources within the government to avoid any sort of ascription to Hindu belief. As one resident intellectual explained: “So we must be a Buddhist to show the government that we are Buddhist, but in the reality, we may not be Buddhist; even I am not a Buddhist. You see? So to show the government that we are Buddhist, you have to have a monastery, a cultural center.” I have written about the temple elsewhere (2007).

the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> As he would tell me on numerous occasions, it was this trauma that initiated the tailspin of his life, which culminated in alcoholism, unemployment, and his failings as a father. And it was Buddhism and his rediscovery of Tamang culture that saved him and gave him the '*ujyālo*' (brightness) of his being today.

Down we walk, past the factory where the tea is processed before being shipped to the international auction houses of Kolkata. Down we walk, into villages tucked into the forested wastelands of the estate. Down into different degrees of poverty. As we descend, Pemba stops along the way to share with Tamang friends and families the main points of the meeting. He speaks with remarkable eloquence and passion, yet as he disseminates the niceties of AITBA's brand of Tamang culture, all traces of the dissent that colored the meeting drop out of his narrative. His phrases and tenor are uncannily like that of the Central Committee member. Time and time again we stop to say hello to fellow Tamangs, and time and time again, Pemba relays the message before heading further down. The repetition gives these informal conversations a deliberate bent. Thus, we carry on.

Down to his parent's home, a porous thatched hut, standing wearily on a small plot of precious level ground. Pemba invites me in. Yet when I step inside, I mistakenly see his mother's withered body, shirtless, and bent from years of plucking in the fields. His father, racked by years of alcoholism sits, toothless, on a bed in the back corner of the hut watching our embarrassing encounter. Realizing we are unexpected guests, we continue on. Down, through more forests dotted with Hindu *mandirs* (temples). Down past the football game, the P.A. system blaring a crackled play-by-play, as six-man teams try to keep the ball in play on a miniature field that is but an extended terrace carved into the edge of the hillside. As we skirt the field and

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<sup>10</sup> I have been unable to pinpoint which anti-Gorkha forces burned the village. The Border Security Forces (BSF), the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), and CPI-M para-military forces were all active in combating the Gorkhaland Movement.

the hundreds who have gathered to cheer on their boys, a wayward kick sends the ball vanishing over the field's edge. The game breaks while the ball is recovered, so we proceed. Down through a mostly Tamang village, their prayer flags flying atop their homes. Down past the Tamang *gomba* (monastery) built in 1951 by a resident lama.<sup>11</sup> And down to the newer, more extravagant one built in 2000 by AITBA.

Established on September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2000, the *Dinchen Tanshi Choeling Gumba* is a local showpiece of AITBA's outreach programs. The seemingly unfinished concrete and corrugated aluminum building sits on a manicured parcel of land overlooking the river-valley below. Its appearance is unmistakably new. Both practically and symbolically, it serves as a locus of Tamang rebirth. Having arrived here, Pemba fetches the family who lives nearby and oversees the *gomba*. A middle-aged woman emerges and shuffles across the courtyard, the keys in hand, to open the door. As the heavy door creaks open, Pemba launches into an unsolicited lecture on the vitality of Tamang culture: (For hundreds, if not thousands of years, the Tamangs have followed their own original form of Buddhism. We are highland people of the Himalayas. And living high in the mountains we have retained the purest forms of our culture and religion—this, despite the tireless oppression of Hindu rule. Today, we are reviving this pristine culture. Like last year, when hundreds came to this very temple to celebrate our very own Tamang new year. We call it Lochar.....etc).

For ten minutes he rhapsodizes. It is difficult to tell whether his speech is directed at me or the woman who so graciously opened the temple for us. Standing there in the door, echoes of the CC member resonate in my memory as Pemba waxes on about Tamang unity, their achievements, the details of their 'authentic', 'original', 'pure' culture (*maulik, paurānik, suddha sanskriti*), the history of AITBA, etc. My attention slips. Meanwhile the woman stands speechless, trapped on the threshold.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Buddhist Pema Tshoiling Monastery*, est. 1951.

Uncertain whether she is the target of his persuasion or whether it is me, she is unable to either come or go. Her eyes cast me a sideways glance from time to time, as though desperate for some sort of freeing interlocution. I can offer her no respite. For indeed, I am implicated in this articulation. There is no doubt that my presence as an anthropologist interested in Tamang ‘culture’ is egging him on, yet to whom he preaches is unclear. His thoughts stream on in what seems to be an almost automated delivery, one after another, fact after so-called fact. As Pemba rambles on, she continues to nod silently, hapless. At the receiving end of this cascade of identity-speak, there is little we can do but wait for it to reach its own denouement.

### **Finding Anthropology.**

Throughout my time in Darjeeling, I heard hundreds of such narratives championing the unalienable links between ‘culture’ (*sanskriti*) and ‘ethnic identity’ (*janājātiya astitwa/chinhāri*). With relentless repetition, this theme would be played upon: in the cultural awareness programs of ethnic associations; at ethnic conventions where ‘authentic’ ‘tribal’, *janājāti*, and *adivasi* culture was danced away; in essays submitted to the government explaining the certifiably ‘tribal’ characteristics of a community; in cultural engineering efforts such as those of AITBA; and in the village tea stall where ‘culture’ or its native equivalent was indeed the term on everyone’s lips.<sup>12</sup> But there was more at play in these dynamics than mere forms of culturalism. Beyond concerted attention to one’s ‘culture’ or *sanskriti* (notably, both the English and Nepali terms are used), these movements of ethnic rebirth were structured according to unmistakably anthropological techniques, paradigms, and practices, principally of an ethnological nature. Experts were designated within ethnic associations to make ethnographic and archival inquiries in order to fill specific

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<sup>12</sup> Sahlins 1993.

anthropological forms (for instance those of distinct ‘culture’, ‘custom’, ‘religion’, ‘ritual’, ‘death rites’ etc) with socio-cultural content. These initiatives were conducted both for the purposes of gaining ST recognition and to mitigate the ‘cultural loss’ that these groups had accrued through generations of syncretism in colonial and postcolonial India. Ethnic associations searched for ‘model villages’ untouched by the tainting hand of modernity, assembled cultural artifacts, collected oral histories, and documented their findings *ad nauseum*. Unsatisfied by local subjects, they reached out to their counterparts in Nepal (who have supposedly endured less ‘cultural loss’) to codify socio-religious practice in native ethnological literatures and languages in native dictionaries.<sup>13</sup> While it was primarily the educated elites of ethnic associations who drove these initiatives, these knowledges were articulated into daily life by a variety of knowledge-agents, ranging from native intellectuals, ethnic leaders, and designated ‘cultural experts’ to branch organizers, local members, and born-again ethnics like Pemba.

Significantly, these knowledge practices were pushed beyond the realm of literary representation to be mapped onto human subjects. Heavy-handed ethnological cum political agendas were pressed upon the populace. Subaltern subjects were hand-selected by ethnic elites to become objects of the ethnographic gaze of the Indian state—living, dancing embodiments of ‘backwardness’ and pristine ‘tribal’ culture. And ‘culture’, ‘tradition’, and even history were re-worked in compliance with normative criteria of ‘community’. Nowhere were these ethno-logics and techniques more rigid or conspicuous than when practiced in conjunction with respective communities’ quests for Scheduled Tribe recognition. However, as I studied these practices further, it became clear that these ethnological techniques of self exceeded any conventional ideas of what could be conceived of as a political tactic. Individuals

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<sup>13</sup> On the codification of language within these movements, see Shneiderman & Turin 2006.

increasingly abandoned family traditions in favor of those espoused by cultural experts; neighbors became ethnic others; and ethnic groups divided internally, as debates raged about what exactly constituted ‘authentic’ culture. As I carried out this research, it became increasingly clear: the production and impact of ethnological knowledge were to be found in all walks—if not all arenas—of life.

This chapter is dedicated to understanding certain aspects of these ‘found’ anthropologies. I take particular interest in the transformations and translations of ethnological knowledge forms across a series of social and conceptual domains. Socially, I examine this knowledge form as it is actualized across class strata, across inter-ethnic boundaries, and between citizens and the state. Conceptually, I examine how the practice of ethnological knowledge mediates between the realm of normative ideal-types and the often-messy contingency of actual subjects. In tracking ethnological knowledge across these social and conceptual terrains, my approach to the anthropology of knowledge owes much to the work of Karl Mannheim, who showed the value of interrogating simultaneously the socio-material contexts of knowledge production *and* the internal, epistemic facets of knowledge forms themselves.<sup>14</sup> In Darjeeling, coming to terms with these epistemic qualities holds an

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<sup>14</sup> My invocation of Mannheim signals my debt to the Marxian tradition of the sociology of knowledge and those thinkers who have elaborated it in various ways (e.g. Gramsci 1971; Lukacs 1971; Boyer 2005; to name a few). I believe, however, that to date the sociology (and anthropology) of knowledge suffers a certain methodological lacuna on account of its sustained interest in the dominant purveyors of knowledge. This concentration on ‘intellectuals’-- be they as stewards of nationalism (Boyer and Lomnitz 2005; Giesen 1998; ) or their role in the spheres of politics (Gramsci 1971; Lomnitz 2001), culture (Hannerz 1990: 247; Marcus 1997), or their own professional field (Bourdieu 1984; Eyerman 1994; Gramsci 1971; Merton 1972)—has yielded valuable insight into the social mechanisms through which expertise is concentrated and constituted in particular types of individuals. Like Radin (1927) I am interested in subjects’ relation to knowledge, yet I seek to redress the aforementioned deficiency by honoring the capacity of subjects of all socio-political positions to produce anthropological knowledge—albeit with mixed efficacy.

As will become clear in the following sections, I also owe a qualified debt to the Foucauldian tradition and its concern with knowledge-power. Especially in the context of postcolonial India, Foucault’s insights shed considerable light on the collusions of political rationality, anthropological classification, and the micro-processes of governmentality through which normative strictures of recognition have come to shape the social and political horizons of the ethnic subjects in contemporary

important key to understanding how these forms of anthropological knowledge bear upon ethnic subjects—socially, politically, and subjectively.

In taking ‘found’ anthropology as an object of ethnographic study, this work speaks to emerging academic conversations over ‘para-ethnographic’ knowledges.<sup>15</sup> These discussions highlight those forms of ethnographic-like knowledge that increasingly circulate in the world beyond the university. With these studies, my work partakes in a certain deprovincialization of anthropological knowledge. I do so by recognizing and studying the production of anthropological knowledge by institutions and individuals beyond the domain of academic anthropology. However, for reasons I intend to make clear momentarily, the forms of anthropological knowledge that are at the center of identity politics in Darjeeling are *not* para-ethnographic, even though they may occasionally claim ethnographic constitution. In fact, they are often hyper-representational forms of knowledge that obviate—both passively and actively—the imperatives of empirical investigation. In modern India, where ethnological distinction has been transformed into a platform for liberal rights and recognition, these forms of anthropological representation carry enormous socio-political capabilities. Indeed, for the people of Darjeeling, ethnological techniques of self have proven to be of exceptional political expediency. However, as I will demonstrate here, so too can their flight from empiricism affect questionable social and phenomenological consequences.

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India. See especially Foucault 1979, 1980, 1988. Exemplary applications of models of knowledge-power in India include Chatterjee 1986, 2004; Cohn 1996; Dirks 2001; Scott 1995.

<sup>15</sup> On para-ethnographics, see Boyer (2010); Holmes & Marcus 2005, 2006, w/ Westbrook 2006; Westbrook 2008. Lomnitz’s work (2001) also addresses the anthropological practices of non-academic intellectuals. Gilroy (2000) has similarly written of anthropological forms beyond the academy. I return to Gilroy’s notion of a “postanthropological humanism” in the conclusion of the dissertation. I engage with the debates on para-ethnography again in Chapter IV.

## **Ethnologies of the Governed.**

“There must be ‘attraction’. We have to create ‘attraction’. If the ‘attraction’ is there...,” the man breaks off realizing his associates are nodding in full agreement.

On an otherwise quiet afternoon in the offices of AITBA, six men discuss the details of a proposed Tamang calendar, replete with visual representation of authentic Tamang dress, ritual schedules, and the like. Sitting in an office teeming with magazines, books, and stacks of mailers awaiting the week’s round of dissemination, it is clear they are no strangers to documentation. But these ethnic leaders face certain challenges in representing their community.

The president raises the tricky issue of language, “If we put it in Tamang, who will have learned the Tamang to be able to read it?”

With rare exceptions, the Tamangs have collectively lost their native tongue since migrating from Nepal. For these stewards of ethnic reawakening, it is an inconvenient truth. They therefore decide the calendar will be printed in both Tamang and Nepali, their *lingua franca*. More importantly, one of the men reasserts, “The calendar must go in each and every home. For there, it will bring ‘knowledge’.”

This matter resolved, conversation turns to a more ambitious project, the making of an ethnographic film to document Tamang culture. The circumstances that spawned this idea are noteworthy. Earlier that year, in an effort to bolster the case for Darjeeling being declared a ‘tribal area’ under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution,<sup>16</sup> the local administration (DGHC) headed by Subash Ghisingh had begun to make a film documenting the cultural traits of the various ethnicities that make up the Gorkha community. Each ethnic group was to be featured wearing their respective dress and performing their unique ‘tribal’ customs. The film was then to be sent on to Delhi, where it would presumably help convince the central government of the ‘tribal’

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<sup>16</sup> For an explanation of the movement for Sixth Schedule status, please see Introduction and Chapters III and IV.

character of the Gorkha peoples writ large. After hearing rumors of this film, the leaders of AITBA were furious that (a) they had not been consulted during the making of the film and that subsequently (b) Tamangs were shown singing and dancing wearing *daurā suruwāl* and *chaubandi choli*, which are not AITBA-sanctioned, ‘authentic’ Tamang attire. With their cultural authority circumvented and their people misrepresented, the leaders of AITBA felt compelled to set the record straight.

Not coincidentally, this was also the time when the rift between AITBA and Ghisingh’s party was growing deeper on account of AITBA’s refusal to participate in DGHC-mandated cultural performances exhibiting the ‘tribal’ traits and unity of the Gorkha peoples. The DGHC insisted these cultural displays would behoove their chances of winning Sixth Schedule status for the hills. Already recognized as STs, AITBA wanted no part.<sup>17</sup> After all, they had struggled for over two decades to attain this coveted form of recognition. Helping others would only diminish the Tamangs hard-earned slice of the proverbial pie. What is more, by charting their own politics of identity, AITBA was actively trying to distance itself from Ghisingh, the DGHC, and the failed politics of the Gorkha ‘identity’. Though Ghisingh’s mandated ‘style’ of identity had shifted from Gorkha to ‘tribal’, it made little sense for them to contribute to a pan-ethnic ‘tribal’ identity of the hills. As per AITBA’s logic, the Tamang already had their own ‘identity’, their own recognition, and their own politics of identity. These were to be guarded tightly. Such were the politics of representation at the time.

Within two weeks, the film project was formally proposed at AITBA’s Central Committee Executive meeting, where 15 elites (again all men) from Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Sikkim discussed the prospects of the film. The president introduced

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<sup>17</sup> This was holiday season (Fall) of 2006. The DGHC’s mandates included participation of ethnic groups in processions and public rituals, as well as dress codes banning any ‘Hindu’ attire. For more detailed ethnographic accounts of these events, see Chapter III and Conclusion.

the idea by noting the contentious field of identity politics in Darjeeling. His introduction began as follows:

“Because of all the hooliganism (*guraṅdāgari*) here, it is difficult to make any statement at the moment. And there are other hurdles too. That is why we ought to preserve and conserve our culture. And we should promote our culture. Some Tamangs have been forced from above to put *ṭikā* on their foreheads and celebrate Dasain [a veiled stab at the rival faction, the Gedung]. We, the Tamangs, will not even mention the ‘D’ of Dasain, and this has to be enforced very strongly, and totally, and should be disseminated by all the different branches... We must make a CD, a cassette, or a picture based on our complete dharma and traditional dress. We have our own dress. Our own festivals too.”

“Yes,” another man chimes in, “It should be fully technical. From the technical point of view, we should shoot it. From the time before our child’s birth. According to our culture and tradition, what kind of practices, from the name giving ceremony, marriage, and things like that.”

“Yes,” another opines, “It is a time to bring our own fellows into understanding, to instill communal feeling (*jātitwa*). With the help of our culture, let us instill *jātitwa* among our fellows!”

For two hours, these men discuss the details of the script and its potential to awaken *jātitwa* among the Tamangs of India. But the film is not only to be for Tamang viewers; it is also to serve political purposes.

As a representative from Sikkim makes clear, “Over all of India and in the interest of all Tamangs, decisions have to be taken. We can create, whatever you may call it, a think-tank, an intellectual (*buddhijibi*) group. It could be you all! Even now when I look at it, this high command body, why don’t we meet the Chief Minister of West Bengal?... If we make this film, then why can’t we meet this high body? We can go as a delegation. We can talk to the Government of West Bengal, the Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary, and *show them exactly what we are*. This is the big

thing, the Government of India. To send it to the Government of India. It can convince the government.” [emph. added]

AITBA has been in the business of “convincing” for a long while now. In fact, such forms of ethnological representation were integral to their successful attainment of ST status. Over that 22 year span, they produced countless media forms, essays on the distinct customs, language, religions, and rituals of the Tamang people, and countless performances of Tamang ‘identity’, none of which were more important than when they became the objects of their official Ethnographic Survey by the anthropologists of the Government of West Bengal. All of these techniques were aimed at showing the government, and indeed, the Tamangs of Darjeeling, *exactly what they were*.

AITBA pioneered ethnic renaissance in Darjeeling through both their ethnological and political savvy. In the course of their successful struggle for ST recognition, the leaders of AITBA became adept at navigating the bureaucratic channels of government, as well as the more informal channels of political society. Their extensive correspondences with the central and state-level governments, their ability to recruit the services of the Chief Minister of Sikkim (who many believe ultimately pushed through their ST application), and their vividly remembered hunger strike at the foot of Parliament all demonstrated their learned abilities to navigate Indian political society. By staking their claim in places like Kolkata and Delhi, which are typically perceived to be socially and politically unfriendly climes for people of the hills, AITBA won considerable admiration from fellow ethnic associations in Darjeeling. Yet AITBA guarded their ‘trade secrets’ closely, prompting one organization to break into their offices in hopes of literally stealing their tactics.<sup>18</sup> As the Tamang’s ST application progressed through the 1990s, other ethnic groups would

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<sup>18</sup> See Middleton & Shneiderman 2008. My thanks to Shneiderman for sharing this story with me.

follow in their footsteps, borrowing organizational, political, and representational techniques to advance their own bids to become Scheduled Tribes of India. While the Tamang, along with the Limbu<sup>19</sup>, achieved ST status in 2003, to date none of the remaining ‘left out’ communities has achieved tribal status. Their applications remain pending.

AITBA’s successes depended largely on their abilities to negotiate the demands of ST recognition, on the one hand, and the empirical realities of life in Darjeeling on the other. When groups like the Tamang, Gurung, Rais, and others migrated from Nepal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they did so with *relatively* discrete socio-cultural repertoires. Yet these systems gradually amalgamated throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as inter-ethnic settlement and labor on the plantations stirred the cauldrons of syncretism. As this conglomerate community took social and political form—eventually coming to be known by the ‘Gorkha’ appellation—the constituent groups’ respective native languages and discrete cultural practices were “lost” (*harāyo*), as people now say, with the passing of generations. And yet, these were precisely the ethnological attributes that ST recognition in the 21<sup>st</sup> century demanded in no uncertain terms.

Established by *Advisory Committee on Revision of SC and ST Lists (Lokur Committee) of 1965*, the official ST criteria are as follows:

- a) Indication of primitive traits,
- b) Distinctive culture,
- c) Geographical isolation,
- d) Shyness of contact with the community at large, and
- e) Backwardness.

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<sup>19</sup> Though my work with the Limbu community was limited, it seems they largely piggy-backed on the efforts of AITBA to secure their ST status. The Tamang are the largest ethnic group in Darjeeling. Thanks in large part to the work of AITBA over the past two decades, they have been able to generate funds and support that dwarf those of many of the smaller ethnicities in the hills.

Note the ways in which Requisites B and C—‘distinctive culture’ and ‘geographical isolation’—inscribe strict logics of cultural singularity and purity. Meeting these conditions would seem nearly impossible for the ethnic groups of Darjeeling, for whom plantation life has historically been a crucible of hybrid forms. Whereas the dominant identity politics in the hills throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century organized under the banner of the ‘Gorkha’, a hybrid identity if there ever was one, the new trajectory of ethnic renaissance (and the prospect of ST recognition at its core) demanded hybridity’s undoing. The efficacy of ethnic revitalization, in other words, hinged upon these respective communities’ abilities to extract their so-called ‘identities’ from an already melted melting pot.<sup>20</sup> How then did organizations like AITBA attempt do this?

### **Epistemic Techniques.**

In large part the terms of ethnic revitalization were already set. Normative ethnological paradigms of community (especially those enshrined in the positive discrimination policies for Scheduled Tribes) offered ready-to-hand conceptual forms into which ethnic associations could press cultural—and purportedly empirical—content. Yet the hybrid, indiscreet socio-cultural attributes of these communities proved unruly when mapped into the prescriptive categories and logics of the

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<sup>20</sup> For additional readings on the tensions between purity and hybridity (especially within the frameworks of multiculturalism and the nation-state) see Bolland 1992; Brah & Coombes 2000; Cornwell & Stoddard 2001; Garcia-Canlini 1995; Gedalof 1999; Gunew 2004; Munasinghe 2001, 2002; Povinelli 2002; Puri 2004; Shaw 1994; Stewart & Shaw 1994; Stewart 1999; Werbner & Modood 1997; Williams 1989, Young 1995; Zizek 1997.

It is also worth noting how (as per Requisites A and E) ‘tribes’ are to have ‘primitive traits’—that is, characteristics not of this time. Furthermore, they are to exude ‘backwardness’—in other words, attributes counter-posed to the standard alignments of the modern day. ‘Backwardness’ here marks the ‘tribal’ subject as s/he who has not *as of yet* progressed into the normative arenas of rationalism, education, democratic participation, etc. Like the requirements of cultural distinctiveness, these criteria pose practical problems for ethnic groups aspiring for ST status. As I will elaborate further in Chapter IV, the ethnic associations of Darjeeling went to great lengths to feature their most ‘backward’ constituents, while hiding their modern attributes. Along with pressing these groups into a representational bind, these official criteria encourage the primordialist bent of these programs of ethnic revitalization. I have written about these issues more in Middleton (forthcoming).

postcolonial Indian state. The quests for ST recognition and ethnic revitalization subsequently involved a curious reconciliation of ideational and empirical forms on the part of the ethnic associations leading these movements. The agonistic tensions between these two registers, in turn, encouraged the production of particular kinds of anthropological knowledge that, thanks to work of ethnic associations, have become central to these movements. Yet when we stop to examine the inner-workings of these articulations, we see that they are of peculiar epistemic qualities. In particular, these professed ethnologies of self have been cast in a strange relation to their purported referent, the people of Darjeeling. This strangely devised referentiality has, in turn, cast the people of Darjeeling into awkward relation with their supposed ethnology. These epistemic peculiarities have proven largely determinant of these knowledge forms' political, social, and subjective implications.

In teasing out these epistemic qualities, we may turn to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* to garner some useful analytic frameworks. In particular, Kant's explication of the relation of *knowledge* to *experience* provides an inroad to exploring the epistemic qualities of 'found' anthropology through ethnographic means. For Kant, "Cognition commences with experience, yet it does not on that account all arise from experience."<sup>21</sup> As opposed to 'empirical' judgments, which are based on intuition/experience, Kant presents 'pure' judgments, which admit nothing empirical whatsoever. However, the relation of empiricism to pure reason in Kant's model of knowledge is a tricky one. On the one hand, Kant must refute Hume to show that objective knowledge can exist and be valid irrespective of individual experience. Yet at the same time, he sees inherent dangers in the dogmatic practices of idealism (whether of Descartes or Berkeley), and thus retrieves empiricism-with-qualification as a way to check the hubris of reason, to restrain against the tendency of reason to go

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<sup>21</sup> Kant 1998: 136.

beyond the world which it ostensibly represents; in other words, to ground reason in the world.<sup>22</sup> Pure reason and experience thereby enter into a mutually necessary, mutually critical relation to one another. Kant goes on to explore where imbalances in this relation would necessarily lead: either to a world without knowledge or a world perpetually thinking beyond itself. In the *Critique*, the consequences are of metaphysical proportions. In Darjeeling, they are more human.

‘Homegrown’ anthropology lies at the core of ethnic renaissance in Darjeeling. Yet these knowledges of the purported ethnic self are as marked by their colorful depictions of ethnic subjects, as they are by their misrepresentation. Obviously, no semiotic representation can perfectly capture its referent, especially when that referent is something as contingent and mystified as human ‘identity’. As Elizabeth Povinelli points out, “In their nature as socially produced and negotiated abstractions, all identities [and their representation] fail to correspond fully with any particular social subject or groups.”<sup>23</sup> However, as Povinelli goes on to explain, “All failures of identity are not the same; they are not related to state and capital institutional structures in the same way, and they do not produce the same discursive and affective results.”<sup>24</sup> Broadly speaking, the “failures of identity” of which Povinelli speaks may be considered a fundamental aspect of reflexive knowledge production and identification writ large. In Darjeeling, however, the misrepresentation of ‘identity’ has become an acute social problem.

Often the projected referents of these knowledges (i.e. the people of Darjeeling) bear little resemblance to their semiotic representation. Recall AITBA’s calendar or its video: the content for these portrayals was to be gleaned from Tamangs

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<sup>22</sup> Justus Hartnack’s *Kant’s Theory of Knowledge* (2001) provides a helpful overview of the *Critique*. For a more extended secondary engagement, see Adorno lectures on *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason* (1995).

<sup>23</sup> Povinelli 2002: 55.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

in Nepal, not India. Since their migration from Nepal, most Tamangs in India have ‘lost’ many of the socio-cultural attributes that would typically earn them ethnological distinction (distinct language, religious practice, custom, dress, etc). Tamang culture in Nepal is thus heralded as the ‘pure’ (*suddha*) and ‘original/authentic’ (*maulik*), while that of India is somehow ‘diluted’ (*dhamilieko*) or ‘impure’ (*asuddha*). This idea is widespread among Darjeeling’s various ethnic communities, not just the Tamangs. Anxieties over hybridity, genuine curiosity, and the exigencies of recognition have prompted numerous ethnographic trips into the ‘interior’ of Nepal to gather information about the supposedly pure and original practices of these ethnic communities. The data acquired is precisely the type that becomes the content of media like the calendar, the documentary, the impassioned narratives of the CC member and Pemba, etc. These are ethnographic endeavors and thus bespeak an empirical element. However, *and this is crucial*, when brought back to the context of Darjeeling, these representations obtain a different intentionality;<sup>25</sup> they come to refer not to subjects in Nepal, but instead to subjects in Darjeeling itself. In this way, ethnic associations have been able to furnish the cultural stuff of ethnic rebirth—at once filling politically normative ethnological forms with socio-cultural content, while supplying the informational scaffolding for the reconstruction of ethnic selfhoods among their constituents. Accordingly, this referential sleight of hand has proven mutually instrumental in achieving both ST recognition and ethnic *jātitwa*.

Recall AITBA’s branch meeting at the tea estate schoolhouse. The CC member’s pedantry walked a slippery slope between ethnology-as-worldview (the world as it is) and ethnology-as-ethos (the world as it should be): the Tamangs *are* Buddhists; the Tamangs wear such and such dress, practice such and such rituals, etc; when, where and for whom this is not the case, it *should* and must eventually be. The

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<sup>25</sup> Intentionality: the pointing to/aboutness of knowledge. Brentano 1874; Husserl 1900.

ethical imperative established, the issue of referentiality—that is, the question of which Tamangs he is actually speaking about when he spouts off ethnographic fact after ethnographic fact—goes unchallenged.

What I found most remarkable as I accompanied Pemba on his relay of AITBA's message down through the estate was the issue of which elements remained *in* Pemba's narrative versus which elements dropped *out*. *Out* was the locals' concern with the political entanglements of AITBA; *in* was AITBA's political achievements. *Out* was the locals' dissatisfaction with AITBA's cultural mandates; *in* was the ad nauseam litany of ethnographic 'facts'. Here we see a decidedly local, informal iteration of the technocratic dispensations of AITBA. Whether in the form of documentaries "shot from the technical point of view" or in detail-ridden narratives of cultural singularity, AITBA has made *exactitude* a powerful tool for convincing people who they are and what they should be. But this *exactitude* is a matter of the detail and surety of the representation itself, not its referential accuracy or descriptive veracity.

In their renderings of 'pure' Tamang culture, the referentiality question has been largely obfuscated by a fog of ethnographic 'facts'. For some like Pemba, these 'facts' have condensed into resplendent streams of ethnic consciousness. For others, they remain a cloud hanging over everyday life—at once confusing, disorienting, and alienating. These varying degrees of subjectivation<sup>26</sup>—that is, how the subject finds relation to the discursive form—depend upon the ability, or at least the willingness, of the subject to recognize and/or identify his/her self in these anthropological constructions. Despite their purported attributes of ethnographic verisimilitude, the impositions of these ethnologies on the people of Darjeeling entails a necessary

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<sup>26</sup> Translations of Foucault use both this term as well as 'mode of subjection'. For Foucault, *mode d'assujettissement* "is the way in which the individual establishes his relation to a rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice" (1986: 27).

disavowal of what Kant would call the empirical—or what everyday citizens might simply see as lived tradition or the realities of daily life.

And yet there is no denying the political efficacy of this referential sleight of hand and the pretense of exactitude with which it is enacted. Ethnological self-representation is a crucial aspect of the ST application process. Ethnic associations are tasked with providing specific information about their socio-cultural, economic, educational, and demographic attributes. Accordingly, the essays submitted to the government are laden with ethnographic details, academic citations, and an overarching positivist bent (matched only by that of the government itself). The information provided plays a crucial role in augmenting and corroborating the findings of the all-important official ‘Ethnographic Survey’ of the groups in question, when and where that happens.<sup>27</sup>

As I learned from observing the Ethnographic Survey of 2006, these classificatory moments put the organizational structures of ethnic associations to the test.<sup>28</sup> In the days and hours leading up to their respective study in 2006, operatives worked under great duress: trying to glean tips from their sources as to how to present themselves; traveling hundreds of kilometers to prepare localities for the day’s showing; and pulling all-nighters to ensure the nearest possible correspondence between their documents and their people. Because the selection of the site falls to the ethnic groups, the most remote and ‘backward’ villages were selected for study, and their denizens coached into the proper performance of ‘tribal culture’. As I will show in Chapter IV, when the ethnographic moment came to perform for the state, the aspiring communities went to astounding lengths to insure compliance with the criteria

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<sup>27</sup> The Government of West Bengal has the capabilities to conduct such ethnographic surveys of prospective ST communities. In states without Tribal Research Institutes (or their equivalents) ST certification may occur without an ethnographic survey (viz. Sikkim).

<sup>28</sup> Please see Chapter IV for extended discussion of the Ethnographic Survey and the dynamics of ‘tribal’ certification.

of recognition. Subsequently, the ethnographic encounter became a decidedly stilted affair.

Interestingly, the people who are compelled to perform the prescribed ethnological forms often do so with only a vague understanding of their political consequences. About a year after the Ethnographic Survey of 2006, I returned to one of the remote villages where the study was conducted in order to explore the villagers' memory of the Survey. They recalled the ethnic leaders arriving in the dead of the night before to coach them; the frantic assembly of their primitive artifacts; the beckoning of ethnic peers throughout the area; the details and embarrassment of the daylong performance; and the probing interviews conducted by the government experts who could not speak Nepali. Yet when asked why these government officials were gathering this information, the villagers expressed uncertainty. With about 20 of us crammed into a room to watch videos that I had brought with me of the Survey, my research assistant, Prakash, broached the subject:

Prakash: So what were they taking the information for?

Older Man: It could be that we, the ones who are here, are the 'backward' community.

Prakash: You mean as an OBC, an Other Backward Class [an official minority designation]?

Older Man: No, not the OBC.....ahmmmm....What is it called?.....ahmmmm....'tribal' ....for the 'tribal'!

Towns: And for the 'tribal', what does a community have to be or have? In other words, what are the criteria for being a 'tribal'?

Older Man: For becoming 'tribals', what is there with the government, we cannot say.

Prakash: So they didn't tell you what the requirements were?

Older Man: No, they didn't tell us anything. Even if they did, they might have only told our big shots.

Prakash: [to the group] So you all don't know what it takes to be 'tribal'?  
[to which two middle age women respond in frustration]

Woman A: We are tiny, insignificant little bugs (*bhusunā*). We wouldn't know!

Woman B: We were told "You should do all of these things." So in one day we brought all of these things from our houses and did it. Right? [to the group for affirmation]

[they affirm]

Near the end of my fieldwork (late in 2007), I was already well familiar with the interleavings of class and the politics of ethnic representation that this conversation seemingly articulated. Yet I left this interaction particularly struck by the woman's comment about she and her fellow villagers being 'bugs' (*bhusunā*). Identifying herself and her peers as but insects removed from the know of Indian political society seemed to me to be a most telling articulation of subalternity. Thrust into the ethnographic spotlight, yet kept in the proverbial dark, the people of Laharā Gāū were made, at once, 'tribal' recognition's *examples* and its subalterns. Neither of the class of the particular nor the universal, but somehow both, they were held forth as the embodiments of the 'tribal' ideal-type.<sup>29</sup> And yet, in my conversations with them, these purported *examples* of the 'distinct', 'isolated', 'primitive', 'backward' culture of the Lekh could articulate neither the category ('tribe') nor the criteria that *it* entailed and *they* (ostensibly) evinced. As they themselves said, "We are tiny, insignificant little bugs (*bhusunā*). We wouldn't know!" These testaments of subalternity prompted

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<sup>29</sup> Further developing a point I made in the Introduction (concerning the *exempli gratia* logics of ethnic revitalization and 'tribal' recognition), here I am once again working with Agamben's consideration of the 'example', about which he writes: "In any context where it exerts its force, the example is characterized by the fact that it holds for all cases of the same type, and, at the same time, it is included among these. It is one singularity among others, which, however, stands for each of them and serves for all. On one hand, every example is treated in effect as a real particular case; but on the other, it remains understood that it cannot serve in its particularity. Neither particular nor universal, the example is the singular object that presents itself as such, that *shows* its singularity." See "Example" in Agamben 1993: 10-11.

me to revisit Partha Chatterjee's thoughts on the ways in which political society entails the mediation of "domains that are differentiated by deep and historically entrenched inequalities of power." And they made me think further about what role ethnological knowledge plays in mediating "between those who govern and those who are governed".<sup>30</sup>

The processes of 'tribal' recognition clearly cast the people of Laharā Gāũ into specific relations with the state and the Lekh community writ large. Yet these relations were marked not so much by free association and communication as by significant degrees of mediation—themselves involving carefully calibrated dynamics of representational exclusion and inclusion. Understood accordingly, my conversation with the people of Laharā Gāũ signaled the uneven ways that knowledge gets translated across social and conceptual strata in Darjeeling. For ethnic associations and their constituents, translating particular ethnological schemas from the realms of 'pure' theory into the lexicons of daily life has indeed proven a key dynamic of ST recognition and ethnic rebirth. But these dynamics of translation involve more than simply changing the linguistic terms by which socio-cultural practices are known. They also involve translating—or rather, transforming—*conceptual* schemas into *empirical* practice. In this regard, it is especially telling that the subjects in which the *conceptual* and the *empirical* dimensions of knowledge were to converge would themselves be unable to communicate the terms of their performance.

Articulated and performed at various levels, anthropological concepts and logics clearly mean different things to different people in Darjeeling. And, as we see with the people of Laharā Gāũ, sometimes those meanings are notably lacking, veiled, unclear, confusing, etc. In such instances, it is not only the dynamics of translation that call for ethnographic attention, but also translation's apparent failures. Here we must

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<sup>30</sup> Chatterjee 2004: 66.

ask not only how particular kinds of anthropological knowledge translate across social, empirical, and conceptual levels, but also how they have not. After all, to focus our ethnographic attention solely on the question of translation would be to miss what is perhaps most telling about my conversation with the people of Laharā Gāū: namely, their inability to speak the language of their reckoning.

### **On ‘Pure Identity’**

Shortly after the Ethnographic Survey in 2006, the Government of West Bengal sent the applicant communities a request for further information. The enclosed ‘Census Form’<sup>31</sup> asked for data on a litany of demographic topics ranging from population distribution; marriage, divorce, and widowhood rates; to literacy, occupation, income figures, etc. The request effectively transferred the onus of enumeration from the state back to its supplicant communities. For the ethnic associations handling the ST bids, this presented both a bind and an opportunity. Urgent meetings were held between and within ethnic groups to discuss the means through which such data could be gathered, and ultimately *what kind* of data they should provide. In one such meeting, held at the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs (DICA) of the DGHC, a representative (who not incidentally was also a high-level DGHC official) explained that the local Block Development Offices (BDOs) did not have the required information on these groups (since they were not already STs). However, he went on to explain how, if the ethnic groups were clever, they could have the BDO stamp the forms, thereby giving the forms the appearance of being official. He ended his instructions with an important coda: “There is one very important thing about Hinduism. If we are ‘tribals’ then we should not put down that we are followers of Hinduism.”

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Census Form’ is how the document came to be known by the ethnic groups in question. The actual form was titled, ‘Particulars Required by the Members of the Cultural Research Institute’.

Later, conversation shifted to the ways they should respond to the questions about education and economic status, in light of the prerequisites of backwardness. “For the education question,” one leader opined, “We should be 95% backwards, at least!” Then sarcastically, “What does this term ‘illiterate’ mean anyhow?” His joke elicited laughter, but also hinted at the imminent doctoring of information that was to occur later in the offices of these respective ethnic associations.

For those ethnic associations that had previously endeavored to enumerate their local populations, only minor tweaking would be required to fill out the government’s form. Others used what little census information could be derived from local voter registers and then added an estimated population growth rate to arrive at current numbers. To fill in other fields of the Census Form, many simply made up numbers to match what they perceived to be the appropriate profile. During one of these doctoring-meetings, I pulled the newly appointed “demographer” of the given ethnic group aside shortly after he had presented his figures to the association. Having heard him lament the “technical difficulties” of understanding the Census Form itself and filling out its fields, I was curious to know how he had gone about ascertaining the required information. “So were you going village to village?” I asked him.

“No, I was just doing the math. We just had to make the numbers work out perfectly,” he responded with a wry grin—the implication being the numbers were completely fudged. His number crunching served his community well, as their information was accepted by the government. Others who were less careful with their numeric pandering to ideal-types were punished for their lack of calculation. When government statisticians caught the inconsistencies in their figures, their forms were sent back for further correction. Their demographic profile of ‘backwardness’ literally did not add up.

Manipulating numbers was but one of the many tactics used by aspiring ethnic groups to conform to established ideal-types. These tactics made extensive use of ‘pure reason’ to do so. Recall from Kant, that as opposed to the ‘empirical’, the ‘pure’ was that which admitted no experience, no empirical knowledge whatsoever. Mathematics is the classic example:  $2+2=4$  does not necessarily derive from experience, but holds for all future experiences. The demographic fabrication of ‘backwardness’ was therefore largely a figment of ‘pure’ identity—that is, one devoid of empirical grounds.

Yet, if we look deeper into these tactics, we encounter a second form of ‘pure’ identity—namely, one cleansed of the polluting trace of hybridity. Indeed, ‘pure’ here serves as a productive double entendre. The champions of ethnic rebirth in Darjeeling advocated ‘pure’ identity in both senses of the term. As per their logics: the consummate born-again ethnic subject was predicated on the recovery of ‘pure’ (*suddha*) and original (*maulik*) culture, religion, language, etc. And this predication itself involved a flight from empiricism, a referential sleight of hand, through which the purported referents of this knowledge (i.e. the people of Darjeeling), were obviated from the representation. The rendering of ‘pure’ ethnic identity was, in other words, largely an exercise of ‘pure’ reason.

Relevant here are the socio-cultural engineering programs and knowledge practices through which all traces of hybridity, syncretism, and the like are representationally disavowed and/or forcibly exterminated in the name of producing cultural purity. These cultural purification programs are said to serve two purposes. They restore the ‘pure’, ‘original’, and ‘distinct’ ethnic practices that were ‘lost’ (*harāyo*) since migrating to India from Nepal—thereby enabling subjects to recover their ‘true’ ethnic identities. Second, they are a means of achieving compliance with the ethnological requisites of ST recognition. When we examine the criteria and

demands of ST recognition, we see that groups' prospects of attaining liberal rights and recognition hinge precisely on these kinds of 'pure', 'distinct', and certifiable ethnological qualities.<sup>32</sup> Subsequently, the use of ideal-types and establishes schemas of anthropological knowledge have thereby become a viable way for populations to represent and constitute themselves as morally and politically endowed communities. The anthropology of ethnic self has accordingly emerged as an effective political technology of communities through which groups may establish a sense of identity, at once unto themselves and within the nation-state.<sup>33</sup>

But due to the epistemic peculiarities discussed earlier, these ways of representing and remaking the ethnic subject involve marked degrees of misrepresentation, distortion, and compulsion. As they are propagated these (mis)representations carry their own imperatives of ascription. For the linked purposes of ethnic rebirth and ST status, subjects are asked not only to recognize themselves in 'their' anthropologies, but, more than that, to take on these prescribed ethnic forms in their daily lives. These imperatives can cause significant problems for the people, who wittingly or unwittingly have become the objects of anthropological knowledge—and yet are hereby burdened with the task of managing the discrepancies between these 'pure' anthropological forms and the empirical, ever-contingent conditions of their daily lives.

The official delineations of the 'tribal' ideal-type (along with all the perceived criteria that attend it in the postcolonial imagination) have become a template for the refashioning of ethnic identity in the hills. By a strangely perverse logic then, the

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<sup>32</sup> I address these matters in greater detail in Chapters III and IV.

<sup>33</sup> This formulation is derived from Foucault's notion of the 'political technologies of individuals', which he explains partly as "the way by which... we have been led to recognize ourselves as a society, as part of a social entity, as a part of a nation or of a state" (1988: 146). For the people of Darjeeling, anthropologies of the ethnic self have likewise become a way for people to recognize their collective (and individual) selves as part of an 'ethnic' community, itself a legitimate constituent of the nation-state.

anthropological techniques of the ‘self’ have proven to be highly inductive affairs. They have largely involved finding, identifying, or otherwise creating socio-cultural content to fill preconceived conceptual forms. Throughout these auto-representational practices, established ethnological paradigms have enjoyed nearly complete epistemic privilege. Of the hundreds of conversations I had about ethnic revitalization and ST status during the course of my research, I can recall exactly two individuals who ever questioned the category of ‘tribal’ itself. I recall no unsolicited instances when the ‘culture’ concept was subjected to critique—and certainly not the kind of which it has undergone in academic anthropological circles over the past several decades. The *de facto* credence of these anthropological forms (along with their rampant circulation), I believe, calls for a renewed questioning of the specific histories through which particular paradigms of anthropological distinction have come to structure the contemporary.<sup>34</sup>

As I came to appreciate and loath through this research, disciplinary histories are constantly articulating themselves in the identity politics of Darjeeling—often times in ways that professional anthropologists today may find unsettling, if increasing familiar. But, so too are other histories—lived histories of hybridity, prejudice, and anxieties over belonging in India, which may or may not be reconciled through these anthropological techniques of self. In this regard, ethnic groups’ engineering of cultural singularity, their ethnological submissions to the government, their stilted ethnographic performances, and their crunching of numbers to fit the bill of the certifiably backward ‘tribal’ ideal-type necessarily involve the fraught negotiation of both national and local histories. From the former spawns the ethnological schemes that have come to structure the prospects of ethnic renaissance and ‘tribal’ recognition.

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<sup>34</sup> This is the project of Chapter III.

From the latter, spawns the empirical realities of history and contemporary life that prove so unruly when pressed into the former's ideational mold.

As groups like the Tamang know well, the political viability of ethnological self-representation in large part hinges upon the ability to at least provisionally reconcile the tensions between these conceptual and empirical domains. Yet in weighing the social and epistemic strategies through which this is attempted, we must remember that these anthropological reconstructions of the ethnic self are intended for more than just political purposes; they aim to fundamentally refashion the social and subjective lives of ethnic subjects. That such 'pure' renditions of the ethnic subject would be propagated as assertoric (actually true), or even apodictic (necessarily true)<sup>35</sup> not only to the Government of India, but also to the very constituents they ostensibly claim to represent both politically and conceptually, is a dynamic that raises serious questions about what happens when a provisionally deductive, descriptive enterprise such as anthropological knowledge-making becomes prescriptive of people's ways of living. Here the question of the 'ethics of anthropological knowledge' refigures itself as an object of ethnographic attention in its own right—one to be pursued beyond the university, or wherever anthropological knowledge is making its mark. Significantly, in places like Darjeeling, the debate itself is found to be notably lacking.

### **Beyond Governmentality.**

Questioning the histories through which ethnological forms of anthropological knowledge have come to condition minorities' prospects of attaining rights and recognition in India is beyond the scope of this chapter. (These matters are addressed in Chapter III). But for present purposes, suffice it to say that the official systems of recognition in India today have emerged out of a complex interplay of colonialism,

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<sup>35</sup> These are some of Kant's 'categories'. Along with 'problematic' (merely possible), 'assertoric' and 'apodictic' fall under the heading 'Modality'. Kant 1998: 206-212.

disciplinary anthropology, state formation, and the development of liberal thought on the subcontinent. Even a cursory glance over these colonial and postcolonial histories shows ‘tribal’ recognition to be a conspicuous means of classifying and governing populations. In this regard, ‘tribal’ recognition remains a mechanism of governmentality.<sup>36</sup> The anthropologies of ethnic self taken up in Darjeeling have subsequently developed as an innovative response to the demands and opportunities created by the Government of India’s policies of positive discrimination. They are, as Chatterjee would have it, a facet of the ‘politics of the governed’. As such, one of their signature functions—and indeed one their greatest challenges—then is mediating between the idealist logics of the secular nationalist project and the day-to-day realities of ethnic subjects.<sup>37</sup>

The Foucauldian overtones are undeniable. India’s systems of positive discrimination are saturated with ethnological paradigms of both an informal and formal/disciplinary variety. The politics of recognition have subsequently become an arena for obvious exercises of anthropological knowledge-power. Here we may look to the articulations of the Indian government and its anthropologists, as well as those of Darjeeling’s ethnic associations and the individuals that comprise their membership. And as we saw earlier, normative ethnological forms makes their way ‘down’ into localities through branch meetings and knowledge-agents like AITBA’s Central Committee member and even Pemba, who so passionately convey the message of ethnic revitalization. Here we might profitably recall Foucault’s critical insight that “the individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle,” in order to appreciate how the people of Darjeeling have become both the subjects and objects of

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<sup>36</sup> Foucault 1979.

<sup>37</sup> Chatterjee 2001, 2004.

anthropological knowledge—at once turning ethnological lenses upon themselves in response to the logics of liberal governance.<sup>38</sup>

As we make our way ‘down’ further and further into the lifeworlds of everyday subjects, again we find anthropological knowledge-power at work in subtle, ever-more diffuse forms. And again the Foucauldian analytic seems apt. Along similar lines, the overt effects that these *ethnologies of the governed* have had on people’s socialities and sensibilities brings to mind Corrigan and Sayer’s critical consideration of the ways in which state formation works at the level of the “constitution and regulation of social identities, ultimately of our subjectivities.”<sup>39</sup> These insights shed light on how even the most intimate aspects of ethnic rebirth in the hills tie into greater systems of state formation and liberal governance, manifest most palpably in the policies of secular nationalism in India.

Thinking historically about the socio-political efficacy of ethnological techniques of self today, we might therefore draw a line from the governance of colonial India, through the policies of the Nehruvian developmental state, through the emergence of contemporary Indian political society, all the way to today’s born-again ethnic subject. Following Foucault, we might furthermore recognize this line as the penetrating trajectory of governmentality. Adding to this genealogy the allure of rights, recognition, and positive discrimination, we can understand the political compulsion of populations like those in Darjeeling and beyond to announce themselves in such exacting and singular anthropological forms. Tracing this line further down into the subjects par excellence of ethnic rebirth, we might even come to see Pemba’s shining subjectivity as the embodiment of a greater apparatus of epistemic forms and political rationality. By way of this line, even the very feeling of

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<sup>38</sup> Foucault 1980: 99. On liberalism and ‘the cunning of recognition’, see Povinelli 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Corrigan & Sayer 1985: 2.

ethnic rebirth may be reduced to an ‘effect’ and ‘articulation’ of anthropological knowledge-power.

However, *and this is ethnographically crucial*, when we begin to explore the interiorities of ethnic subjects further, we find a more complex picture. Upon entry into the domain of individuals, our line begins to break up, diminish, refract, scatter. For even in the shining subjectivity of the born-again ethnic subject, there is always more to the story. There are always other lines.

Ethnographic engagement with the people of Darjeeling shows clearly that *not all terms and conditions of the ethnic subjects may be reduced to an effect of anthropological knowledge-power*. What is needed in addition to a sustained concern with the regulatory effects of anthropological knowledge-power is an ethnographic, phenomenological appreciation of the contingencies through which subjects are finding relation to the normative anthropologies of the day. The following section ventures such an analysis.

### **Fathomable Interiorities**

For days, villagers have made their way to Pemba’s home. In each hand they carry a plastic bag: one a kilo of sugar, the other a kilo of flower. In Bidhuwā Busti, this is the standard neighborly donation upon the death of a family member.<sup>40</sup> Two weeks earlier Pemba’s ailing mother had passed away. During her life, she had considered herself a Hindu, yet since her death Pemba has taken care to assure that every detail of her passing is attended to in the proper Tamang Buddhist way. It being the 16th day since her death, the lamas who had taken up residence for the past several days have finally completed their duties. As I approach, the house seems to lack its usual cheer. Outside I do not see the goat hides drying in the sun, soon to become the

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<sup>40</sup> Augmenting these, the village samaj and the local branch of AITBA contributed funds to offset the expenses of the funeral rights.

heads of one of Pemba's illustrious and veritably 'authentic' Tamang *damphu* drums. I call into the house to find Pemba alone. With his wife in the tea fields plucking her daily quota and the kids off at school, there is a solemn stillness inside the home. I wonder if I am intruding on the quietude of his mourning.

He greets me with warmth, and I offer him my apologies for being unable to attend his mother's *ghewā* (funerary rite). As always, he welcomes me into his home, and I offer him my two plastic bags. I notice right away he lacks his usual zeal. His mannerisms are unmistakably demure. He speaks in hushed even tones. Yet something else is different. There is something about his appearance that doesn't ring true. He seems somehow younger, frailer, smaller than the boisterous Pemba of before. I wonder if the grief could have taken a toll so quickly on his countenance. Then I realize: he has recently shaved his head. His once close-cropped hair is now but stubble. When I ask him about it, he explains that he has shaved his head to mark the mourning of his deceased mother. This practice upon death is commonplace in Hindu homes. So why has Pemba—a born-again Buddhist, done so?

Pemba needs little prompting to explain the apparent contradiction. Pemba describes that he was uncertain whether or not he should shave his head. Particular family members and neighbors believed he should do so. They pressured him accordingly, he tells me. His explanation then wanders into a longwinded history of the Tamang, and how upon the death of Nepal's king, all subjects would be required by law to shave their head. This practice was part and parcel of the religious mandate in the Hindu kingdom, Pemba explains, "It did not exist in our Buddhist dharma. But what to do now? It has become tradition (*paramparā*). That is why. If I don't shave off my hair my friends in the village will say, 'Your mother has died, at least shave off your hair.' This is all. More and more, the people debate. Somebody says one thing

and somebody else says another. The most important thing: what I wish to state is that our heart must be pure. If this is pure then the soul will pass away peacefully.”

What is particularly interesting about Pemba’s explanation is that the embodied history—or as he frames it, the ‘tradition’ (*paramparā*)—that he calls upon to justify the shaving of his head is in fact the very history of Hindu ‘oppression’ and sanskritization that he and his AITBA cadres rail against with such conviction. In fact, their cultural purification programs have been implemented with the expressed design of ridding and thereby reversing this history of Hindu influence. And yet, here Pemba elicits this very history to justify his action. This was one of the many contradictions of his explanation. At one point he alluded to the troubling history through which Tamangs were forced to take up this practice;<sup>41</sup> at another, he offered veiled references to the pressures of local tradition; still at others, he reverted back into his familiar idiom of identity-speak, reeling off a litany of ethnographic facts about how true Tamangs care for their dead—‘facts’ seemingly torn straight from the proverbial pages ethnic rebirth.

I found Pemba’s narrative exceptionally difficult to follow. Ricocheting from one point to another, he seemed unable to justify his decision in any coherent matter. Clearly, he was torn between two traditions—one, the lived tradition of his family, friends, and neighbors for whom the shaving of one’s head was a routine marker of grief; the other, the reconstructed ‘tradition’ of AITBA which so stridently espoused the return of the Tamang’s original (*maulik*), ‘pure’ (*suddha*), and even ‘primordial’ (*pauranik*) ‘religion’, ‘culture’, and the like. Sitting through his painful search for

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<sup>41</sup> David Holmberg notes that Tamangs in Nepal still will shave their head upon the death of a family member. However, the meanings attributed to this act differ from those commonly held by Hindus. Nevertheless, these practices seem to emerge out of sustained histories of sanskritization. Holmberg notes that Tamang death rites stress social solidarity and inclusion, whereas Hindu rites stress pollution and social separation. In his narrative, Pemba speaks about pollution, but beyond that mention, it is difficult to locate his understanding of his shaven head and related acts within the spectrum Holmberg speaks of. (Personal correspondence with Holmberg).

reason, I also began to sense the shame and confusion this decision had engendered for my friend.<sup>42</sup>

Pemba's dilemma signaled many of the conditions and paradoxes of ethnic rebirth in Darjeeling. Along these lines, his narrative affords a poignant window into the phenomenology of 'found' anthropologies as they are experienced in Darjeeling. Step by convoluted step, Pemba walks us through the frameworks of his decision. In doing so, he explicates what the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz would refer to as "the criterion by which [he chose] one interpretive scheme...out of the many that [were] available when the moment [came] to explicate a given lived experience."<sup>43</sup> What I found most remarkable listening to Pemba was how he formulated the tension he felt between the lived tradition of his family on the one hand, and the reconstructed 'tradition' of Tamang rebirth on the other. These contending interpretive schemes were clearly pulling him in opposite directions. What is more, he formulated them as just that—contending schemes. To express his grief via an ostensibly Hindu *act* or via the prescribed *acts* of a 'pure', reconstructed Tamang Buddhist tradition: this was the troubling question. Coming from a syncretic family tradition and pressured from all sides to do what was culturally right, Pemba in the end chose the interpretive scheme of lived tradition. But while that choice may have satisfied his family members who pressured him to do what had always been done, for him the choice clearly engendered misgivings about his personal commitment to Tamang ethnic rebirth.

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<sup>42</sup> Thinking back upon this conversation, I cannot help but wonder the extent to which my presence and identity as an academic anthropologist affected its course. Though I broached the subject of his shaven head, Pemba clearly felt compelled to explain his act. And he did so with remarkable historical and ethnological awareness. Pemba's flagging search for a coherent justification to his rather simple act poses the questions: Why did he feel so compelled to explain himself in the nuanced (if contradictory) way he did? Did he see me, the anthropologist, as an arbitrator of his own ethnic authenticity? In this instance, I have no definitive answers to these questions. I do, however, take up this general reflexive concern with 'finding' anthropology in the section titled "A Foreign Presence" of Chapter IV.

<sup>43</sup> Schutz 1967: 85.

Precisely because it was fraught with social, political, and analytic tension, Pemba's decision to shave his head exemplifies the ways ethnic revitalization is increasingly being experienced in the hills. At one level, the circumstances of his dilemma (the social pressures, the political implications, the subjective loyalties, etc) signal the inherent contingencies through which the subjects of ethnic revitalization—even the most committed among them—are coming to terms with the anthropological imperatives of these movements. At another level, the entire moment is indicative of the doubts and difficult decisions that ethnological knowledge has imposed upon people's socio-cultural practice. Whether it is a question of how one expresses grief, how one celebrates a given holiday, or with whom one associates, defining the self vis a vis ethnological paradigms has become an increasingly compulsive practice in and of itself. More so than the choices individuals make in a given instance, it is this very *compulsion* to render the self and the other in particular anthropological ways that most comprehensively marks the encroachment of this modern knowledge form into the lifeworlds of everyday subjects.

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Pemba's personal investment in Tamang ethnic rebirth created for him a difficult decision at an especially difficult time of his life. We must remember that the time around his mother's death was by all accounts a period of intense mourning. In evaluating the nuances of his decision, it is therefore important to think compassionately about the more affective dimensions of his dilemma. With his mother's soul passing through the *bardo* and he and his family experiencing the pain of losing a loved one, Pemba's decision carried with it its own intensity. It is difficult to ascertain exactly *how* the affects of the moment animated, shrouded, and charged Pemba's negotiation of lived versus reconstructed 'tradition'. The anguish of his dilemma, however, was readily apparent to me as I sat with him through his befuddled

account of his own mental life. These traces of affect were conveyed as much through his gestures, body language, and emotional expression as they were through the words by which he tried to make sense of his decision.

As we saw with his proselytizing down in the tea-estate, Pemba was certainly one to trumpet the logics of ethnic rebirth. Tamang Buddhism, as he was wont to tell, had completely revolutionized his being, transforming him from a deadbeat alcoholic into a respectable, employed father and leader of ethnic renaissance within his community. Yet despite the fact that the discovery of Tamang ‘culture’ and Tamang Buddhism had given him what he called the brightness (*ujyālo*) of his being, he seemingly betrayed his own story of ethnic makeover—arguably when it mattered most. Amid the grief and social pressures of his mother’s death, Pemba was unwilling to turn his back on lived tradition. Certainly, it would have been easy for both he and I to discard the shaving of his head as an erratic byproduct of a grief-ridden circumstance, but as his searching explanation made clear, he himself was unsettled by his self-contradictory decision—especially so, in the presence of me, a friend but always-also an anthropologist. In trying to explain himself, he in many ways seemed to be coming to terms with the limits of his own ethnic makeover. In this regard, his decision and his struggles to make sense of it, shed revealing light on the limits of anthropological schemas in (re)forming the ethnic subject. Admittedly, I learned a lot by asking him about his shaven head. Regrettably, I caused him added despair by doing so. Were I somehow able to return to this conversation, I would wish to tell him that a perfect rationale was not necessary. Considering his grief, perhaps neither was it possible.

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For this study, the question of affect has significance beyond Pemba’s mourning. Throughout this dissertation, affect stands as an important counter-attention

to the question of knowledge. While the study of ‘found’ anthropology can be a powerful analytic for exploring the dynamics of ethnic ‘identity’ in Darjeeling and beyond, a sole attention to knowledge cannot adequately understand the intensity of the ‘identity’ question in Darjeeling. ‘Identity’ or *astitwa/chinhāri* as it is also known, is a uniquely charged, and deeply historical, issue in the hills. As I argue in the following chapter on *Anxious Belongings*, affect is that charge. Anxieties about belonging in India have largely precipitated these groups’ turn to ethnological knowledge as a means to constitute themselves and their place in the nation-state. So too have these affective longings for rights, recognition, and a secure sense of self animated their anthropological makeovers with palpable intensity. In this research, affect must therefore be considered alongside the question of ‘found’ anthropologies. Through this multiattentional method<sup>44</sup>, the ethnic subject comes into view as always the embodier of alternative dimensions of social and subjective life. His/her ethnography, as I aim to show throughout these chapters on knowledge and belonging, can thereby make for a more spirited anthropology of knowledge.<sup>45</sup>

To return to Pemba and the limits of his own ethnic makeover: even if we were to jettison the influence of affect and focus exclusively on the question of knowledge per se, Pemba’s phenomenology still challenges any unilateral models of subject formation—especially those that focus exclusively on the generative capacities of knowledge-power. His decision was shot-through with multiple, contending lines of anthropological knowledge—most notably, those of lived tradition and those of

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<sup>44</sup> Boyer 2010.

<sup>45</sup> I use ‘spirited’ here to suggest the dialectical counter to what might be deemed the ‘system’ of ethnological knowledge-power in India. In doing so, I borrow insight from Boyer’s work on dialectical knowledge, *Spirit and System* (2005). Though I believe knowledge-power is a powerful optic for studying ‘found’ anthropology in Darjeeling, the optic (both descriptively and methodologically) wrongly diminishes the dialectical nature of ethnological knowledge production in Darjeeling. Raising the question of affect/belonging is, I believe, a productive way of attending to the role that potentiality, creativity, and subjective agency plays in shaping the contours of ‘found’ anthropology and ethnic renaissance in the hills.

(re)constructed ‘tradition’. The intersection of these ‘lines’, itself involved its own set of contingencies: the social pressures exerted on him by his family members and friends, the imperatives of ethnic rebirth championed by AITBA, or the affects of his personal grief, to name a few. In this way, Pemba’s seemingly simple but subjectively vexed decision typifies the experiential dynamics of ethnic renaissance in the hills.

A Foucauldian concern for knowledge-power might rightfully scale back and point to the exigencies of ST recognition in shaping Pemba’s subjectivity, as well as the pan-ethnic dynamics of rebirth within which Pemba has allegedly re-found himself.<sup>46</sup> But such an approach would be hamstrung in accounting for the social and subjective contingencies through which individuals—even those born-again—are

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<sup>46</sup> A note here on those models that see recognition as the moment *par excellence* of modern identity formation: Scholars of various intellectual traditions corroborate this view of recognition. Judith Butler goes so far as to claim, “Recognition is not conferred upon the subject, but forms that subject.” Here, recognition obtains a seemingly monopolistic hold over the subject; “it forms the subject” (1993: 225). Empirically, this logic echoes with that of the leaders of ethnic revival who insist that recognition—whether that of the State, or that of the subject who recognizes his/her true ethnic self in their anthropology—holds the key to ethnic uplift. The community will be whole, will be validated, if they can only achieve recognition—be it through ST status, the Sixth schedule, a separate state of Gorkhaland, or the inter-subjective resonance of *jātitwa*. Recognition, in both these etic and emic views, shores up what Taylor deems the “supposed links between recognition and identity” (1992: 25). My data challenges this logic.

In fact, I will maintain that an over-attention to recognition has particularly adverse affects for the study of ethnic subject formation and/or ‘identity’. First, the monopolistic notion that recognition forms the subject grants undue authority to the power of discourse to effect subjects. It circumscribes the ontology of the subject by assigning him/her only discursive potentiality. Second, it brackets out the inherent social and subjective complexity of the subject by pursuing his/her formation through the prefigured analytic of recognition. By way of gross inductive reasoning, such a view mistakes the conditioning terms of the circumstance of recognition for the qualities of those subjects who inhabit it. The subject’s heterodox attributes suffer a double negation—originally by the empirical strictures of recognition, and then again in the interpretation. My concern is that any study that approaches the question of identity and/or subject formation through an expressed attention to recognition will inevitably be steered into a blinkered understanding. Moments of recognition are *by definition* prefigured social scenarios in which particular discursive forms are automatically privileged. When examined in the context of state systems of recognition, their over-determined social constitution prefigures our findings of governmentality. In other words we are left to see what was already presupposed in the social scenario itself—governmentality.

For various construals of recognition and its relation to subject formation, see Althusser 1971 (especially the ‘hailing vignette’). Weedon (2004) provides an accessible commentary on this aspect of Althusser. Bourdieu and Boltanski 1975: 8 (translated by Thompson 1984: 46 and also cited in Williams 1991: 247) provides a more ideologically concerned model of recognition and subject formation. On these themes, see also Elizabeth Povinelli 2002 and Charles Taylor 1992.

finding relation to the discursive (re)formations of ‘identity’ in Darjeeling. As Pemba might attest, these dynamics can be neither drawn nor lived by a single line.

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Pemba now carries with him a certificate denoting his designation as a member of a Scheduled Tribe of India. The advantages he and his family will receive as STs will in all likelihood improve their quality of life. He, moreover, has seemingly found in ethnic revitalization a sense of purpose, identity, and belonging that long eluded him. Many of his neighbors have not—either because of their respective ethnic association’s less adroit maneuverings of political society; because of their individual refusal to recognize themselves in the image of the revitalized ethnic subject; or because of their unwillingness to change themselves and their social world in accordance to such ethnological prescriptions. Here the achievements of ethnic ‘uplift’ are tempered by the messy experiential dynamics that accrue in the shadows of ethnic rebirth. Nevertheless, as ethnological self-awareness continues to seep into all walks of life, it is clear that the interwoven power of state and ethnic subject formation continues to reconfigure how individuals understand, relate, and experience their socio-cultural practice, their community, and their selves.

That said, Pemba’s story suggests that ethnological knowledge works as much to form and reform the ethnic subject as it does to divide his/her subjectivity. Thinking through the fraught, ever-tenuous circumstances of Pemba’s ethnic makeover, as well as those of the Darjeeling populace writ large, we can begin to appreciate how the linked power of state and ethnic subject formation “works through the way it forcibly organizes, and divides, subjectivities, and thereby produces and reproduces quite *material* forms of sociality.”<sup>47</sup> Importantly, it is not merely those who contest ethnic

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<sup>47</sup> Sayer 1994: 374.

revitalization that confirm Sayer's notion of divided subjectivities, but also those who epitomize ethnic revitalization.

The following section takes a deeper look at how 'found' anthropological knowledge is being actualized in socio-cultural practice. After all, in the context of Darjeeling, the turn to ethnological knowledge is not merely about representing subjects, it is also about making and remaking them in particular ways. It is worth then considering further how this comes to be.

### **Living Knowledge.**

"No, you're doing it wrong. Like this, like this!" a voice exclaims from the corner of the barren concrete gomba.

Having just meandered in, Anju freezes in her tracks, then looks left to see her uncle seated in the rippling light of 109 butter lamps. "What?" she says to him.

"Like this" Again bringing his hands to prayer position at his forehead and then lowering them to his chest, as he bends slightly forward in his chair. Anju mimics along, and then stops.

Everyone is watching.

"Like this?" She pauses to ask, her hands still held in prayer position.

"No. Now prostrate! Go down."

"What?"

"Down! Down!"

"Down?"

"Yes, go down!" Still seated, he guides her by again bending forward slightly.

Standing there just a few steps inside the gomba threshold, she is clearly on stage. Everyone bites their lips to hold back laughter. After all, this is supposed to be a somber occasion. She hesitantly starts lowering her body toward the concrete floor,

looking left for approval that she is indeed doing it right. A nod of approval. She continues moving to the floor in hesitant, segmented movements. Finally her chest touches down and she stretches her body out toward the newly minted Buddha statue that presides over the temple. Once fully prone, she hears approval from the five or six relatives in the room and quickly returns to her feet with a smile. Now confident with the sequence, she hurriedly proceeds through the final two of three prostrations. Having passed the test, she holds back an embarrassed grin and sneaks, relieved, to the side of the room, joining the relatives who have gathered for the 49<sup>th</sup> day funerary rites of their recently deceased ancestor. Slowly, other Gurungs begin to trickle into the half-finished gomba to attend the ghewā.

Ten years ago, the death of a Gurung in Bidhuwā Busti would have typically been marked by a rite of the Hindu tradition, but today this family has chosen that of Buddhism. Since early morning, the local branch leaders of the Gurungs' ethnic association, the *Tamu Chhoj Dhin* (TCD)<sup>48</sup>, have been preparing the temple, along with several Buddhist monks who have been hired for the day. Unfortunately, the monks are not Gurungs, but these Tamang lamas will have to do until the Gomba Management Committee can afford to sponsor a Gurung lama to live in the village and see after the temple. The temple itself, which doubles as a Gurung 'cultural center', is the pride and joy of the local TCD members. In fact, their grassroots initiative to build the *Guru Pema Choeling Gomba* (est. 2006) has earned the local branch much repute among Gurung communities stretching across the Darjeeling, Sikkim, Kalimpong and beyond.<sup>49</sup> For the Gurungs of the hills, and especially for those of this village, the

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<sup>48</sup> The TCD's registered English name is: The Darjeeling Gurung (Tamu) Welfare Association.

<sup>49</sup> For the temple's inauguration in 2006, thousands descended on the village from Sikkim, Kalimpong, and Darjeeling.

gomba, even in its incomplete construction, is an important symbol of their ethnic revitalization.<sup>50</sup>

Still, the entire setting is somewhat unfamiliar for the family who has gathered on this particular morning. The warmth of the butter lamps, the wafting smoke of juniper, the cadence of the lamas chanting a foreign tongue are all part of a Buddhist religious tradition that until very recently had far less traction in the religious practices of the village. That Anju would be so unsure of the proper Buddhist practice upon entering the new temple thus occurred through no fault of her own. In fact, her uncle who coached her through the routine movements had just perfected them himself minutes earlier. Nevertheless, they were there as a family making a conscious decision to relinquish the Hindu tradition of their past—marked by what they now saw as the snobbish Brahmans with their inscrutable Sanskrit, exploitative fees, and oppressive histories—so as to embrace the questionably ‘original’ religion of the Gurungs, Buddhism.<sup>51</sup> That a departed soul hung in the balance only upped the stakes of their

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<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, I have written about this temple and its relation to ethnic revitalization. See Middleton 2008. A similar sea-change toward Buddhism among Gurungs in Nepal is noted by Ernestine McHugh (2006).

<sup>51</sup> The debate over what is original and/or authentic Gurung culture rages in Nepal as well, where numerous ethnic associations of Gurungs represent different viewpoints. These are in Pokhara, Nepal: *Tamu Dhin Kaski*; *Tamu Chhoj Dhin*; *Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh*; and at the national level: *The Gurung National Council*; *the Nepal Gurung (Tamu) Mahila Sangh* (a women’s association); *the Nepal Gurung Yuva Sangh* (youth association). *The Syarlo Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh* represents Gurungs living in the eastern portions of Nepal. These groups are divided according to the demographics of their constituency (age, region, gender), political leanings, but also very deeply by divergent opinions as to what constitutes ‘original’ Gurung socio-cultural and religious practice. The main cleavage has organized around the place of Hinduism in Gurung socio-cultural practice. In this sense, the Gurungs reflect the growing historiographic consciousness among Nepal’s *janājāti* communities that Hindu was imposed upon them by the central powers Hindu monarchical state. While certain groups have accepted this influence as an indelible part of their contemporary socio-cultural practice and tradition, others have turned against these histories of Hindu ‘oppression’ in order to reconstitute themselves as culturally and politically distinct from the ruling high-caste majority. Studies that have dealt with these histories and their contemporary effects include Levine 1987; Onta 1996; Pfaff-Czarnecka & Gelner *et al* 1997; Whelpton 2005; Hangen 2005, 2007; Tamang 2008.

There has been occasional communication between the Gurungs of Darjeeling and these associations in Nepal (including research delegations sent from Darjeeling and Sikkim and cultural-troops sent from Nepal to India for the purposes of raising cultural awareness), but they have yet to constitute formal and sustained cross-border relations.

conscious decision to choose a new, supposedly old, tradition. Part and parcel of a less than pacific sea change within Gurung communities, they were participating in a movement toward their ‘original’ (*maulik*) culture, their ‘ancient’ (*pauranik*) religion, their ‘pure’ ethnic identity (*suddha janājātiko astitwa.*)

Like their Tamang neighbors, the Gurungs of Bidhuwā Busti and Darjeeling more generally have been enmeshed in an ethnic makeover contemporaneous with their quest for Scheduled Tribe status. Yet unlike the Tamangs whose socio-religious practice was and remains predominantly Buddhist with Hindu traces, Gurung syncretism was of a strong Hindu persuasion. While there have always been Buddhist Gurungs in Bidhuwā Busti, it has only been in the last five to ten years that the Gurungs have shifted in mass to the Buddhist tradition. As the major proponent of Gurung renaissance, the TCD has encouraged this shift, especially since their initial application for ST status was denied on the grounds of too much Hindu assimilation. Gurung efforts at cultural purification have followed a similar trajectory as that of the Tamangs, however they have been exercised with less of a fundamentalist bent. As the TCD president put it, they have instead decided “to simply offer the people the knowledge and let them make their own decisions.” Thus, while Gurung cultural awareness programs have generated ample confusion in the details of socio-cultural practice, the Gurungs of Darjeeling have by and large averted the schisms that have divided the Tamang community.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> This only holds within Darjeeling and Kalimpong. In Sikkim, two factions have emerged within the *Akhil Sikkim Gurung (Tamu) Boddha Sangh* (The All -Sikkim Gurung Buddhist Society) One advocates only Buddhist practice. The other is more accommodating of syncretic and alternative religious practices. The principle issue dividing these factions is the question of Hindu syncretism, with one group insisting on cultural purification and the other accepting of Hinduism’s influence in contemporary Gurung practice. This factionalization has created significant tension within the association, as well as within the Gurung community of Sikkim.

Generally speaking, there is nothing unusual about Anju's and her uncle's interaction. Especially in ritual scenarios, but also in cultural practices more generally, human subjects are constantly analyzing their actions, constantly taking themselves and others as objects of understanding, just as the uncle did of Anju and she, in turn, did of herself. Specifically though, insofar as this moment is fraught with reflexive analytic attention, social pressure, and anxiety, this exchange is emblematic of the social and subjective manifestations of 'found' anthropology in Darjeeling today. Precisely in its otherwise routine qualities it typifies the way the question of ethnic identity is increasingly being experienced in the hills. This rather simple moment therefore poses a challenge for the 'finding' of anthropology in Darjeeling: how to weigh the general human capacities for anthropological knowledge against its specific actualizations in the lifeworlds of the people of Darjeeling? The social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz can help us gain some footing to pursue this question.<sup>53</sup>

Upon entering any temple, practitioners of variations of Tibetan Buddhism (such as the Tamangs and Gurungs) typically prostrate three times before the Buddha. Once the devotee has decided to perform the act, the minutia of the action is fluid and virtually automatic. It is part of what Bourdieu, following Mauss, might deem a religious habitus—an embodied disposition that constantly meanders between the realms of conscious and unconscious action.<sup>54</sup> Yet we see something very different upon Anju's entry into the temple. She wanders in, unaware of what is expected of her. Just over the threshold, in the empty space of the half-finished temple, she is stopped dead in her tracks by her uncle's directive. Put on the spot, and with everyone

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<sup>53</sup> The italicized terms in the following paragraph are technical terms of Schutz's social phenomenology. Many of them are self-explanatory. That said, I have included technical elaborations of each in footnotes. All notes refer to Schutz's *Phenomenology of the Social World*, 1967.

<sup>54</sup> Mauss 1973: 97-104; Bourdieu 1977: 73; 1987: 77, 130-1.

watching, her presence can no longer be *taken for granted*.<sup>55</sup> Caught off-guard and suddenly embarrassed, she is called upon to there and then reflect upon herself and even her most subtle actions.<sup>56</sup> From that moment on, her every movement is analyzed, calculated, hesitant, uncertain. With the prodding of her uncle, she is compelled to conceptualize herself in relation to a hitherto unknown *act*—step by painful step.<sup>57</sup> Never mind that many of her consociates in the temple are equally as unfamiliar with the act of prostration. The social pressure to enact the proper form is palpable. She hesitantly lowers her torso to the floor, performing piecemeal the elemental *actions* of the *act* of prostration. Once her chest touches the concrete floor and she hears the approval of her peers, she realizes the proper form. She is able to synthesize the elemental *actions* as a single *act*. More importantly for her at that moment, it means that she can perform the *act* herself—and quickly! And so, she races through her final two prostrations and sheepishly scurries from the impromptu stage of their attention and her chagrin.

In turning her analytic attention upon herself, Anju performs the enabling move of reflexive knowledge production. Schutz would call this *stepping outside* the

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<sup>55</sup> “The taken-for-granted is always that particular level of experience which presents itself as not in need of further analysis” (74).

<sup>56</sup> Schutz would say that Anju has been ensnared in the “net of reflection”, which he explains as the cognitive practice of stepping outside the stream of consciousness to reflect upon and cognitively objectify action. (45) Working with Husserl’s idea of ‘attentional modification’ (in other words, the stepping-outside-to-reflect-upon), Schutz suggests that “We must therefore distinguish between the pre-empirical being of the lived experience, their being prior to the reflective glance of attention directed toward them and their being as phenomena. Through the attending directing glance of attention, the comprehension, the lived experience acquires a new mode of being. It comes to be ‘differentiated’, ‘thrown into relief’, and this act of differentiation is none other than being comprehended, being the object of the directed glance of attention” (Schutz 1967: 50) Schutz goes on to explain that these moments of differentiation need not be monumental. For in fact it through these ‘transformations of attention’ that experiences are made meaningful. On ‘attentional modification’ see Husserl (1931: 267), discussed in Schutz (69).

<sup>57</sup> The distinction between *action* and *act* is crucial. *Action* refers to the actual phenomenon, the practice, movement, etc. “In contrast to *act*, *action* is subject bound” (39). *Act* on the other hand is the concept of a given kind of *action*. It is action conceptualized, objectified. Projections of *acts* guide *action*. “What distinguishes action from behavior is that action is the execution of the projected act. And we can immediately proceed to our next step: the meaning of any action is its corresponding projected act....An action, we submit, is oriented toward its corresponding projected act” (61).

stream of consciousness.<sup>58</sup> Through this phenomenological movement, the self is then understood in relation to and through conceptualized *acts* (in this case, the proper Buddhist prostration). These discursively construed *acts* are ready-at-hand—that is, available to be brought to bear on experience. As concepts they give experience meaning and direct further action. These are general dynamics of reflexive knowledge production. Framed as such, they do not yet demonstrate the specifics of the ‘age of ethnology’ in Darjeeling. For that, we must query the discursive ensemble and socio-political milieu from whence the *act* of prostration impinges on this social circumstance. That this *act*, the death rite of which it was a part, the temple in which it was held, etc., hung together in a relational web of ‘authentic’ ethnic practice; that these were seen as crucial facets of a return to ethnic roots and purity; that these facets were inexorably linked to governmental systems of recognition; that this day was an emblematic part of an ethnic renaissance sweeping across the hills: it is in these qualities that we can begin to glean the specificity of not just reflexive knowledge, but *ethnological* knowledge—and not just in the world of Man, but in the lives of the people of Darjeeling.

### **Knowledge and its Realizations.**

Whether imposed through the *guṇḍāgari* politics of the DGHC, AITBA’s fog of ethnographic ‘facts’, or the casual social pressure of Anju’s relatives, these ethnological techniques of self have pressed upon the ethnic subject not only particular conceptual forms, but also an accentuated compulsion to take oneself as an object of particular kinds of knowledge—namely those forms of ethnology sanctioned by the state and championed by ethnic associations. However, in crucial ways, the

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<sup>58</sup> On stepping outside: “I who have been living within the social world can also turn my attention to it by stepping outside and transforming it into an object of observation or thought” (157). Schutz later goes on to note the homology between this normal cognitive dynamic and the project of the social sciences more generally (140, 220).

compulsion to step outside one's practice and to rethink oneself and perhaps revalue one's experience of tradition in light of these normative ethno-logics, has been met with mixed response on the ground. Born-again ethnics like Pemba are hallmarks of ethnic revitalization, yet the preeminence of their story belies the complexity and contention of ethnic revitalization and its politics.

For the Tamangs and Gurungs of Bidhuwā Busti alike, their concurrent programs of ethnic revitalization and uplift have dramatically affected their sociality. For instance, since 2003 the Tamang's ST designation has increasingly set them apart from their neighbors such that their inter-ethnic relations are now often marked by competition, resentment, and jealousy. Unbending definitions of 'culture' have sharpened what earlier were much more fluid distinctions between the Tamangs and other communities. Neighbors who once celebrated popular holidays like Dussehra together now refuse to join one another. The logics of ethnic rebirth have rendered their alterity in new, normatively ethnological ways. As ethnic others, they are now held at a discernable social distance at such times. These are the kinds of inter-ethnic dynamics that ethnic revitalization and the quests for 'tribal' recognition have introduced into daily life in Bidhuwā Busti. This is not to say that these movements and the ethno-logics at their core have created difference out of thin air. The Tamangs and Gurungs of Bidhuwā Busti—and indeed groups from across the ethnic spectrum of Darjeeling—have retained awareness of their ethnic distinction through the generations. However, the recent programs of ethnic revitalization and 'tribal' recognition have significantly reworked how those distinctions are known and lived. The issues to be considered here concerns not so much the existence of ethnic difference per se, but rather the nature of that difference and the degree to which normative ethno-logics transform modes of social differentiation for everyday

subjects. Currently, these are questions still being worked out in the inter-ethnic spaces of life in Darjeeling.

Meanwhile, the imperatives of cultural singularity and purity have created rifts *within* ethnic communities where bitter disputes over what constitutes ethnic culture have sent schisms racing through the social fabric. The strident agendas of ethnic associations have pushed many of Bidhuwā Busti's residents away from becoming members. What is more, the logics that these bodies disseminate into the village have created confusions, disagreement, and tensions within the Gurung and Tamang communities of Bidhuwā Busti. Cultural practices—be it the observation of certain holidays or one's dress—have become a signal of individuals' and families' ascription to the logics of ethnic revitalization—and to the given ethnic association in particular. On Diwali, homes that used to glow through the night now go dark. Even families have been torn apart by divergent ethnological persuasions. Here the politics of culture play out in the most socially intimate of spaces.

On the register of subjectivity too, the effects have been mixed. For some, these ethnological makeovers have enabled a cherished understanding and refashioning of the ethnic self. For others though, the pressure to constantly analyze oneself through socio-politically loaded categories, concepts, and rationales has engendered a massive complex bordering on cultural neurosis. Some have openly resisted such ethnological agendas. Others seem to suffer a form of cultural paralysis-through-analysis. Still others have learned to cope by simply subscribing to the 'proper' forms in public, while retaining their lived traditions in their private lives. Whatever the case, what is increasingly clear for everyone is that particular domains of socio-cultural practice simply can no longer be *taken for granted*.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> These domains of concern will look familiar to anyone familiar with the history of anthropology: ritual, dress, religion, dance, music, festivals, marriage practice, funerary rites, etc.

This is not to presuppose that the people of Darjeeling were at some earlier point in their history not inimically concerned about their cultural practice. Such a view would belie the contested nature of culture. (Moreover, the archive shows various identity claims being made by the people of Darjeeling on grounds of shared language, custom, etc, since the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.) Rather, what distinguishes the contemporary ‘age of ethnology’ in Darjeeling is the *degree*, *compulsion*, and *styles* of self-awareness that shape life in the hills. That particular aspects of socio-cultural practice have become hyper-reflexive can be divorced neither from the exigencies of recognition in India, nor from the articulations of ethnic rebirth at the most local of levels.

These dynamics of ‘found’ anthropology have spurred a marked shift in the experiential balance of embodied versus representational knowledge. In the logics of ethnic renaissance, being an ethnic subject is less about embodied know-how and more about orienting oneself in relation to discursive renderings of proper ethnic practice—the logic being that anthropological knowledge provides the conceptual wherewithal for people to become ‘authentic’, practicing ethnic subjects. The anthropology of the ethnic self has thus become largely a prescriptive enterprise. In the classic Geertzian terms, it is not so much a ‘model of’, but rather a ‘model for’ socio-cultural practice.<sup>60</sup> This curious referential logic gives rise to equally curious social and subjective dynamics—not unlike those of Pemba, Anju, and others. For the study of knowledge, it also raises important questions about the very nature of knowledge and what exactly we are trying to study when we take ‘knowledge’ as an object of research.

There are, of course, long-running debates within the discipline of philosophy about what exactly knowledge *is* and how to define it. Rehashing these debates is not

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<sup>60</sup> Geertz 1973: 93.

needed. However, if we return to Anju's awkward prostration, we can glean some of these different philosophical construals at play in her rather embarrassing moment in the gomba. Through Kantian lenses, the proper act of Buddhist prostration may be viewed as a facet of what may be called an *epistemological* construal of knowledge.<sup>61</sup> The conceptual form of the act is projected onto Anju's bodily action. Knowledge here consists of an ensemble of epistemic forms operating at an ontological removal from its object (what Kant would call *the-thing-itself*). Critics of the epistemological construal (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and Charles Taylor to name several), argue that knowledge is first and foremost about bodily engagement or embodied know-how.<sup>62</sup> Through this view, we see that Anju does not yet have the

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<sup>61</sup> My use of 'epistemological' here follows Charles Taylor's use of the term, whereby 'epistemological' refers to the general model of knowledge advanced by the 'epistemological' tradition of Kant, Descartes, Locke, and others. Taylor sums up this construal of knowledge as that in which "knowledge is to be seen as correct representation of an independent reality." 1995: 3.

<sup>62</sup> As a philosophical question, knowledge has been variously construed. For Aristotle, coming to understand an object involved sharing something of its essence. The object gave forth its understanding; knowledge was born out of the union between the subject and object. Charles Taylor has called this Aristotelian construal 'participatory knowledge'. With Kant we find a different view. Kant's epistemological construal focused attention on the cognitive processes through which objective knowledge of the world could be possible at all. For Kant the thing-in-itself was not knowable, except through our own cognitive faculties. These faculties thus became the subject of his decidedly epistemological engagement with the question of knowledge. Kant thus jettisoned the ontological question of the 'world out there', and offered instead a critique of the human ability to formulate (accurate) judgments of it. Unlike Aristotle's participatory knowledge, Kant posited knowledge at a remove from the world; it pointed to/represented something 'out there'; it bore intentionality; it was representational knowledge. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the epistemological construal of knowledge would undergo numerous attacks under the auspices of thinkers like Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and others. Heidegger would reinsert the ontological question as necessarily prior to the epistemological one—that is, the question of how there *is* a subject to know must precede the question of how that subject knows. Whether or not this truly undermines the epistemological construal is irrelevant for our concerns. Where the critique of epistemology becomes relevant though is in how it demarcates knowledge.

For Taylor (following Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty), knowledge is embodied. It is bodily know-how. (Taylor 1995) Take the example of riding a bicycle: we know how to ride a bicycle through an embodied knowledge of riding a bike. Once bike riding has been bodily experienced, we 'know' how to do it—(thus the phrase "It's like riding a bike"). When riding, we are not consciously thinking, 'I am balancing', 'I am braking', 'I am turning left', etc. We instead are oriented within the riding process itself, and thus that orientation precedes any reflective Kantian moment that might arise in traffic (i.e. 'If I lean left, the bike will go left. I am turning left,' etc). For Taylor, knowledge is the way of riding the bicycle, not merely the reflexive mental representations of that practice which we formulate when we conceptualize ourselves as riding the bicycle (which would be an epistemological construal of knowledge).

bodily know-how to perform the requisite acts of ‘authentic’ Gurung ethnic practice. In the logic of her uncle’s intervention—and indeed, in the logic of ethnic revitalization throughout the hills—knowledge in its purely *conceptual* form (ala Kant) was to be the conduit for knowledge in its *embodied* form. The anthropologically recovered *act* was to provide the template for newly reformed ethnic practice. Anju’s prostration, like the greater funerary rite of which it was a part, was thus, in principal, conceptually construed. In no way did it emerge out of embodied socio-cultural know-how or tradition.

This tension between what Taylor would call *embodied* and *epistemological* knowledges—or what elsewhere may appear as the tension between *empirical* and *conceptual* forms—remains a lynchpin of ethnic revitalization in Darjeeling. Chapters III and IV discuss how these tensions play out in the dynamics of ‘tribal’ recognition specifically. In the phenomenologies of Pemba and Anju though, we see the experiential ramifications of these tensions. At once emblematic and specific, the accounts of Pemba and Anju signal the often-fraught ways in which subjects in Darjeeling are finding relation to the normative—and decidedly ethnological—forms of ‘community’ available to them in postcolonial India. These phenomenological analyses are not intended as ways of knowing fully the subjective interiority of the other; instead, they aim to chart a phenomenological terrain within which we can conceptualize the encounters, conflicts, appropriations, and negotiations of particular interpretive schemes with one another. From this phenomenological terrain, we may then begin to see how these knowledges are affecting people’s practices, as well as their experiences of themselves and their worlds.

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In my discussion of ethnic renaissance, I have referred to this distinction as embodied knowledge (embodied know-how) versus representational/epistemological/discursive knowledge. Charles Taylor’s “Overcoming Epistemology” (1995) provides a helpful synopsis of these philosophical debates over what is knowledge. Taylor’s “To Follow A Rule” also in *Philosophical Arguments* (1995) provides a clear depiction of bodily know-how versus representational knowledge.

Pemba and Anju's respective troubles and successes in finding themselves in these schemas of ethnic rebirth bespeak the lived complexity and contingency of real subjects—human beings who sometimes do, and sometime do not, inhabit the ideal-types of the 'backward', 'primitive', 'culturally distinct' 'tribal'; or the practiced, 'authentic', or even recognizable, ethnic subject. Their stories put pressing questions to this study of anthropological knowledge, political society, and the 'identities' that emerge out of their entanglement: How do normative paradigms of 'community' (especially those sanctioned by the state) impress upon the lives of citizens? Through what techniques are the tensions between these forms of 'pure' ethnological reason and the empirical complexities of socio-cultural life mediated? Who mediates? Who is mediated? And what roles do the dynamics of Indian political society play in shaping the limits and possibilities of the contemporary ethnic subject?

Through these glimpses of ethnological knowledge at work in the lives of the people of Darjeeling, I have tried to offer partial answers to these provocative questions. And yet, examining the question of identity through the optic of 'found' anthropology leaves profound questions unanswered: How does it *feel* to be a born-again ethnic? What might it feel like for someone like Pemba to find himself in these knowledges of the ethnic self—to realize rights, recognition, and a sense of belonging through these discursive forms? And conversely, what degrees of misrepresentation, alienation, and disavowal do such forms of ethnological distinction bestow upon their subjects? Such questions push the study of 'found' anthropology beyond the pale of representational knowledge. They ask how anthropological knowledge can affect people's senses of belonging and their very ways of being-in-the-world.

### **In Lieu of a Conclusion, Fanon.**

Knowledge and Belonging? This is a question taken up with considerable force by Franz Fanon in his celebrated critique of the 'Fact of Blackness'.<sup>63</sup> In lieu of a conclusion, it is worth considering an extended passage of this riveting account. Note in particular the traces of affect that inflect Fanon's narrative of his own objectification:

“‘Dirty Nigger!’ Or simply, ‘Look a Negro!’

I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning to things, my spirit filled with desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.

Sealed into that crushing objecthood, I turned beseechingly to others...

I thought that what I had in hand was to construct a physiological self, to balance space, to localize sensations, and here I was called on for more.

‘Look a Negro!’ It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.

‘Look, a Negro!’ It was true. It amused me.

‘Look a Negro!’ The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.

‘Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened’ Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.

I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends, stories, history and above all else historicity...It was not that I was finding febrile coordinates in the world. I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other...and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nuasea...

On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object.... But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men. I wanted to come lithe and young into a world that was ours and help build it together.”

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<sup>63</sup> Chapter V of *Black Skin/White Masks* (1967).

Yet for Fanon, that possibility was qualified by racialized classificatory systems. Explicating that qualification, here Fanon directs our attention to the impress of classificatory systems upon the subject. He does so with palpable attention to these knowledge systems' affective and 'psychoexistential' ramifications.<sup>64</sup>

For Fanon, it is the social dynamic of recognition—the “Look a Negro!” moment—that engenders his angst. At once he recognizes himself as the object of the statement, yet this recognition is simultaneously a betrayal of his self—an over-determined reflection, a misrecognition—that then initiates his subjective search for self through a hall of distorted mirrors. It is through this Hegelian moment of double recognition<sup>65</sup>—when the little girl recognizes Fanon as ‘the Negro’, and he recognizes himself in her epithet—that Fanon experiences the affective weight of what it *means* to be a black man. This compounded objectification, this “unwanted revision and thematization”, renders him nauseas and alienated from his self. His potentiality to *be* a “man among other men” suffers an ontological disavowal. It is precisely the psychoexistential disjunctures between his subjectivity and this racialized schema of meaning—or to put it another way, the disjuncture between his felt potentiality and the social conditions of his subjectification—that engenders the turmoil of unhomeliness and unbelonging for Fanon—and by extension, for the ‘black man’ in postcolonial society more generally.<sup>66</sup>

Fanon was specifically concerned the experiential dynamics of racial classificatory logics. However, his thoughts on the distortions that colonial misrepresentations impose upon the subject bear strongly upon current identity politics

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<sup>64</sup> Fanon variably referred to the orientation of his work as ‘psychoexistential’ or ‘psychopathological’ (1967).

<sup>65</sup> Throughout *Black Skin/White Masks*, Fanon references Hegel’s ‘master-slave dialectic’. The most extensive treatment comes in Chapter VII: “The Negro and Recognition, specifically in Section B. The Negro and Hegel” (216-222). On the ‘master-slave dialectic’ see Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “Lordship and Bondage” (1977: 111-119).

<sup>66</sup> ‘Turmoil of unhomeliness and unbelonging’ phrasing borrowed from Gunew’s reading of Fanon (2004: 99)

in Darjeeling. As I will outline in Chapter III, many of the anthropological paradigms that have come to structure ethnic revitalization emerged out of colonial systems of recognition and governance. Having become constitutive of the postcolonial state's policies of positive discrimination, these forms of knowledge today constitute a platform for much needed rights, recognition, and political justice. While appreciating that promise, Fanon asks us to consider also how such classificatory rubrics condition and limit the possibilities of the subject. Along these lines, we may question if and how schemas of recognition over-determine the terms and conditions of identification—at once dictating the avenues to socio-political becoming, while simultaneously devaluing and/or stymieing other ways of socio-cultural being. Though a notably different approach than the psycho-existentialism of Fanon, ethnography can generate unique insights into intended and unintended effects (and affects) that systems of classification level upon individuals and communities. Ultimately, venturing these considerations means probing further the shadows of postcolonial political society and modern identity formation.<sup>67</sup>

In taking up this Fanonian concern for postcolonial systems of recognition, it is worth pausing to ask whether this issue of phenomenological distortion is, in fact, inherent to discursive identification more generally. In expressing something as intimate as 'identity', is the moment of semiotic capture not inherently partial, unstable, and incomplete? Do the experiences of Fanon and the people of Darjeeling not at least partially affirm Marx's point that objectification itself is a practice of alienation?<sup>68</sup> Can that illustrious moment of recognition of the self-in-the-knowledge form ever surpass the representational verity of the uncanny? If not, then what may be said about the similitudes of knowledge and belonging? Thinking more pragmatically:

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<sup>67</sup> Chatterjee sees the 'dark side' of political society as marred by violence and crime. Here, my interest in the shadows and shadow-effects of political society concentrates on more subtle dynamics.

<sup>68</sup> From "*On the Jewish Question*" (1843/1978: 52).

how might an attention to these issues restructure social scientists' ability to simultaneously honor and critique the phenomenological incoherencies of 'identity' and the dead certain ways they are redressed in the world?<sup>69</sup>

There is no denying that Fanon's *politics* raise the specter of violence. Yet in his *analytics* we find the traces of a more humanistic approach to the question of identity. Fanon uses phenomenological insight to direct our attention to the affective (im)possibilities of belonging to and within knowledge forms. His project to "liberate the black man from himself", to recuperate him from his "zone of non-being", asks us to fathom a subject with interiorities beyond the immediate pale of discourse, and to subsequently consider not only what it *means* but also how it *feels* to become at once a subject and object of anthropological judgment. The question he raises for the anthropology of identity—and especially for this thesis—then is nothing less than the question of *(the) being within the subject*.

By reprising the conjoined issues of epistemology and ontology, Fanon returns us to the question of knowledge. While certain champions of ethnic renaissance in Darjeeling preach a rather Aristotelian notion of knowledge through which ethnological techniques of the self are practiced as way of revealing the hidden essence of a people, my findings cannot corroborate such a construal. Against the Aristotelian ideal of an essential union between the thing-in-itself and the knowledge of it, the self-contradictions of Pemba, the hesitancy of Anju, and the cultural confusions of the Darjeeling populace writ large suggest this relation between the

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<sup>69</sup>This project joins the work of Paul Gilroy in harboring an empirically-based skepticism towards the more orthodox forms of identity that have taken root in the modern era. Gilroy's notion of a 'postanthropological humanism' is extremely provocative. However, as I will discuss in the conclusion of this dissertation, the issue is less getting past anthropological/ethnological construals of identity (i.e. postanthropological), and more shifting the kinds of anthropology that render identity. My optimism stems from anthropology's potential to recognize emergent and alternative forms of community, solidarity, and belonging that could become constitutive of a more humanist future. See Gilroy's *Against Race* (2000), especially his seminal chapter on "Belonging, Identity, and the Critique of Pure-Sameness".

subject and his/her anthropological representation is rather one haunted by ontological disjuncture, socio-political power, and varying degrees of (un)homeliness.

Evoking Fanon, it is thus through my own humanistic concerns for people's ways of being-in-the-world that I focus on the relations of subjects to their anthropological depiction. This study of knowledge is necessarily shaped by a Kantian construal of knowledge, which posits a fundamental ontological distinction between knowledge-as-representational-form and that which is known. Such a model does not obviate the importance of embodied ways of being-in-the-world. Quite clearly, neither does it deny the way knowledge can transform its object.<sup>70</sup> To the contrary, I believe that it is precisely through an attention to practices of representational knowledge that we can begin to understand the impact of anthropological knowledge on the past, present, and future ways-of-being an ethnic subject. Balancing our engagement with the discursive facets of knowledge with a complementary attention to the affective dimensions of social life, the ontological distance between knowledge and the thing-in-itself comes into view as a site of social and subjective potentiality where we find both the penetration and limits of knowledge-power in effecting—and affecting—the contemporary ethnic subject. Maintaining this space we are able to weigh the social, political, and subjective consequences of epistemic forms, while simultaneously preserving a space for the acknowledgment of alternative forms of embodied knowledge and/or belonging. Posing the question of 'found' anthropology in all walks, but not all ways of life, opens up the possibility of an ethnographic critique of 'pure' identity, the findings of which can empirically check the hubris and veracity of 'identity's' perennial claim in the world today. It holds open a space for the telling of the stories of those who lack the technical armatures of the anthropologically construed ethnic subject, and a space from which to inquire into how their ways of

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<sup>70</sup> This is a point made with great acumen by Timothy Mitchell in his work on cartographic knowledge production in Egypt. Mitchell 2002. I engage with Mitchell more fully in Chapter III.

being are faring in this 'age of ethnology'. Thinking ahead, these findings ask us to critically consider how the criteria and politics of recognition today are prefiguring the belongings of tomorrow. More than that, they invite us to ponder what role anthropology (however construed) might play in charting the future possibilities and politics of belonging.

## CHAPTER II.

### **Anxious Belongings: Affect and History in the Darjeeling Hills.**

Hours after dark, I find the village *samaj* president, squatting on his haunches over a small fire, seething with anger at the anthropologist in his midst. His shifty eyes cast me a sideways glance as I approach, then turn with sudden revulsion back to the fire. In his hands is a dead chicken. There are feathers everywhere. Some stick to his calloused fingers plucking at the bird, others float seemingly suspended in the tense air between us. Even as I squat down beside him, he refuses to look at me. I remain quiet, watching as the flames ribbon over the deep lines in his face and graze his wild head of hair, before leaping into the night. He appears to be trembling.

“Sir,” I say humbly, “I heard you came to my house this afternoon looking for me.”

He shoots a look of disgust into the fire, sucks through his teeth and responds gruffly, “No.”

He works the bird with redoubled vehemence. Turning its limp body over in his hands, its charred head hangs flaccidly above the flames, burning black. I try again. “But sir, my landlord told me you came.”

Another look of disgust. “No, I didn’t come!” he snaps back, now shaking, still staring into the fire.

This is, of course, a lie, yet in his ire he cares not whether we both know it to be so. To admit even this much, would be to acknowledge me, would be to establish the grounds for communication, and that for him, at this moment, is far too much.

But I am going nowhere. I will wait him out. His efforts to dismiss me—his refusal to make eye contact, his expressions of contempt, his lies—are futile. My words, demeanor, and action, my very presence, beg him to come off his anger, to

engage me as something other than the object of his wrath, to explain to me what I had done to so upset him. For, I still do not know. So I wait...

As he plumes the last feathers, I engage him once again, "I heard there was some problem with my survey...?"

And at that he begins to speak. "What is this survey?... You come here and ask these questions: When did your family migrate from Nepal? Why did they come? How long have they lived in this village?" Suddenly, his upwelling anger cuts off his speech.

"No, no, no...let's talk about this. I didn't mean to upset anybody. Why are you so upset?"

"I am the president. This is the samaj of the village [the village association]. If you want to ask questions about the village this is fine, but these questions of 'When did you come? Why did you come?': I am the president of the samaj....If you want to ask these questions, you can't!"

Suddenly, it all starts to make sense to me. "Please forgive me. I did not know, but now I understand that I should have cleared this survey with you. You are the samaj president and I should have worked through you."

"Oh, yes...that is right, you should have...but this business of 'When did you come to Darjeeling? From where in Nepal?' You can't ask these questions." His temper resurging, his tenor again becomes aggressive. I seem to be losing ground to his anger. He goes on, scoffing with sarcasm "Why did you come from Nepal? For how many generations have you lived here?"

'Enough!' I tell myself; I won't give anymore ground.

"Wait!" I say assertively, "What's the problem? Listen, you and I both know, we all know: the people here, their ancestors came from Nepal."

His roughshod antagonism suddenly checked, he is taken aback. He begins shaking his head back and forth begrudgingly before conceding. “Ok, Ok....We know, we know that but...you can’t ask these questions...That would be proof, you see, if we put our signature here..... [inscribing his signature on his hand like it was paper]...That would be proof!”

And at that—the slightest explanation of his anger—the tension dissipates, and the interaction warms. At one point I even get him to crack a modest smile. But this is not the time to hash out these matters in full, so we agree to a meeting the next morning with the samaj council. For me it promises to be a tribunal of sorts with the leaders of the village, but as I stand up from the fire to leave, it is not dread I feel, but relief—relief to have connected with him through his anger, relief to have an inkling of an idea of the crisis I had caused.

As we part, I reach out and place my hand on his shoulder assuring him, “Don’t worry, tomorrow morning we will talk with everyone and work this all out.”

He nods in affirmation and I leave...with much to understand.

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Village darkness can feel especially dark when one is alone and in trouble. On the clock and with the imperatives of apology pressing upon me, I began a frenetic search for understanding. Moving about the village long after gates had been latched and doors locked, I was able to reconstruct piece by piece what had happened earlier in the day to spark the crisis I now faced. The sequence of events I was able to string together seemed like a rather inadequate back-story to the sheer intensity I had just encountered, but nevertheless this much was certain:

In the morning, on my way up to town, I had met a freshly graduated 19 year-old who I was enlisting to help me administer a simple survey of the village. The survey itself consisted of a two-page questionnaire on basic demographic information

along with several seemingly innocuous questions on family history.<sup>1</sup> Having lived in the village for seven months, I assumed it would be a simple project. I left the forms with my newly hired assistant, and told him to wait further instruction. Apparently, he did not. Unbeknownst to me, my eager assistant had set straight to work, handing the survey out to 39 houses without incident. It was only when he reached the president's home that things went awry. The president, a man with a reputation for being a prickly leader, saw something alarming, and immediately put out a gag order, which quickly spread across the village, banning any response to the questionnaire and eliciting distress along the way. This was all I knew as I laid my head down that night.

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Minutes before my tribunal the next morning, I am pacing nervously near the village temple when I run into several neighbors. Perhaps it is my own paranoia, but they seem aloof. Among them is my friend Deepak, who works for an insurance company in town and is thus among the more affluent people of the village. Fortunately, he also serves on the samaj council. I cut straight to the chase: "Deepak, what happened?"

"You see," he says in a soothing tone, "Its all fine, there is just that one question that is a problem."

"Which one?" I ask, pulling the form from my bag.

Scrolling down the questions with his finger, "This one: How many generations ago did your family migrate from Nepal? You see this is the one that caused the trouble. You see the people around here are scared. They are scared what

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<sup>1</sup> The particularly problematic questions were: On household ownership: In what year did you acquire this property? From whom did you acquire this property? On family history: For how many generations has your family lived in Bidhuwā Busti? Where did your family live before coming to Bidhuwā Busti? Which year did your family arrive in Bidhuwā Busti? How many generations ago did your family migrate to Darjeeling from Nepal? From where in Nepal did they migrate? Why did they migrate to Darjeeling? Estimated year of migration from Nepal?

will happen to this information. If we put our signature on this here, then people are scared it will be proof, and if the government gets it, they will send us back to Nepal.”

“No! That’s impossible!”

“You see Towns, this is a political thing. We had the Gorkhaland Agitation where we tried for our own state. The people of India think we are foreigners. Now we have the Sixth Schedule. So there is history there. There is a lot of discrimination from the people of the plains. They think we [i.e. the general Nepali-speaking populace of Darjeeling] are foreigners...If we give this information, it will be proof that we came from Nepal.”

“But Deepak, everyone’s ancestors came from Nepal, right?”

“Yes, but we can’t say that. People think we are foreigners. Like you know the situation with the Bhutanese refugees that got sent back to Nepal. If the Ministry of External Affairs somehow gets hold of this form and it has all of our information: where we came from, when we came.... People think they could send us back.” He breaks off to check his watch. Its 10:15. We’re late.

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The meeting commenced with far less intensity and confrontation than the night before. The hours I had spent preparing my case and honing my apology served me well. I was clearly guilty on two counts: first, for circumventing the samaj’s leadership; and second, for violating a people’s sensitivities. The latter was clearly the more grave, more vague offense. I therefore began the meeting with an earnest and longwinded apology. Having heard my side of the story, the council members were quick to reciprocate in likewise apologies for their overreaction to what was now clearly an honest, yet insensitive, mistake. My remorse and embarrassment I wore on my sleeve; theirs were more inflected. With the situation diffused and an awkward shame lingering among us, conversation happily shifted to more mundane matters.

More so than the change of topics, this shift of communicative registers from that of grassroots jurisprudence to that of friendly neighbors was the most reassuring. It was a closed case, like we all wanted it to be. But my understanding could never be the same, not after that night. In that moment of raw inter-subjective intensity, a window was opened into a depth of historical being that could in no way be jettisoned from the ethnographic present, but which remained steadfastly opaque, even haunting.

### **History and Affect.**

As Deepak so succinctly pointed out during those anxious minutes before the meeting, the question of the Gorkha people's place in India remains a "political thing" with a real—and at times, frighteningly present—history. His breathless mention of the Gorkha National Liberation Front agitation of the 1980s, the pending Sixth Schedule bid for Darjeeling which would be the "full and final settlement" to the question of ethnic-based sovereignty in the hills, the prejudice Nepali-Indians face as 'foreigners', and the spectral threat of extradition back to Nepal despite generations of inhabitation in India index key facets of the historical being of the peoples of Darjeeling. That he would link these touchstones with such ease and eloquence—even as anxiety reverberated all around us—suggests that his spur-of-the-moment answer was anything but spontaneously constructed. Indeed, the explanation Deepak articulated to me in his soothing tone was a narrative ready-at-hand for a people ill at ease in a nation where they were not yet securely home. Spoken just moments before I was to engage these historical sensibilities head-on, Deepak's back-story to a back-story could not have come at a better time.

Having focused my research on the knowledge practices through which the peoples of Darjeeling were staking an ethnic claim in India, I was keenly aware of much of what Deepak referenced in his explanation. The recent, violent history of the

1980s agitation, in which villages were burned and bodies dismembered, all in the name of the Gorkha ethnicity<sup>2</sup>; the sustained prejudices and paradigmatic stereotyping of ‘hill-people’ versus ‘plains-people’; the ongoing efforts to bring ‘tribal’ recognition to the populations of Darjeeling: all of these had proven fertile sites for the study of ‘found’ anthropology. And yet now, in the crucible of anxiety, the grounds of understanding had suddenly morphed, making the limits of my own knowledge (along with the methodologies and epistemologies underpinning it) painfully clear. Beyond knowledge and politics, the perennial question of identity was now revealing itself to be always also something more.

This chapter attempts to identify and understand the profound sense of unease that haunts the people of Darjeeling with regard to belonging in India.<sup>3</sup> It is not, however, a study of belonging; rather it is a study of the anxieties of non-belonging. These anxieties have fueled the various quests for ethnic rebirth and ‘tribal’ recognition featured elsewhere in this dissertation. Pervasive anxieties over belonging—and by extension, ‘identity’—lie at the root of these groups’ recent anthropological self-concern. Here though, I shift attention from questions of knowledge to questions of belonging in an effort to understand the anxieties that have prompted and animated this ‘age of ethnology’. The question of anxious belonging here emerges as a crucial counter-attention to this study’s overarching focus on ‘found’ anthropology.

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<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that at least 1164 private homes were destroyed during the GNLF movement (1986-1988). Estimated deaths totaled 297. Samanta 2000: 54.

<sup>3</sup> The issue of belonging in Darjeeling has been raised in two recent papers by Thapa and Dhakal in a recent edited volume *Indian Nepalis* (2009). Both Thapa’s and Dhakal’s analyses are somewhat provisional, but raise the important issue of the longstanding desire amongst the people of Darjeeling to belong within the Indian nation-state. Hutt has also made brief mention in his work on the Nepali diaspora that, “The deep-seated sense of insecurity felt by Indian and Bhutanese Nepalis is not well understood, but is an important factor in the political and ethnic turmoil of the regions they inhabit,” (1997: 119). In light of Hutt’s point, my analysis concentrates greater attention on the affective dimensions of non-belonging and its complex historical conditions in Darjeeling.

To understand the anxieties of non-belonging that haunt the people of Darjeeling, one must venture a critical consideration of affect and history in the hills. From the outset it is important to recognize that the quandaries of knowing affect are daunting even for most phenomenologically attuned ethnographies. Affect and history is thus a particularly odd coupling of attentions, fraught with further epistemological impasses and challenges. Nevertheless, as I intend to show, history and affect are inseparable, thereby making historiography integral to the study of affect, and vice versa.

To recognize the nature of anxious belonging in Darjeeling, we need a lucid conception of affect. This requires cutting through an often-confusing scholastic din over the idea of affect to get clear on what we mean by the term. For reasons that will become clear in the pages to come, I believe affect is best known through its conjuring. Consequently, I choose not to define affect from the outset. Instead, I aim to conjure it through a particular selection and arrangement of materials. Each fragment presented here, I will maintain, is pregnant with affect, but, as will become clear, the forms of its actualization differ in each instance. This divergence helps us understand and incorporate the mercurial nature of affect into our conceptualization of it. As its resolution sharpens, the concept will, in turn, afford a unique understanding of the affective underpinnings of ethnological self-concern in Darjeeling. Through this approach, I hope to bring us to a place where we can both sense and understand anxious belonging in Darjeeling as a phenomenon of affect properly conceived.

In a moment by a fire with a man so angry that he could hardly look at me, much less speak to me, on account of the ire coursing through his body, I most strongly understood the depth and power of the anxiety in question. Surely though, it had been there all along, moving in the shadows of my recognition. In the months following that night, I would see it again and again, in intense flare-ups and

more subtle intonations. Tacking back and forth between archival and ethnographic work, I began to recognize more and more of that night in history, and more and more of history in that night. Particular events from within the historical record began to resonate in new, yet eerily familiar ways with my experiences of the contemporary. Several episodes in the 1850s and 1860s in particular bear an uncanny resemblance to the alarm I sparked in the winter of 2007. It is worth then turning to the early years of these populations in Darjeeling, when seemingly similar crises and anxieties shaped life in the hills.

### **Rumors and the White Elephant of Jung Bahadoor Rana.**

In October 1864, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, one H.C. Blake, sent the following letter to the Political Department of Bengal:

“To the Secretary:

I have the honor to inform you that considerable excitement exists among the Nepalese laborers and Emigrants in this settlement in consequence of Jung Bahadoor [Rana’s, the prime minister of Nepal] approaching visit to our Terai. Reports have been sent in by the Police to the effect that he is building and repairing the Forts on our Frontier and that his brother is in the neighborhood with 1900 men.

2. I have explained that Jung Bahadoor is on a shooting expedition and will probably enter our Terai with the permission of Government.

3. *The coolies and others are reported to be selling their property at a loss and leaving in large numbers.* For this, two reasons are given: one that there will be war in this District in the cold weather, and the other that I have recently given up to the Nepalese Government two subjects of that government on its requisition.

4. *Many of the Nepalese Laborers and settlers are refugees, and I have no doubt that they fear that Jung Bahadoor’s visit is made with a view to obtaining the extradition of such persons.*

5. I have now sent a trustworthy Nepalese Police Office to all the places where these reports prevail with instructions thoroughly to explain matters and quiet the people.

6. I may here mention that the fact of Jung Bahadoor being about to enter our territory was only accidentally communicated to me on my mentioning these reports, and that it would be well in the future that such information should be officially communicated to me in good time, or occasions may arise in which I may be puzzled to act.”<sup>4</sup> [emph. added]

With regard to the anxiety of the laborers, the record trails off. However, files in Delhi explain that the notorious Prime Minister had his sights set on a fabled white elephant rumored to be foraging in the Darjeeling foothills.<sup>5</sup> Jung Bahadoor made almost yearly forays into Indian territory in quest of game, and he seldom traveled light.<sup>6</sup> On this particular trip his entourage was reported to include 600 cavalry, 7 regiments of infantry, 700 elephants, two guns, and just for good measure, two Europeans.<sup>7</sup> That the coolie populations of Darjeeling would notice such a force is thus no surprise. What is intriguing is the response it triggered. *Why* were coolies selling their property at a loss and fleeing?

Ever since the 1830’s, when the British began developing Darjeeling as a sanatorium, and later as a tea-growing district, colonial administrators tacitly encouraged the immigration of labor from Nepal.<sup>8</sup> Feudal conditions in Nepal and wage labor in India created apt push-pull factors, and soon thousands of sought after ‘sturdy hillmen’ were pouring across the border.<sup>9</sup> Given the proximity and the

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<sup>4</sup> Bengal, Political, Political Proc 27-28 Nov 1864. [emph. mine].

<sup>5</sup> India, Foreign, July 1864 132-133 Political A; India, Foreign Nov 1864, 152-154 Political A.

<sup>6</sup> India, Foreign, 2 Mar 1860 243-255 FC; India, Foreign July 1864 132-133 Political A.

<sup>7</sup> India, Foreign, Dec 1864, 206-8 Political A.

<sup>8</sup> India, Foreign, Aug 1837 139-140; India, Foreign, 28 June 1841 135-6 FC.

<sup>9</sup> The British were well aware of the dire conditions in Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim, and recognized that these ‘push factors’ could work in their favor. In fact, the British even used the moral card of slavery as a means to justify their tacit immigration policies. The Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, A. Campbell, writes (1841) “As the Darjeeling tract was on its cession to us almost uninhabited we could only look for accession to its hill people to immigration from the surrounding state of Sikkim and the neighboring countries of Bhootan and Nipaul. In all of these states hereditary slavery exists to a great extent and the purchase and sale of human beings is being daily practiced... Under this state of things it will readily appear to the Governor General in Council that almost all the hill people who have settled at Darjeeling are by usage of our neighbors claimable from us. It will also be evident that in admitting the propriety of such claims, the British government would in many cases be directly countenancing slavery, and in such cases as the one in hand, it would be unjustly interfering with the right that all men should have in peace and good faith.” India, Foreign 28 June 1841 135-6 FC.

anthropological types that flowed in, Nepal was, for the British, an ideal and decidedly *ethno-logical* labor pool. But there was a problem; the Nepali Durbar did not approve.<sup>10</sup>

Thus while the planters relegated the dirty work of moving bodies across borders to informal *sardāri* labor recruiters, the entire system operated in a realm of quasi-legality, which obviated the possibility of formal papers, acknowledgment, or bona fides of any sort. To this day, many Gorkhas (including those in the village where I lived) still lack proper papers. (This is precisely why they reacted so strongly to one of my survey questions about household ownership.) From the outset then, this history of migration was a history that could not officially exist. This explains *why* the archive remains relatively silent on the laboring peoples of Darjeeling.<sup>11</sup> Any traces of this history, any residues of quasi-legality, by juridical rule would have to be rendered on a different register.

The panic surrounding Jung Bahadur's hunting trip was not unprecedented. Similar outbreaks of anxiety flashed across the hills throughout the earlier decade of the 1850s as well. Typically triggered by Nepali military maneuvers near the border,

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Explaining the increasing in-migration in the 1850s, A. Campbell opines in 1855, "A further influx is expected... The immediate cause of this continued migration is, as formerly reported, the excessive demand made on the people for *begaree* or uncompensated labor," which Campbell goes on to explain was mainly done at the behest of the state. India, Foreign, 27 April 1855 63 FC. On forced labor regimes in Nepal, see Holmberg & March. 1999. For additional information on the 'push-pull' factors driving the 19<sup>th</sup> century migration from Nepal to Darjeeling, see Hutt 1998, 1997: 109-113; Pradhan 1991; Samanta 2000: 20-22; Sinha & Subba *et al* 2003: 14-17.

<sup>10</sup> A. Campbell (1858) reports of "bad feelings on the part of the Nipal Durbar towards the British government", and of a rumor circulating through the labor populations of orders by Jung Bahadoor Rana to return to Nepal immediately. Campbell notes, "With these orders of the Nipal Durbar it is clear that the orders are directed against the increase of our own laborers," India, Foreign, 31 Dec 1858 2522-6 FC.

<sup>11</sup> In comparison to other tea growing districts of India such as Assam, Cachar, and Sylhet, there is a great paucity of archival information on the tea plantation labor of Darjeeling. Official tea districts like Assam, Cachar, and Sylhet were under far more governmental regulation. Darjeeling planters, on the other hand, preferred to remain beyond the government's purview. This would slowly change toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but by then the paradigms of informality were established in the plantations of Darjeeling, leaving little paper trail behind them. Academic studies of Darjeeling tea-estates include: Bhowmik 1981; Chatterjee 2001; Nag 2000; Subba 1985.

the fright and flight of labor was a source of anxiety for the colonizers in its own right.<sup>12</sup> This may explain why the archive affords us the following rare glimpses of a more sentient labor force:

October of 1854, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, A. Campbell, alerts government of “universal” rumors of an invasion by Nepal, inducing “much alarm among the population generally, but especially among the Nipalese who are settled here, and those who are employed as working coolies.”<sup>13</sup>

November 1854: Campbell continues, “The alarm amongst the Nipalese subjects employed here has been very great. It rose to such a pitch on the first instant that about 500 men employed on the government works were not to be found, and their sardars were in despair of getting them back to their work.”<sup>14</sup>

September 1858: Campbell describes rampant rumors of a proclamation by Jung Bahadoor Rana that “all the Nipalese who do not return to their country before the end of the Durga poojhā shall be shut out from ever going back to Nepal and shall be considered in the light of British subjects, or as enemies in the approaching

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<sup>12</sup> India, Foreign, 29 Dec 1854, 22-34 SC; India, Foreign, 31 Dec 1858, 2522-6 FC; India, Foreign, 30 Dec 1859, 1431-1446 FC/SUP.

<sup>13</sup> Letter 154, 29 Oct 1854, India, Foreign, 29 Dec 1854 22-34 SC.

<sup>14</sup> Letter 568, 9 Nov 1854, India, Foreign, 29 Dec 1854 22-34 SC. This chapter’s primary concern is the affect of the Nepali-Indian peoples. However, one can’t help but notice the intensity of concern on the part of the British colonials in these reports. On the one hand, the British were constantly worrying about the loss of labor. On the other hand, the archive suggests that the anxiety of the coolies may have jumped the subjective divisions of Empire to affect the colonials as well. As Campbell noted during this particular crisis, “My assurances are by no means satisfactory at present. A good number of Nipalese have already absconded and the European visitors are by no means comfortable under the influence of all the current reports of invasion.” *Ibid.*

Did the colonials see the coolies as knowing something they did not? Was the affective contagion that well articulated or was it of another order of transmission? As might be expected, several years later, colonial anxieties spiked even more pointedly in the milieu of the Mutiny. Again Campbell offers clues to the affective state of colonials in Darjeeling: Regarding the various rumors of invasion, extradition and embargo that “came pouring in from Nipal--a source over which I have no control-- and [were] quickly disseminated by the Nipalese servants among the Europeans here in the most exaggerated forms... I confined myself to endeavors to trace the origin of the news and to giving the European community the strongest assurance of my disbelief in these rumors.” India, Foreign 30 Dec 1859 1431-1446 FC/SUP.

invasion of Darjeeling from Nipal.” This time 1000 laborers fled in the span of two days. To where, the British did not know.<sup>15</sup>

October 1858: Under what he terms the “pressure of failing labor”, Campbell reports hearing further that “Jung Bahadoor had issued a proclamation to all Nipalese wherever located that now or never was the time to return to their allegiance; if they wished to be of use to their native land, and not to forfeit by protracted absence all the most cherished privileges of Nipalese subjects. The whole native population became uneasy at these rumors, the sappers got alarmed, and the European community did so also.” From October 9<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>, 700 more men on government hire, gone.<sup>16</sup>

Though it remains difficult to ascertain if and how the precariousness of the circumstance were rationalized by the immigrant laborers, these spates of anxiety in the 1850s suggest several things. First, they demonstrate how, by the time he crossed into Darjeeling territory in pursuit of his fabled white elephant (1864), Jung Bahadoor Rana was already a spectral presence in the coolie imagination—a figure apparently capable of great subjective coercion. Second, the archive’s exaggerated and recurring attention to the flight of labor bespeaks an associated anxiety on the part of the British colonials—albeit one emanating from a different motivational [read: capitalist] logic. Third, these outbreaks of alarm inflect the picture of plantation life in the hills with an anxiety that is notably lacking in the standard, romanticized, colonialist histories of the ‘hill-station’. Together, these instances remind us of the unstable place that the populations of Darjeeling have had in India since their earliest migration to the area. Thinking through the living conditions of these colonial laborers, we see that theirs was indeed a precarious, liminal, dwelling. *Betwixt and between* feudal and imperial

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<sup>15</sup> “Campbell to Secretary of Bengal” India, Foreign 31 Dec 1858 2522-6 FC.

<sup>16</sup> India, Foreign 30 Dec 1859 1431-1446 FC/SUP.

capitalist modes of production, *no longer Nepali and not yet Indian* subjects, status of any sort was tenuous at best.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, extradition was a real, albeit rare, possibility. Along with formal cases of extradition<sup>18</sup>, the archive tells harrowing stories of Nepali raiders crossing into Darjeeling in the dark of night to recapture escaped slaves.<sup>19</sup> In the official and demi-official reports of these cases, the Britisher's ambivalence toward the Gorkha subject is on full display. At once, the colonials wished to claim these people as 'British subjects', yet they recognized they had little recourse to do so. Such were the conundrums of quasi-legality.

Drawing back, what then can we say about the relation between the panic surrounding Jung Bahadoor's pursuit of the white elephant in 1864 and that which I caused in the village in 2007? First, there is a similar *emotion* articulated in both—namely, the *fear* of being shipped back to Nepal. Accordingly, these two instances might well be placed in a history of emotion, the type of which Lucien Febvre announced long ago when he and Marc Bloch were pushing the envelope of historiography with the imaginative projects of the Annales school.<sup>20</sup> But a history of emotion is not the type of history that I am trying to write. In drawing out a linkage between these events of 1864 and 2007, it is not this *fear* that I have in mind. The linkage I sense is of a different order, and begs a different question: From whence does this fear emanate? That is, of what is it an articulation?

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<sup>17</sup> Here I am working with classic anthropological notions of liminality and rites of passage. See Van-Gennep 1965; Turner V. 1967, 1969.

<sup>18</sup> India, Foreign, Jan 1864 222-223 Political A; India, Foreign July 1866 63 Political A.; Bengal, Judicial Proc 206-209 Aug 1868.

<sup>19</sup> India, Foreign, Aug 1868 219-220 Political A; Bengal, Judicial Proc 200 Aug 1868; India, Foreign Aug 1868 404-5 Political A; India, Foreign Feb 1869 9 Political A; India, For Mar 1878 1-8 Pol A.

<sup>20</sup> See in particular Febvre's 1941 essay "Sensibility and History: how to reconstitute the emotional life of the past." The Annales School began in 1920.

To answer this, we must follow the lead of Brian Massumi in beginning to recognize affect as something other than emotion.<sup>21</sup> Various anthropologists of emotion have taught us to think about emotions as culturally specific patterns of expression. The question of affect, I believe, must be distinguished from these models of emotion. The next section affords precisely this analytic cleavage. It moves us beyond the pattern of *fear* that lends the events of 2007 and 1864 their apparent similarity, and invites us to see the affect anxiety as of a different order than *fear*—or any other emotion for that matter. In this light, the next section further elucidates this history of affect, or what may now come into view as an affect of history itself.

### **The Suitcases of Kharag Bahadur Singh.**

Being Gorkha in India comes with certain baggage. When 20<sup>th</sup> century Nepali-Indians began making identity claims under the appellation ‘Gorkha’ they confirmed a dangerous slippage of terms. Already imbricated in the colonial nationalist imaginary, were the ‘Gurkha’, of the famed ‘martial race’ regiments of the British Indian army, who, as history tells us, rescued the British in their most desperate moment of need.<sup>22</sup> Both during the Mutiny of 1857 and through the seditious twilight of the Raj, the

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<sup>21</sup> Massumi 1996. I discuss Massumi’s conceptualization of affect, as well its problems, later in the chapter.

<sup>22</sup> Following the late-colonial British spellings, ‘Gurkha’ (with a ‘u’) refers to the military ranks of Gorkha (i.e. Nepali speaking peoples). ‘Gorkha’ (with an ‘o’) refers to civilian populations and conforms to contemporary emic spellings. The Gurkhas involvement in the Mutiny is well documented. Des Chene (1991) and Farwell (1984) offer particular accounts of their deployment against the mutineers. Primary materials tracing their involvements include: India, Foreign 27 Nov 1857 35-42 S.C; India, Foreign 25 Sep 1857 487-88, 490 SC; India, Foreign 29 Jan 1858 384-386 SC. The Gurkhas involvement in the Mutiny (along with other anti-sedition deployments) has also been written into the popular historical canon of India. See for instance Jawaharlal Nehru’s *The Discovery of India* (2002/1946).

‘proverbially loyal’, ‘fierce and humble’<sup>23</sup> Gurkha would be relied upon to uphold—and when necessary enforce—colonial discipline.<sup>24</sup>

Essentialism met its limits though on November 14, 1930, when the increasingly paranoid British Indian state cracked the case of one Kharag Bahadur Singh, a Gurkha of Dehra Dun suspected of sedition.<sup>25</sup> Upon his arrests at the Delhi train station, his suitcases were confiscated and searched, revealing a network of nationalist propaganda aimed specifically at civilian and military Gorkhas across India. His campaign promised a significant “breach...at the very centre of the Government’s stronghold of loyalism,” and moreover prophesied that “Government’s faith in the proverbial loyalty of the Gurkhas will receive a rude shock as in the case of the Garhwalis since the Peshawar incident.”<sup>26</sup> The ensuing investigation found scores of propaganda, proposals, and correspondence with the brass of the Indian National Congress party, including Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Vallabhbhai Patel.<sup>27</sup> These letters stressed the urgency of an “authoritative declaration on behalf of the Congress that the Gurkhas were their own brethren forming an integral part of the Indian community”.<sup>28</sup> The Congress leaders further promised equitable minority status for Gorkha peoples in an independent India, as well as the qualified backing of

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<sup>23</sup> Essentializations of the Gurkha soldier are rampant beyond reference. These terms are some of the more common caricatures of the Gurkha soldier. This form of essentialization ties in directly with this dissertation’s interest in ‘found’ forms of anthropological knowledge.

<sup>24</sup> Hutt has commented as well on the framings of Gurkhas as anti-nationalists (1997: 121).

<sup>25</sup> India, Home, Political F 14/9 1931.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Pertinent documents seized included: 300 copies of the pamphlet titled “The Eight Days Interlude” written in English, Urdu, and Hindi containing “objectionable statements and speeches made by Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru”; Correspondences between Singh and [Gorkha] candidates for Congress work; a letter dated November 4, 1931 from C.M Singh of Darjeeling (Conservative Office); additional Congress pamphlets including “The Eleven Terms of Mahatma Gandhi” written in Nepali; account books; a letter dated November 12, 1930 from Motilal Nehru to Vallabhbhai Patel urging him to draft a letter guaranteeing Gorkha rights in a Swaraj Government and promising a Rs. 820/month allowance for Singh’s project; proposals for a Publicity Department in Calcutta and a bi-weekly Congress bulletin in Nepali; as well as proposed tours and propaganda distribution in the following target areas: Karachi, Lucknow, Benares, Darjeeling, Shillong, Jullundur (Reserve Battalion), Ranchi (Military Police), Dehra Dun, Lansdowne, Almora. Dharamsala, Simla, Calcutta, and Dibrigarh. *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> As was paraphrased by the Government of India, *Ibid.*

Congress for Singh's secret campaign to woo the Gurkha troops and people away from the paternalistic British.<sup>29</sup>

The British took notice. In fact, they were already on-guard against such developments. Four circular orders had been issued in September 1930, just two months before Singh's arrest, prohibiting all Gurkha sepoys and officers from joining the Congress.<sup>30</sup> Now, with their suspicions confirmed, it did not take long for them to respond. By December 12, 1930 the Intelligence Bureau had labeled Kharag Bahadur Singh an "extremely active and dangerous agitator who was capable of doing considerable mischief among the Gurkhas" and recommended that it was "advisable to warn all Governments who have considerable Gurkha populations residing within their limits ...to keep a bright look out for the appearance of any propaganda, either spoken or printed among their Gurkha populations."<sup>31</sup>

Six of Kharag Bahadur Singh's parcels eventually made their way to the Gorkha bastion of Darjeeling, and it was there in the post office on March 12, 1931 that they were seized. Inside, the British found hundreds of pamphlets written in Nepali to both military and civilian Gorkhas of India. The arguments of the propaganda were agonizing. One pamphlet, "A Letter From a Gurkha Jail Pilgrim" is particularly affective and thus warrants closer analysis. It reads as follows:

#### OM BANDE MATRAM

What is the religious duty of the Gurkhas belonging to both the civil and the military in the religious war which is being fought for the attainment of Swaraj?

1) You people eat the salt of India and therefore you should serve her. Don't sing the praises of the English, who do not feed you.

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<sup>29</sup> Motilal Nehru read Singh's proposal to Jawaharlal Nehru while in jail. The latter regretted not being able to fully fund the elaborate plans of Singh (specifically those expenditures required for his proposed 'Publicity Department'). *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Circulars were found in Singh's suitcases. *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Intelligence Report signed 13.12.30 by D. Petrie. *Ibid.*

- 2) To be faithful to the English is synonymous to slaughtering the Bharat [India].
- 3) To serve the English is to enjoy a luxurious life by selling the country.
- 4) Serve your motherland instead of serving the English.
- 5) It is better and respectable to become the bear and the monkey of Ram Chanderji, instead of becoming the soldiers of Rawana.
- 6) The true religion of the soldiers is to protect the life and the property of the public. It is irreligious to kill children and unarmed people.
- 7) The soldiers should obey orders which are in keeping with law and religion. They should [not] carry out orders based upon lawlessness and injustice.
- 8) You people have sold your life in lieu of ten or twenty rupees but not your religion.
- 9) Always remember that religion is superior to wealth, public is superior to the ruler, and paradise is superior to hell.

Particular facets of the pamphlet sharpen its affective capabilities. From the outset the entire plea is couched in overtly religious idioms, leaving little doubt that this was not only a decision to be made in mind, but also in heart and soul. The reference to the Gurkha troops who had “sold their life but not their religion” by serving the British draws immediate attention to the questionable nationalist loyalties of the Gorkhas. At the same time, it refigures this martial history not as a source of pride, but one of shame. Repeatedly, the pamphlet emphasizes that the moral lines being drawn were not, and could never be, contiguous with those of Empire; it was above all a “*religious war* being fought for the attainment of Swaraj”. In the loaded language of salvation, the propaganda harps upon allegiance, then takes a sudden turn into more recent nationalist history in order to evoke a certain sense of historical guilt within its presumed readership.

*10) What have you gained by giving your lives for the English, if you will do something even slightly conducive to India you will be in comfort and will go to paradise.*

*11) The Gurkhas did not display any bravery in opening machine-gun fire upon the audience in a meeting of Amritsar, Punjab in April 1919. The*

Gurwalis did not open fire on a procession in Peshawar in June, 1930. By not thus obeying an unjust order, they exhibited real chivalry. They were sentenced to transportation and to imprisonment, but were called religious heroes, and they made a name.

*(12) In the Mutiny of 1857, the Gurkhas and the Sikhs deprived the Indians of the Swaraj they had won and gave it to the English. Now the Sikhs have made amends for their error and they are fighting for the achievement of Swaraj. The Gurkhas too should rectify their mistake and help India.*

13) The eyes of the country, the world and the deities are at present focused upon the Gurkhas. They should not commit blunders, should not abandon their religion, *and should not allow their names to be slurred.*

Given the political zeitgeist of the moment, this indexing of then-contemporary nationalist history is especially pointed. 1930, the year of Kharag Bahadoor's arrest, was a time of rising anti-colonial fervor. On January 26th, 1930 the Indian National Congress announced its Purna Swaraj, the Declaration of Independence from British Rule. And on March 12th of that same year, Gandhi embarked on his legendary Salt March in symbolic protest of the salt tax and British rule more generally. For both the British Raj and an increasingly agitated public, the climate of sedition was heating up.

Further, it had been just a decade since Brigadier-General Dyer and his soldiers which included members of the 1<sup>st</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Gurkha Rifles had marched into the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, Punjab (April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1919) and opened fire on thousands of unarmed civilians, killing hundreds. It had been a mere matter of months since the members of the 2/18 Garhwal Rifles had refused similar orders in Peshawar (April 23, 1930), electrifying the movement for Swaraj with an immediate precedent of defiance. Of course, the cornerstone of defiance was already established by the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, but again, for the Gorkhas, this was anything but a moment of nationalist zeal. Quite the contrary: at one point the Gurkhas were reported to be the only native force still fighting for the British in their desperate attempt to control Delhi.<sup>32</sup> As the

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<sup>32</sup> Des Chene 1991, 123.

pamphlet frames it, the problem with the Gorkha's place within the emergent nation was one of inappropriate loyalties. What was even more concerning than their ties to Nepal was their historical allegiance to the British. Whereas other 'martial races' like the Sikhs "had made amends for their error", insofar as the Gurkhas had yet to "rectify their mistake", their loyalties—and thus their moral belonging within a soon-to-be-free India—remained in question.

The propaganda addresses Gurkha troops directly, but, importantly, it does not stop there in assigning guilt. As the concluding lines proclaim, *all* Gurkhas were responsible for the misdeeds of "military brethren"; all Gurkhas were capable of rectifying those mistakes. The conclusion reads as follows:

#### TO CIVILIAN BRETHERN

*Civilian Brethren! It is your religious duty to make amends for the work supplied by military brethren. It is your religious duty to bandage the injuries inflicted on account of their mistakes. As the result of the injustice, and irregular acts perpetrated by the Indian soldiers and civilians, today sixty thousand of our Indian Brothers, Sisters, [and] the infirm[ed] children are incarcerated in jails. The result of the tyranny and oppression practiced by the English government has been that many English ladies and gentlemen are also pondering over the subject of Swaraj for the Indians. In order to wash out the sins of the Gurkhas and to maintain their dignity, Mr. Kharag Bahadur [Singh] joined the battle with fifty Gurkhas out of their number of 10 lakhs, like Sri Lakshman. Those people are at present shut up in a corner of the jail. Gorkha youths! Don't [you] feel pained? These people (the imprisoned Gurkhas) are looking at you from the big gates of the jail. Get up and say that you are also coming. The Gurkhas are chivalrous and they should come forward to destroy the British Government. They should soon come out in order to remove the sufferings of mother India, to uphold the dignity of the Gurkhas, to better the lot of their progenies and in order to pave their way for settling in India. Come soon.*

From: A Gurkha Jail Pilgrim.<sup>33</sup>

In making the link between the civilian and military constituencies of Nepali-speakers in India—that is, in holding the Gorkha peoples accountable for the history

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<sup>33</sup> Translation Intelligence Bureau; *Italics* mine: India, Home, Political F 14/9 1931.

of the *Gurkha* troops—the propaganda glosses the decision at hand as more than a matter of morality, destiny, religion, or salvation. It was also *the* opportunity to make right the identity of the Gorkha peoples in India. Throughout the pamphlet, note how smoothly the moral and religious idiom slips into one of identity. For example, Point 13: “[The Gurkhas] should not commit blunders, should not abandon their religion, and should not allow *their names* to be slurred.” Time and time again the argument waylays the mercenary identity of the Gurkha, while accentuating the true moral “chivalrous” qualities of the ideal Gurkha subject. In this logic of appeal, “coming forward to destroy the British Government” was not merely a nationalist decision, but one also to “uphold”—even, “rectify”—“the dignity of the Gurkhas”. As this plea makes explicitly clear, these frames of reference (nationalism and ethnic identity) were problematically entangled.

In weighing the heavy burden of history that these calls place upon the conscience of the Gorkha subject, we must remember that this propaganda was *confiscated* in the Darjeeling post office in March of 1931. I have found no evidence to suggest the circulation of these pamphlets in the hills, and more generally, there is very little evidence of nationalist activity in Darjeeling. It is therefore difficult to know precisely to what degree the pleas of the “Gurkha Jail Pilgrim” may have resonated with the people of the hills. At the same time, we must remember that these pleas were written *by* Gorkhas *to* Gorkhas. That they would so viscerally index a profound guilt of history within, I think, lends a special credence to their suggestions of such an interiority. So too does it charge their appeal with a purportedly inter-subjective affect to be felt and acted upon by all Gorkhas of India. Despite their confiscation, the parcels of Kharag Bahadoor Singh clearly landed up in Darjeeling with an especially heavy burden to bear.

## What is Affect?

The aforementioned episodes of 2007, 1864, and 1930/1 generated a host of powerful emotions ranging from *fear* cloaked as *anger* (in the crisis in the village), *fear* and *loathing* (in the panic of Jung Bahadoor's hunting trip), and historical *guilt* (in the suitcases of Kharag Bahadoor Singh). These emotive responses were born out of specific historical and socio-cultural conditions—particularly those of a nationalist variety. In this regard, they largely affirm the common model within the anthropology of emotion that views emotions as culturally patterned.<sup>34</sup> Viewed in this light, they suggest emotive patterns that continue to attend the 'identity' question in Darjeeling today. However, the study of emotion is not the primary objective of this essay. Rather, it is to fathom a field of incipience that gives rise to these scenarios and charges them with intensity—a field that links and encompasses these emotive moments. In Darjeeling, what links these events and countless other articulations of 'identity' is an underlying anxiety, the instigating condition of which is the question of

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<sup>34</sup> How episodes like these produce and/or elicit specific emotions remains a key question for both the anthropology and history of emotion (Bourke 2003; Febvre 1973; Weinstein 1995). Eschewing those understandings that posit a universal pallet of emotions for the human subject, the social sciences of emotion beckon detailed investigation of the dialectical processes through which agents and socio-cultural contexts do their emotional work on the sentient subject. From such studies we shall begin to understand emotions and emotional experiences as not only psychologically and/or physiologically rooted, but also socially, culturally, and historically produced. Lutz and White offer a helpful, although somewhat dated review of "The Anthropology of Emotions," (1986) *Annual Review of Anthropology* (15), in which the various anthropological and psychoanalytic models of emotion are examined and classified. Concerning the relation of affect to emotion: a commonly held conception in the anthropology of emotion is the two-tiered model, in which affect is seen as 'under' emotion. This model of layers was established early in the history of psychoanalysis and has since weathered many alterations. Universalist understandings of emotion often root the 'universal pallet of emotions' in this underlying layer of affect. My ethnography questions this link. Nevertheless, as will become clear in the coming review of literature, the general idea of a two-tiered model does, to a certain extent, withstands the test of time. However within this scheme, the model becomes extremely vague and contentious at two points: first, on the relation between the two layers; and second, on the origin and causality of the layers. Again Lutz and White (1986) provide a helpful inventory of anthropologies and psychologies that have deployed this type of model. More recent treatments of emotion and affect can be found in Boellstorff & Lindquist 2004; Brennan 2004; Campbell & Rew 1999; Lindholm 2005; Massumi 1996; Mazzarella 2005, 2009; Oatley, Kelter, & Jenkins 2006.

belonging in India. This anxious belonging, I suggest, must be understood as affect, not emotion. What then is affect?

To date, scholarly discussions of affect have tended toward obfuscation, even mystification. In more and less veiled ways, psychoanalysis has dominated these discussions. Freud's theories of affect, by his own admission, were suspect. In his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1915-1917) he described his thoughts on affect as "not very assured", as "a first attempt at finding our bearings in this obscure region."<sup>35</sup> Freud's views on affect, and in particular anxiety, underwent significant revisions throughout his career leaving him largely dissatisfied with his own explanations. Amid his protracted confusion, certain threads remain constant though—some of which are redeemable, others of which are highly problematic when brought to bear on the people of Darjeeling.

Freud makes an interesting distinction between *anxiety* and *fear* that serves as a useful starting point for distinguishing between *affect* and *emotion*. "Anxiety (*Angst*) has an unmistakable relation to expectation: it is anxiety *about something*. It has a quality of indefiniteness and lack of object. In precise speech we use the word fear (*Furcht*) rather than anxiety (*Angst*) if it has found an object."<sup>36</sup> Lacan later complicated this model by positing the unforgettable aphorism: "Anxiety is not without an object"<sup>37</sup> (I will return to this aphorism momentarily, as it is useful in

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<sup>35</sup> Freud, S. 1966: 492.

<sup>36</sup> Freud 1966: 491. (Lectures presented from 1915-1917).

<sup>37</sup> Harari (2001:34) explains that Lacan's "not...without" aphorism "accounts for the obscure, imprecise condition of the object at hand". The key here is Lacan's ideas of the ontological in-betweenness of the object of anxiety--at once not present, but not without ontology. Through an extremely complex system of logic, Lacan would extend this line of thought toward yet another aphorism: that anxiety arises when lack lacks. Along the way he offers a fascinating explanation of the relation between anxiety, action and certainty--a reading that awaits further explication with regard to Arjun Appadurai's explanation of ethnic violence in "Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization" (1999). Lacan's views on anxiety are highly developed, but I am unconvinced that they can be fully applied to the type of data my research has generated. Doing so would make me uncomfortable because I have neither the data nor the clinical expertise to interpolate the psyches of my research subjects as Lacan did his patients. Furthermore, I am trying to move the discussion of affect away from certain psychoanalytic propensities, while retaining key insights (which I discuss in the main

understanding anxieties at hand in Darjeeling.) But what is important here is that, for Freud, fear is an articulation of anxiety in the face of an imminent threat, whereas anxiety exists as an affective state irrespective of an immediate object or threat. For our purposes, *fear* then is emotion, an organized (or ‘patterned’) response oriented toward an object, while *anxiety* is affect, a condition of intensity without organized progression or object. *Fear* then is to *anxiety* as *emotion* is to *affect*.

Freud, Lacan, and the psychoanalytic school more generally, clearly define anxiety as an affective state. “And what is affect in a dynamic sense?” Freud asks, “It is in any case something highly composite. An affect includes in the first place particular motor innervations or discharges and secondly certain feelings.”<sup>38</sup> Freud’s willingness to see affect (and thus anxiety) as both mental and physiological is crucial if one insists on the Cartesian duality of mind and body. In the common psychoanalytic conception, affect bridges the physical and the psychic; it is both somatic and mental.<sup>39</sup> However, where Freud’s views become problematic is with regards to the origin of affect and anxiety. In his early work, Freud attributed affect and anxiety to the repression of libido.<sup>40</sup> In later work (1925), Freud revised his views to at least partially open up the causality of affect:

“Anxiety is not newly created in repression; it is reproduced as an affective state in accordance with an already existing mnemonic image. If we go further and enquire into the origin of that anxiety—and of affects in general—we shall be leaving the realm of pure psychology and entering the borderland of physiology. Affective states have become incorporated into the mind as

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body of text). Incorporating Lacan here would surely plunge the discussion even further back into the psychoanalytic intellectual milieu. Lacan’s analysis of anxiety may be found in the unpublished *Seminar X: L’Angoisse* (1962-3), which is best accessed in English via Roberto Harari’s (2001) book *Lacan’s Seminar On ‘Anxiety’*. For a critique of Lacan’s treatment of affect, see Andre’ Green’s *The Fabric of Affect in the Psychoanalytic Discourse* (1999).

<sup>38</sup> Freud 1966: 491.

<sup>39</sup> For elaboration see Charles Sheperdson’s ‘Forward’ to Harari (2001: xxxix).

<sup>40</sup> See Lecture XXV “Anxiety” in the *Introductory Lectures*.

precipitates of primaevial traumatic experiences and when a similar situation occurs they are revived like mnemic symbols.”<sup>41</sup>

According to Freud, the prototype for this “primaevial traumatic experience” was birth. This opinion, along with his enduring insistence on the generative role of repressed libido, places the origin of affect and anxiety squarely within the realm of a seemingly universal species-based human psychology. In my opinion, such a view is untenable because it wrongly obviates the ways that the circulation and production of affect are socially conditioned.

Freud’s 1925 revisions do however offer an important insight—namely, that affect functions upon precedent. If anxiety is about *expected* danger, we must inquire further into the genesis of such expectation. Freud would undoubtedly root this genesis in the innate drives and subsequent repression within the patient. The anthropology or history of affect must, I think, search out different origins. We must socially historicize it. From what conditions does anxiety arise? What generally is it about? If we can answer these questions, then we can begin to recognize how anxiety—and affect more generally—is *socially, historically* (re)produced. The anxiety that links and encompasses all of the episodes addressed in this paper is unequivocally about belonging in India.

It is here where Lacan’s notion that “anxiety is not without an object” becomes especially useful. What Lacan is trying to point out with this perplexing grammatical construction is that the key issue of anxiety is the indeterminateness of its object. While anxiety may be *about* something, that something does not need to be wholly present or perfectly coherent. Yet neither is the ‘object’ of anxiety wholly absent. Even when not presently at hand in Darjeeling, the question of national belonging is seemingly always there, ready to take shape in a variety of forms. In 1864 and 2007 it

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<sup>41</sup> Freud, S. 1959: 119.

manifested as a fear of possible extradition. With the ‘Letter from a Gurkha Jail Pilgrim’, it was the questionability of the Gorkhas’ loyalty—and thus their moral belonging within an emergent, free India—that was framed as the crux of their membership in nation.

In the analyses to follow, I will discuss other instances and forms through which anxious belonging has shown itself in more recent years. Traversing from these histories into the present, we find multiple, partial, causal ‘objects’ for the people of Darjeeling’s anxieties over ‘identity’ and belonging. These include real and imagined instances of extradition, real and imagined xenophobic prejudices, racism, enduring class inequalities and a host of other troubling facets of the past and present. These unsettling precedents are seemingly always present for the people of Darjeeling. In this regard, Lacan’s perplexing aphorism begins to make a good deal of sense; as certainly, the people of Darjeeling’s anxieties about their ‘identity’ and belonging in India are ‘not without’ just cause.

In this regard, the “Letter from a Gurkha Jail Pilgrim” is a brilliantly affective document. It cuts to the heart of Gorkha identity and asks the reading Gorkha subject to rethink, even re-feel, the ‘brave’ history of the Gurkhas as a source of shame not pride. The once stable identification of the ‘loyal’, ‘martial’ Gurkha is here refigured as a source of collective embarrassment.<sup>42</sup> By playing the ‘identity’ card, the pamphlet at once creates and plays upon an amorphous sense of unease with regard to belonging in India. It manifests anxiety, reaps credence from it, foments it. Above all, it taps into this unease as a field of mobilizing potentiality. It does so by first eliciting a sense of historical guilt, an emotion presumably laden with affect (i.e. intensity). It then seeks to transform this affective energy into the revolutionary desire to join the nationalist

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<sup>42</sup> My thanks to William Mazzarella, whose comments on this chapter helped me develop this point. An excellent analysis of the essentialist paradigm of ‘bravery’ in the context of Nepali nationalism can be found in *Onto* 1996.

movement to overthrow the British. In this way, the pamphlet works *through* emotion to access affect, the expectation being that the affective intensity conjured by guilt will be redirected and channeled into a different emotion—ideally the passionate desire for swaraj. In so doing, the vignette of the suitcases and their evocations of historical guilt help us isolate affect as a topic of study by asking us to analytically sever any assumed contiguity of affect and emotion. Following the important work of Brian Massumi, affect in this case comes into view as the region of anxious intensity out which emotions emanate.<sup>43</sup> For Massumi, affect is embodied, unqualified intensity. Emotion, on the other hand, is culturally mediated qualification of that intensity; “It is intensity owned and recognized”.<sup>44</sup> Through these lenses, the fears of being sent back to Nepal and the historical guilt of the Gorkhas then appear as articulations—or ‘qualifications’, as Massumi would have it—of this resonating field of anxiety about being-in and being-of India.

### **The Question of Knowing Affect.**

Massumi’s writings on the “autonomy of affect” raise important considerations for this dissertation’s concerns with knowledge and belonging—particularly his distinction between affect and the realm of semantics, semiotics, epistemology, etc. For Massumi, affect is raw, embodied intensity—a distinct register of human life. But in Massumi’s view, affect is not only ontologically distinct from the dimension of knowledge/discursive mediation; it is, in essence, “autonomous” from it.<sup>45</sup> But he also

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<sup>43</sup> Massumi, 1996.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

<sup>45</sup> As William Mazzarella has noted: “Massumi is asking us to imagine social life in two simultaneous registers: on the one hand, a register of affective, embodied intensity and, on the other, a register of symbolic mediation and discursive elaboration.” Mazzarella 2009. Elsewhere, Massumi explains further how emotion fits into this model: “An emotion is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from the point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning.” Massumi 1996: 221.

notes, “The problem is that there is no cultural-theoretical vocabulary specific to affect.”<sup>46</sup> This, I will maintain, is not only a problem of lexicon, but also of semeiosis and ontological differences between affect and knowledge. Here is where Massumi’s formulation raises important, if at times overly hermetic, epistemological barriers. For if we accept Massumi’s ideas that affect is unqualified intensity, a pure potentiality that is only actualized and/or captured through culturally mediated expression, then how would we ever know it? Because in its very moment of actualization, would it not have already instantly become something else? Could we fathom such a thing? To understand the mercurial sensitivities of the people of Darjeeling with regard to belonging in India, I believe we have to—with qualification.

The critical question for this thesis on belonging and knowledge then becomes: What is the relationship between affect (understood as pure intensity) and the discursive (semiotic, semantic, cultural, symbolic) register? Massumi is unclear. At times, his championing of the “autonomy” of affect seems to posit a relation of pure difference. Yet according to Massumi, affect is always coming into social being through discursively mediated expression. Here Massumi’s model suffers from similar deficiencies as Freud’s: First, while Massumi discusses the circulation and “actualization” of affect, he accounts for neither its origins nor causality. In his model, affect is seemingly always out there and on the move, ready to be tapped or “captured”. Second, if affect is as “autonomous” as Massumi would have it, then there would be little possibility of semiotic and semantic phenomenon generating their own affective effects. Such a view would hold scant analytic space for a dialectic of knowledge and affect. Or to put it into the terms of this dissertation, we would never be able to understand how knowledge itself produces affect, and how affect, in this

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

case anxious belonging, can become an impetus for, and animator of, specific kinds of knowledge (in this case, anthropological knowledge).

In sum, Massumi offers a compelling distinction between affect and emotion that pushes us to fathom a realm of being that is not *of knowledge*, and yet is often there *with* it. I share with Massumi a will to study knowledge's beyond, because like him I sense its profound impact in the world. However, Massumi mystifies affect in a way that renders any anthropology of affect epistemologically and methodologically ill equipped to apprehend the posited "autonomous" ontology of the term's referent.<sup>47</sup> Because of this, his theory of affect begs further critique.

The charged history of 'identity' in Darjeeling asks us to rethink the relationship between the registers of affect and discursive/epistemic/semiotic mediation. Along with William Mazzarella, who himself offers a compelling critique of Massumi, I will argue that we must "resist a *universal* separation between the 'rules of formation' that govern meaning and affect," while simultaneously acknowledging a *relative* difference in their formation.<sup>48</sup> Maintaining a *relative* ontological distinction between these respective registers of social life is crucial if we are to recuperate affect as a topic of anthropological and historical analysis. Refigured accordingly, we open up a space for understanding affect's dialectical constitution through time. From here, we can begin to understand how specific discursive, social, and material conditions of history can generate particular affects among particular populations. This empirical approach promises to work against Massumi's notion of the 'autonomy of affect', but

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<sup>47</sup> Massumi himself seems to acknowledge the mystification at hand, yet he remains unfettered by the prospect; he admits, "At this point, the impression may have grown that affect is being touted as if the world could be packed into it. In a way, it can and is.... The affective atoms....are autonomous not through closure but through a singular openness. As unbounded 'regions' in an equally unbounded affective field, they are in contact with the whole universe of affective potential, as by action at a distance. Thus they have no outside, even though they are differentiated according to which potentials are most apt to be expressed (effectively induced) as their 'region' passes into actuality. Their passing into actuality is the key. Affect *is* the whole world: from the precise angle of its differential emergence." Massumi 1996: 235.

<sup>48</sup> Mazzarella 2005: 48-9.

without relinquishing a healthy skepticism toward any professed commensurability between affect and discursive form. What I am advocating then is a ‘middle-way’ approach that can (a) expose the dialectical, historical constitution of affect, while (b) resisting the logic that this form of raw, intensity could ever be fully resolved, satisfied, and/or captured through discursive mediation. Mazzarella sees a similar way forward. “Rather than seeking to recuperate an emergent non-alienated state,” he notes, “We might instead productively pervert Massumi’s terminology, and acknowledge that the condition of our becoming is indeed a negatively dialectical one, in which we are always moving between immanence and qualification.”<sup>49</sup>

Indeed, the imperfect play between immanence and qualification—between the affects of anxious belonging and identification—may be understood to be *the* engine of identity politics in Darjeeling. Along these lines, this dissertation may be read more broadly as an examination of the constitutive links and important disconnects between belonging and ethnologically-effected practices of identification. The affects and history discussed in this chapter have clearly prompted the people of Darjeeling’s recent turn to anthropological knowledge, but how exactly ethnic revitalization, ‘tribal’ recognition, or the attainment of any other discursive or juridical form could ever fully resolve the anxieties embodied by the people of Darjeeling remains a fraught—and to date, unanswered—question in the hills.

Contra the models of Freud, the intensity of feeling that attends being-Gorkha in India is not sequestered in the depths of an individual’s psychological history. Nor does it exist in a realm of pure autonomous being as Massumi might have it. Rather this affective complex remains in constant dialogue with socio-historical conditions,

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<sup>49</sup> Locating Massumi’s presumed “autonomy of affect” within a poststructuralist tradition that has largely disavowed dialectical social onto-logics of any kind, Mazzarella gestures to the deleterious impact such a conception of affect could have on the social sciences. He asks: “Rather than positing the emergent as the only vital hope against the dead hand of mediation, why not consider the possibility that mediation is at once perhaps the most fundamental and productive principle of all social life precisely because it is necessarily incomplete, unstable, and provisional?” See Mazzarella 2009.

often re-generating its very own hypersensitive conditionality. Like a wave-length resonating between the nodes of history and the present, the ambient anxiety over ‘being-in’ and ‘being-of’ India has reverberated with different amplitudes according to the conditions of any given Now. The episodes discussed in this chapter are some of the more amplified moments of this history. Studying affect in such moments of heightened intensity offers a productive way of “rubbing history against the grain”, as Walter Benjamin would have it.<sup>50</sup> Through these lenses, we see that history does more than predetermine the present in Darjeeling. Instead, unsettled matters of the past continually refigure and perturb the present in new, unexpected ways. The crisis I caused with my survey in 2007 is a recent, regrettable, example. Turning to other facets of Darjeeling’s recent past, we see further ways that these anxieties over belonging in India do not just emerge from history. They also, in a sense, make it.

### **Agitation.**

In the 1980s, history and affect erupted into the present. As the leader of the Gorkha National Liberation Front, Subash Ghisingh, explained:

“The growing fears of the Gorkhas had spread like a cancer. No ordinary medicine would cure this malady—it was a very, very old disease. There was just one capsule which could clean the system of this affliction—Gorkhaland. On April 5, 1980 our first cry for Gorkhaland pierced the skies and made the once tranquil hills resound with rebellion. The night before I gave the call for a separate state, I had a ‘miracle’ dream and vision asked me to go ahead. The Gorkha would be successful.”<sup>51</sup>

Ghisingh spoke these words on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1988 less than two months after signing the *Memorandum of Settlement* that effectively ended the three-year violent

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<sup>50</sup> Benjamin 1968: 257.

<sup>51</sup> Interview given by Ghisingh in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, October 2, 1988.

‘agitation’ for Gorkhaland, a homeland that was never to be.<sup>52</sup> Ghisingh, like the people he represented, had been called many things: ‘anti-nationalist’, ‘foreigner’, ‘traitor’, etc,<sup>53</sup> but the classic anthropological characters of the shaman and the trickster are far more apt. Given his propensities for the mystical, it is unlikely Ghisingh himself would shed these labels like he did xenophobic pejoratives: “Me! An anti-nationalist!” he once exclaimed, aping an epithet he described as “far removed from reason. For, weren’t we just *longing to be* called Indians?”<sup>54</sup>

Born of belonging’s lack, ‘Gorkhaland’ was and remains beyond all else a longing-to-be—an embodiment that cannot be understood sans the framings of nation and the affective wizardry of Subash Ghisingh. For there, in the ambiguous nether-regions of national belonging, we find the sorcerer and his magic. Like the healer of Levi-Strauss’s fascination, Ghisingh was a master of abreaction<sup>55</sup>, a capturer of malady who could affect the traces of a “very, very old disease” and affect both its symptoms and its notional cure. As the preceding analysis has shown, the seeds of disease were already sown. Under the spell of Ghisingh, they metastasized into what the man himself called a “cancer” of fear.

Born on the Manju Tea Estate in 1936 and having served briefly in the Indian army, Ghisingh rose from relative obscurity. A poet and author of over 21 novels, Ghisingh was rhetorically deft. After dabbling in politics throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Ghisingh finally found his calling in the quest for Gorkhaland.<sup>56</sup> With a style

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<sup>52</sup> Studies of the Gorkhaland Movement include: Magar 1994; Samanta 2000; Sarkar 2000; Subba 1992; Timsina 1992.

<sup>53</sup> See Lama’s *Gorkhaland Movement*, a compilation of relevant material published by the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (1996: 61).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Levi-Strauss writes, “In psychoanalysis, abreaction refers to the decisive moment in the treatment when the patient intensively relives the initial situation from which his disturbance stems, before he ultimately overcomes it. In this sense, the shaman is a professional abreactor.” Ghisingh was both an abreactor and a guide for this sort of psycho-political channeling. Levi-Strauss, 1963: 191.

<sup>56</sup> In 1968, Ghisingh floated his first party, the Nilo Jhaṇḍā, which concentrated on rights for hill peoples. Neither the party nor Ghisingh achieved much success at the time. On Ghisingh, see Lama 2006; Magar 1994.

uniquely paternal and bizarre, Ghisingh seized upon ambiguity, produced it, played with it, and harnessed it, so as to yoke the affective power of uncertainty to the wagon of ethnic destiny.<sup>57</sup> He fixated in particular on Clause 7 of the Indo-Nepali Treaty of 1950, which granted “reciprocal” rights to Nepalis domiciled in India and vice-versa.<sup>58</sup> On June 2, 1985, Ghisingh took the stage in the hill town of Kurseong to deliver what would become the most famous speech of the Gorkhaland Movement. His rhetoric longwinded, poetic, and peculiarly soothing for a militant, Ghisingh informed the masses of the dangers of the juridical word:

“This word ‘Reciprocal’ has become a blemish for we (Nepalese in India). This word indicates that we (Nepalese) have come to India after the 1950 Treaty as immigrants. ....Accordingly, we are not bona fide citizens of India. Life and future is not secured here for us in India. ....We have simply been hired tenants in the country of Gandhi, Nehru, Sastri, Morarji Dasai, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.”<sup>59</sup>

The Indian Constitution states unequivocally that those residing in India at the time of independence (1947) were by law citizens. This would accordingly include the overwhelming majority of Darjeeling’s population. Yet despite the Constitution’s guarantee of their citizenship, Ghisingh, here (and through tireless re-iteration in the years to come) preached that their status was questionable at best.<sup>60</sup> The vaults of

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<sup>57</sup> On the affective power of uncertainty within ethnic mobilizations see Appadurai’s “Dead Certainty” (1999).

<sup>58</sup> The ambiguous Clause 7 reads: “The Government of India and Nepal agree to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territories of the other the same privileges in the matter of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature.” Note: the clause makes no mention of citizenship.

<sup>59</sup> Transcript of ‘The Historic Speech’ available in Lama 1996: 22-27.

<sup>60</sup> Relevant clauses of Indian Constitution are Section 2, Article 5. As early as 1983 in his *Memorandum Sent to the King of Nepal*, Ghisingh was claiming that “under deep-rooted illusion [Gorkhas] have unknowingly considered themselves the true citizens or inhabitants of independent Union of India and India as their motherland or country since Bharat independence”. Lama 1996: 19. Contacting the king of Nepal proved to be a political blunder, as it only facilitated additional anti-nationalist accusations. Both in the 1983 *Memorandum* and the ‘Historic Speech’ in Kurseong, Ghisingh loops through the history of the Gurkha regiments. He touches upon their involvement in the Mutiny and other wars, not to invoke guilt, but to both recapture some of the symbolic capital of such service, and to problematize the colonial exploitation of the Gorkha peoples writ large. In these instances and countless others,

affective history now opened, Ghisingh then proceeded to rake over more recent wounds by reminding the people of the infamous words spoken in 1976, by then Prime Minister Morarji Desai, who in refusing to recognize Nepali as a national language of India, claimed that “Nepali is a foreign language spoken by foreigners in India.”<sup>61</sup> Notice how Ghisingh links Desai and the Treaty of 1950, thereby conjoining prejudice and law in a sinister spin.

“The former PM Shri Morarji Desai had understood about the controversial Indo-Nepal Treaty [clause] No. 7, so he had told that you people (Nepalese) were foreigners, your language was foreign. Morarji had said the truth, but the other PMs of India [presumably those that assured the Gorkha peoples of their citizenship] are telling lies. So we should be thankful to Morarji Desai who has opened our eyes.”<sup>62</sup>

On July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1986 the GNLf ceremoniously burned the Indo-Nepali Treaty of 1950 at rallies throughout the hills.<sup>63</sup> But the questioning of citizenship—and in particular Clause 7—would remain a centerpiece issue throughout the agitation, making ‘reciprocal’ a household term.<sup>64</sup>

Ghisingh quickly became an icon of the hills and increasingly an operator on the national stage. As his fame grew he took his message to the Indian public: “Consider our situation,” he told *India Today* in late October 1986, “Morarji Desai described us as foreigners and said we were welcome to go back to Nepal. ... We

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Ghisingh would explicate how the Gorkha peoples had fallen through the national cracks of decolonization, and once again become subjects of an internal neo-colonization by West Bengal.

<sup>61</sup> On the language movement in Darjeeling, see forthcoming dissertation by Chelsea Booth, Rutgers University.

<sup>62</sup> Lama 1996: 25.

<sup>63</sup> “Letter to Prime Minister of India, Sri Rajiv Gandhi” in Lama 1996: 40.

<sup>64</sup> Citizenship remained a hot-button issue throughout the Movement. Though there are a vast number of iterations of this issue; some exemplary ones are: ‘The Fate of the Indian Gorkhas is Burning’ 14 May 1984 (Lama 1996: 16); ‘Frontline Interview’ Jan 1987 (Lama 1996: 103); ‘Posterred Public Statement by Subash Ghisingh’ 3 Feb 1987 (Lama 1996: 115); ‘Letter to Rajiv Gandhi’ 22 July 1987 (Lama 1996: 154); ‘GNLF Press Release’ 23 July 1987 (Lama 1996: 163). Indeed, in the first ‘Memorandum of Settlement’ Signed 25 July 1988 by the Home Minister of India and Ghisingh, the first point of the agreements was the ‘Citizenship Issue’. It was decided that a Gazette notification would be issued by the Indian government to ‘clarify’ the question of citizenship of the Gorkhas. Memorandum available in Lama 1996: 241. Gazette issued on 23 Aug 1988 available also in Lama 1996: 245.

Nepali-Indians who have nothing to do with Nepal are constantly confused with ‘Nepalis’, that is, citizens of Nepal, a foreign country. But if there is Gorkhaland then our identity as Indian belonging to an Indian state, just like our identity, will be clear.”<sup>65</sup>

Four months later in a 13-page spread in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, he was quoted as saying: “Can you imagine how we felt when Morarji Desai openly called us foreign nationals? We have given our lives for this country, we have fought wars and sacrificed our families, only to be accused of being traitors!”<sup>66</sup> Here Ghisingh seems to tacitly index the troubling history of the Gurkha troops discussed earlier, which, as we saw earlier, was a mechanism of nationalist othering that no doubt fed into the notion that all Gorkhas were foreigners. While Ghisingh prove adept at tapping into sensitive histories, what is most notable about his rhetoric throughout this period was its repetition. Certainly, the 1970s and early eighties were a time of growing dissatisfaction in Darjeeling. Various political outfits such as the Pranta Parishad and the All India Gorkha League bespoke such frustration with similar demands for statehood.<sup>67</sup> Ghisingh’s unique contribution was to inject a viral politics of fear into this milieu—a move that facilitated the GNLFF’s affective capture of the public imagination. Over and over throughout the 1980s, Ghisingh and his party reminded the people of their historical sensitivities and socio-political vulnerabilities precisely by aggravating the very nerve endings in question.<sup>68</sup> With each reiteration, those nerves became simultaneously more raw, more real. The affective wizard was not just summoning a sheer intensity of dis-ease, he was also producing it.

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<sup>65</sup> *India Today*. 66 October 31, 1986.

<sup>66</sup> *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. Feb 22, 1987.

<sup>67</sup> On the pre-agitation political climate, see Samantha 2000; Subba: 1992.

<sup>68</sup> Iterations of this sort are too many to cite. Those interested in repetition may find it in the Lama’s compilation (1996).

Ghisingh thus emerged as a fomenter, diagnostician, and self-proclaimed healer of a self-described ‘identity crisis’ for the Gorkhas—an affliction with only one cure. And “Why the Name Gorkhaland?” he would ask in 1987 in *The Voice of Gorkhaland*. His answer? “[Because] only the ethnic name of any place or any land...can germinate the real sense of belonging in the conscience of the concerned people?”<sup>69</sup> Clearly, like any good shaman, Ghisingh knew his domain of operation, and his craft was somewhat magical. A skeptic might thus ask: How would this become the case? How would receiving statehood resolve the crisis of identity? How would a state bring belonging?

I put similar questions to a new generation of Gorkha youth during the Fall of 2007. High off the euphoria surrounding one of Darjeeling’s own winning the Indian Idol competition of 2007, and with the drum beat of Gorkhaland once again resounding through the hills, the young men could produce no direct answer. Instead they regurgitated with uncanny precision the narrative of under-development and discrimination spouted just a week before by the man who would finally bring down Ghisingh in 2008, Bimal Gurung.<sup>70</sup>

Towns: In your personal opinion, do you think you need your own state?

Rajiv: Yes, we have to have our own state. It is better to have our own state. Now in the district, you know, we have a great financial problem. Due to finance we cannot progress. We have great footballers and cricket players but they cannot go beyond Calcutta. It is the ploy of Bengal. It will be good if we have our own state.

Towns: I read in the newspapers that a leader from the All Gorkha Student Union, Mr. Giri, said “Our future is not secure in

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<sup>69</sup> *The Voice of Gorkhaland*. 25 Nov 1987.

<sup>70</sup> As will become clear momentarily, Bimal Gurung’s rise once again shifted the terms of ‘identity’ and its politics in Darjeeling. The remainder of this chapter examines the circumstances by which he usurped Ghisingh’s power. In the Conclusion of the dissertation I discuss in detail the re-emergence of the Gorkhaland Movement and its effects on the politics of ‘tribal’ recognition.

Bengal. We want our own state!” But my question is if Gorkhaland is a reality how will the security come? What is the meaning of security in the future?

Rajiv: We will not be under anyone. Like now we are under Bengal, but after Gorkhaland we will not be under Bengal. We will have our own police. Everything will be ours. We will not be under anyone. That is what is meant by security.

Towns: And in history, do you personally think that in India people have discriminated against the people of Darjeeling?

Rajiv: Yes, that’s the way it is. They say what we should do. They say all Nepalis are chowkidars [guardsmen]. That’s it. That’s the reason that in this region we are demanding Gorkhaland. Everyone bullies us because we are Nepalis.

Towns: So do you think if Gorkhaland were to come, this kind of discrimination would stop?

Rajiv: Hmmm. It should stop.

Samir: [chiming in simultaneously] It should.

Rajiv: I think we need it to stop. They should stop it. Maybe.

It was an unfair question. But in fact, Rajiv responded as most did throughout my research, by fumbling for a reticent logic that steadfastly evaded articulation. And that is precisely what is most telling.

‘Gorkhaland’ has become the telos, the ultimate realization, of affect’s embodied potentiality. A future. A promise-land. In the spirit of Hegel, it is a dream worth living, a dream worth dying for. But it remains to be seen whether it could ever perfectly quell the anxiety over belonging harbored by the people of Darjeeling. In the logic of a negative dialectic, such a perfect realization of affect may prove impossible. The social sciences and governments the world over would do well to understand ethnic radicalism in such terms—as embodiment, as the frustrated actualization of affect in the world. Before that, the case of the GNLFF ‘agitation’ and the affective wizardry of Subash Ghisingh asks us to take seriously the social (re)production of

affect, to interrogate its socio-material grounds, to seek out agency and responsibility within its resonance. In short, to embrace affect in the dialectical historical-materialist spirit of Marx.

### **Shape-shift.**

The party began just after 6 pm. The voting booths that had sprouted up all over the hills under the aegis of opportunistic political parties were now officially closed. People poured into the streets. The promenade became a thicket of joy. Jeeps and motorbikes overflowing with youth began to parade through town honking, chanting, singing. Across the nation the votes had been cast. All that was left was to tally the inevitability of destiny. In just a few short hours, a Gorkha would become an ‘Indian Idol’.

Just minutes before the winner of Indian Idol-3 (2007) was to be announced, Prashant Tamang was handed the microphone, and the opportunity to sing one last impromptu number before the final results were to be announced. A boyish 24, Prashant took the microphone and launched into “Bir Gorkhali”, an accapella ode to Gurkha warriors.<sup>71</sup> On stage before thousands and on air before millions, Prashant’s off-the-cuff rendition was a bit awkward and not nearly as polished as his competitor’s, Amit Paul. But it appeared as heartfelt as it could be. One of Darjeeling’s own, for a celebrated moment, could bask in the national limelight.

Then just before 10pm, at the apex of a corporate, stilted crescendo of suspense, Bollywood star John Abraham reached into a magical box and confirmed what many already knew in their hearts: Prashant Tamang was this year’s Indian Idol. Overcome by joy, pomp, and circumstance, Prashant hugged everyone in sight,

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<sup>71</sup> ‘Bir Gorkhali’ was written and originally performed by the pop-rock band Mantra, based out of Darjeeling and widely acclaimed across Nepal.

repeatedly. Someone handed him a Nepali *topi* (cap), which he immediately squeezed onto his perfectly sculpted hair. On stage the climax went off in rather unscripted fashion, but what would Sony, the event's sponsor, care? Having ridden the marginalized identities of the two finalist to the tune of 7 crore sms mobile phone votes, a number that exceeded the entire populations of Darjeeling and Assam combined, the show was a smash hit.

Meanwhile, in Darjeeling firecrackers exploded across the hills. People frolicked in the streets and danced as live images of Prashant warped across jumbo public televisions in the background, almost like he was there, larger than life. Fans distributed sweets. Strangers hugged strangers. "This is one of the happiest moments of my life!", "His victory gives strength to our community!" "The people of the hills have shown they have hearts of gold!" "This is a once in a lifetime opportunity! I want to make the most of it!" "Never before have the people celebrated so hard. The celebration will continue for long!" ...words uttered in the frenzy.<sup>72</sup> In suburbs like Singamari and elsewhere the Prashant Fan Club launched all night parties. Come dawn, there would be no problem: local schools, colleges, tea gardens, and most businesses were given holiday so that the carnival could continue.

Hailed as an ambassador of the Gorkha people, Prashant Tamang had become much more than an instant pop-icon. For the people of Darjeeling, indeed for Nepali speakers the world over, his victory was seen as a coming out party, a debutante of sorts, for the Gorkha peoples on the national stage. Born in the village of Toongsoong and a constable in the Calcutta police force, Darjeeling's golden boy was now India's. The fairy tale was real.

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<sup>72</sup>*The Telegraph*, Sep 24, 2007.

How quickly things can change in the world of affect. Little did the revelers know that in five short days 800 of them would find themselves pinned inside the Siliguri courthouse grounds, Gorkhas held hostage by the ballistics of a communal riot.

Even by September 25<sup>th</sup>, the euphoria of the 23<sup>rd</sup>, had morphed into outrage. The day after Prashant's victory, Red FM DJ Ulta Pulta Nitin went on air and joked to the Delhi public that if all Nepali *chowkidars* (guardsmen) became Indian Idols, who would guard the private property of India?<sup>73</sup> "Prashant Tamang has become Indian Idol," he noted with a sarcastic laugh, "Tonight we need to guard our houses, malls, and restaurants by ourselves as there will be no Nepali people to guard these places. The whole night we will need to say 'Jagtay Raho'!" He also announced, "All footpath momo shops will remain closed as the Nepali guy has become Indian Idol."<sup>74</sup> Of course, no one in Darjeeling actually heard these incendiary remarks; Red FM is a Delhi-based radio station. Nevertheless word reached Darjeeling and by the 25<sup>th</sup>, the Prashant Fan Club, led by GNLFF muscle man Bimal Gurung, had declared a *bandh* (general strike) in the hills and effigies of Nitin were ablaze in the streets.

The outrage unabated, on the morning of September 28<sup>th</sup>, some 5000 Prashant supporters gathered in Siliguri to march an official complaint against Nitin and Red FM to the Siliguri court. Though the details remain uncertain, a minor skirmish of some sort broke out at the front of the procession in a crowded commercial strip near the courthouse. Almost instantly, the row spread along communal lines. Bengali shop owners emerged from their stalls with sticks and attacked the Gorkha protestors. About 800 Gorkhas, including 50 school children fled into the courthouse grounds,

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<sup>73</sup> See Satyadeep Chhetri's "No Chowkidar!" where this stereotype is shown to be not only a figment of prejudicial imagination, but also of judicial law. In *Himal* 21:1 January 2008.

<sup>74</sup> Transcript and translation from *Darjeeling Times*, Sep 26, 2007. Earlier in the Indian Idol-3 season, Gorkhas had been offended when Prashant was made to dress as a chowkidar for one of his earlier round performances.

where they sought whatever shelter they could find from the barrage of bricks and rocks hailing down upon them. Outside, rumors spread that a pregnant woman had been kicked, that a sick man buying medicine had been beaten up, that a hospital patient had been bludgeoned, and soon the mob owned the streets of Siliguri. Tear-gas was ineffective. Unable to contain the situation the police vanished, leaving the hostages on their own to weather the storm. For eight hours they remained trapped inside the courthouse, as vehicles and motorcycles burned in the streets. The police tried slapping a Section 144 on Siliguri banning gatherings of four or more people, but the mob ignored the proclamation. The army and Border Security Forces were then called in to regain control. Finally, at 7:45pm the Gorkha hostages were freed.

The news broke in Darjeeling piece-mail. On Star TV and other national channels, looped video snippets of burning vehicles, projectile-wielding mobs, and police idling at a safe distance played incessantly, as reporters on the ground tried to make sense of what was happening. Simultaneously, the local channel, Darjeeling TV, aired live footage of the All Gorkha Student Union (AGSU) demonstrations going on in town. In these images, hundreds of hot-blooded Darjeeling youth were shown gathered, chanting with rage: “The police procession should give us justice! All those who slander the Gorkhas, watch out! Death to the Bengali Government!” The streets went dead as people clung to the safety of their homes waiting for more news. No one was sure whether a bandh had been officially called or not. But that didn’t matter. The fantasy had turned into a nightmare.

For myself and my friend Prakash, it was too much to watch. After an entire afternoon of being glued to the television, the fragmented reportage had become an agonizingly slow and heartbreaking drip of information. So we turned off the television and went for a walk.

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Bandhs in South Asia have a way of bringing with them an eerie peace. Without the intermittent drone and wobbling headlights of the endless stream of jeeps that typically ply Hill-cart road, the *phātak* is pleasantly quiet, and strangely dark. As we reach the crossroads, Prakash hails his old buddy Puran, who emerges from the freshly painted violet façade of his new store sporting a stylish three-piece beige suit. A budding entrepreneur who dabbles on the side in jazz and blues guitar, Puran, with his long pony-tale and laid-back style, cuts quite the figure as he ambles over, hand outstretched to greet us.

It would have been a great day for the grand opening of his new store, but history has said otherwise, so we get to talking. Puran tells us that earlier in the day he and his friends almost beat up a carload of Bengali men who waved and made a comment at a Nepali girl as they passed through the very stretch of road where we are standing. As he narrates, he bows up his chest then suddenly flinch-strikes at the air like these Bengalis were right there in front of him, close enough to feel his rage.

“What did they say to her?” I ask.

He doesn’t remember. “Normally I wouldn’t do such a thing, but at this moment, in the wave of the moment...” He can explain no more.

We discuss Prashant’s win, Nitin’s comments, the riot. Puran continues, “You see this is what happens when someone makes an irresponsible comment...people these days don’t have any respect for others’ culture. You know Jesus, he said that thing: treat others as you would treat yourself?”

I share with Puran my sympathy, but gently suggest to him how things could have been different had the people of Darjeeling not reacted so strongly to the comments made over the airwaves of Delhi. If they had only let it roll off their back...

A man in the moment, Puran listens intently, then rejects the grounds of my perspective. “But you see, this Prashant Tamang thing is really about more than Prashant Tamang.”

Standing there in the middle of a dark empty road at 9 o’clock on a Friday night, this much is painfully clear.

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Within a week, the leader of the Prashant Fan Club, Bimal Gurung quit the GNLFF to float his own party. Twenty thousand people thronged to see the former muscle man of the GNLFF launch the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM)—in English, The Gorkha People’s Liberation Front. With bodies perched on beams of unfinished construction projects and the crowd extending as far as one could see into the labyrinthine bazaar, it was the largest public gathering in Darjeeling since the Gorkhaland Agitation of the 1980s. Not coincidentally, as of this momentous rally, ‘Gorkhaland’ was once again a movement.

By way of an almost unbelievable story of popular culture and local politics, Subash Ghisingh’s reign came to an end just four months later. Usurped and upstaged by Bimal Gurung, the affective wizard was beaten at his own game. Ghisingh’s unwillingness to officially support Prashant Tamang in the weeks leading up to the finals hurt the people of Darjeeling more than anything. Just days before the Indian Idol finale and with the ‘Old Man’ in Indonesia on a ‘tribal tourism’ research venture, posters went up in town warning, “If Prashant doesn’t win, Ghisingh will not be allowed to return to Darjeeling!” Betrayed by their paternal leader and strung-out from the emotional rollercoaster that followed Prashant’s victory, the public was on edge. Meanwhile having led the spirited campaign to Indian Idol victory, Bimal Gurung’s political capital was surging. So with the masses once again reverberating with anxiety, the muscular politics of the GJMM proved right for the time. Amid GJMM-

organized hunger strikes, indefinite bandhs and sporadic inter-party violence, on February 29<sup>th</sup> 2008, Subash Ghisingh was forced to resign.<sup>75</sup>

No one foresaw the swiftness of Ghisingh's demise, but when viewed through the analytic aperture of affect this amazing story in which a television show became the catalyst of profound political transformation is more believable. How quickly the euphoria of Prashant's victory morphed into horror and anger. How quickly that horror and anger morphed into revived, embodied determination for Gorkhaland. With our senses attuned to affect, we can begin to sense a continuity coursing through this turbulent series of events. In this sequence, we see affect seeping into the present as incipient, mercurial form.<sup>76</sup> One moment effusive joy, the next hot-blooded rage, the next unbridled determination: the power of shape-shift is one of affect's manifest conditions.

Affect in this case comes into view as an amorphous field of anxiety, a sheer intensity of unease, that begins to resonate at the slightest question of belonging in India. In Darjeeling, this sheer intensity of unease is simultaneously 'identity's' field of imminence and its amplitude. Whether agitated or latent, this anxiety over 'being-in' and 'being-of' India seems to have always there *underlining* and *undermining* the conditions of possibility for the Gorkha subject. Simultaneously, it has proven a volatile action potential for a specific politics of anxiety that continues to dominate the

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<sup>75</sup> Those not familiar with contemporary Darjeeling might find this narrative confusing. While Ghisingh led the GNLFF movement of the 1980s and took over as the Chair of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (1988-2008) the public increasingly saw that his regime was propped up by the CPI-M government of West Bengal, and that he subsequently abandoned the call for Gorkhaland. For the last several years of his reign, Ghisingh was not even an elected official. His term ran out in March 2004. Since then Ghisingh continually received 6-month extensions from the CPI-M government earning him the nickname 'Recharge Voucher'. For an excellent analysis of Ghisingh's fall, see Niraj Lama 2008's "A Dictator Deposed" (2008). On the twilight years of his reign, see Lama 2006.

<sup>76</sup> My word choice here is inspired by Massumi who writes of affect: "It is the edge of the virtual, where it leaks into actual, that counts. For that seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found." (1996: 236).

hills. To understand this circuitry, consider how quickly the Siliguri riots became affective grist for the political mill.

Just five days after the riots the All Gurkha Student Union (AGSU) announced: “The recent Siliguri riots have prompted us to speak out. The incident made us feel that the Gorkhas are not safe. We always have to prove our identity in this country. This is happening because we do not have our own land. More than the Sixth Schedule, the Gorkhas require their own land!”<sup>77</sup> Within days, AGSU would join the GJMM to once again put Gorkhaland on the proverbial table. To answer William Mazzarella’s provocative question: “Affect, What is it good for?” these events offer one clear answer: politics.<sup>78</sup>

In studying affect, we must avoid the psychoanalytic tendency to view such events as misrepresentations or distortions of some underlying condition; rather, I believe we must understand such phenomenon as expressions of anxiety, or what we might call the social actualization of an intensity of unease that itself has its own socio-historical bases. The historicity of affect is seldom transparent; rather it waits, often veiled, ready for release into the present. As a region of incipient intensity then, affect is potentiality but not ‘pure’ potentiality—that is, affect is not as ‘autonomous’ as Massumi suggests. The historical moments presented here demonstrate how affect is not only tapped and captured, but also socially produced, reproduced, and conditioned. As we see in the events of the 1850s, 1860s, 1930s, 1980s, and even in the nearly instantaneous reworking of the Siliguri riots of 2007 into ‘history’, anxious belonging in Darjeeling is affect with precedent—if not always perfectly sound reason. This raises an important question: If affect is a region of yet to be actualized intensity that can manifest, morph, and shape-shift into a spectrum of discursively mediated emotional scenarios, then, to borrow phrasing from Mazzarella—is the study

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<sup>77</sup> *The Telegraph* Oct 4, 2007.

<sup>78</sup> Mazzarella 2009.

of affect “always arriving too late at the scene of a crime it is incapable of recognizing”? Yes and no.

In my own fathoming, this compilation of vignettes suggests two understandings of affect. One is that affect is something like an energy field that precedes articulation, an ontological region of intensity-as-potentiality. The other is that affect is a *dimension-of* social phenomenon. In the former conceptualization, affect as potentiality, we might only posit its existence. Conceptualizing affect in this way helps us understand the hair-trigger responses the people of Darjeeling have to the question of belonging in India—whether actualized as the sheer elation of Prashant Tamang’s victory, the horror that followed, or the rage with which the masses are once again hailing ‘Gorkhaland!’ But this view of affect as incipient intensity tends precisely toward the sort of mystification that this essay has taken issue with. Viewing affect only as *potentiality-for* social actualization renders the topic virtually impossible to study with any empirical rigor.

Methodologically, it makes more sense to also approach affect as an integral *dimension-of* the social world—integral, that is, to embodied dispositions, ‘memory’, and yes, politics. Affect here is the charge that attends and infuses discursive formations, semiotics, and knowledge—at once a unique register of social life, yet dialectically constituted by specific conditions of history. Conceiving of affect as a *dimension-of* the social world, we might sense the variant intensities of social phenomenon. For instance, we could say that the call for Gorkhaland is *stronger* now—that is, more affectively charged—than it has ever been. This conception invites a more phenomenological line of study that need not be estranged from historical materialist methods, but instead can be successfully integrated into them. After all, as we have seen in Darjeeling, affect is inextricably linked to specific discursive, material, and socio-political circumstances. Taken to be a dimension of study in its

own right, affect here can lend sentient amplitude to other methodological commitments.

From my own experiences of affect in Darjeeling, some of which are captured here, I believe that we can learn a great deal from conceptualizing affect as both *potentiality-for* and *dimension-of* socio-cultural practice. Both views capture something of the nature of affect; hence they are not mutually exclusive. With them we gain multiple starting points for an analytic pursuit of the elusive referent at hand. Beyond rigid analytics, such an open view may also help us tune-in to affect's resonance. Importantly, the series of affective vignettes presented here does not ask us to choose one view or the other, but rather to embrace both conceptualizations. As students and beings of affect, I believe we could greatly expand our capacity to understand the social world and each other by learning to live with this touch of analytic ambivalence.

### **Affect and Knowledge.**

As a topic of study, affect presents many challenges and opportunities. The materials presented here hail from different methodological domains but make no claim to comprehensively capture the totality of experiences of anxious belonging in Darjeeling. While each fragment presents an actualization of affect in the world, affect is perhaps best fathomed as that vibratory resonance between the pieces themselves. Insofar as the parts presented here are key scenarios to the history of the people of Darjeeling, I have tried to conjure something of the anxiety that arises out of this history in order to question how affect and history bleed into the present in shaping the problems of 'identity' and belonging in the hills—as well as their sought solutions.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> This bleed should be kept in mind as the reader moves into other aspects of this dissertation.

The first challenge of studying affect is to recognize it. As an ethnographer inspired by the phenomenology of Alfred Schutz, I feel this is best achieved in the realm of directly experienced social reality, where something like a true We-relationship of consociates can be experienced.<sup>80</sup> With rigorous reflexive care, Schutz's critique of Weber's interpretive sociology sets the methodological stage for an ethnography of affect. However, in important ways the modality of his platform also limits such a project. Schutz rightfully critiques Weber's treatment of the interiorities of the individual subject. Specifically, Schutz phenomenologically dissects how subjective meaning is made by the subject, and how it may then be articulated and apprehended socially as objective meaning. In this way, Schutz charts a middle way between Weberian sociology and the phenomenology of Husserl and others.<sup>81</sup> We must recognize though that Schutz's attention to subjective meaning contexts offers an important shift, but not a radical break, from Weber. At the end of the day, both men were principally concerned with the making of meaning, with Schutz's eyes, of course, calibrated to far more subjective detail. Such an approach, I believe, can only throw but so much light on the question of affect generally—or the pervasive sense of anxious belonging in Darjeeling, specifically.

As I learned through my anxiety-ridden experience with the samaj president, the strongest recognition of affect may be less a matter of meaning making in the Schutzian sense or objective knowing in the Kantian sense, than a matter of sensing.<sup>82</sup> Beyond Schutz, I want to pursue affect as that energy or feeling that is somehow always *involved in*, and yet psycho-existentially beside or *with*, the making of

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<sup>80</sup> Schutz 1967: 98-142.

<sup>81</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, Phenomenology was a dominant front in the European intellectual climate (especially in Germany). Within the debates that raged then, the question of inter-subjectivity became especially pronounced, luring in the likes of Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, Arendt and others. The influence of these debates is clear in Schutz's work, which represents an attempt to sure up the phenomenological grounds for a philosophy of the social sciences. On 'the controversy over inter-subjectivity', see Moyn 2005: Chapter 2.

<sup>82</sup> On Kant's epistemological construal of knowledge, please refer back to Chapter I.

meaning.<sup>83</sup> Such a pursuit pushes the envelope of socially scientific understanding toward knowledge's beyond—into the realm of sense, sensing, sensation.

If we are willing to go there, such an ante can also move the study of affect beyond the strictures of the individual subject to embrace phenomena that Durkheim might have sensed as “collective effervescence” or Victor Turner might have experienced as “*communitas*”.<sup>84</sup> This willingness to privilege—however provisionally—sense, sensing, and sensation as modalities of understanding could help us further understand how feelings like euphoria or rage sweep through crowds like waves, generating at times wonderful, and at others, horrifying consequences. Through the lenses of affect, such collective energies can be seen to be at once embodied by, yet transcendent of, the individual subject. Sensing affect, we may envisage these forces as wavelengths of real, embodied history capable of electrifying masses in seemingly capricious, potentially volatile extensions into the present.

If affect is indeed *beyond* but always somehow *with* and *in relation to* semiotics, semantics, and knowledge in the Kantian sense, then its most precise

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<sup>83</sup> Schutz, following Weber, was primarily concerned with subjective meaning, albeit in a much more phenomenologically concerned way. Both Schutz and Weber flirt with the question of affect but continually turn toward the question of meaning. Weber considers what he calls ‘affectual behavior’ to be a borderline case between his categories of meaningful and meaningless behavior. He writes, “Purely affectual behavior also stands on the borderline of what can be considered ‘meaningfully’ oriented, and often too, goes over the line. It may for instance be an uncontrolled reaction to some exceptional stimulus. It is a case of sublimation when affectually determined action occurs in the form of conscious release of emotional tension. When this happens, it is usually, though not always, well on the road to rationalization in one or the other or both of the above senses” (1978: 24) Here Weber seems to allude to a realm of affect that his ‘affectual behavior’ is moving *from* on its ‘road *to* rationalization’. His mention of sublimation bolsters the innuendo. Weber then explains that affectual action “does not lie in the achievement of a result ulterior to it, but in carrying out the specific type of action for its own sake. Examples of an affectual action are the satisfaction of a direct impulse to revenge, to sensual gratification, to devote oneself to a person or ideal, to contemplative bliss, or finally toward the working off of emotional tension. Such impulses belong in this category regardless of how sordid or sublime they may be.” (Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* p.12, as cited in Schutz 1967: 18) However, the concern for both Schutz and Weber remains the subjective meaning of intentional action. Schutz’s critique of Weber reveals how Weber pulls up short at the question of subjectivity, and it is into this analytic void that Schutz develops his theory of subjective meaning making and the possibility of its inter-subjective knowing in his *Phenomenology of the Social World*. See also Weber 1978.

<sup>84</sup> Durkheim 1995; Turner, V. 1969.

recognitions may well come through alternative registers of a similar kind. In other words, affect's recognition itself may be a matter of resonance, sensation and feeling—all of which are modalities of understanding that face perennial difficulties gaining purchase in normative academic circles. However, as I hope to have shown, the study of affect can also be grounded in more established methodologies, while remaining open to more unorthodox techniques of understanding.

Nevertheless, *even if* we are able to recognize affect ethnographically or by other means; *even if* we are able to historiographically track the hazy dialectic between what Schutz would call the “objective” conditions of history and the “subjective-meaning contexts” through which history is lived, the study of affect inevitably arrives at the impasse of Representation. To be scholarly effective—perhaps even affective—any portrayal of affect must consign itself to the terms of its own semiotic actualization—themselves, incomplete, limited, and open-ended. More than that, it must creatively embrace the possibilities of that moment. Here, in the domain of semiosis, the challenge becomes not merely to craft “objective meaning-contexts of subjective meaning-contexts” but also to present something of the virtual substance of affect.<sup>85</sup> My attempts to represent history and affect through the materials offered in this chapter, necessarily, can only be but a portrayal and betrayal of the anxiety I experienced most intensely on that dark night with the samaj president. So at that, I shall try to leave my treatment of anxious belonging in a more gracious way than I stumbled into it: by allowing it a peace that history itself seems to have denied to those who embody it—by simply letting it be.

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<sup>85</sup> Schutz 1967: 241.

## CHAPTER III.

### Durga and the Rock:

#### Rethinking the History of 'Tribal' Recognition in India.

In Darjeeling, as throughout much of India and South Asia, Durga Pujā is traditionally a holiday of great public celebration.<sup>1</sup> Though understood to be of Hindu origin, it has typically been celebrated by individuals across the religious spectrum of the Darjeeling hills. Annually a time for visiting family and friends, Durga Pujā has always proven an apt alibi for libations and celebratory spirits of all kinds. Presiding over the merry-making from her sumptuous *pandals*<sup>2</sup> has always been the fierce, compassionate, and, at this time of year, particularly bloodthirsty Hindu goddess Durga.

In 2006 though, instead of unveiling the ornate idol of Durga that is typically at the center of the spectacle, the local administration, the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) rolled out an enormous stone (*shilā*) plucked from the bed of a nearby river by a local shaman (*jhankri*) sanctioned by the DGHC and its caretaker Subash Ghisingh.<sup>3</sup> Chosen for its spiritual prowess, the stone was then ensconced on stage at *Chow Rasta*, the town plaza, in its own pandal of opulence. For days, shamans adorned in full ritual attire hovered around the rock shaking in trance, as suited bureaucrats monitored the proceedings from deluxe VIP chairs. Musical troops were

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<sup>1</sup> The multi-day holiday is known in Darjeeling by various names: 'Dusshera' as it is called elsewhere in India, 'Dasain' as it is known in Nepal, and, of course, 'Durga Pujā', the name emanating from its resplendent observance in the state of West Bengal. Its celebration in Darjeeling has indeed been a confluence of these traditions and others, making for a rather fluid affair in which lines of distinction give way to the flood of conviviality that fills the holiday season.

<sup>2</sup> Pandals are temporary stages erected to house the idol of Durga. They are often ornately designed and may reach heights of several stories.

<sup>3</sup> The ceremony began on September 28, 2006. Ghisingh formal title was 'caretaker' because at this point he was not an elected official. His elected term ran out in 2004, after which he was given consecutive 6-month extensions by the Government of West Bengal to continue administering the DGHC.

brought to the stage to sing specially arranged devotional songs. These were then broadcasted across town at mind-numbing pitches. Processions came and went, as did politicians, party loyalists, tourists, and everyday passer-bys. Through it all, the *shilā* sat dumbly on stage enwreathed in incense, flower garlands, and vermilion, just as Durga would have in previous years. This year, however, it was the rock—the centerpiece of a bizarre, ostensibly ‘animistic’, misc-en-scene.

The ritual was one of many put on by the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs (DICA) of the DGHC throughout 2005, 2006, and 2007. It was no secret that these displays were part of Subash Ghisingh’s ongoing efforts to bring Sixth Schedule status to the hills, thereby securing it limited autonomy as a designated ‘tribal area’ as per the Indian constitution. In December of 2005, Ghisingh, the Centre, and the state of West Bengal signed a tripartite Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) to bring Darjeeling under the purview of the Sixth Schedule, but the details of the plan remained hazy. By constitutional design, the Sixth Schedule incorporates existing tribal political institutions into autonomous District Councils with powers to regulate forest and property rights, social customs, and local administrative structures (for instance, the appointment of headmen and chiefs).<sup>4</sup> But how this provision originally intended for the tribal populations of the Northeast would take form in Darjeeling (which to date was only 32% ‘tribal’ by official Scheduled Tribe recognition and which lacked any ‘tribal’ political institutions) remained to be seen.

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<sup>4</sup> On the Sixth Schedule, see Articles 244(2) and 275(1) in *The Constitution of India*. Antecedents to the ‘tribal’ based exceptionalisms of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules include: the *Scheduled Districts Acts of 1874*; *The Government of India Act of 1919* (Sec. 52-A(2)) that established ‘Backward Tracts’; and *The Government of India Act of 1935* (Sec. 91 & 92) that demarcated ‘Excluded’ and ‘Partially Excluded Areas’. These acts based the need for special forms of governance on the purported aboriginal, frontier, and/or ‘backward’ conditions of the said areas. Importantly, Darjeeling has traditionally fallen within this ambit of exceptionalism. Darjeeling was declared a Scheduled District under the 1874 Act, a ‘Backward Tract’ in the 1919 Act, and a ‘Partially Excluded Area’ under the 1935 Act. A useful synthesis of these policies, as well as those pertaining to Scheduled Tribes may be found in Ghurye’s *The Scheduled Tribes of India* (1963)

Numbers aside, the Sixth Schedule promised a qualified form of ethnic-based sovereignty. Were it to be implemented, Darjeeling would remain within the borders of West Bengal with the district magistrate, police, and certain other administrative instruments remaining under the control of the state government. The MoS did, however, guarantee a “self-governing council... to fulfill economic, educational, and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of hill people.”<sup>5</sup> Certainly, the Sixth Schedule was not Gorkhaland, but it held promise nonetheless. Despite the wording of the MoS which stated unequivocally that the Sixth Schedule would be the “full and final settlement” to the question of sovereignty in Darjeeling, many believed the Sixth Schedule bid was part of Ghisingh’s master plan to achieve Gorkhaland—or, at the very least, a stepping stone for future generations.

As of the Fall of 2006, there was considerable work to be done to make the Sixth Schedule a reality in Darjeeling. As the details of eligibility and governance were being worked out in closed-door meetings in Kolkata and New Delhi, Ghisingh redoubled his mission to prove the ‘tribal’ identity of his constituency. The supplanting of Durga with the rock was one of the many tactics Ghisingh deployed toward this end. Yet who was to be convinced of ‘tribal’ authenticity in Darjeeling remained largely an open question. The government needed to be convinced, but apparently so too did the people of Darjeeling.

In the latter years of his reign, the ‘Old Man’, as Ghisingh came to be known, had grown extremely reclusive—some would say paranoid, even mad. On the rare occasions he emerged from his headquarters high on the *Lāl Khoti* hill, it was typically to spout the latest findings of his studies of the lost ‘tribal’ identities of the Gorkha peoples. On October 11, 2006 Ghisingh’s identical bulletproof Ambassadors rolled

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<sup>5</sup> Clause 5 of the Memorandum of Settlement signed December 6, 2005.

into the town of Lebung, where he was to inaugurate a new community hall. After the requisite performances of ‘tribal’ culture by local dance troops, the Old Man took the podium to begin a rambling diatribe on the links of culture and politics. “We are hill tribes!” he proclaimed to the thousand or so Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) cadres gathered, “‘Tribal’ means it is of ancient times. It is not modern. Our civilization, our culture, our tradition, all that we have here in Darjeeling are of ancient times. It could never be lost, or destroyed.”

Ghisingh then went on to accuse not only the “Britishers” but also “international spy agencies” such as the ISI, CIA, and KGB of trying to destroy their ‘tribal’ culture.<sup>6</sup> Ghisingh stared down these imagined foes with great bravado, reminding the audience that:

“In reality, it could not [be destroyed] because our people did not stop the chant of the shamans. Their cultures and traditions, they did not forget; they continued with those. Like the *shilā pujā* and the *kul pujās*. They did not stop practicing anything. The Indian Government may have knowingly or unknowingly tried to break us. But this could not be broken.... Though my blood is still hot. I have kept it under control. Locking horns with the Government of Bengal and Delhi is not going to work. The way forward is the kind of politics I am doing these days. In today’s context of the Sixth Schedule, it is the policy of protecting the tribals. Not a separate state of Gorkhaland but security for the tribals!”

Ghisingh’s appeal to the “security of the tribals” was but the newest articulation of a politics of fear and uncertainty he had mastered decades earlier during the Gorkhaland Agitation. But whereas in the 1980s, Ghisingh harped on the vulnerability of the

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<sup>6</sup> Espionage was a recurrent paranoia of Ghisingh’s. His 2004 letter to the Prime Minister of India titled “International Spy Agencies” claimed Darjeeling was suffering from “tremendous pressure of the top international conspiracy and its terrorist activities without any proper help of justice of the State Government and the Central Government of India.” (Ghisingh to Singh, Oct 6, 2004. Printed in *Hills and Mountain Forum*, ed. Mahendra P. Lama). Ghisingh frequently blamed such agencies like the CIA and ISI of trying to divide and destroy the Gorkha peoples. Earlier in his career, Ghisingh’s accusations included claims of systematic human rights abuse by the British of Gorkhas (See Memorandum to the King of Nepal, Dec. 23, 1983), as well as claims against the Government of West Bengal of “genocide and apartheid crimes” on the Gorkha peoples (“Telegraph to Prime Minister of India, May 5, 1986). All available in Lama 1996.

‘Gorkha’ in India, now it was the ‘tribes’ who needed security. Shifting his sights from Gorkhaland to the Sixth Schedule thus entailed the supplantation of the previously hallowed appellation ‘Gorkha’ by the more anthropologically savory and political viable ‘tribal’ identification.

As Ghisingh mesmerized and confounded the masses, his administration and firebrand GNLF cadres took the message to the streets. Public rituals were engineered. Attendance and dress codes were mandated. And pressures spoken and unspoken were put upon communities and individuals to fall into ethnological line. The heavy-handed politics that had become the signature of GNLF power since the 1980s now was put to work as a different form of compulsion—a different kind of stick, if you will—propelling the people toward the constitutionally-based carrots of ethnological distinction.

Few denied the political motivations underpinning of the DGHC’s fashionings of ‘tribal’ identity. As a resident anthropologist, I was often summoned to public rituals like that in which Durga was replaced by the rock. While my presence, in the eyes of DGHC officials, may or may not have lent credence to these vivid displays of ‘tribal’ identity, the veneer of authenticity was thin at best. In one such moment, I was sitting with the Vice President of the Municipality on the side of the aforementioned stage where the rock still sat dumbly. With hundreds of spectators looking on (but out of earshot), even he conceded the transparency of the cultural orchestrations at hand. The Vice President explained, “We started bringing the rock last year. We have to prove that we are not Hindu. We worship an ancient religion of *bon*. It came before, and Hinduism only came later; it was imposed on us. Our ancestral religion, you know this *kul* ritual, is animistic. *Bon* means animism. The *shilā* is animism, nature worship.”

The Vice President's confessions of the obvious merely reiterated a maxim that reverberated in the administrative halls of the DGHC, in the offices of ethnicities seeking Scheduled Tribe status, in the press, and on the street: to be 'tribal' one mustn't be Hindu. The fashionings of 'tribal' culture were obviously stilted affairs. Yet it was nevertheless the case that even as the Vice President confessed to me the underlying motives of the anthropological pomp and its political circumstance, a steady stream of GNLFF devotees—men, women, rich, and poor—ascended to the stage to bow before the rock and receive its blessings.

From where I sat stage left, I was in no position to judge the sincerity of their moment with the *shilā*, only to note the political import of the ethnological forms in which they were partaking.

### **The History of a Category and its Discontents.**

This chapter questions how ethnological distinction has become a platform for liberal rights and recognition in modern India. My aim is to historicize the systems of recognition in which the people of Darjeeling are currently ensnared. In exploring the collusions of anthropology/ethnology and colonial rule, this analysis will necessarily travel what have by now become familiar grounds in the field of colonial studies.<sup>7</sup> But it navigates this history with a different sort of awareness. Importantly, one need not mine the oeuvres of postcolonial critique to realize the conditioning effects of the taxonomies of the census<sup>8</sup>, the 'ethnographic state',<sup>9</sup> and liberal thought on contemporary identity politics.<sup>10</sup> These historical objects pepper the 'found' anthropologies of Darjeeling. In the claims of aspiring communities and the

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<sup>7</sup> On colonialism and anthropology, see Asad 1973; Bremen & Shimizu *et al* 1999; Cohn 1987, 1996; Uberoi, Sundar, & Deshpande *et al* 2008; Dirks 2001, 2004; Dudley-Jenkins 2003; Haller 1971, 1971a; Pinney 1991; Saleminck & Pel *et al* 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Academic treatments include Cohn 1996; Kaviraj 1992; Anderson 1983, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Dirks 2001, 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Exemplary studies include Guha 1989; Mehta 1999; Metcalf 1995.

government agencies handling their cases, these facets have already been rendered in genealogical accord. My historiography therefore follows suit.

I concentrate on taxonomies of colonial rule—in particular the category of ‘tribe’ (or ‘tribal’).<sup>11</sup> However, this is not, I hope, another ‘colonial constructions of’ argument. Arguments on the colonial constructions of caste, race, and gender have opened up critical understandings of the ways in which colonial knowledge conditions contemporary identity politics.<sup>12</sup> Extensive attention has been directed in particular at the colonial constructions of ‘caste’—the work of Nicholas Dirks (2001) being the most forceful. Yet, the figure of the ‘tribal’—Hinduism’s other Other—has remained largely beyond the pale of this line of critique. On the surface it would appear the most colonial of categories. But as I shall demonstrate here, once that surface is scratched, the history of the category itself becomes a morass of nebulous conceptions and broken epistemologies, making the genealogical project especially problematic. As I will show, it is precisely the discontinuities, contradictions, and uncanny returns within the epistemic history of this category that have made the designation ‘tribal’ the peculiar calling-card for liberal rights and recognition that it has become for hundreds (and perhaps soon, thousands) of communities in India today.

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<sup>11</sup> Though ‘tribes’ have in large part evaded the line of critique charted by Dirks and others, there have been some scattered articulations of this sort. See for instance Karlsson 2000; van Schendel 1992; as well as various papers given as part of the ‘Tribes of Mind’ panel at the 2006 EASAS meetings. Peter Pels (2000) has written an excellent essay on the ‘aborigine’ category in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Indian ethnology. There is a large body of literature about the ‘tribal’ problem in India, most of it written after independence. And in this work there is frequent mention of the colonial roots of the category itself. But these studies have not probed the history of this category in the way that has been done for the construction of ‘caste’. I believe the history of the category poses particular methodological difficulties that have subsequently affected its critique. Exemplary readings on the ‘tribal problem’ in India may be found in the essays of Thapar’s edited volume, *Tribe, Caste, and Religion* (1977), Bhattacharya’s “Recent Trends in Acculturated Tribes in West Bengal” (1996), Singh’s *The Tribal Situation in India* (1972), and Helm *et al*’s *Essays on the Problems of Tribes* (1968). Excellent historical critiques of the category of the ‘tribe’ in the African contexts can be found in Fardon (1987) and Binsbergen (1985).

<sup>12</sup> On colonialism and caste, see Bates 1995; Bayly, S. 1995, 1999; Dirks 1987, 2001, 2004. On colonialism and race, see Epperson 1994; Ranger 1982; Robb *et al* 1995; Young 1995. Related studies on gender include: Bannerji 2001; Burton 1994, 2003; Ghosh 2006; Mani 1998; Sangari & Vaid *et al* 1990; Sarkar 2001.

Though I am interested in the history of the ‘tribal’ category, following the recent work of Ann Laura Stoler, I am equally concerned with the epistemic anxieties, misgivings, and uncertainties that shrouded its institution.<sup>13</sup> Alongside colonials’ sometimes-rampant pretensions of rationalist certainty, were troubling doubts about knowledge, its representational precision, and, by extension, its administrative utility. These doubts about (and attending) colonial knowledge were instrumental in shaping the trajectory of human classification throughout the colonial and postcolonial eras—especially in regard to the checkered construct of the ‘tribes’. In exploring these affective histories of ‘colonialism and its forms of knowledge’, I seek to develop a ‘historical negative’ of colonial discursive constructions—one that considers not merely the inscribed categories and concepts of colonial anthropology, but also the greater social, affective milieu of their production. Questioning these social and affective dimensions of colonial knowledge production allows us to understand colonial knowledge as something other than the monolith it is often made out to be. The historical negative I develop here exposes the persuasions and ever-shifting social, political, and intellectual circumstances that shaped ethnological knowledge production in colonial India. Following Stoler, I argue that it is only by reading the archive “as both a corpus of writing and as a force field that animates political energies and expertise, that pulls on some ‘social facts’ and converts them into qualified knowledge” that we can appreciate the checkered fate of the category ‘tribe’ and those subjects that have hitherto fallen under its sway.<sup>14</sup>

When evaluated over the long *durée*, the imbrications of the category ‘tribal’ in colonial governance were less methodical, programmatic and monolithic than one might think. Its definition and analytic usefulness were in constant doubt. Moreover, the grounds of questioning were constantly shifting. The term was used rather

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<sup>13</sup> Stoler 2009.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*: 22. On ‘developing historical negatives’ see *Ibid*, Chapter IV.

haphazardly through much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, as it came to bear increasing administrative weight, the category was subjected to heightened scrutiny. In turn, ‘tribal’ and ‘hindooism’ (against which it came to be diametrically opposed) became the source of traceable epistemic angst. Despite its apparent staying power, when we train our eyes to epistemic anxiety, the history of the category appears internally differentiated, dynamic, and unstable. The protean grounds of the category were furthermore linked to the shifting contours of the newly emerging academic discipline of anthropology. The resiliency of the ‘tribal’ category owed more to its widespread usage, amorphous definition, and ability to change with the times than to any assumed fixity of what the term actually meant. As I will illustrate momentarily it was a curious mix of epistemic uncertainty, rational hubris, and the desire for systematic calculation that steered the checkered journey of the ‘tribal’ figure through the twilight of the British Raj.

By the 1930s and 1940s, when Indian lawmakers began to assume the reins of governance, the category’s reputation lay in shambles. Historically marred by past ethnologies of ill repute, the British had deemed the category “worthless” and had all but given up on its analytic and administrative utility. Yet precisely when it seemed the death knell of this problematic category would finally be sounded, the bits and pieces that remained were gathered and liberally reworked by the likes of Ambedkar, Nehru, and their fellow ‘architects’ of independent India. Their discursive re-assembly of the ‘tribal’, as well as the grids of modern recognition in which this figure became fossilized, would condition the possibilities for millions in the post-1947 era—including the people of Darjeeling.

In considering their contemporary conditions—their anxious sense of belonging in India, their enduring struggles for rights and recognition, and the ethnological forms they have in turn invested themselves in—it is worth asking: Why

the cultural engineering to eradicate the influence of Hinduism, a religious tradition that until very recently was held in high-esteem by these groups? Why the finagling of ST applications and the epistemic sleights of hand in their representations of themselves?<sup>15</sup> Why the mandates of singularity and exactitude? Why the performative evocation of ‘animism’, ‘primitiveness’ and the like? In short, why the rock and not Durga?

These details of the ‘ethnologies of the governed’ call for a careful study of the history of epistemic forms. Yet the epistemic history I seek here entails more than a close study of the categories, concepts, and logics of human classification through the colonial and postcolonial era. Along with these inner-workings of knowledge, it also examines the socio-political and subjective contexts within which, and *to* which, these discursive forms were applied in knowledge practice. To understand the contemporary socio-political possibilities, impossibilities, hopes, and dreams attached to ‘tribal’ recognition, it is crucial that epistemic history not confine itself solely to what is ‘epistemological’—in Charles Taylor’s sense of the term.<sup>16</sup> That is, it must question more than the techniques and discursive forms through which representational knowledges of colonial subjects were created. Augmenting this important line of questioning, I believe there is much to be learned by attending to the affects that haunt and animate particular knowledge forms. It is through an attention to the more

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<sup>15</sup> I discuss these issues in the previous chapters.

<sup>16</sup> In referencing Taylor, I suggest that a history of epistemic forms and practice cannot rest merely with the discursive accretions of knowledge (categories, concepts, etc), nor can it rest merely with the question of knowledge as a form of representation to an object that is ‘out there’. The latter concern of colonial misrepresentation has been a mainstay of postcolonial critique ranging from Said to Fanon and beyond. Charles Taylor notions of ‘overcoming epistemology’ entail moving beyond the epistemological construal that sees “knowledge as the inner depiction of an outer reality.” For the history at hand, I believe there is much to be learned by heeding his call and examining the more embodied affects that attend the discursive forms of knowledge. Such an approach allows us to engage with the question of knowledge not merely as a question of representation in which knowledge is seen as phenomenon removed from its objects and agents, but instead knowledge-production as a dynamic process that is always entangled within the discursive and non-discursive dimensions of social and subjective life. For Taylor’s critique of epistemology, see his *Philosophical Arguments* (1995), especially Chapters I-IV.

affectual facets of history that I historicize the grids of intelligibility through which ‘identity’ is being made and remade, cognized and recognized today.<sup>17</sup> Historical anthropology is, I believe, well suited to such an endeavor. This essay thereby seeks to ‘people’ a genealogy with the aspirations, anxieties, and confusions that attended colonial knowledge production, and which have since transmuted into distinctly postcolonial forms.

I begin with a seminal figure not only to colonial ethnology, but also to the people of Darjeeling both then and now.

### **Foundations: ‘Broken’ and ‘Unbroken’.**

In 1819, a budding colonial official received his first appointment in the East India Company (EIC). His name was Brian Hodgson. Of impeccable pedigree (he studied at the *East India Company College* at Haileybury before doing a year of training at Fort William in Calcutta), Hodgson was sent to serve as Assistant Commissioner of Kumaun. There he worked under George William Traill, who like Hodgson was a young man, adventurous in both mind and body. Largely left to their own wares on the North-West frontier, throughout 1919 and 1920 Traill and Hodgson explored their jurisdiction by foot, interacting with the locals in their native tongue, garnering first hand information with an ethnographic rigor that would stay with Hodgson throughout his career. Their findings were written up in a variety of forms: for example, “A Statistical Account of Kumaun” (1822), which was also the basis of the administrative handbook of the province (1820); a scholarly article in *Asiatic Researches* (1828);<sup>18</sup> the content of Kumaun’s Settlement Reports (1842-1848);<sup>19</sup> the

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<sup>17</sup> On ‘grids of intelligibility’, see Dreyfus and Rabinow’s discussion of Foucault’s notion of *dispositif* (1982:120-122). Additional readings of *dispositif* can be found in Foucault 1980 and Stoler 1995: 11, 36.

<sup>18</sup> “Statistical Sketch of Kumaun,” *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XVI. Calcutta, 1828. References listed here cited in Hunter 1896: 52.

<sup>19</sup> No.1. *The Official Reports of the Province of Kumaun*. Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1851.

content on Kumaun in Atkinson's *Statistical Survey of India* (1877),<sup>20</sup> as well as the *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (1886). As W.W. Hunter notes in his biography of Hodgson many years later, "The habit of systematic enquiry into the population, their history, language, social institutions and economic conditions which Traill impressed upon Hodgson in his first year of service became the keynote of Hodgson's whole official career. It is surprising how long a really good piece of work lives in India."<sup>21</sup> When he conducted this work, Hodgson was just nineteen years old.

In 1820, Hodgson was appointed as Assistant Resident in Nepal, later becoming the Official Resident from 1833 to 1843. An agent of the Empire in a technically non-colonized land, Hodgson's responsibilities were ambiguous and difficult. Yet he managed the ambivalent relationship between the EIC and politically tumultuous Nepal with remarkable acumen. During his time in Kathmandu, Hodgson also became a committed scholar of the Himalayas and its people. It is said that in his last meeting with the Nepali Durbar before leaving his post in 1843, the Raja burst into tears.<sup>22</sup> Though he resigned from the EIC that same year, his ties with Nepal were firmly established. After a brief hiatus in England, he returned to India to take up his studies once again. He found his new home in Darjeeling, where he lived from 1845 to 1858. Now free from the burden of administration, but not from his tireless dedication to the Empire, Hodgson continued the scholarly work he had begun while in Kathmandu. He was a naturalist, religious scholar, and collector extraordinaire, but it was his ethnological obsession with the 'tribes' of the Himalayas that is of importance here.

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<sup>20</sup> Atkinson, E.T. 1877. See *Imperial Gazetteer* (volumes on North-Western Provinces), dated August, 31, 1877.

<sup>21</sup> Hunter 1896: 52. A recent volume edited by David Waterhouse (2004) has shed light on Hodgson's multifaceted scholarship in the Himalayas. Of particular interest there is Martin Gaenszle's essay "Brian Hodgson as Ethnographer and Ethnologists" where a useful overview of Hodgson's ethnological work can be found. Gaenszle 2004. Biographical information on Hodgson also available in Pels 1999.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*: 234. Hodgson's appointment ended when he fell into disfavor with Lord Ellenborough who dismissed him from his post.

As early as 1832, Hodgson began studying the ‘martial tribes’ of Nepal for their potential as soldiers for the British Indian army.<sup>23</sup> Throughout his writings Hodgson bandied the term ‘tribal’ about rather haphazardly. In this regard, he was not unlike other colonials of his era. In the parlance of the time, the term ‘tribe’ meant anything from what we might today call ‘race’, ‘nationality’, ‘community’, or ‘group’. That said, Hodgson writings on the ‘martial tribes’ and ‘hill tribes’ of Nepal took a more pointed form.<sup>24</sup> He was particularly concerned with harnessing the ‘martial spirit’ of the ‘tribes’ into the service of imperial rule. Hodgson worried that if the innate martial spirit of the Nepalis was not marshaled for productive purposes, it would lead to a perpetually unstable frontier for British India. Hodgson was, moreover, adamant that Himalayan ethnicities like the Khas, Gurung, and Magar embodied traits of soldiers far superior to those of the plains where religious taboos (especially those of castes) were increasingly understood to interfere with the duties of soldiery. Though Hodgson was expressly concerned with the religious habits (or lack

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<sup>23</sup> Hodgson’s “Classification of Military Tribes of Nepal” [Hodgson Collection; MSS 6, Vol 6/1/1-12]. Convincing the EIC of the military worth of the ‘martial tribes’ of Nepal was a longstanding project of Hodgson. Up to and through the Mutiny of 1857, he wrote repeatedly on not only the desirability of these ‘martial tribes’ for the British Indian army, but their necessity. His ideas proved prescient of the events of the 1857 Mutiny, in which Gurkhas were instrumental in helping the British overcome the Mutiny. Following the lessons of the Mutiny, the British upped the Gurkha regiments considerably. See Des Chene (1991) and Hunter 1896: 259-60). Additional writings by Hodgson on the value of the ‘martial tribes’ include: “Letter dated July 8, 1833” in [Hodgson Collection--MSS 7/20/119-122] and the essays written in the 1840s organized under the title, “Tribes of Hillmen” [Hodgson Collection; MSS 7 Vol. 5/1/1-78].

<sup>24</sup> An excellent analysis of the 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectual history out of which Hodgson’s classificatory rubrics emerged may be found in Gaenzle 2004. Though Gaenzle does not deal with the exact categories that I am concerned with here, his analysis provides some helpful contextualization for understanding Hodgson’s notion of what constitutes a ‘tribe’-- ‘broken’ or otherwise. Peter Pels has also written on how Hodgson did and did not fit in with the Orientalist thought and practices of his time. In particular, Pels makes the notable point that Hodgson shifted the primary object of study from ‘foundational texts’ to ‘aboriginal bodies.’ Pels further emphasizes how the concept of ‘race’ undergirded Hodgson’s classificatory rubrics and his turn to ethnological methodologies. Pels 1999. Though Hodgson was clearly concerned with ‘racial origins’, it should be noted that his work with the ‘martial tribes’ and ‘hill tribes’ of the Himalayas concerned not only their ‘racial’ qualities, but also their linguistic and socio-cultural practices. In other words, Hodgson’s ethnological interests extended well beyond the question of racial origins. On Hodgson and his collections, see also Dhungel 2007.

thereof) of the “martial tribes”, there was no clear antagonism between ‘tribes’ and ‘Hindooism’ (and/or ‘caste’) within his ethnological renderings.

Hodgson’s interests were, however, heavily influenced by concerns over race and origin. One of the more interesting distinctions he relied upon was that between ‘unbroken’ versus ‘broken’ tribes. ‘Unbroken tribes’ included groups like the Gurungs, Magars, Khas, etc. They were recognizable, bounded communities—discrete ‘ethnicities’, we might say, with traceable socio-cultural forms and history. ‘Broken tribes’, on the other hand, were those groups “whose status and condition... sufficiently demonstrate that they are of much older standing... [with a] remote past too vague for ascertaining.”<sup>25</sup> Hodgson depicted ‘broken tribes’ as on the verge of extinction. They lacked the cultural vitality, coherence and function of the ‘unbroken’, ‘martial’, and ‘hill tribes’ of the region that would become the fancy of both 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Himalayan anthropology.<sup>26</sup> Accordingly, Hodgson devoted little time to the ‘broken tribes’. They were compromised, ‘broken’ forms of an ideal-type—in other words, subjects too ‘vague’ for either scholarly or imperial use.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Hodgson here explains the meaning of ‘broken tribes’ in reference to the ‘Vayu’ community of Nepal, who were for him a prime example of a ‘broken tribe’. See Hodgson, B. 1857. “Comparative Vocabulary of Languages of the Broken Tribes of Nepal. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Calcutta: XXVI. Pp. 317-522 ( 293).

<sup>26</sup> The labyrinthine topography and human landscapes of the Himalayas have long been seen to offer a lucrative field of ethnological study. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century bureaucrat cum ethnologist W.W. Hunter noted, “The Mountains...furnished the asylums for these human survivals of a prehistoric age... [and were thus] an unrivalled field for the study of such tribes” (1896: 284). As compared to the evolutionist bent expressed by Hunter, 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropological engagements with the Himalayas began with a more structural functionalist interests in the seemingly bounded ethnicities of the hills. Anthropological interests shifted considerably in the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as Nepal became increasingly accessible to ethnographers. In many ways, the history of Himalayan anthropology can be read as an allegory of the development of the discipline of anthropology.

<sup>27</sup> Later colonial ethnologies, such as E.T. Dalton’s *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872) adopted the ‘broken tribes’ designation, often clubbing it with the designations ‘hinduised aborigines’ and ‘semi-hinduised aborigines’ to denote groups that belied the conceptual purity of the ‘aboriginal tribes’, ‘hill tribes’, ‘martial tribes’, etc. that were quickly becoming the fancy of burgeoning ethnological imaginations. W.W. Hunter, in the section on Darjeeling in *The Statistical Account of Bengal* (1875), directly cites Hodgson’s notion of a three-fold division of Himalayan tribes into ‘unbroken tribes’, ‘broken tribes’, and ‘tribes of craftsman’ (124). Hunter’s work also contained the increasingly common rubric of ‘semi-hinduised tribes’.

As a pioneer of colonial ethnology, Hodgson developed his methodologies and taxonomies at a time when the ethnological impulse was far more faint and scattered among colonial officials than it was after the jarring events of the Mutiny.<sup>28</sup> His techniques were nevertheless instructive for those that followed in his footsteps. Hodgson's reliance on literate upper-caste research assistants and informants demonstrated the utility of such collaboration in information gathering. In the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this relationship became pivotal to the social production of ethnological knowledge. Moreover, Hodgson's tireless attention to detail anticipated the empiricist and positivist bents that drove the giants of colonial ethnology like Hunter, Risley, Latham, Dalton, Grierson and others. As ethnology emerged as a science unto itself from the 1860s onward, many of these leading figures looked back to recognize Hodgson as a standard-bearer of the ethnological cum colonial enterprise.<sup>29</sup> Though he remains an underappreciated figure in the history of South Asian anthropology, his legacy extended throughout the colonial era,<sup>30</sup> and even into the postcolonial articulations of 'ethnographic state'. To this day, his insights are called upon to bolster the ethnological claims of the Government of India—including the very reports determining the people of Darjeeling's eligibility to become Scheduled Tribes of India.

Regarding the history of contemporary systems of recognition and their dynamics in Darjeeling, Hodgson's significance is two-fold. First, Hodgson's

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<sup>28</sup> Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the EIC began seeking more systematic knowledge gathering. Buchanon's general survey work in Mysore and Colin Mackenzie work as the first Surveyor General are examples; see Metcalf (1995: 25.) Kim Wagner's work (2009) on the *thugees* demonstrates some early ethnographic endeavors of the EIC. Throughout the pre-Mutiny era, however, these ethnological enquires were far less systematic than they became after the Mutiny.

<sup>29</sup> Latham hailed Hodgson's essay "On the Kocch, Bodo, and Dhimal Tribes" as "a model of an ethnological monograph" (cited in Hunter 1896: 289). Hunter wrote the biography *The Life of Brian Hodgson* (1896), championing his role as an ethnological pioneer. Risley relied upon Hodgson's work in his book *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891).

<sup>30</sup> Hodgson's work was lauded by preeminent scholars throughout the middle and later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century including the likes of Baron Von Humboldt and Max Muller. See Hunter 1896: 286.

migration from Nepal to Darjeeling paralleled and was contemporaneous with the first wave of migrants who fled the feudal circumstances of Nepal to sell their labor in Darjeeling, which at the time was a rapidly developing hill-station. That Hodgson did most of his writing on the ‘hill tribes’ while living in Darjeeling must not be overlooked. Yet there is little in Hodgson’s personal papers and collections to suggest how he engaged with his fellow immigrants, either socially or through research. Nevertheless, his writings on the ‘hill tribes’ insured there would be no dearth of information on these groups when it came time for them to be entered into the classificatory rubrics of the ethnographic state. Thanks in no small part to Hodgson, these communities became one of the many darlings of colonial ethnology. Crucially though, in his formal writings it is difficult to tell whether he is referring to the ‘Goorongs’, ‘Muggars’, ‘Murmis’, ‘Kirantees’, ‘Newars’ etc,<sup>31</sup> that he researched in Nepal, or whether his ethnological insights also emerged out of his shared experiences with them in the Darjeeling hills. In this referential ambiguity, Hodgson’s ethnology shares a certain epistemic affinity with these communities’ ethnologies of themselves, as well as those of the Government of India in which their longings for liberal rights and recognition ultimately rest.<sup>32</sup>

The second dimension of Hodgson’s significance is less direct. Hodgson’s commitments to his subjects, his methods, and ethnological rubrics left an indelible impression on many who followed in his paired ethnological and administrative footsteps. Yet in the ‘broken’ and ‘unbroken’ distinction we see subtle cracks already beginning to open in the epistemic foundations of ‘tribal’ recognition. The application of the category was in certain ways ‘broken’ from the beginning. The perceived devolution of ideal-types—the kind of which Hodgson captured with his notion of

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<sup>31</sup> These are the spellings typically used by Hodgson himself.

<sup>32</sup> Often in their ST applications (and in their ‘self’-representations more generally) there is an ambiguity whether the ethnological content has been gleaned from communities living in Darjeeling or in Nepal. Chapters I and IV examine these referential ambiguities.

‘broken tribes’—would dog colonial ethnology until its end. It was a source of constant epistemic doubt, worry, and reflexive self-concern. Precisely as a source of epistemic uncertainty, so too did it function as a catalyst for innovative, if forever problematic, ethnological forms and practice.

### **Ethnology’s ‘Museum of the Races’.**<sup>33</sup>

Since its founding in Calcutta in 1784, the Asiatic Society of Bengal was a forum for colonial intellectual pursuits. Its museum and library teemed with oriental curiosities collected from across the British Empire in South Asia. Brian Hodgson alone was responsible for over 180 submissions. Over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Asiatic Society became a locus of ethnological knowledge production.

In August of 1865, the society’s members—which, at the time consisted predominantly of British colonials and high-caste *babus*—held their monthly meeting. Ethnology was at the fore of their concerns. The Hon’ble George Campbell opened the proceedings by hailing ethnology as “the most popular and rising science of the day”:

“My object now is to suggest that taking ethnology in its broad sense: there is at our very door another and perhaps equally rich gold field almost wholly unexplored and in which a rich store of nuggets lies ready at hand... It seems strange that we should at this moment have in constant and immediate contact with us—working around us daily—men of a race and of languages wholly different from our own—a race certainly among the most interesting—perhaps the very oldest in the world; and that we should have scarcely any knowledge of them, physically, linguistically, or in any other way. Any day you may see working in the ditches of the *maidan* [the park just outside the Asiatic Society’s doors], perhaps working on the repairs of this very house, men whom the eye at once singles out as of an unknown race and of a form which I am, I confess, inclined to think, probably more closely than any other hands down to us something like what may have been the aboriginal Adam of the human species.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> W. W. Hunter’s phrase, 1896: 284.

<sup>34</sup> *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society* [Aug 1865]

Campbell's enthusiasm was typical among India's budding ilk of ethnologists.<sup>35</sup> His racial, religiously inflected evocation of the "aboriginal Adam", articulated, the ambient prejudices of colonial understanding at the time.<sup>36</sup> In February of 1866, Campbell sustained his call for study of these living relics of mankind's past by exalting India as "an unlimited field for ethnological observation and inquiry," and explaining his personal efforts to bring "into the field several of the most learned and scientific men...to reap this abundant harvest."<sup>37</sup>

A month later, Dr. J. Fayrer, a professor of surgery in the Medical College, captured the imagination of the Asiatic Society with a proposal to hold an 'Ethnological Congress' to "bring together in one great ethnological exhibition, typical examples of the races of the old world, and that they should be made the subjects of scientific study."<sup>38</sup> Importantly, these examples were not to be the stuff of cultural artifacts and/or human crania, the collection of which was already under-way. They were to be living specimens, displayed in "booths or stalls divided into compartments, like the boxes in a theater or the shops in a bazaar."<sup>39</sup> As Campbell elaborated, each should be:

"Classified according to races and tribes, should sit down in his own stall, should receive and converse with the public, and submit to be photographed, painted, taken off in casts, and otherwise reasonably dealt with in the interest of science...I hope, I need scarcely argue, that a movement of this kind is no mere dilettantism. Of all sciences, the neglected study of man is now

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<sup>35</sup> George Campbell eventually served as Lieutenant Governor of Bengal (1871-4). During the 1860s though, he was an active ethnologist, with his most notable contribution being his 1868 book *Ethnology of India* (published by the Asiatic Society). At the time of the discussions cited here, he was serving as Judge on the Calcutta High Court (1863-66). He published his memoirs in 1893.

<sup>36</sup> 'Prejudices of understanding' here works as a double entendre. First, it denotes the racial discriminations inherent in this world-view. Second, it calls to mind Gadamer's conceptualization of "prejudices as conditions of understanding." See Gadamer 1997: 291-307.

<sup>37</sup> *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society* [Feb 1866]

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Fayrer to J. Anderson (Natural History Secretary, Asiatic Society, Bengal) *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society* [April 1866].

<sup>39</sup> This and the following quotation are taken from Campbell's supporting arguments of Fayrer's proposal. *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society* [April 1866]

recognized as the most important... When we better understand his nature, his varieties, and the laws of his development, we may better improve him... To solve the great questions of the day, we ought to know how and how far the varieties of our race are capable of improvement; what is the effect of intermixture of various races, and much more besides.”

The members supported the proposal unanimously. The next step was to pitch the idea to the Government of Bengal. The proposal letter expressed the Asiatic Society members’ belief “that Dr. Fayrer’s proposition [was] based upon an appreciation of this great want...and [that] if carried out in an enlightened spirit and countenanced by the support of a liberal government, that Ethnology will enter upon a brilliant career of discovery.”<sup>40</sup> The government responded by issuing instructions to all Commissioners to gather “complete and accurate lists of the various races of men found in the respective districts. They should state briefly in regard to each race the grounds, whether of language, physical conformation, or manners and customs, on which they consider it entitled to be classed apart.”<sup>41</sup> However, that was the extent of the government’s support for the scheme. The proposal remained under consideration for years, but ultimately the Ethnological Congress was never convened.<sup>42</sup>

It is as a historical *non-event* that the Ethnological Congress reveals the most.<sup>43</sup> As an idea, the proposal illustrates the traction that the “science of ethnology” had gained in the colonial imaginary by the mid-1860s. But as an event that never happened, the Ethnological Congress offers a deeper reading of the shifting ideological contours of liberalism in 19<sup>th</sup> century India.

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<sup>40</sup> Letter 139; “Anderson to Bayley (Sec to Govt. of India, Home Dep)” *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society* [April 1866].

<sup>41</sup> No. 40. Bengal, General. Proc 40 1866.

<sup>42</sup> The idea of the Ethnological Congress would be re-introduced several times. Its last archival trace is found in 1888, when Fayrer laments that though “the [scheme] has been generally approved of. All see the difficulties, but all equally recognize its value if carried out in a liberal and scientific spirit.” Nevertheless, despite its two decades in embryo, the proposal “is not yet sufficiently matured to assure us that any prospect of its early realization is practicable.” [Annual Presidential Address, *Proceedings of the Asiatic Society* 1888.] Much of the information gathered in the early stages of the project was synthesized by Dalton in his *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872).

<sup>43</sup> On the analytic usefulness of historical non-events, see Stoler 2009: 106-8.

Uday Mehta has argued that in reading the ideologues of liberalism in the colonies, “one gets the vivid sense of thought that has found a project.”<sup>44</sup> If so, then that project underwent traumatic shifts on the administrated ground of India. Mehta’s readings of luminaries such as James Mill and his son J.S. Mill shows that despite British liberalism’s pretenses of radical universality, at its core it harbored particular prejudices that came to significantly affect the project of colonial rule in India. Per this reading, the Ethnological Congress evinces a liberal fascination with the inscrutable alterity of Indian populations. Its failure to become a real event may be further understood in terms of the shifting expectations, commitments, and applications of the liberal project in the post-Mutiny era.<sup>45</sup>

When the Mutiny of 1857 nearly turned the tables on imperial rule, it also checked the very moral logic of liberalism. If, as Metcalf has argued, the Mutiny showed that colonial subjects “did not, in the British view, pursue their own best interests, but obstinately clung to traditional ways, then the liberal presumption that all men were inherently rational and educable fell to the ground.”<sup>46</sup> For the British, the traumas of 1857/8 forced a re-evaluation of the way liberal thought should (and should not) inform imperial governance. Importantly, many of the anxieties and the lessons learned took a decidedly ethnological form. That an upheaval as monumental as the Mutiny could be triggered by a detail so seemingly slight as a religious taboo barring the sepoys from using cartridges greased with animal lard, hammered home to the British their glaring lack of, and subsequent need for greater, ethnological understanding of their colonial subjects. In the emergent post-1857 colonial order, the

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<sup>44</sup> Mehta 1999: 12.

<sup>45</sup> Here I do not mean to suggest a monolithic liberalism, either of a European or Indian kind. What I find most interesting are precisely the negotiations of contradictions within the field of liberal thought, and their hesitant applications in the administration fields of colonial rule. For more on the contradictions of liberal thought, especially regarding colonial India, see Mehta 1999.

<sup>46</sup> Metcalf develops this idea through an analysis of the peasant uprisings in Oudh during the Mutiny (1995: 46-7).

‘problem of populations’ became not just a ‘challenge’ of liberal governance—as Foucault has framed it—but an imperial mandate, buoyed no longer by the mere fascination with the Indian other, but by the anxious need to penetrate his/her inscrutable alterity. Herein was constituted an affective impetus for anthropology’s becoming a form of colonial governmentality.<sup>47</sup>

Despite their appeals to the “enlightened spirit” of “liberal government” and the promise of exploring just “how far the great varieties of our race are capable of improvement,” the Asiatic Society’s Ethnological Congress was from its inception a figment of a dated liberalism. What the members missed in pitching the idea to government was precisely the newly minted, anxiety ridden, *need* for ethnological knowledge. Human difference had shown itself in far more real terms than could be displayed by “living specimens placed in booths and stalls and otherwise reasonably dealt with in the interest of science.”

### **Ethnology: A Problematic ‘Science’ of Governance.**

By the late 1860s, the British Raj sought ethnological projects of far greater administrative utility and *ethnographic* rigor than that offered by the intellectual

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<sup>47</sup> On governmentality, see Foucault 1979. In Foucault’s scattered writings on liberalism, he speaks of how the problem of population established the groundwork for the possible fields of the social and human sciences. (1988: 161). Elsewhere in his writing on biopolitics and biopower, he mentions economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine, and penology among these possible fields of reflexive science (1994: 224). Yet he never fully raised the question of anthropology—this despite having devoted considerable attention to Kant’s *Anthropology* (1978) much earlier in his career. The one glaring exception would come late in his life in what he called an aperçu into the question of “The Political Technology of Individuals” in which he wrote, “The emergence of the social sciences cannot, as you see, be isolated from the rise of this new political rationality and from this new political technology. Everybody knows that ethnology arose from the process of colonization (which does not mean that it is an imperialistic science). I think in the same way that, if man--if we, as living, speaking, working beings-- became an object of several different sciences, the reason has to be sought not in an ideology but in the existence of this political technology which we have formed in our societies” (1988: 162). I suspect that Foucault tended to not include anthropology within his discussions of biopower because anthropology somehow lacked the raw viscerality (e.g. the bio-aspects of life, birth, death, etc) that was the object of biopolitical attention. That said, the career of anthropology in India certainly pushes the bounds of biopolitics in productive ways.

musings of an Ethnological Congress. In 1869, W.W. Hunter was appointed Director General of Statistics and tasked with standardizing the *Imperial Gazetteers* of India. The Government framed the project as “a work of great practical utility to the Officers of the Government” and an “important instrument in developing the resources of the country.”<sup>48</sup> Themes of inquiry were to include: topographical, ethnical, agricultural, industrial, administrative, medical, and others.

That the British relied on educated upper-caste (typically Brahman) informants to carry out such projects is well documented.<sup>49</sup> In time, this partnership would drastically affect the analytic placement of ‘tribes’ within the Indian imaginary. As this working relationship developed, British conceptions of race coalesced with Brahmanical conceptions of caste. Aryan theories of the British, which held that Aryan races, epitomized by the figure of the Brahman, gradually spread across the subcontinent encountering and absorbing darker-skinned aboriginals, fused beautifully with Brahmanical sensibilities of the varnic caste order and its mythical historical bases. The ‘view’ that emerged through these colluded sensibilities located the ‘tribes/aborigines’ at a remove from a purported orthodoxy of Hinduism. An example of this rendering is found in Dalton’s statements on ‘Hinduised Aborigines and Broken Tribes’ in his *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872). He writes, “In ascribing fanciful origins to the aborigines, the Aryans to a certain extent admitted them into their own families as bastard relatives of their own and of their gods. There is says, Menu, no fifth class from which impure tribes could have been born.”<sup>50</sup> In this overlay of British and Brahmanical theories, ‘tribes/aboriginals’ were analytically subjected to (and/or negatively defined against) totalizing Brahmanical schemas.

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<sup>48</sup> Bengal, General, 1-2, Feb 1869.

<sup>49</sup> See for instance, Bandyopadhyay 2004: 144; Dirks 2001: 200-225; Metcalf 1995: 11, 106; Pels 2000; Raheja 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Dalton 1872: 123.

Purity thereby became dually inflected: racially (as per the British construal) and ritually (as per the Brahmanical construal).

From this confluence of British and Brahmanical worldviews emerged two versions of the ‘caste: tribe’ binary. In the first, a synchronic version, ‘tribes’ were counter-posed to Hindu ‘castes’ as Hinduism’s other Other (i.e. not Muslim). This religiously determined opposition thus established diametric ideal-types.<sup>51</sup> As concepts, Hindu ‘castes’ and aboriginal ‘tribes’ functioned as what Robert Young has called “the pure fixed and separate antecedents” which analytically framed the dynamics of hybridity encountered in colonial life.<sup>52</sup> These empirical forms gave rise to a second, diachronic, version of the ‘caste: tribe’ binary. Here ‘tribes’, insofar as they bore the trace of Hindu influence, were deemed to be inevitably in the process of being absorbed into the Hindu fray.<sup>53</sup> Apparent syncretic socio-cultural forms were thus apprehended as transgressions of the ‘pure antecedent pasts’ established by the first version. Tribes bearing the syncretic trace were thus understood to be tribes-in-transition, or as would become the standard denotation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, ‘semi-hinduised tribes’.<sup>54</sup>

These were general frameworks—rules of thumb, if you will—of colonial ethnological knowledge in India at the time. However, when deployed in the actual enumerative practices of the state, these rubrics became incessantly perturbed by the specificities of the populations in question. As early as 1872, when the first (yet partial) census of India took form, the categories had already become problematic. In

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<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, in the first comprehensive census of India (1881), ‘aboriginals’ were enumerated under “Populations Classified by Religion”.

<sup>52</sup> Young 1995: 25.

<sup>53</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this diachronic version would go by the name ‘sanskritization’—a term coined by the famed anthropologist M.N. Srinivas in 1952.

<sup>54</sup> This category, along with other awkward neologisms like ‘hinduised aboriginals’ and ‘semi-hinduised aboriginals’ were standard categories in ethnological writings of India at the time: See Dalton’s *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872); W.W. Hunter’s *Statistical Account of Bengal* (1875) and the *Imperial Gazetteer*; as well as the Census of India, 1881. Later I discuss the extended debates over hybridity within the contexts of census enumeration.

his Report on the 1872 Census, Census Commissioner Beverly raised the profound question of ‘what is a hindoo?’. He wrote, “What then is to be the test of faith which is to define the real hindoo from the semi-hindooised aboriginal?...Without some such test no two men will agree in the classification of numerous aboriginal tribes and castes in India who profess hindooism in some or other of its multifarious forms.” Beverly cites the problematic examples of “savage tribes [in lower Bengal] who have renounced their barbarism” but in adopting Hinduism have “debased the Hindoo religion from the Vedic monotheism of the middle land... Hindooism has been lowered from its purer type in order to meet the necessities of the indigenous tribes whom it is made its home.”

Beverly intervention seems to be of a most undermining kind. He evokes both versions of the ‘hindu caste: tribe’ binary, but attacks the entire construct at the most basic level. Notably, Beverly does not call for an abandonment of the binary, but rather for a better epistemic instrument—a “test of faith” as he calls it—to “define the real hindoo from the semi-hindooised aboriginal”. What is particularly interesting here is the ambivalence of Beverly’s intervention. He advocates finding an improved epistemic device for identifying populations mired in socio-cultural and religious inter-mixture. But the ontology of the “real hindoo” and by extension his perfect other, the ‘aboriginal/tribal’, are not called into question. It is hybridity that is the problem. Beverly’s remarks thus play upon a particular tension between conceptual and empirical form. The former is the domain of “real hindoos” and religions of a “purer type”; the latter is the messy domain of socio-cultural life where the “debased”, the “semi-hindooised”, and “multifarious forms” elude their ideational capture in ideal-types. In not questioning the posited ontology of the “real hindoo” and the non-syncretized “tribal”, only their epistemology, Beverly holds these pure antecedent pasts to be still at large in the hybrid murk of Indian life. For Beverly and his fellow

ethnologists/bureaucrats, hybridity posed the fundamental epistemological problem of the day.

Amid the rising credence of the “science of ethnology”, Beverly’s reflexivity remains somewhat jarring. Importantly, he was not alone. Throughout the 1860s, 70s, and 80s the categories, logics, and ethnographic techniques of colonial ethnology were shrouded in epistemic concern. Without question, the projects such as the census reified particular taxonomic understandings. And in doing so, they made rigid the ‘fuzzy’ boundaries of Indian communities, as Sudipta Kaviraj has argued.<sup>55</sup> But importantly, that reification was not lost upon those charged with establishing and continually improving colonial classificatory rubrics. Neither was the fuzziness of socio-cultural life itself. One need only evaluate the extensive reports that attended the decennial censuses to appreciate the debates that cropped up in and around the application of its rubrics. These reports and un-published proceedings recorded myriad frustrations from across India concerning the problems of mapping the indeterminate realities of socio-cultural life into the sanctioned rubrics of the colonial state. In these reports and correspondences, we see high and mid-level enumerators and administrators, as well as the occasional European ethnologist, all participating in, and fomenting, a growing field of epistemic concern.

Epistemic concern like that articulated by Beverly did not come from outside the development of ethnological knowledge in India. Doubt and anxiety were integral to its social production. Beverly’s intervention merely shows how early classificatory systems were cast in doubt. Tracking epistemic uncertainty is therefore not a project of tearing down histories of colonial knowledge construction. Rather it is a way to fray genealogies of knowledge-power and to people them with the agents, affects, and social circumstances that leant colonial knowledge forms their ever-tenuous analytic

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<sup>55</sup> Kaviraj 1992.

existence.<sup>56</sup> As I shall show later, the accumulated affects of epistemic doubt ultimately led to the crumbling of ‘tribal’ category in the twilight of the British Raj, such that only epistemic fragments remained. The ways in which those remains were reformed and resurrected into a coveted postcolonial form prove startling not only from a historiographic point of view, but also from an ethnographic one. As dynamics in Darjeeling clearly illustrate, the ‘tribal’ category (and all that goes with it) has become a formidable force in reshaping the social, political, and subjective possibilities of the ethnic subject in India today.

### **The Empiricist Edge.**

In March of 1885, a “Conference on Ethnography of Northern India” was held in Lahore. It was not so much a conference as a meeting of three men with “considerable experience in similar enquiries”. Present were: Mr. D.C.J. Ibbetson (Director of Public Instruction, Punjab); Mr. J.C. Nesfield (Inspector of Schools, Oudh) and Mr. H.H. Risley (On Special Duty, Bengal). Several months earlier Risley had been appointed as Special Officer to oversee a systemic enquiry into the customs and physical characters of all castes and tribes of Bengal. The ‘conference’ in Lahore was to lay the groundwork for that enquiry.<sup>57</sup>

Risley, Ibbetson, and Nesfield sat together for four days. As Risley later explained, “The endeavor throughout was not so much to strike out new lines of inquiry as to adapt the methods already sanctioned by the approval of European men of science to the special conditions which have to be taken into account of in India.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Stoler makes a similar point in noting the way colonial taxonomies were continually “shuffled, re-assigned, and remade.” 2009: 36.

<sup>57</sup> This enquiry later materialized in Risley’s *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, published in 1891.

<sup>58</sup> Risley 1891: vi. Proceedings from the conference are appended in Risley *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*. Those proceedings along with extensive governmental correspondence regarding the enquiry are contained in file: “Special Enquiry into the Castes and Occupations of the People of Bengal” Bengal, Financial, Misc 1-55, March 1887.

During the course of the conference, the men produced a list of some 391 ethnographic questions to guide Risley's study. The Proceedings of the Conference began not with those questions, but rather with a one-page statement titled, "Suggestions Regarding Some Doubtful Points of Ethnographical Nomenclature." It began as follows:

"Much confusion is often caused by the indeterminate use of the various terms applied to the divisions upon which society is based. It seems that some attempt to define more precisely the nature of the groups to which these terms should respectively be applied might usefully be made... The group organization commonly follows one of two main types—(1) the caste, (2) the tribe. The former may be defined as the largest group based on community of occupation; the latter as the largest group based upon real or fictitious community of descent, or upon common occupation of territory."<sup>59</sup>

These definitions carried little weight in Risley's future work. In fact, the statement largely served as a liberating qualifier, which freed the 391 questions that followed to focus almost solely on issues of caste. This obsession with caste (and its ostensible ties to racial origins) would become a signature of Risley's future ethnology.<sup>60</sup>

To bolster his acumen and credentials, Risley solicited the opinion of esteemed European scholars. Max Muller, Francis Galton, E.B. Tylor, Sir Henry Maine, and Paul Topinard all commented favorably on Risley's plans.<sup>61</sup> Of these, it was Muller who gave the most extensive and critical feedback. He wrote to Risley:

"As you truly observe, 'many of the ethnological speculations of recent years have been based far too exclusively upon comparatively unverified accounts of the customs of savages of the lowest type,' and as a result, the whole science of ethnology has lost much of the prestige which it formerly commanded. It has almost ceased to be a true science... and threatens to become a mere collection of amusing anecdotes and moral paradoxes."

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<sup>59</sup> Bengal, Financial, Misc 1-55 March 1887. P.43.

<sup>60</sup> On Risley's obsession with caste, see Dirks 2001, particularly Chapter 10.

<sup>61</sup> Bengal, Financial, Misc 1-55 March 1887.

“If I may point out some dangers which seem to me to threaten the safe progress of ethnological enquiry in India and everywhere else...Foremost among them I should mention the vagueness of the ordinary ethnological terminology which has led to much confusion of thought and ought to be remedied *ferro et igne*. You are fully aware of the mischief that is produced by employing the terminology of Comparative Philology in an ethnological sense. I have uttered the same warning again and again.”<sup>62</sup>

Later, Muller singled out Risley’s unreflexive use of the term ‘caste’, and further warned against “allow[ing] ourselves to be deceived by the sacred law books.” (This seems to be a veiled attack on the British’s over-reliance on Brahmanical sources.) Interestingly, Muller never problematizes ‘aboriginal’ or ‘tribal’ (which is not surprising given its sparse usage in the proposed research dossier). He only notes being “afraid of words such as *totemism*, *fetishism*, and several other *isms* which have found their way into the ethnological sciences.”<sup>63</sup> Despite the cautionary criticism, with regards to race Muller was far more encouraging:

“In India we have first of all the two principle ingredients of the population—the dark aboriginal inhabitants and their more fair skinned conquerors..[who along with ‘inroads’ made by other races, have been] mingling more or less freely with the original inhabitants and among themselves. Here, therefore, the ethnologist has a *splendid opportunity of discovering some tests by which, even after a neighborly intercourse lasting for thousands of years, the descendents of one race may be told from the descendents of the others.*”<sup>64</sup>

What then were these ‘tests’ to be? How could ethnologists cut through the din of “neighborly intercourse lasting thousands of years” to trace racial origins?

Risley turned to the anthropometry of Drs. Paul Topinard and Paul Broca. He framed the epistemic problem (hybridity) and solution (anthropometry) as follows:

“One of the main objects of the enquiry is to determine the race affinities of the leading caste groups of the people of Bengal before the advance of Hinduism

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid 16.

<sup>63</sup> All passages *Ibid*.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. [emph. mine]

has obliterated all customs which give a clue to ethnic descent. Here I find myself continually met by the difficulty that people change within a comparatively short time their religion, their language, and their customs to such an extent that there is often no custom that can be safely pointed to as a test of Aryan of non-Aryan descent. In this difficulty it has occurred to me that recourse might possibly be had to measurement of the heads of the different castes.”<sup>65</sup>

In March of 1886, Risley submitted a statement to the government titled “On the Application of Dr. Topinard’s Anthropometric System on the Tribes and Castes of Bengal.” Here he threw the empirical acuity of anthropometry into high relief against the backdrop of “the great religious and social movement described by Sir Alfred Lyall as the ‘gradual Brahmanising of the Aboriginal, non-Aryan, or casteless tribes.’” In Risley’s view, even direct, ethnographic enquiry was likely to be duped by the hybridity at hand:

“If we look merely to customs, ceremonies, and the like, we find in the majority of cases that the admission of a tribe into the charmed circle of Hinduism results after a generation or two in the practical disappearance of the tribe as such. Its identity can no longer be traced by direct enquiry from its members, or inferred from observation of its members.”<sup>66</sup>

In pursuing his obsession with the historical origins of caste, Risley thus approached the contemporary—and by extension, its ethnographic engagement—with a certain skepticism. To Risley, caste was a ‘contagion’ that had infected and thereby obscured the pure forms of the past.<sup>67</sup> Faced with this field of study so tainted by the confounding realities of hybridity, Risley proffered anthropometry as the cutting edge science needed to slice through the socio-cultural indeterminateness of India’s masses.

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<sup>65</sup> Demi-Official letter from Risley to W.H. Flowers (Director of British Museum, Natural History Department) written 9 June 1885. In *Ibid* 95.

<sup>66</sup> Letter No. 51 “From Risley to Secretary of the Government of Bengal” written 8 March 1886, *Ibid* 83-4.

<sup>67</sup> Dirks 2001: 222.

Risley's hard-sell worked. The Government of Bengal approved the proposal in March of 1887.<sup>68</sup> By July of that year, circulars containing ethnographic *and* anthropometric instructions were circulated to Risley's research assistants. The latter measurements were to be conducted on jailed prisoners of selected castes. The project was thought to be a great success and its findings were published as *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal* (1891). From this study, Risley himself launched a lucrative career as the colonial ethnologist cum administrator par excellence.

Risley's racial empiricism ruled the next two decades. His ethnology was without question one of great epistemic hubris. Yet through the optic of epistemic uncertainty, we can better understand the problem space from which Risley's strident ethnology arose. Structuring this problem space were outstanding questions on the possibilities of classifying communities of hybrid socio-cultural and religious forms. The more the colonial government sought policies attuned to the nuanced diversities of colonial subjects, the more these concerns over classificatory precision would dog colonial governance.<sup>69</sup> With a sharply empiricist edge, anthropometry thus became Risley's antidote to the quandaries of hybridity. It was then from a general epistemic disquiet regarding the problem of recognition that Risley and his ethnology ascended to colonial prominence.

### **Placing the 'Tribal'.**

It was never clear for the British where and how to classify the 'aboriginals'/'tribes' of India. The first comprehensive Census of India in 1881, awkwardly placed 'aboriginals' under the heading 'Population Classified by Religion'.

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<sup>68</sup> Letter No. 1033 "From E.N. Baker to Risley" dated 22 March 1886. *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> An example of this growing impetus for policy designed in accordance with the characteristics of specific populations and/or regions is the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874, which effectively exempted particular areas from standard rule based on their "frontier", "backward", and/or "ethnic" qualities. As I mention elsewhere, the 1874 Act presaged contemporary provisions for 'tribal areas' such as the Fifth and Sixth Schedules.

This drew immediate concern. In his official *Report on the Census* of 1881, W.C. Plowden called the classification “dubious”, explaining that “those whom I have grouped together under this term in the religious classification consist of the aboriginal tribes who, not having been converted to Christianity, or to Islam, or the Hindoo belief, retain, if they have any religion at all, the primitive cult of their forefathers, adoring nature under the various forms or images they have chosen to select as representative of Deity.”<sup>70</sup> Plowden further complicated matters by quoting at length Beverly’s aforementioned doubts about determining ‘what is a hindoo’. Having laid out the problems, Plowden then explained what happened when census officials encountered religions unknown to them:

“It was thought advisable to enter these as undistinguished by religion, or to show them as hindoos where it was open to question...Facts in India are found to justify this course and where the aboriginal tribes, with whom only the question arose, have been brought into close contact with hindooism, the demarcation between their beliefs and the lower forms of hindooism is so slight that we err little in following the course which has been adopted.”<sup>71</sup>

Thus, in spite of its indeterminacy, ‘hindooism’ functioned dually as the default classification *and* dominant reference point against which ‘aboriginals’ were negatively determined. When and where clear-cut distinction was impossible, it was left to the individual enumerator to classify them either as the catchall ‘hindoo’ or as Hinduism’s pure Other.

Ten years later, in the 1891 Census, ‘tribes’ were again placed under ‘The Distribution of the Population by Religion’ section, only this time with a different valance. Here they were explicitly associated with the religious category ‘Animism’. Census Commissioner Baines explained, “The rules for enumeration were that under the head of Animistic should come all members of the forest tribes who were not

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<sup>70</sup> Census Report of 1881 published in 1883: 21.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 23

locally acknowledged to be Hindu, Musáلمان, Christian, or Buddhist, by religion. No general title for the religion of such communities was prescribed, but the enumerator was instructed to enter in the column reserved for this information the name of the tribe.”<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere, the 1891 census redoubled the concentration on ‘castes’, further reifying its default centrality to the taxonomies deployed.<sup>73</sup> That Risley’s work was beginning to circulate (and was repeatedly cited in the 1891 report) is not coincidental.

By 1901, the census was in its third generation.<sup>74</sup> As was evidenced by the official Census Reports (1881-1901) and the hundreds of complaints launched by provincial officials, the British were deeply concerned with the failings of their categories. If the census was to measure decennial change and at the same time be of administrative use, it would necessarily have to rely upon precedent, while continually innovating, and improving its rubrics. The system of recognition that Risley inherited as the Census Commissioner of 1901 was a mess of residual and emergent anthropological sensibilities. Conceptually, it was incoherent. In practice, it was inconsistent, overly subjective, and highly problematic. And yet the scapegoat remained hybridity. Ever the empiricist, Risley wiped the slate clean by proclaiming: “Until physical measurements have been extended to the chief castes and tribes of India, and the results correlated with those ethnographic data which furnish a clue to

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid 158.

<sup>73</sup> Chapter V of the Census, “Ethnographic Distribution of the Population,” inscribed the ubiquity of caste with an opening section titled “The Spirit of Caste” that claimed in no uncertain terms the ubiquity of caste: “In treating of the religious and social divisions of the people this influence will be found traceable throughout the whole course of their development.” One would expect ample consideration of ‘aboriginals/tribals’ under the new heading “Distribution of the Population by Race, Tribe or Caste”, but here the discussion is dominated by the question of ‘caste’, its racial origins, and physiological characteristics. ‘Forest Tribes’ receive brief mention in the occupational divisions under this heading, but that category itself is given little reflexive attention. The only other notable mention is under a short tabulation of the ‘great tribes of the Himalayan Mongoloid Race’ where the ethnic communities of Darjeeling (Bhoti, Lepcha, Kamba, Tharu, Newar, Limbu, Gurung, Mangar, Sunuwar, Murmi) are enumerated without much ado. See *General report on the Census of India, 1891*. (1893: 121, 158, 190, 193).

<sup>74</sup> I begin counting with the 1881 census. The 1871/2 attempt was incomplete and problematically administered.

probable origins, it is impossible to say whether any scientific classification of the population can be arrived at.”<sup>75</sup>

With endorsements from the British Association for the Advancement of Science it was recommended that additional ethnological enquiries be conducted in conjunction with the 1901 census.<sup>76</sup> These were to involve ethnographic, anthropometric, and photographic techniques, the logic being that while “the census provides the necessary statistics; it remains to bring out and interpret the facts which lie behind the statistics.”<sup>77</sup> As co-Commissioner of the 1901 census and then as Director of Ethnography of India, Risley oversaw the massive ethnographic operations tied to the census, and eventually published its findings as *The People of India* in 1908. The work was in large part a continuation of Risley’s earlier work insofar as it re-inscribed a general obsession with caste and race. At the turn of the century, these concerns were entrenched in the ethnological cum bureaucratic imaginary of the British Raj.

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<sup>75</sup> Risley and Gaits’ *Report on the Census of India, 1901*, p. 312-3.

<sup>76</sup> See “Ethnographic Survey in India In Connection with the Census of 1901” in *Man*, Vol 1 (1901), pp. 137-141. Related correspondence also found in: Bengal. Financial. Misc. File M-3C-18 Proc B 1-2 Dec 1900. A special ‘Note on the religion, castes and languages of the inhabitant of Nepal for Guidance of Census Officers’ was sent to areas where people of Nepali origin were to be enumerated. The two-page document sought to clarify the inherent confusion caused by the groups both in terms of nomenclature and classification. The note gives the explicit instructions, “*Religion*. -- It is the fashion in India to be a Hindu. Hence most Nepalese tribes in India will so describe themselves, including the Gurungs, who are Buddhists in Western Nepal. Some tribes are neither Hindu nor Buddhist. It is believed that many Limbus belong to this class. In such cases the tribal name should be entered in the column for religion.” Elsewhere the instructions provide a list of ‘the more important tribes of Nepal’ that it breaks down into four major designations. They are: 1) Religious Castes {Brahman and Sannyasi}; 2) Military and Dominant Tribes {Thakur, Lekh or Chettri, Gurung--Purely Mongolian, Magar}; 3) Other Tribes {Tharu, Newar, Limbu, Khamba, Yakha, Sunuwar, Murmi, Manjhi, Haiyu, Thami}; and 4) Menial Tribes and Castes {Badi, Damai, Draï, Gain, Gharti, Kamara, Kami, Khawas, Manjhi, Sarkhi}. See Bengal, Financial, Misc. File M-3c-26 Proc B. 86 July 1900

<sup>77</sup> Resolution 3219-32 Bengal, General, Misc File 6E-1 Proc B 69 Nov 1902

### **Ethnologies of Ill-Repute.**

The shifting currents of ethnological thought soon began to erode Risley's empiricist edifice. The 1911 census sustained the general practice of "lumping together as animistic" the "aboriginal tribes who have not yet been absorbed in the Hindu social system". Moreover, it continued to lament the indeterminateness of the category 'Hindu' and the persistent problems posed by hybridity. The report noted, "The change takes place so slowly and insidiously that no one is conscious of it."<sup>78</sup> Therefore, "the practical difficulty is to say at what stage a man ceases to be an Animist and becomes a Hindu. The religions of India, as we have already seen, are by no means mutually exclusive."<sup>79</sup> Although colonial officials increasingly chafed against the suppositions of classification, the fact remained that mutual exclusion was to a certain degree the analytic *modus operandi* of census taxonomies.

That being the case, the 1911 census signaled change away from the paradigms of Risley. Whereas the previous censuses had only designated 'tribes' religiously (i.e. in terms of 'Hindooism' and 'Animism'), the 1911 rendition of the heading "Caste, Tribe, and Race" altered the terms of distinction in stating, "A tribe in its original form is distinguished from a caste by the fact that its basis is political rather than economic or social."<sup>80</sup> This subtle change brought the census's definition into line with the more technical definition that would be taken up throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by European and American academic anthropologists. Along those lines, the 1911 census indexed a discipline of anthropology, which at the time was rapidly developing in new directions. Even once citing Franz Boas, the 1911 census report commented on the declining faith held in the anthropometric tactics of Risley, Topinard, Broca, and

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<sup>78</sup> *Report on the Census of India, 1911*: 121.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 370.

others of their heady kind.<sup>81</sup> But it did not go so far as to relinquish the understood entwining of caste and race. Instead, it merely bent the existing narrative to accommodate emerging anthropological sensibilities—viz. “It may be asked whether it is possible that, when so many existing castes have a functional origin, there should be any correspondence between caste and race. The answer is that the conqueror [read Aryans] would naturally have reserved for themselves the higher occupations, leaving the primitive ones to the aborigines.”<sup>82</sup> That said, shifts were afoot.

As of 1921, the categories continued to crumble. ‘Animism’ became ‘Tribal Religion’. But as soon as that category was created, it was rendered “extremely problematic” on the grounds that it was “misleading” and lacking the standardized precision called for by a census.<sup>83</sup> In what had then become the “Caste, Tribe, Race, and *Nationality*” section it was further explained that “primitive tribes are divided into tribes some of which have racial and others territorial origin.”<sup>84</sup> The Official Report leveled an analogous critique of the category ‘Hindu’ calling it an “unsatisfactory category in the census classification of religion.”<sup>85</sup> But although the report expressed interest in ridding the census of ‘caste’ altogether, it maintained that “caste is still the foundation of the Indian social fabric.”<sup>86</sup> One gets the sense from reading these Reports and the anecdotal complaints that informed them that the whole classificatory apparatus had become entangled in ever-tightening knots, with precedent pulling on one end and emerging anthropological paradigms pulling at the other.

Beyond its accentuated expression of epistemic frustration, the 1921 census stands out in other ways. Notably, it exuded a second kind of reflexivity, this time oriented to the social life of the census itself. Acknowledging with great concern the

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 382-4.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 381-2.

<sup>83</sup> *Report on the Census of India, 1921.* 112.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 222

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

uptake of census classification in what was becoming an increasingly contested field of identity politics in India, the report reads:

“The opportunity of the census was therefore seized by all but the highest castes to press for recognition of social claims and to secure, if possible, a step upwards on the social ladder. This attitude has been strengthened by the recent development of the caste sabbas or societies, whose purpose is to advance the position and welfare of the caste.”<sup>87</sup>

These emergent politics of recognition posed particular problems for census administrators. As more and more groups in India looked to index and/or manipulate census data for their own purposes, these dynamics challenged the presumed at-a-remove relation of the census to its subject populations. These developments call to mind Timothy Mitchell’s work on expert knowledge in colonial Egypt, where he argues that the census and other instruments of technocratic knowledge did not merely represent their objects of study; they transformed them, in effect making the very “facts that statistics wished to fix far more elusive and difficult to define.”<sup>88</sup> The irony, as Mitchell would have us see, is that the practices of calculability had ironically made the populations under study simultaneously more “mobile, uncertain, and incalculable.”<sup>89</sup> In this regard, the census reports show the census administrators themselves coming to terms with the ways that “expert knowledge works to format social relations, never simply to report or picture them.”<sup>90</sup> The then-current identity politics in India were making that much imminently clear.

At the time, the term ‘Depressed Classes’ was in its ascendancy. First dotting the administrative blotter in 1916 when the Indian Legislative Council’s decided to include under this term ‘criminal and wandering tribes’, ‘aboriginals’, and

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 223.

<sup>88</sup> Mitchell 2002: 111.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 118.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*.

‘untouchables’, the category received a decidedly Hindu inflection when the Southborough Committee (1919) based the identification of Depressed Classes on the test of untouchability.<sup>91</sup> As identity politics heated up for both the government and minorities alike, the resolve was sharpening to secure special rights and recognition for India’s minority groups. These stirrings of political society upped the epistemic ante considerably for those tasked with classifying populations and no doubt added socio-political weight to their longstanding epistemic difficulties.

The 1931 *Report on the Census* echoed the reflexive concern over reification. The Commissioner commented, “It has been argued that the census statistics of religion tend to perpetuate communal divisions; the census cannot, however hide its head in the sand like the proverbial ostrich, but must record as accurately as possible facts as they exist and there is no question of the existence of communal difference which are reflected at present in political constituencies.”<sup>92</sup> Census officials proved socio-politically sensitive in other ways as well. Into their treatment of ‘tribal’ communities crept a sense of protectionism with a notably structural functionalist bent. ‘Tribes’ increasingly came to be seen as possessing distinct, isolated, and self-sufficient socio-cultural systems. ‘Contact’ thereby emerged as a point of acute governmental concern. The 1931 report expressed the fear that communication and settlement near ‘tribal’ communities “substitutes conflict for contact. Not necessarily, that is, a conflict of arms but of culture and material interest.”<sup>93</sup> Elsewhere the dangers of disturbing ‘tribal’ equilibriums were commented upon:

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<sup>91</sup> See Ratna Revankar’s *The Indian Constitution* for a concise overview of these developments. Revankar 1971: 105.

<sup>92</sup> *Report on the Census of India, 1931*: 379. It is also worth noting that the 1931 census based much of its calculation of ‘tribal’ communities on the notion of ‘primitivity’, but this came with apologies and apprehensions for (a) leaving out the “broken and scattered tribes” that lacked the coherency of other groups and (b) failing to adequately deal with the problem of where tribes “fade off into castes”. It furthermore noted the impossibilities of accurately determining what sufficed for primitivity. See Appendix II of 1931 Census.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 504.

“It is easy to see how a combination of anti-tribal forces is likely to create a condition of excessive discomfort in tribal life, the most serious aspect of which is the complete breakdown of communal organization. A tribe living in comparative isolation will usually be found to have developed an adaptation to its environment which within certain limits approaches perfection, an adaptation which may have taken many millennia to accomplish and the breakdown of which may be the ruin of the tribe.”<sup>94</sup>

This growing governmental concern with the well-being of ‘tribal’ communities poses what at first would seem to be a contradiction. Since government officials had clearly lost confidence in the representational accuracy and utility of ‘tribe’/‘aboriginal’ designations, then to what conceptual form—and more importantly, *why*—did they direct their sentiments of care toward these ancient societies framed as living on the precipice of both “perfection” and “ruin”? Here we must think beyond the census to examine how the charged political contexts of India at the time influenced the production of both knowledge and late colonial policy.

### **Emergent Politics of Recognition.**

The prospects of governmental care for ‘tribes’ was greatly diminished in 1932 when the Indian Franchise Committee declared that ‘Primitive and Aboriginal Tribes’ should *not* be included as ‘Depressed Classes’. At the time, separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims were being hotly debated by British and Indian political leaders at the now famous Anglo-Indian Roundtable Conferences (1930-32). In the first of these Roundtable Conferences (Nov 1930-Jan 1931) Dr. B.R. Ambedkar added a demand for separate electorates for Untouchables, (or what he was then calling, ‘Depressed Classes’ and/or ‘Dalits’). Ambedkar’s tactics insured that the most downtrodden of Hindu castes would have a place at the proverbial table. The Communal Award was subsequently granted at the end of the Second Roundtable

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 506.

(Sep-Dec 1931), promising separate electorates for the Depressed Classes [read ‘castes’]. Gandhi took issue with the Award on the grounds that it would divide Hindus. He then launched a fast until death in protest. Amid great pressure to save the life of the Mahatma, Ambedkar eventually conceded, leading to the signing of the Poona Pact in the Yerawada Jail on September 20, 1932. Instead of separate electorates, the Pact established reserved seats for Depressed Classes within a joint electorate.

The Roundtables were the centerpiece events of an especially formative time in the identity politics of India. The events leading up to and surrounding the actual meetings themselves were perhaps equally as pivotal as what transpired within the conferences. Along with shaping the *Government of India Act of 1935*, which was to serve as the final constitution of British-ruled India, the events of the early 1930s in many ways charted the trajectory to and beyond independence for not one but two South Asian nations (India and Pakistan). Relatedly, they also laid the groundwork for particular systems and politics of recognition that would transcend the coming transition from colonial to independent rule.

During the contentious years of the early 1930s, paradigms for the politics of minority began to take shape.<sup>95</sup> By the time the India Act of 1935 was finalized, the ‘Depressed Classes’ had become ‘Scheduled Castes’. Under this designation the welfare of India’s Scheduled Castes was placed fully within the ambit of the liberal government. That of the ‘tribes’ was another matter. Precisely when the issue of minority rights and recognition was coming to the fore, the fate of the ‘tribes’ slid quietly from view. As giants like Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar, and Jinnah wrestled for control of constituting a national polity, ‘tribes’ were largely dropped from the popular equations for a new India.

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<sup>95</sup> For an insightful reading of the establishment of these paradigms of the ‘politics of minority’, see Anupama Rao 2007.

If the removal of the ‘tribes’ from the Depressed Classes dealt a political blow to those communities once classified under the term, then the 1941 Census sounded the death knell of the category itself. The Census Commissioner stated in no uncertain terms, “Every census has seen the old nuisance about tribal enumeration and 1941 saw communal activities at their height. The religious return in respect of tribes has never been anything but worthless.”<sup>96</sup> The Report declared the “whole enquiry...unsound, and quite apart from the necessities which made the extraction of the general tribal figure desirable, it was time the whole question was put on something approaching an exact and scientific basis.”<sup>97</sup> Though this was a convincing rebuke of earlier taxonomies, it nevertheless refutes ethnological distinctions of the past on the exact same grounds that Risley had before, and that Beverly had before that. It was, after all, similar calls for exactitude, scientific integrity, and the allaying of epistemic uncertainty that had propelled these earlier shifts in forms and techniques of classification.

The 1941 Census did away with ‘caste’ and supplanted the religious distinction of ‘tribals’ with a new category, ‘Community Origin’, in which “no opinion has been expressed on whether the number returned as tribes should be considered as assimilated to Hindus or not.”<sup>98</sup> In making these changes, census officials showed a keen awareness of the diminishing status and visibility within the politically charged, protean contours of emergent politics of recognition. The Report framed the vanishing as follows: “With the abolition of caste sorting this year, it was essential to bring the figures for tribes into a community table if they were not to be lost sight of.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> *Report on the Census of 1941*, 18.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 20. Yeatts also notes that accounting for the tribes remained necessary due to the provisions for ‘Reserved’ and ‘Partially Reserved’ areas (as per Sections 91 and 92) of the India Act of 1935, which placed predominantly tribal areas under the administration of the governors of the state within which the area was contained. These provisions were the antecedents of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution, which created ‘tribal areas’ with limited sovereignty, again under the aegis of the

Despite the admitted problems with the term itself, “not losing sight of the tribals”, had nevertheless become imperative for both moral and policy reasons. Sections 91 and 92 of the India Act of 1935 had created ‘Reserved and Partially Reserved Areas’ for regions inhabited predominantly by people of ‘tribal origin’. (These provisions later become the Fifth and Sixth Schedules.) It was therefore largely for administrative purposes that the 1941 Census instituted the ‘Community Origins’ distinction. Meanwhile, as various constituencies ramped up their demands for rights and recognition throughout the 1930s and 40s, the government continued to morph into a welfare state. As the pressures and ramifications of recognition mounted, mitigating against the “excessive zone of indeterminacy” which ethnological classification entailed thus became more than an administrative, epistemic, or scientific imperative; it was a political mandate.<sup>100</sup>

The Census Commissioner Yeatts himself noted, “The handling of indeterminate data requires a strict scientific attitude which cannot be expected from the ordinary citizen whose tendency is to attribute an absolute value to anything presented in figures. This is quite apart from any preconceptions that may be introduced from political or communal interests or anxieties, but where those are present, the case for presenting in the tables only [those] matters on which a reasonable determination is possible [becomes] enormously stronger.”<sup>101</sup> Elsewhere Yeatts lamented the impossibility the religious classification of ‘tribes’, when “to the ordinary member of a tribe the word ‘religion’ has no meaning.” Even if such subjects were to understand the term, the hybrid realities of socio-religious life were such that “even an expert anthropologists might find it difficult to determine without some hours or days’ enquiry whether a particular individual, family, etc could be said to

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governor. In Darjeeling, it was the quest for the Sixth Schedule status that dictated the events described at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>100</sup> “Excessive zone of indeterminacy” is the language of the 1941 Census.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

have been more than half assimilated to the Hindu community... Our enumerators are busy men. They have not hours to spend on either an individual or a family. They have no expert knowledge and there is not automatic principle or guidance which can be afforded to them” in discerning between religious traditions.<sup>102</sup> It was thus decided that the ‘Community Origins’ designation would offer an altogether safer and better analytic.<sup>103</sup>

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Six decades of the census suggests the colonial career of the category ‘tribal’ was conditioned neither by coherency nor stasis so much as contestation, doubt, and continually unsettled grounds of understanding. The census and ethnological endeavors contemporaneous with it were, moreover, inflected with a level of reflexivity that has been underappreciated in the study of colonial constructions of knowledge. Colonial ethnologists cum bureaucrats were painfully aware of the reification inherent in their work—especially amid the rising identity politics during the latter decades of British rule. These intensifying politics of identification, classification, recognition only exacerbated their longstanding epistemic angst. By the time the British ceded the reins of their massive administrations of difference to their Indian counterparts, the category of the ‘tribal’ lay in shambles. Census officials had all but given up on its analytic worth. What remained were bits and pieces of ethnologies of the past previously torn asunder by the changing currents of anthropological and imperial thought.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>103</sup> Accordingly, a brief numerical table (XIV) calculating the ‘Variation in Population of Select Tribes’ was added to insured that these marginalized groups would not vanish from administrative sight, even as their political visibility (and in turn, possibility) was slowly being pushed out of the nationalist view forward.

<sup>104</sup> Reading the career of the category ‘tribal’ within the history of the census offers a parable of sorts on the fate of disciplinary knowledge forms, and the problematic categories and logics they leave behind. The relationship between the census and academic anthropology was, of course, something more than allegorical. Chapter IV addresses these matters ethnographically.

When juxtaposed to the contemporary dynamics of recognition in Darjeeling and beyond, the history at hand poses an interesting riddle for postcolonial studies: If the genealogy of the category ‘tribal’ lay in shambles as the British began their imperial withdrawal, if on the eve of independence it had been declared “worthless”, then how has it come to be the case that today the category carries so much weight? At present there are over 700 communities benefiting from their designation as Scheduled Tribes of India. There are an estimated 1000 more desperately seeking this coveted status. As I have tried to show elsewhere in my writing, modern systems of recognition can radically reshape the political, social, and subjective possibilities of ethnic subjects—be they in Darjeeling, Assam, Rajasthan or elsewhere. Reviewing these most current irruptions in the politics of recognition on the subcontinent, we must ask how it is that, so long after the self proclaimed “dubious” and “worthless” colonial ethnologies ceased to be, people continue to die in the streets to become ‘tribal’? For those of us who consider ourselves students of both the colonial and the contemporary, the challenge in historicizing today’s systems of recognition lies in how to hold in view both their obvious coloniality *and* their perplexing postcolonial forms. Here, it is worth refreshing the original question: Why the rock and not Durga?

### **The Anthropology of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.**

The Cultural Research Institute (CRI) is located in a vacuous government building on the outskirts of Kolkata. Inside the CRI’s offices, communities’ memorandums, ST applications, and ethnographic reports flutter incessantly from beneath the paperweights that pin them to the bureaucratic table. Among the files waiting out the bureaucratic *durée* are those of the aspiring ‘tribals’ of Darjeeling. In the concrete stairwell of this mildewed monolith hangs a lone portrait of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Disproportionately small, the portrait seems too modest to preside over the

happenings of the department, but it is there nonetheless—hanging quietly on a barren concrete wall.

It is especially apt that Ambedkar's image would deck the stark interior of the CRI. On the one hand, as the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, Ambedkar oversaw the formation of policies that granted exceptional powers of recognition to the Indian government—the responsibilities of which, in West Bengal, fall largely to the social scientists of the CRI.<sup>105</sup> Likewise, the affirmative action, tribal sovereignty, and related fruits of positive discrimination enshrined in the Indian constitution created lucrative incentives for communities to mobilize identity for political purposes. Hence the stacks of applications clogging the anthropological wings of government.

On the other hand, Ambedkar's activism for the Depressed Classes (Dalits) established key paradigms for the politics of minority in South Asia. His steadfast critiques of social, political, and economic inequality, his subsequent calls for positive discrimination, and his tactics of community mobilization, all became exemplary measures for an increasingly dynamic, increasingly participatory, political society in 20<sup>th</sup> century India. (These were the dynamics referenced by the census officials earlier). Reading Ambedkar as both bureaucrat and activist, we may thus learn a great deal about the history of identity politics in India. Reading Ambedkar as organic anthropologist, we may learn even more.

Ambedkar was a luminary of acute, if problematic, anthropological sensibilities. Though he maintained that positive discrimination should draw its impetus from disadvantage, not difference,<sup>106</sup> he continually ventured into socio-cultural terrain to buoy his calls for special privileges for Depressed Classes. His

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<sup>105</sup> The CRI in Kolkata is analogous to the Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) found in other states. It was established in May of 1955, with the TRIs coming up in other states over the decade to follow.

<sup>106</sup> Rodrigues makes this point in his thoughtful introduction to *The Essential Writings* (2002).

arguments, many of which were characteristically ethnological, took the form of scathing critiques of the Brahmanical logics through which Hindus justified their castigation of Dalits. In her incisive readings of Ambedkar, Anupama Rao has examined how he forged an antagonistic alterity between high caste Hindus and Dalits.<sup>107</sup> This was precisely the alterity that drew Gandhi's ire in the wake of the Communal Award, leading to his fast, and eventually the Poona Pact. Carving out a sense of alterity from within the Hindu fold was a lynchpin in Ambedkar's mission to establish and mobilize a pan-Indian minority known as the Depressed Classes/Dalits.

There is, however, another degree of alterity lurking in Ambedkar's worldview that has hitherto yet to be addressed, but which was instrumental in shaping the trajectory of positive discrimination in postcolonial India. By his own admission, Ambedkar's politics virtually disavowed the 'tribal'/'aboriginal' peoples of India. Ambedkar justified this by proclaiming, "The Aboriginal Tribes have *not as yet* developed any political sense to make the best use of their political opportunities and they may easily become mere instruments in the hands either of a majority or a minority and thereby disturb the balance without doing any good to themselves."<sup>108</sup> In other words they, were 'not as yet' ready to be responsible participants in the world of liberal democratic rights. Ambedkar's phrasing calls to mind Dipesh Chakrabarty's eloquent critique of the 'not yet', historicist logics through which particular peoples have been relegated to what he calls the "waiting room of history".<sup>109</sup> Only here, we see how historicist logics and what we might call anthro-logs worked hand and

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<sup>107</sup> Rao 2007.

<sup>108</sup> "Communal Deadlock and a Way to Solve It (1945)." in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* (BAWS). Bombay: Gov. of Maharashtra, 1979.

<sup>109</sup> Chakrabarty 2000. Johannes Fabian has made a similar argument. However, Fabian focuses primarily on how academic anthropology denies coevalness to its object communities. See *Time and the Other*. 1983.

glove in ordering Ambedkar's modernist vision of India.<sup>110</sup> 'Tribals' were not only Hinduism's other-beyond-mention, they were modernity's as well.

It is striking that one of India's most strident and recognizable spokesmen for the disadvantaged could so easily push the 'tribals' from the pale of political rights. Such exclusionary logic would seem to be a glaring contradiction in Ambedkar's politics. In fact, it is. And as such, his exclusion of the 'tribes' exposes a more profound paradox at the heart of liberal thought—especially as it took form in colonial India. The political scientist Uday Singh Mehta has carefully examined these contradictions of liberal ideology. Mehta argues that liberal universalism was predicated on what he calls an “anthropological minimum”. He explains, “The exclusionary basis of liberalism...is so not because the ideals are theoretically disingenuous or concretely impractical, but rather because behind the capacities ascribed to all human beings exists a thicker set of social credentials that constitute the real bases of political inclusion.”<sup>111</sup> As Mehta unpacks the precepts of liberalism's claims of 'universal' political inclusion, he rightly pinpoints the anthropological nature of such presuppositions. “Central among these anthropological characteristics or foundation for liberal theory,” Mehta tells us, “are the claims that everyone is naturally free, that they are, in the relevant moral respects, equal and finally that they are rational.”<sup>112</sup> Mehta thus asks us to probe the anthropological underpinnings of liberal thought—especially as it took form in the colonies.

Mehta develops his insights on liberalism and empire through close readings of liberals like James and John Stuart Mill, Thomas Macaulay and others. These early

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<sup>110</sup> I distinguish these 'anthropo-logics' from the 'ethno-logics' mentioned earlier in the thesis on the grounds that these modern sensibilities entailed more than mere logics of what constitutes a recognizably 'ethnic' community. Instead, these anthropo-logics appeal to a more Kantian view of 'anthropology' insofar as they involve broader, more philosophical, presumptions about “Man as a citizen of the world”. See Kant's *Anthropology* (1978:3). I address these issues later in my discussion of Mehta's notion of the 'anthropological minimum'. See also Middleton (forthcoming).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>112</sup> Mehta 1999: 52.

19<sup>th</sup> century luminaries were engaged with India a century before Ambedkar's time. And yet there is a similar exclusionary logic at work in Ambedkar's dealing with the 'tribals': they lacked the requisite "political sense" to be responsible, fully participatory citizens of the coming nation-state.

These opinions are especially peculiar, given other aspects of Ambedkar corpus. Elsewhere in his writings, Ambedkar expressed clear skepticism toward the juridical project of ethnological classification, even once noting:

"However desirable or reasonable an equitable treatment of men may be, humanity is not capable of assortment and classification. The statesman therefore, must follow some rough and ready rule, and that rough and ready rule is to treat all men alike not because they are alike but because classification and assortment are impossible."<sup>113</sup>

At other more subtle moments, Ambedkar even proved wary of the limitless demands that identity-based politics could put on the nation-state. In his view, identity was not necessarily something to be cultivated by the state.<sup>114</sup> However, once present it had to be addressed and accommodated. When and where he conceded to bring the question of religious, cultural, and linguistic identity into the ambit of government, he did so with ambivalence—the most obvious example being his shifting opinions on the possibilities of Pakistan.<sup>115</sup>

When these stately opinions are weighed against the actual practices of Ambedkar, glaring contradictions arise. Ambedkar's forays into socio-cultural critique were precisely designed to shape the identity and recognition of the erstwhile, politically disparate Untouchables. Ambedkar sought to endow these scattered

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<sup>113</sup> "Annihilation of Caste" in *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar* (2006). Also available in BAWS 1979: Vol. 1.

<sup>114</sup> See in particular "Thoughts on Linguistic States" (1955) in BAWS VOL.1 and *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (1940/1946) in BAWS Vol. 8, especially Chapters 11 & 12 that address "Communal Aggression" and "National Frustration", respectively.

<sup>115</sup> For instance, in his "Thoughts on Linguistic States" (1955) he opines, "This scheme of dividing India in the name of Linguistic States cannot be overlooked. It is not so innocuous as the Commission thinks. It is full of poison." BAWS Vol. 1:143.

populations with a socio-cultural and historical coherency that could in turn generate *within* this constituency a sense of community, while giving *to* this constituency a recognizable community form. Once mobilized and perceived as a political community, the Depressed Classes under the guidance of Ambedkar became a force to be reckoned with.

Ambedkar's activism was thus at odds with his ideals of liberal universalism. His jettisoning of the 'tribes' from equal participation in a world of democratic rights further contradicted his opinions of the inherent "impossibilities" of human "classification and assortment". Both in his activism for Dalits and in his exclusion of the 'tribals', Ambedkar leaned on ethnological mechanisms to justify two forms of alterity: the first was an antagonistic alterity carved from within the Hindu fray; the second, was one of a more radical kind, which rendered the 'tribes' beyond Hinduism, beyond modernity, and beyond the domain of liberal rights. In all cases, anthropological judgments snuck in the backdoor of Ambedkar's view of India, unannounced, yet silently shaping the imagination and policies of an embryonic nation-state.

In harboring this view, Ambedkar was not alone. His fellow 'architects' of modern India maintained likewise dispensations—both stated and unstated. Eventually, affirmative action would emerge as the tonic of the 'tribal's' historical incipience, but only after intensive (and exceptionally telling) negotiation. When read with an ethnographic eye, these negotiations, which I now examine, bespeak a distinctly Indian form of liberalism, replete with its own prejudices of understanding. In time, these ethnological cum liberalist presumptions would become normative, as ideologies of secular nationalism came to shape the policies and political possibilities of difference in postcolonial India.

## **The Constituent Assembly Debates.**

The Constituent Assembly was first convened on December 9, 1946. Nearly three years later, on November 26, 1949, its 207 members finally settled on the first Constitution of India. The debates that transpired in the interim ranged from banal deliberations over juridical detail to fierce, and at times exceptionally personal, ideological attacks.

On September 5<sup>th</sup> 1949, the Assembly met to finalize provisions for ‘tribal areas’ as per the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Some notable excerpts follow: [italics mine]

Prof. Shibban Lal Saksena initiated the debate by proclaiming, “The existence of the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Areas are a stigma on our nation just as the existence of untouchability is a stigma on the Hindu religion. That these brethren of ours are still in such a sub-human state of existence is something for which we should be ashamed.”<sup>116</sup>

A.V. Thakkar questioned the ‘tribals’ capacity for self-rule on accounts that they were “too shy.” He went on to say, “Therefore the more *we* are able to know of these tribes the better it is for the country as a whole and to assimilate those tribal people as fast as *we* can in the whole society of the nation as *we* are now.”

Biswanath Das questioned, “What are we doing now? We are creating another virus, a racial virus in Tribal Councils, Scheduled Areas, and the rest. Sir, why not save the country from the troubles arising from the distinctions between adibasis [aboriginals] and nonadibasis... As long as you keep recognizing such terms, you keep on fanning difference.”

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<sup>116</sup> All passages quoted from the Constituent Assembly Debates on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of September, 1949. Transcription available in *Government of India; Constituent Assembly Debates, Official Report, 1950.*

The following day, the Assembly members shifted their attention to the Sixth Schedule—which dealt with ‘tribal areas’ in Assam and other northeast states. The debates got personal.

Kuladhar Chaliha of Assam began, “If you see the background of this Schedule you will find that the British mind is still there. There is the old separatist tendency and you want to keep them away from *us*. You will thus be creating a Tribalstan, just as you have created a Pakistan.” Chaliha’s history was not off base; there was a long history of exceptionalism for the areas populated predominantly by ‘tribals’.

Antecedents to the Fifth and Sixth Schedules may be found in: the Scheduled District Acts of 1874; *The Government of India Act of 1919* (Sec. 52-A(2) which established ‘Backward Tracts’; and *The Government of India Act of 1935* (Sec. 91 & 92) which demarcated ‘Excluded’ and ‘Partially Excluded Areas’. These policies based the need for special forms of governance on the purported ‘aboriginal’, ‘frontier’, and/or ‘backward’ conditions of the said areas. The ethnic justification for special forms of governance obtained less in the formal measures of these Acts, and more in the presumptions of what constituted the ‘backward’ nature of these tracts. The Fifth and Sixth Schedules, on the other hand, stated clearly that these were to be recognized as ‘tribal areas’. Granting ethnic based sovereignty to such populations was clearly alarming for some of the members of the Assembly.

Brajeshwar Prasad opined, “To vest wide political powers into the hands of tribals is the surest method of inviting chaos, anarchy and disorder throughout the length and breadth of this country.”

R.K. Chaudhari concurred with both of them and took the opposition a step further by accusing Ambedkar, who was the presenter of the draft under consideration, of “wanting to perpetuate the British method so far as the tribals are concerned. *We* want to assimilate the tribals.”

Rev. Nichols Roy of Assam at this point intervened: “I myself being a hillman know what I feel. It is said by one honourable gentleman that the hill tribes have to be brought to the culture which he said was ‘our culture’, meaning the culture of the plainsman....You say, ‘I am educated and you are uneducated and because of that you must sit at my feet’. That is not the principle among the hill tribes. When they come together they all sit together whether educated or uneducated, high or low. There is that feeling of equality among the hill tribes in Assam which you do not find among the plains people.”

This infuriated Chaudhari, himself a high-caste Hindu: “Why do you make propaganda against *our* people? Do *we* not dig earth in our villages and raise houses? Why do you vilify *our* people?”

Roy quipped back, “I am telling facts!”

Kuladhar Chalisa commanded Roy, “Please withdrawal your remarks!” His objection was not sustained by the president, at which point Ambedkar tried to steer the conversation back on track.

Ambedkar stated, “I am speaking of Assam and other areas for the moment. The difference seems to be this. The tribal people in areas other than Assam are more or less Hinduised, more or less assimilated with the civilization and culture of the majority of the people in whose midst they live. With regard to the tribals in Assam that is not the case. Their roots are still in their own civilization and their own culture...”

But the hotheaded Chaudhari was not done. He retorted, “Is the Honorable Dr. Ambedkar entitled to make insinuations against us?”

Soon after this seemingly out of bounds personal attack on Ambedkar,<sup>117</sup> the spat gave way again to the details of finalizing the provisions. The Sixth Schedule was finalized the following day (September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1949).

As Rev. Roy from Assam astutely pointed out, the issue here was as much about the ‘tribals’ as it was about the majority, the de facto ‘we’, against which they were being defined. Who was the ‘we’ that should be ashamed of the ‘tribals’, their “sub-human brethren”? Who was it that had been vilified by the remarks of Roy and the rather innocuous ones of Ambedkar? In the genesis of a national polity, who was to be the illustrious first-person of the nation? This was the subtextual issue undergirding the arguments over how to govern the ‘tribes’.

The Constituent Assembly was in many ways a crucible of modern nation making. It subsequently elicited persuasions—political, ideological, ethnological, and otherwise. The debates carried an overarching liberal, modernist spirit. The perceived exceptional nature of the ‘tribal’ subject accordingly prompted extended discussion, specifically about whether and how to extend nationalist universals to those who fell below the anthropological minimum. This naturally prompted the second line of questioning which set off the row between Chaudhari, Roy and others. In the nuances of their quarrel, and throughout the more cordial deliberations over the future of ‘tribes’ and ‘tribal areas’, there arose signs of a re-emergent Hindu-centricity.

The presumptions of a Hindu-dominated system of recognition were well established by the logics of colonial classification. But they were also tied to then-contemporary demographics and dynamics of a nation still working out the traumatic

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<sup>117</sup> That Chaudhari would take such offense to Ambedkar’s statement that the tribals of Assam merit extra attention on the grounds that they are less ‘hinduized’ is intriguing. Ambedkar’s statement (at least in transcription) seems devoid of accusation, yet Chaudhari quipped back, “Is the Honorable Dr. Ambedkar entitled to make insinuations against us?” Chaudhari’s ire seems directed at something besides Ambedkar’s words. That he calls him out by name suggests that it is perhaps Ambedkar’s very subject position, not merely as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, but also as a Dalit, an activist, and consummate critic of Brahmanical culture. Was it these facets of Ambedkar’s personhood that Chaudhari, himself a high-caste Hindu, found so insinuating?

effects of Partition. While Partition split a nation in two, caste politics from the 1920s onward also did much to divide the Hindu world internally. The alterity claimed by Ambedkar on behalf of the Depressed Classes at once reified the Hindu center, while effectively redoubling the alterity and liberal exclusion of the ‘tribes’. As was the case in colonial days, but somehow different, both the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of a national polity once again came to be defined in terms of a Hindu order.

Moreover, it is remarkable how hybridity—once the bane of colonial classification—suddenly gets proffered by members of the Constituent Assembly as a proactive solution to the radical alterity of the ‘tribals’—viz. “We want to assimilate the tribals.” In this new valence, hybridity was no longer an epistemic problem; it was a socio-political process to be encouraged, a way of centripetally pulling ‘tribes’ in from the forested margins of an ethnological imaginary to an appropriately modern, de facto Hindu, center. So it was claimed by assimilation’s protagonists. The logical opposition took the form of protectionism, through which special governance was seen to be justified by the exceptional ethnological qualities of the ‘tribes’, which rendered them vulnerable to the impress of modern life. The positive discriminations of the Indian Constitution in large part split the difference between these two options. But irregardless of the questionable successes of the Fifth and Sixth Schedules in protecting the traditions of ‘tribals’, or the questionable successes of reservations and affirmative action to assuage STs’ entry into the mainstream, the frameworks of ‘the tribal problem’, as it came to be known, were already well-formed by the time of decolonization.

The Constituent Assembly debates signal an important shift in the history of ‘tribal’ recognition. Whereas the British had all but given up on the category, with Ambedkar and his modernist contemporaries we see a decidedly Indian recuperation and re-formation of earlier understandings of what constituted the ‘tribal’ subject.

These recuperations were neither wholesale, nor could they have been. The taxonomic schemas ready-at-hand in the 1940s were anything but a coherent system. They instead constituted an array of ideological and epistemic fragments—‘imperial debris’ of a conceptual kind, as Stoler would have it.<sup>118</sup> Yet given the feverish pitch of identity politics in the decades leading up to independence in 1947, the classificatory system of governance bequeathed to Ambedkar and his contemporaries was under great duress. For the architects of independent India, re-administering difference was thus both a responsibility and a great opportunity. These were the prevailing conditions in which the epistemic remains of the ‘tribal’ figure were gathered and fleshed out anew in a decidedly postcolonial form. The terms of ‘tribal’ distinction are today far more rigid than they ever were during the era of colonial ethnology.

### **‘Tribes’ by Law.**

In the post-1947 era, the ‘ethnographic state’ was significantly reprised. In 1949, when the Constitution was in its final drafts, orders were sent by the Ministry of Home Affairs to all provincial governments to prepare lists and information on Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes.<sup>119</sup> It was imperative that these lists be finalized before the 1951 census so that the said groups could be accurately counted. The next year, the *Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order of 1950* was released listing the communities to be recognized as Scheduled Tribes, as

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<sup>118</sup> Stoler 2008.

<sup>119</sup> There were several other developments pertaining to ‘tribes’ during this time. In 1945, the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) was created with a concentrated attention to the study of tribal communities. Despite its notoriety and historical precedents, the ASI plays little role in the contemporary systems of recognition for STs. Also of note during this period was the Ayyangar Committee’s 1949 recommendation to repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act, which had been on the books in various forms since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Ayyangar report determined that “the provisions which ‘seek to class particular classes of people as Criminal Tribes, are inconsistent with the dignity of free India’” The listed Criminal Tribes were subsequently ‘denotified’ by The Criminal Tribes Act of 1952. See also *Ayyangar Report on Repeal of Criminal Tribes Act of 1924*, Gov. of India, 1949.

per Article 342 of the newly minted Constitution of India.<sup>120</sup> Importantly, neither Article 342 nor the Scheduled Tribes Order of 1950 mention any criteria by which tribes were determined.

By 1953 the *Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes* was advocating for the establishment of research institutes designed to gather information on ST communities. These institutes were to be “manned by social anthropologists, [who] should study all the aspects of tribal life with a view to preserving the good points of tribal culture and advising the state governments on the right approach to the various problems concerning the STs and also in chalking out welfare schemes for them on scientific lines.”<sup>121</sup> The Commissioner’s Report in 1953 went on to say:

“The problem of the STs [is] different from but not as complicated as that of the SCs, for there is no deep-rooted prejudice against them in society. The STs have been pushed back to the jungles and the hill areas and have been altogether neglected both by the Government and the society for centuries. Thus they are in a way cut off from the society and have been living in areas inaccessible but with the advantage of keeping their culture intact... The STs will naturally take more time in coming up to the level of the SCs in their assertion of their rights, and therefore, Government help and encouragement are very necessary in the initial stages.”

Again, no mention is made regarding ‘tribes’ *vis a vis* Hinduism; officially, the opposition obtained only in the distinction Scheduled Castes versus Scheduled Tribes. A key aspect of the 1953 report and others like it was its concentration on the unique “culture” of the tribes. This concern, coupled with that of “tribal welfare”, began to dictate much of the government’s involvement in ‘tribal’ life.

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<sup>120</sup> In addition, Article 338 established a *Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes* to oversee and administer tribal-oriented governance from the Centre.

<sup>121</sup> “Report of the Commissioner for SC and ST for 1952” Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, 1953.

Just a few years after the Constitution's enactment, problems had already arisen with ST enumeration. Members of parliament were convinced that the list put forth in 1950 excluded groups that were deserving of ST and SC status. A subsequent Revision of the Lists was carried out in 1954. Still, there were no official criteria.

Finally, in June of 1965 an Advisory Committee was convened under the Chairmanship of B.N. Lokur to revise the list once again. The Lokur Committee, as it came to be known, laid down the official criteria. As of 1965, they were and remain:

- a) Indication of primitive traits,
- b) Distinctive culture,
- c) Geographical isolation,
- d) Shyness of contact with the community at large, and
- e) Backwardness.

As has been the case in Darjeeling, these criteria—and in particular their demands of cultural distinctiveness and singularity—spawn their own peculiar (and at times, troubling) social dynamics. It is a telling antinomy that in an era of increasing hybridity and inter-cultural flow, the strictures of recognition would demand empirical evidence of such pure conceptual types, yet they continue to insist on distinctiveness in the most rigid terms. 'Tribes' are to have distinct cultural attributes and live in isolation from the rest of society, as though both culturally and socially their ways of being were sealed off from the murk of the modern mainstream. For communities such as those in Darjeeling whose political and socio-cultural world has been dominated by hybrid forms, and perhaps for communities everywhere, meeting such clean-cut demands is exceedingly difficult. As I have shown elsewhere, the criteria and carrots of ST recognition in Darjeeling have led to extensive cultural engineering projects that carry with them profound, if unintended, social and subjective effects.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Middleton & Shneiderman 2008.

The Lokur Committee's decision to establish official criteria of recognition for 'tribal' subjects was a watershed moment in the history of the category. For groups struggling to fit themselves into the amorphous categories of the state, the criteria offered a fixed prescription for attaining ST status and all that goes with it. This postcolonial fixing of the 'tribal' category put a capstone on the contentious, convoluted history of the term, effectively smoothing over the epistemic messiness, contradictory logics, and anxieties of the category in its colonial forms. The way was thus paved for all-too-easy presumptions of the category's ostensibly unilinear, monolithic colonial construction.<sup>123</sup> My concerns with any such reading are two fold: first, the argument is to a certain extent historically incorrect; second, by investing causal weight in the problem of colonial knowledge, such an argument obviates what happened to 'tribal' recognition in the postcolonial era.

There are major contrasts in the social and juridical career of the category in its colonial versus contemporary forms. In many ways, the Government of India is even more bluntly positivists in its ethnology than was Risley with his racial empiricism. By law and in practice, the Government of India now holds 'tribal culture' to be *out there*, waiting to be found—a certifiable reminder of modernity's past. The very presumption that 'distinctive culture', 'primitive traits', and 'backwardness' could be certified, itself confirms the empiricist propensity. At the same time, it reifies and gives tacit political sanction to the pejorative, historicist valuations of the 'tribals' purportedly certifiable qualities. In such a calculus of historical progression, 'culture' stands in as the fixed variable and is thus no variable at all—not through time and certainly not within a given community on any given day.

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<sup>123</sup> This kind of critique seems to be gaining a foothold in the contemporary scholarship of 'tribal' India (see Karlsson 2000; van Schendel 1992; as well as various papers given as part of the 'Tribes of Mind' panel at the 2006 EASAS meetings.) Articulations also appear in the contemporary Indian press (for instance, Sanjib Baruah's Op-Ed 'Reading the Tea Leaves' in *The Telegraph*: Dec 10, 2007).

Notably, the formal criteria make no mention of ‘tribals’ *vis a vis* Hinduism. This is a conspicuous absence. Why then have ethnic groups in Darjeeling worked so hard to purify their culture of the Hindu trace? Or to return to the original riddle: why would Ghisingh and his administration supplant Durga with a rock, their most hardened symbol of primitive, animistic, recognizably ‘tribal’ character?

Formal policy offers few clues. The radical alterity between ‘tribes’ and Hinduism lies elsewhere: not so much in the laws and official forms of postcolonial knowledge, as in their perceptions and practice. With regard to ‘tribes’, the Indian Constitution, the official “Modality for Scheduling Tribes, 1999”, and the Lokur Committee criteria are all properly ‘secular’; they do not positively discriminate ‘tribes’ by religion. In practice, however, there arises a crucial cleavage between the letters of law and the practices, perceptions, and experiences of ‘tribal’ recognition. Finding an answer to ‘why the rock and not Durga?’ necessitates a coming to terms with the ways in which particular paradigms of ethnological distinction have saturated the socio-political imagination in India writ large. In these more informal realms of the ethnological imaginary, oftentimes the details matter dearly.

### **Crestfallen Eyes.**

It is 9am in Darjeeling and the *Phulpāti* parade of 2006 is about to begin. Stretching as far back along Hill Cart Road as the eye can see, members of various ethnic associations and their cultural troops are assembled. In compliance with the “instructions” sent out by the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs (DICA), everyone is dressed in their most authentic ethnic attire. In any other year, the seventh day of the Durga Pujā would be celebrated in great splendor with *Phulpāti* offerings being made to Durga. In any other year, costumed representatives of the goddess herself would dance through the parade furiously wielding their knives symbolically

cutting through whatever obstacles may come. But today, under specific orders from Ghisingh, the parade is to be a show of Darjeeling's verifiably 'tribal' character. The parade is slated to snake through town, culminating ultimately at Chow Rasta, where the rock, not Durga, awaits. DICA officials do their best to corral the unwieldy crowd, as last minute participants join the thousands waiting to march. Drums from various cultural troops sound up and down the road, as loudspeakers blare unintelligible instructions. Banners are unfurled, flags are hoisted. Amid the cacophony, dancers' bodies begin to move ahead of schedule. The crowd surges forward in anticipation. The officials of DICA stand in front, arms outstretched trying to hold back the crowd for one last moment until everything is in order.

About 50 meters back stands a group of young girls and their mothers. The girls, who look to be between the ages of eight and ten, are wonderfully dressed up. They sparkle in beautiful gold jewelry. Their black eyeliner is applied thick and heavy, the overindulgent touch of young beauticians making themselves up for the year's big show. They are dressed in headscarves and saris of beautiful, deep red hues.

Suddenly, the people standing in front of them begin to move. This is it, the parade is setting out. Not more than ten paces in, though, they are face to face with the leader of the whole show. He is in front of them, putting space between them and those in whose footsteps they were following. He begins shouting something at the girls' mothers, waiving his hands about. With the drumming, singing, and sheer mass of bodies it is hard to make out what he is saying. But his face clearly expresses disapproval. The mothers begin to step sideways, not in the flow of where they were to go. The girls look up through their makeup with eyes that were seconds ago big with excitement, but now are full of confusion. From the gravel-pile on which I stand, I can only imagine what is running through their heads: What is happening? Who is this man? Why is he holding us up? Why is mother stepping out of the parade? Before any

solid answers quell their confusion, their mothers grab their hands and forcibly pull the girls out of the parade, across the grimy railroad tracks and through the barrier of spectators. As they flee, the man continues waiving his arms, steering them out. Behind him, the gap in the parade quickly sutures itself, and the man disappears to continue on with his duty. The spectators with whom I am standing on the gravel pile express their outrage at what just happened. “This is such a political thing,” they say. Meanwhile, as the parade marches on without them, the mothers are left there at the side of the road to explain to their daughters that they have been banished because their appearance was deemed by the authorities to be too ‘Hindu’.

That man was Ram Bahadur Koli, the recently appointed Executive Officer of DICA. As with the substitution of the rock for Durga, his removal of the girls from the parade was part of his administrative duty to coordinate, demonstrate, and otherwise render for all to see the ‘tribal’ culture of the hills. If Darjeeling was to achieve Sixth Schedule status, then unequivocally ‘tribal’ displays such as the parade and the rock were absolutely necessary. So it was believed by Ghisingh. It was towards that end that Ghisingh had courted the services of Mr. Koli just months before the holiday season. In the years prior to his appointment, Koli had earned himself a budding reputation as a local scholar. His periodic essays in the local papers on the cultures, customs, and histories of Darjeeling’s ‘tribal’ communities were well-known. When not researching and writing, Koli had devoted himself to the social wellbeing of Darjeeling’s primary Dalit communities (the Kamis, Damais, and Sarkis) of which he was a member. In fact, he, along with several other GNLF loyalists, had recently formed a new ethnic association, *The Gorkha Janajati Ka.Da.Sa Sangh*, with the

expressed interest of converting these groups from Scheduled Castes (a status they had enjoyed since 1950) to Scheduled Tribes.<sup>124</sup> Such were the times.

Mr. Koli took to his job with great vigor, letting no detail go unnoticed in his realization of Ghisingh's ethnological will. Indeed, it was as much an honor to be allowed entry into Ghisingh's mystical inner-circle, as it was to be rewarded for his ethnological expertise with such sudden power. The executive office, chauffeur and car—a Gypsy SUV no less, the ultimate sign of power in the hills—and a modest bureaucratic salary only sweetened the deal. The job, however, wore on Mr. Koli quickly, as public resentment against Ghisingh's cultural ploys began to focus on DICA and its Executive Officer in particular. At the center of a political maelstrom, Mr. Koli's health declined rapidly, as did his enthusiasm for this particular brand of ethnology. Increasingly when I visited his offices, I would have to make my way through hawkish journalists hovering about awaiting an audience with Mr. Koli. Now the cultural mouthpiece of the GNLF, his name was no longer appearing in the papers as a purveyor of knowledge, but instead as a defender of a performative, and at times utterly ridiculous, orthodoxy. Months into his tenure, he would admit to me how bad it had actually gotten: Ghisingh had installed a one-way direct-line telephone from his office high on the Lāl Khoti hill straight into Mr. Koli's office. Orders were coming from above and there was little that could be said otherwise.

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<sup>124</sup> Koli's *Gorkha Janajati Ka.Da.Sa Sangh* organization was formed in 2006 with conspicuous backing from the GNLF. Their objective is apparent in their name, which translates as The Gorkha Ethnic/Tribal Kami, Damai, Sarki Society. Here the untouchable Kami, Damai, and Sarki *castes* are represented as 'janajatis' meaning *ethnicities* and/or *tribes*. The organization's efforts to convert the Kami, Damai, and Sarki communities from ST to SC status met significant opposition from the *All India Nepali Scheduled Castes Association* (AINSCA) (est. 1947) which feared the communities could lose all designation through such finagling. Op-ed debates between rival factions opened up in the papers, and soon local party politics mapped onto the division, with AINSCA receiving backing from the new GJMM party, while Koli's Ka.Da.Sa Association was backed by Ghisingh's GNLF. At least one assault related to the controversy occurred (on March 17<sup>th</sup> 2007 in Chyanga, Panighatta) when a supporter of AINSCA was attacked by GNLF supporters in the course of trying to convene a local branch meeting. *Himal Darpan* March 20, 2007.

I came to know Mr. Koli as an exceptionally kind and sensitive man. Watching him carry out his responsibilities and weighing the ill affects it caused for both him and for the people he was tasked with disciplining, I was continually pained by the rather crude apparatus of knowledge-power of which he had become a part. Despite his high-profile administrative status, Koli was not unlike many of the other ‘culture makers’ I had witnessed. Like the elite leaders of various ethnic associations who pressed ‘tribal culture’ upon their constituents in the name of Scheduled Tribe recognition, he was explicitly concerned with engineering culture and reinventing tradition. And like these other leaders, Koli’s authority as an administrator of ethnological right braided local dynamics of class and political clout, with an ability to operationalize historically entrenched systems of anthropological knowledge. That these men’s expertise arose from this confluence of forces enabled them—at least provisionally—to forcibly set the terms of ‘tribal’ identification in the hills. The tactics at hand were notably crass—certainly much more so than the subtle mechanisms Foucault trained our eyes upon in his celebrated studies of discipline and knowledge-power.<sup>125</sup> But they were tactics leveled upon the population nonetheless.

These tactics of identity politics spoke to the frayed histories explored in this essay. However, the ethnographic details also challenged the official histories of ethnological governance in India. Despite the fact that neither the Constitution of India, the Lokur Committee’s official criteria, nor any other public policy made formal mention of ‘tribes’ relation to Hinduism, that particular radical alterity was so widely-held that it had become an unquestioned maxim of the quests for ST status and the Sixth Schedule.

Irrespective of its secular, highly ossified status today, it is clear that the category of the ‘tribe’ has escaped the officialdoms of law and the archive to run wild

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<sup>125</sup> Foucault 1977, 1980.

on the open discursive terrain of the public imaginary. At large in the public imagination, the meanings and valuations of the term are abundant. Typically not even the ethnic leaders stewarding the ST application process know its official criteria. Those who do have learned primarily in the course of the application process itself. This says nothing of the average villager, who is often presumed to—and/or asked to—embody its confusing, checkered history.

Importantly, any division between the formal realm of governance and the informal realm of public understanding easily dissolves in the classificatory moment. In official statements, government officials reiterate the secular logic that “religion is no bar to being a ‘tribal’”. But in practice, government anthropologists and administrators alike are acutely concerned with ‘tribes’ relation to Hinduism. As I will show in the following chapter, these vested concerns obtain throughout government in both subtle and conspicuous ways. Documents obtained from one high level source in Delhi denied ST certification to one group of the Darjeeling hills on the following grounds:

“Though [the community in question] had tribal origin, with the passage of time and due to their contact with exogenous people and their contacts with the Hindu tradition, they are gradually assimilating into the Great Tradition. It will be then a retrograde step if they are included into the list of Scheduled Tribes.”<sup>126</sup>

When coupled with the more ambient paradigms of the popular imagination, statements such as this justify the aspiring communities’ decision to accentuate their animistic tendencies while burying any traces of Hinduism. Though it is tempting to write-off such performative tactics as opportunistic pandering, a more sensitive interpretation might understand these stilted identifications to be symptomatic of the

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<sup>126</sup> Ethnonym removed for confidentiality purposes. This was not a final ruling. For additional analysis, see Chapter IV.

ways in which particular forms of anthropological knowledge have taken root in modern India.

### **Ethnology, Colonialism, Postcolonialism.**

In Gadamerian terms, the ruling from Delhi may be said to evince certain prejudices that condition the understanding and administration of difference in India today.<sup>127</sup> By denying ‘tribal’ status on the grounds of the community’s assimilation into the ‘Great Tradition’ of Hinduism, the verdict raises the specter of hybridity in a uniquely postcolonial form. The groups cannot be recognized as ‘tribal’ because their socio-cultural attributes are empirically in violation of conceptual ideal-types—namely the diametrically opposed, pure antecedent pasts of Hinduism and ‘tribes’. The ruling simultaneously presumes a Hindu center (i.e. the Great Tradition) apart from which ‘tribes’ are opposed, but progressing towards. Except there is an added value to this binary. ‘Tribes’ are not merely assumed to be in transition to Hinduism; the transition itself—and by extension the endgame of Hinduism—come to be positively marked. Hence the language of a “retrograde step” if they were to be recognized as Scheduled Tribes. In such prejudices of understanding, the figure of the ‘tribal’ fulfills in one fell swoop Hindu modernity’s conjoined demands of alterity and anachrony.

Without question, the dark hues in which ‘tribes’ have been painted into the hills, interstices, margins and otherwise negative spaces of modernist India’s portrait of herself owe much to the racial fascinations of 19<sup>th</sup> century ethnological thought. But so too are these renderings colored by the opaque salience of a contemporary Hindu national order. In weighing these involutions of culture and state, it is worth remembering Gramsci’s cautionary insight that “every state is ethical in as much as one of its most important functions is to raise the great mass of the population to a

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<sup>127</sup> On ‘prejudices as conditions of understanding,’ see Gadamer 1997: 291-307.

particular cultural or moral level, a level (or type) which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development, and hence to the interests of the ruling classes.”<sup>128</sup> If this is true, then to follow Gramsci one step further, for both the recognizers and the recognized in contemporary India “The question is this: of what historical type is the conformism, the mass humanity to which one belongs?”<sup>129</sup> The anthropologies ‘found’ here—whether of Ambedkar, DICA, aspiring STs, or the purportedly secular anthropological wings of the Indian state—assume their answer to be cast in shades of saffron.<sup>130</sup>

It is significant that Gramsci framed the problem of hegemony as a question of knowledge. For him, “The realization of a hegemonic apparatus, in so far as it creates a new ideological terrain, determines a reform of consciousness and of methods of knowledge: it is a fact of knowledge, a philosophical fact.”<sup>131</sup> The question driving this analysis is that of “methods of knowledge”, and in particular the epistemic doubts, concerns, and anxieties that attended them throughout their colonial and postcolonial development. Although these conditions steered the convoluted course of ethnological knowledge in colonial India, that course took a marked turn in the postcolonial era. Whereas the final decades of British rule saw a gradual deterioration of epistemic conviction with regard to the knowability of ‘tribals’, the postcolonial trajectory proceeded in an opposite direction. The ontology of the ‘tribes’ was re-instituted, as was the epistemic conviction through which they would be recognized and governed. This trajectory reached its apotheosis in the Lokur Committee 1965 ossification of the

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<sup>128</sup> Gramsci 258.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>130</sup> For the reader unfamiliar with the cultural politics of India, saffron is traditionally the color associated with the rise of the Hindu right. An excellent analysis of the emergence of Hindu nationalism (*hindutva*) can be found in Blom-Hansen’s *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (1999).

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

formal criteria of ‘tribal’ recognition. The category and the system of recognition in which it was situated have since conditioned the possibilities of millions.

There is no denying the colonial pasts of ‘tribal’ recognition, but today that figure has made its uncanny return in subjects and contexts wholly different than in the days of colonial ethnology. In its contemporary form, we confront what was once familiar.<sup>132</sup> However, as students of both the colonial and the contemporary, we must acknowledge that today this category is structured by different sensibilities and generative of markedly different socio-political effects. These contrasts ask us to think carefully about bringing received paradigms of colonial critique to bear on contemporary dynamics. In the post-1947 era, the circumstances and agents of an erstwhile ‘dominance without hegemony’ have shifted.<sup>133</sup> The questions must therefore also shift from ones of ‘colonialism and its forms of knowledge’ to questions of knowledge production in the postcolonies. The figure of the ‘tribal’ now roams a radically transformed national terrain, from which arises the contours of a correspondingly new problem-space for the study of contemporary India.<sup>134</sup>

### **Re-questioning the Contemporary.**

The tactics through which the people of Darjeeling have sought the Sixth Schedule and ST status illustrate the degree to which the ‘ethnology of self’ has become a viable political technique of communities. Identifying the ethnic self in and through existing systems of recognition has become a powerful vehicle for defining these communities and announcing their demands upon the nation-state. An historical critique of such possibilities, while it may necessarily begin with questions of the colonial, must also contend with more recent histories. In Darjeeling specifically, this

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<sup>132</sup> See Freud 2003: 151.

<sup>133</sup> See Ranajit Guha’s seminal essay, “Dominance Without Hegemony and its Historiography,” 1989.

<sup>134</sup> On problem-spaces and their ability to generate guiding questions of critique, see Scott 1999.

involves coming to terms with both the failings of Gorkhaland Movement of the 1980s *and* certain developments of the affirmative action system at the national level, which in time significantly bolstered alternative avenues to rights and recognition.

The ‘Gorkha’ identification, under which the Gorkhaland Movement organized itself, has proven problematic at a number of levels. At the time of the ‘Agitation’ (1986-1988), Subash Ghisingh proved himself adept at fomenting the people’s anxious sense of belonging in India. Despite the fact that these groups had migrated from Nepal to India long before independence, he convinced them that their citizenship and thus security were in doubt. Ghisingh belabored this precarity, but was also steadfast in promoting a distinctly Indian identity for the Gorkhas. “We have nothing to do with Nepal,” he insisted; what was needed to make “our identity as Indian, belonging to an Indian state... clear” was Gorkhaland.<sup>135</sup> But insofar as the history of the peoples of Darjeeling were tied to Nepal, as were the linguistic and socio-cultural practices that lent this community its coherence—the ‘Gorkha’ appellation often re-inscribed the very ambiguity it aimed to resolve.

Furthermore, as a catchall ethnonym for a conglomerate comprised of numerous Nepali-speaking ethnicities, the ‘Gorkha’ identity lacked the ethnological singularity demanded by established channels of recognition. The failure of the Movement to achieve a separate state of Gorkhaland brought with it the painful realization of these shortcomings. In the wake of the Agitation, people in Darjeeling themselves came to see the ‘Gorkha’ ethnonym as a banner that was less than felicitous in the greater schemes of Indian recognition. In the years following the Agitation, many began seeking other avenues to rights and recognition, which they eventually found in the form of ST status—a prospect buoyed by developments at the national level.

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<sup>135</sup> *India Today*. 66 October 31, 1986;

At the all-India level, the administration and politics of difference have undergone marked shifts since the 1970s. In 1974, funds began to flow from the Centre to ‘tribal areas’ and ST populations in the form of ‘Tribal Sub-Plans’. These funds were initially allocated to 180 Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs) and Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) spread throughout the country.<sup>136</sup> To identify the most vulnerable of the marginalized, the government carved out another designation—that of ‘Primitive Tribal Groups’ (PTGs)—in 1975-6.<sup>137</sup> Like regular STs, only in an accentuated sense, PTGs would be the targets of extensive development and welfare projects. Documenting the schemes for ‘tribal’ populations from the 1970s to the present is beyond the scope of this analysis. What is important, however, is the ways in which these initiatives signaled the Indian state’s growing commitment to more *ethnically* attuned forms of governance. Throughout the 1980s and 90s, the anthropologically oriented branches of government necessarily would grow in accordance with the expanding complexity and liberal ambitions of the welfare state as it pertained to ‘tribal’ populations.<sup>138</sup>

The Mandal Commission (1979-80) and its aftereffects have been rightly documented as pivotal moments in India’s affirmative action system.<sup>139</sup> The

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<sup>136</sup> These fell within the funding provisions of Constitution Article 275(1). Prior to these schemes, were the Multipurpose Tribal Development Projects implemented as part of the First Five Year Plan (1954). In the Third Five Year Plan, Tribal Development Blocks were created. The strategy again shifted in 1972 to the current Tribal Sub Plans under the guidance of the esteemed anthropologist Prof. S.C Dube, who chaired the Expert Committee appointed by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare that designed the scheme.

<sup>137</sup> The criteria for PTG status were established as: i) pre-agricultural level of technology; (ii) very low level of literacy; and (iii) declining or stagnant population.

<sup>138</sup> The proliferation and fission of this bureaucracy happened at both the Centre and state-levels. In 1990, the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was formally constituted. In 2003 it subsequently split to become (1) The Commission of Scheduled Castes, and (2) The Commission of Scheduled Tribes. See Constitution Article 338 and 338a. Meanwhile, at the state level, Tribal Research Institutes (like the CRI in Kolkata) were bolstered by grants allocated via Article 275(1). As the Tribal Sub Plans became more robust in their scope, they pulled these institutions into an ever more technocratic and welfare oriented administration of ‘tribal’ populations.

<sup>139</sup> Social commentaries on the Mandal Commission Report and its implementation by Prime Minister V.P. Singh are abundant. For a concise overview of these, see Dirks 2001: 275-296.

Commission's recommendations to increase the affirmative action quotas for SC, ST, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in government offices and public universities from 27% to 49.5% have proven to be at once contentious but formative of minority politics. As commentaries on the paradoxes of positive discrimination, the protests, self-immolations, and violence surrounding the attempted increase of ST, SC, and OBC quotas in 1990 and 2006 speak for themselves.<sup>140</sup>

With regard to recent history in Darjeeling, the timing of these events is important. The Mandal Commission Report and its aftermath punctuated a gradual escalation of the postcolonial welfare state dating back to the Constituent Assembly Debates, Nehruvian secularism, and the subsequent evolutions of the postcolonial developmental state. It did so precisely at the time when the people of Darjeeling were emerging from the throes of the Gorkhaland Movement and in desperate need of alternative vehicles for ethno-political mobilization. The expansion of provisions for 'tribal' populations made the promise of ST status more attractive. The contentious events surrounding the quota increases, moreover, thrust the paradoxes and possibilities of reservations into the national limelight. In Darjeeling, these *possibilities* captured the public imagination.

In 1989, just a year after the Gorkhaland Movement, the Tamangs of Darjeeling submitted for ST recognition.<sup>141</sup> Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, other ethnic groups followed in their footsteps. The Tamangs, however, remained the vanguards of these quests, relying on massive street demonstrations, countless delegational visits to the Centre and Kolkata, *bandhs*, and hunger strikes to substantiate their claims. They, along with the Limbu, eventually achieved ST status in

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<sup>140</sup> The 1990 events were sparked by Singh's implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations. Those in 2006 arose when it was announced that a 27% quota would be established for OBCs in institutions of higher learning. Each led to protests across the country.

<sup>141</sup> The Tamangs had earlier (in 1981) submitted an ST application, but they abandoned that effort during the Gorkhaland Movement when the 'Gorkha' identity held sway.

2003. In the meantime, others like the Gurungs and Rais had joined the race. By 2006, all remaining ‘left-out’ communities were actively trying to become STs.<sup>142</sup> These newfound forms of engagement with Indian political society<sup>143</sup> galvanized a budding ethnic renaissance among these groups. These ethnic makeovers increasingly took form through unmistakably ethnological conceptual forms and practice. This was due in no small part to the fact that these communities’ entry into political society was conditioned by, indeed was contiguous with, the ‘tribal’ ideal-type.

Even Ghisingh, who in the 1980s rebuked the idea of the Sixth Schedule claiming, “We are not tribals...Such a status is bestowed upon people who are uncivilized, very backward, whose men go around naked and whose women go bare breasted. But we are advanced people. We are civilized. Look at me, I wear a three-piece suit and shoes,”<sup>144</sup> had come to reconsider the available options. Whereas in the 1980s he fought for the security of the ‘Gorkhas’, now he preached that of the ‘tribals’. His anthropologically laden diatribes—and, of course the replacement of Durga with the rock—showed him to be the consummate champion of Darjeeling’s re-found ‘tribal’ identity. His ethnological meddlings were accordingly articulated—and, when necessary, enforced—with the expressed intention of bringing Sixth Schedule status to the hills.

The politics of ‘tribal’ recognition in Darjeeling have yet to take the violent forms that erupted in Rajasthan and Assam in 2007.<sup>145</sup> Those events serve as timely

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<sup>142</sup> The self-described ‘left-out’ communities included Magar, Sunwar, Khas, Damai, Kami, Sarki, Thagmi, Newar, Bhujel, Thakori. In 1950, when the original list (The Constitution Scheduled Tribes Order) was published, four communities (Bhutia, Lepcha, Sherpa, Yolmo) out of the approximately 20 ethnicities that make up the Gorkha community were afforded this designation. The Tamang and Limbu were written into the Constitution as Scheduled Tribes per ins. Act 10 of 2003.

<sup>143</sup> See Partha Chatterjee’s recent formulations of political society (2002, 2004).

<sup>144</sup> *Frontline* Aug 9-22, 1986.

<sup>145</sup> In May of 2007, the Gujjar Agitation swept across Rajasthan and beyond, leaving 26 dead in its wake. Frustrated by unrequited demands for recognition as a scheduled tribe (ST), Gujjar protesters met grave ends as police opened fire on the crowds. The violence soon struck a communal chord, causing more casualties as Gujjars clashed with Meenas, a dominant ST community opposing Gujjar demands for ST status. In November 2007, the issue erupted again in Guwahati, Assam, when a mob turned on

reminders of the potential brutality of ‘tribal’ recognition. In light of these events and the perennial demands of existing and aspiring STs, some promising signs have recently emerged. In 2006, a draft of “The National Tribal Policy for the Scheduled Tribes of India” was circulated to both government officials and related civil society bodies inviting views, comments, and suggestions. The draft openly acknowledged the burdens put upon the state for ST recognition. Point 21 reads, “There is an increasingly clamor from many communities to get included as STs... Adding new communities to the list reduces the benefits that can go to existing STs and is therefore to be resorted to, only if there is no room for doubt.” The draft expressed a sustained interest in cultural protectionism noting, “The survival of this diverse tribal culture, ethos, and way of life is increasingly under threat in a liberalized and globalised economy.” Finally and crucially, the draft opined, “The criteria laid down by the Lokur Committee are hardly relevant today... Other more accurate criteria need to be fixed.” The draft thus signaled a budding and greatly needed reflexivity. But in many ways, it retained the epistemic conviction of its postcolonial predecessors: STs are only to be included if there “is no room for doubt”; “more accurate criteria need to be *fixed*”. It says nothing of what such “fixed” criteria would entail, but presumably they would remain of an ethnological register.

Similar, but more radical changes were suggested by the Chopra Commission in 2007. Specially appointed to address the grievances of the Gujjar community in Rajasthan where violence had recently erupted around their claims for ST status, the Commission (headed by Justice Jasraj Chopra) conducted extensive field studies of Gujjar communities. After examining 147 villages, surveying 450 more, recording 2000 statements, and receiving 14,632 memorandums, the Chopra Commission

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adivasis demanding ST status after the protesters went on a vandalizing rampage. When order was finally restored, hundreds lay injured in the streets with at least two dead. Passage excerpted from (Middleton & Shneiderman 2008).

released its highly anticipated report on December 17, 2007. The report recommended *against* including Gujjars in the list of Scheduled Tribes. However, and more importantly for the concerns of this paper, it made the notable suggestion that “the state government should convey to the Centre that a national debate should be initiated on the existing norms for according ST status to any community. It should impress upon the Centre that certain criteria should be abrogated as they had become outdated.” It further opined, “Current norms should be replaced by quantifiable criteria which will be relevant in the present context. The new criteria must stand judicial scrutiny, thereby enabling future commissions or committees appointed by the government to examine the issue with exactness and reliability.”<sup>146</sup> The Commission’s critique in large part undercut the entire dispute that it was charged with settling. But in calling for a “national debate” over the very criteria of ‘tribal’ recognition, the Chopra Commission cut to one of the core problems of systems of positive discrimination that are based upon socio-cultural attributes.

To date, no changes have been made to the Lokur Committee’s 1965 criteria. Thinking through the circumstances of Darjeeling, it seems the political desires of existing STs and those coveting ST status may prove the ultimate resistance to any such changes. These politics are powerfully endowed with hope, expectations, and senses of ‘identity’. Facing the socio-political, material, and affectual resources invested in these paradigms of ‘community’, the government will be hard-pressed to radically shift the terms of recognition. The struggles in Darjeeling for rights, recognition, and a desperately sought sense of belonging in India evince just how much has come to ride on these ways of knowing, constituting, and recognizing communities *of* and *within* the nation-state. Without question, antecedents to these dynamics are to be found in colonial governance. But so too do these contemporary

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<sup>146</sup> The Chopra Commission Report as cited in *The Hindustani Times*. Dec 18, 2007.

dynamics beckon new kinds of questions and new modes of analysis in their own right—and in their own time. The issue they raise for future research, if I may put it so succinctly, is that of finding ways to engage with the contemporary as something more than a coda of the colonial. Ultimately, that may prove a challenge for the students, administrators, and various communities of India today.

### **Conclusion: Beyond Castes and Tribes.**

The politics of tribal recognition—whether in Darjeeling, or in the more bloody contexts of Rajasthan and Assam in 2007—provide timely reminders of the social effects of epistemic forms. Since by law, the Scheduled Tribes of India must exude the requisite criteria of ‘primitive traits’, ‘distinctive culture’, ‘geographic isolation’, ‘shyness of contact’ and ‘backwardness’, certification of these ‘tribal’ qualities has thus become a gateway to affirmative action rights and recognition, and in some cases ethnic-based sovereignty. Given all that hangs on this distinction (and here I believe we must include both the intended and the unintended consequences of this taxonomic designation), it is worth questioning the epistemic surety with which ‘tribes’ are presumed to exist. The very fact that the ‘tribal’ character could be certified at all illustrates the conviction with which the postcolonial state has posited, reified, and sanctioned the socio-political ontology of the ‘tribal’ subject. That certifiability in and of itself is a powerful call for concentrated study of the dynamics of postcolonial knowledge production. However, beyond the certifying of ‘tribals’, there remains a more fundamental, radical question.

If the positive discrimination of ‘castes’ and ‘tribes’ is predicated on the epistemic certainty of their ethnological form, then it is worth thinking deeper about how the policies of secular nationalist India reify not merely the ontology of said populations, but also the ontology of ‘identity’ more generally. In venturing this rather

Nietzschean line of questioning<sup>147</sup>—that is, ‘beyond castes and tribes’—we must measure the promises that liberal government has bestowed upon populations exuding particular ethnological attributes. Pursued in the context of India, such a critique prompts a radical questioning of identity at two levels. First, how do colonial *and* postcolonial ethnologies continue to condition the opportunities and socio-political forms of ‘castes’ and ‘tribes’? And second, how have these histories of ethnological rule shaped the very problem, possibilities, and impossibilities of ‘identity’ and ‘community’ as they are known and experienced today? Of these, it is perhaps the concern for the historically construed impossibilities of ‘identity’ which holds the most promise for deepening our understanding of not only the hopes and dreams invested in modern reckonings of ‘identity’, but also the anxieties and the often dead certain ways they come to be redressed in the contact zones of human difference.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> See Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* (1990).

<sup>148</sup> On ‘dead certainty’ and ethnic violence, see Appadurai 1999.

## CHAPTER IV.

### Across the Interface of 'Tribal' Certification:

#### From State Ethnography to an Ethnography of the State.

Monsoon fog sweeps across a mountain road dripping and pocked with the season's rains. The ghostly serenity of this morning is cut only by the steady drone of diesel engines, as two government jeeps ply their way through the hills. From the back of one of these jeeps, I watch the three heads of the men in front of me loll back and forth to the a-rhythms of the winding road. A head careens off a headrest; a chin digs into a slouching chest; an ear finds an unwelcoming shoulder. Asleep, but without comfort, this morning there is little rest for the weary. They are anthropologists of the Cultural Research Institute (CRI) of the Government of West Bengal. They have been sent to Darjeeling from Kolkata to certify the anthropological traits of ten communities who have applied to become Scheduled Tribes of India (ST). By design, the findings of this official Ethnographic Survey will determine whether or not the groups in question attain the affirmative action benefits guaranteed to ST communities. Today is the final day of their study.

Within an hour, the diesel drone rattles to a stop, and the anthropologists awake from their slumber to find a community waiting to greet them, waiting to convince them that they are the proper 'tribal' subjects of Indian anthropology, waiting for recognition. Just as they have done in the days before, these anthropologists muster the energy to face another day in the field. When they climb down from their jeeps, they do so as both honored guests and adjudicators of unbending ethnological forms. They are treated accordingly. Ethnic association leaders immediately step forward to welcome the anthropologists. The locals, for the time being, mill about in the background, not yet the center of ethnographic attention.

In the hours to come they will barrage their certifiers with a confusing, stilted array of empirical ‘data’ specially designed to satisfy the criteria of ‘tribal’ recognition.

When the study gets underway, the locals will perform their ostensibly ‘tribal’ traits in rag-tag clothes while ethnic leaders wearing suits and ties roam the perimeter with cell-phones in hand, orchestrating the encounter. Throughout the day, these leaders will vie to control who is spoken to, what is said, and what information gets inscribed in the notebooks, questionnaires, and various other ledgers of the Indian state. The anthropologists, for their part, will navigate this ‘field’ with a protocol that bespeaks the bureaucratic realm from whence they came. There is no denying the politics of the ethnographic moment; too much hangs in the anthropological balance. But amid this ethnographic mise-en-scene where so much is contrived, there is little epistemological ground to stand on. Nevertheless, a precise ruling is demanded—even coveted. Such were the stakes of the encounter depicted in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. The Ethnographic Interface.**

### **Toward a Meta-Ethnography.**

Politicians, the press, and ethnic leaders framed the Ethnographic Survey (2006) as a pivotal moment for the ethnic groups under investigation, and possibly for Darjeeling more generally. At the time, Darjeeling was poised to become a ‘tribal area’ as per the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. But with only 32% of its population recognized as STs, serious doubts remained. Popular logic held that if this form of sovereignty were to be brought to the hills, Darjeeling needed to become more ‘tribal’. The Ethnographic Survey of 2006 came to be seen as a crucial step in that direction. Indeed, it was geared precisely toward certifying the remaining non-ST communities of the hills.<sup>1</sup>

I was not part of the Ethnographic Survey in any official sense. My access to the Survey came by way of my then ongoing ethnography with the people of Darjeeling. At the time, I was working closely with several ethnic associations and communities as they pursued ST status. Like them, I learned of the study just over a week before it was to begin. I was therefore able to attend these communities’ ‘Emergency Meetings’ in the stressful days prior. And as it turned out, one of the villages chosen for study was just below the one where I had been living for months. I was thus familiar with many of the ethnic leaders and community members involved. It was by their invitation and in their vehicles that I originally arrived at the Ethnographic Survey.

However, as the Ethnographic Survey got under way, it opened up new ethnographic perspectives. The ethnographic interface itself emerged as an important object of my own ethnographic analysis. After all, what happened there would in all likelihood decide the fate of these communities’ ST aspirations. Yet over the ten-day

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<sup>1</sup> The Gurungs and Rais were not evaluated in the Survey of 2006. Their ST applications were much older and were thought to be on the brink of completion. Therefore they were not included among the ‘left-out’ communities studied in this Survey.

study, my attention came to incorporate more than the groups with whom I had up until then been working. I also began to engage ethnographically with the civil servants—the anthropologists, that is—tasked with certifying these groups. During and after the Survey, my relationship with the CRI team deepened considerably, altering my understanding of state anthropology along the way. In time, this ‘ethnography of the state’ became a crucial, second line of investigation, continually augmenting my concurrent work with the people of Darjeeling.

The jeep ride with the dozing anthropologists marked my initial crossing-over from the recognized to those who recognize. Crammed into the far back of that jeep, I found myself ‘an anthropologist among the anthropologists’, weighing the prospects of studying both sides of ‘tribal’ certification simultaneously. This chapter presents my findings from this ethnographic movement—this sustained crossing back and forth over the ethnographic interface of the Indian state and the aspiring ‘tribals’ of Darjeeling. It is in short an ethnography of state ethnography—or what I shall call a ‘meta-ethnography of the state’.

This meta-ethnographic analysis speaks to emerging discussions in the social sciences on ‘para-ethnographic’ knowledge practices. Holmes and Marcus opened the conversation with a series of articles exploring how particular knowledge agents—in their case, technocrats specializing in economic research—make use of ‘para-ethnographic’ techniques (namely, short ‘anecdotal’ accounts of personal experiences with ‘informants’) to augment their quantitative research.<sup>2</sup> For these technocrats, the utility of para-ethnographic knowledge spikes precisely when and where other knowledge forms fail.<sup>3</sup> In other words, para-ethnographic insight is valued precisely

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<sup>2</sup> On para-ethnographics, see Holmes & Marcus 2005, 2006, w/ Westbrook 2006; Westbrook 2008; Boyer 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Holmes & Marcus 2006: 34. Also on knowledge failure, see Miyazaki & Riles 2005.

for its anecdotalness—i.e. its marginal positionality—*vis a vis* more normative knowledge forms.

Despite clear affinities, my meta-ethnographic findings diverge in important ways from such depictions of para-ethnographic knowledges. For one, the role that ethnography plays in ‘tribal’ certification is anything but ‘anecdotal’. Ethnographic certification instead functions as the consummate exercise of normative—and decidedly ethnological—systems of recognition in India. *By design*, the ethnographic certification of ‘tribal’ communities is to confirm the empirical existence of established conceptual forms of human difference. A community is to be certified as ‘tribal’ if and only if it fulfills criteria A,B,C,D, & E. Importantly, it is not merely the criteria that reify these ethnological schemas, but also the hyper-inductive epistemic structure of certification itself.

As was the case in the days of the colonial ‘ethnographic state’, ethnography remains a modality of governance in postcolonial India.<sup>4</sup> And it is precisely because it is *central* to the administration of difference that the involution of ethnography and governance deserves critical attention. As I will try to show in the following pages, the dynamics that accrue in and around the ethnographic interface of ‘tribal’ certification raise important questions about the integrity of systems of positive discrimination as they are currently construed. Indeed, many of the paradoxes of the secular nationalist project may be found in the minutia of ethnographic practice—whether in the tactics of the studied, or the techniques, categories, and logics of state anthropology. It is therefore necessary to examine the details of ethnographic knowledge production on both sides of the ethnographic encounter. Doing so, the rather straightforward question of what happens when state anthropologists arrive to study communities seeking ST

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<sup>4</sup> Dirks 2001, 2004.

status, soon opens out into a series of more complicated considerations about the administration of difference in India today.

The chapter is written in two parts. The first, longer, part takes a close look at the dynamics of state ethnography. I begin by sketching the problem of certification as it obtains in the recognition of Scheduled Tribes. Having come to terms with the paradigmatic structures of certifying ‘tribes’, the analysis then plunges into the morass of the ethnographic moment to explore the strategies through which state anthropologists *and* their subject populations navigate the exigencies of ethnographic encounter.

In the second, shorter, part of the chapter, I examine the post-field production and circulation of ethnological/ethnographic knowledges within the Indian state. I do so by following the applications of Darjeeling’s aspiring STs as they are ‘written-up’ and processed by various agencies of the government. Tracking these files sheds important light on the structures and ethnological persuasions of the Indian state. As they move through government, state ethnologies face numerous difficulties, stemming largely from the conditions of ethnographic knowledge production and the oftentimes-incongruent demands of policy making. The pitfalls and potentials of this ‘soft science in hard places’ prove inseparable from the actual dynamics of ethnographic encounter.

The chapter accordingly concludes with a discussion of the links between the dynamics of the ‘field’ (discussed in the first half of the chapter) and the checkered fate of ethnographic knowledge as it is pressed into the service of government (discussed in the second half). As I shall argue, it is only by studying these facets of state anthropology simultaneously that we can fully appreciate how particular

ethnological paradigms have become at once a platform for liberal rights and recognition *and* a mechanism of governmentality and moral regulation.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Problem of Certification.**

For the aspiring STs of Darjeeling, the path to recognition passes through the paradigm of certification. The logistical and conceptual structures of ‘tribal’ certification accordingly determine much of what happens in moments like the Ethnographic Survey of 2006. It is subsequently necessary to develop an analytic for the study of certification more generally.

For the anthropology of knowledge, this is a timely problem. Certification’s social, economic, and political footprint is now one of considerable expanse. Moreover, it seems to be expanding. Professional, national, and transnational bodies are increasingly endowed with the power to certify everything from the integrity of goods and service (for instance, certified ‘organic’ and ‘fair-trade’ products); to the nature and domain of technocratic expertise (viz—Certified Public Accountants, Certified IT Architects, etc); to the structures and translatability of institutional forms (for example, the accreditation of educational facilities). In these arenas and many others, certification has come to be the ultimate stamp of compliance with formal standards of all kinds. Despite its ascendancy, anthropology and related social sciences currently suffer a lack of concentrated attention to certification as a distinct phenomenon.

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<sup>5</sup> I return to Corrigan and Sayer’s notion of ‘moral regulation’ later (1985: 4). Regarding Foucault’s considerations of ‘governmentality’: ‘tribal’ certification and recognitions of various kinds clearly function as a means of shaping and controlling populations. However, the Foucauldian attention to knowledge-power, I believe, methodologically limits a close interrogation of the actual practices of certification. The governmentality optic merely draws out what is endemic to recognition (and ever-more ossified in the form of certification)—namely the reification of normative schemas of distinction. Foucault 1979, 1980.

In the contexts of scheduling ‘tribes’ in India, certification functions as an acute subtype of recognition. Elizabeth Povinelli’s work on the ‘cunning of recognition’ perhaps most closely elucidates the conditions and opportunities that the criteria of ST certification impress upon minorities struggling for rights in the liberal order of India today.<sup>6</sup> Yet we lack ethnographic attention to the actual practices of certification, the relation of conceptual to empirical forms it entails, and the socio-political possibilities to which it gives rise. Such a deficiency renders us unable to appreciate how the fate of a minority may ultimately boil down to the slightest detail put forth on the day of their ethnological reckoning. This being the case, it is worth spending a moment to examine certification in the most general of terms.

To sketch the problem briefly, several characteristics need mention: First, certification entails a particular relationship between empirical and conceptual forms. By design, the empirical qualities of the object of certification (be it a product, community, skill, or institution) are weighed against established standards (otherwise known as criteria). The overarching question is thus one of compliance. Second, it is typical that the expert certifier(s) and those being certified ascribe to—and are heavily invested in—the established criteria. Indeed, the participants’ professional, market, and socio-political ‘identities’ are often predicated on the standards under which the entire encounter organizes itself. Reification of the established criteria is therefore automatic to the circumstance of certification. Third, certification often involves ‘on the spot visits’ or ‘on-site inspections’ through which expert certifiers rely on first-hand experience to determine eligibility for certification. Depending on the subject matter, these inspections may well be ethnographic in nature. But while they champion immediacy as a necessary condition for gleaning the ‘as-is’ qualities of the

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<sup>6</sup> Seminal essays by Charles Taylor, “Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition” (1992), and Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (1843/1978), certainly shed light on at least some of the socio-political conundrums in play as well.

object under investigation, the actual dynamics of certification are nevertheless heavily determined by established schemas—both conceptual (as in the criteria) and practical (as in the formally delineated methods of inquiry). In their reasoning then, certification practices are hyper-inductive. The certificate—whether of ‘accreditation’, ‘formal recognition’, ‘approval’, or ‘verification’—thus marks the endgame of this peculiar interplay between empirical and conceptual form. It stamps in definitive terms the compliance between the object and the established criteria.

For the aspiring STs of Darjeeling, exhibiting compliance with the official criteria of recognition holds immense promise. As per India’s affirmative action system, STs are guaranteed significant advantages including employment quotas in governmental posts, lower standards of admission to education, eligibility for special tribal development packages, and hosts of entitlements and advantages of various kinds.<sup>7</sup> But to attain these fruits of positive discrimination, a community must demonstrate their complicity with the official criteria. Established in 1965 by the Lokur Committee, these are: (a) Indication of primitive traits, (b) Distinctive culture, (c) Geographical isolation (d) Shyness of contact with the community at large, and (e) Backwardness.

Within the ST application process, no day is more pivotal than that of the Ethnographic Survey. For the studied, face-to-face interaction with the government’s anthropologists is as daunting as it is potentially lucrative. The immediacy of the moment allows them to demonstrate in the most vivid of ways the socio-cultural attributes that they believe entitle them to ST status. Ethnographic interaction

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<sup>7</sup> Special development programs for STs were first implemented during the First Five Year Plan (1954) under the title Multipurpose Tribal Development Projects. In the Third Five Year Plan, Tribal Development Blocks were created. The strategy again shifted in 1972 to Tribal Sub Plans under the guidance of Prof. S.C. Dube. This structure remains today and focuses on the “improvement of living standards, education, healthcare and skill upgradation of the tribal people.” More recent initiatives have also focuses on Women and Child Development. Information available in *Ministry of Tribal Affairs Annual Report 2006/7*, Government of India.

furthermore gives them a chance to establish rapport with the agents of the state, and, as I shall show later, to quite literally plead their case. From the government's side, 'tribal' certification is overtly predicated on the truth-revealing possibilities of ethnographic study.<sup>8</sup> This reliance on ethnographic immediacy, coupled with the anthropological expertise of certifiers, *in theory*, mitigates the skewing effects of mediation and misrepresentation that desperate communities could resort to to bolster their cases.

Immediacy, however, is not without its politics—as recent work by William Mazzarella and others has shown.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, a veritable politics of (im)mediation shaped much of what transpired within the Ethnographic Survey. Ethnic leaders steered anthropologists to certain subjects and away from others. They peered over the shoulders of anthropologists, checking what was being recorded in their notebooks, and how it was being recorded. (See Figure 3 and Figure 4.)



**Figure 3. Ethnic Leader, Anthropologist, and Shaman.**

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<sup>8</sup> The bureaucratic processes of 'tribal' certification were formally established by 'The Modality for Scheduling Tribes, 1999,' available in The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes' *Handbook 2005*.

<sup>9</sup> Mazzarella 2006. Others such as Dominic Boyer and Patrick Eisenlohr are currently working on similar issues (edited volume in production).

Vagaries were to be explained, and whenever possible covered over. Educated ethnic association elites translated and mediated the responses of locals, often bending statements to the demands of recognition. At other times, these *thulo mānches* (big men) denied the local's voice outright, thereby casting their village constituents into the role of subalterns at the very moment they held them forth as living embodiments of 'tribal' character.



**Figure 4. Monitoring/Mediating Data.**

The anthropologists resented—but were necessarily reliant on—ethnic leaders steering their gaze this way and that, mediating everything from interview responses to the anthropologists' lunch (which was of course 'authentic indigenous' cuisine). What became unmistakably clear in this delicate, sometimes contentious, tussle for control over the very means of ethnographic knowledge production, was that the politics of the moment were operating precisely at the epistemological level. All parties were acutely concerned with *how* the community was to be known. But this was no 'free' epistemic field. Instead, the ways in which the community was to be shown, known, and adjudicated were determined by the structures and criteria of ST certification.

In examining these dynamics of ‘tribal’ certification, this study refigures the by-now proverbial encounter of ‘the anthropologists and the tribals’. Doing so, it is worth calling to mind a mandate from the discipline’s past. Long ago one of the founders of American anthropology, Franz Boas, preached to his students the importance of questioning what the researcher brings with him/her to the study of the Other. The imperative has since been re-articulated many times over in the various ‘reflexive’ turns of the social sciences. But to think meta-ethnographically, it is worth asking whether, at our current moment, we might profitably flip the script on Boas’s directive to consider *what the studied bring with them* to the proverbial table of ethnological reckoning. To understand the dynamics of ‘tribal’ certification, venturing such an analogue, I believe, is imperative. Along these lines, it is worth turning to the anxious events leading up to the arrival of the government anthropologists in Darjeeling. These last minute preparations reveal many of the hopes, expectations, and strategies that the aspiring STs of Darjeeling carried with them into the Ethnographic Survey. Many pertained to the ethnographic moment itself; others hailed from deeper histories.

### **Emergency Meeting.**

News spread quickly that the anthropologists were coming. Just over a week prior to their arrival, word was sent from Kolkata to Darjeeling that a spot-visit was in the works. Whereas other communities seeking ST status had waited years if not decades for such a visit, the pending status of the Sixth Schedule had, it was assumed, expedited this particular Ethnographic Survey.

Just two days before the anthropologists were to arrive, an ‘Emergency Meeting’ was convened by the leaders of the respective ethnic associations to determine the most effective strategy for being studied. The session was held under

the aegis of the *Gorkha Janjati Manyata Samity* (GJMS)—The Gorkha Tribal Recognition Committee—an umbrella organization recently formed to represent the collective interests of these ‘left out’ communities. The GJMS being without an actual office, the meeting got off to a scattered start with ethnic leaders roaming the grimy halls of the Old Supermarket Building in search of others. I made my way into one of the offices where several leaders familiar to me had gathered. Removed from the view of others, they promptly requested that I provide whatever information I could on their ethnic group. Such academic renderings of their ethnic self, they hoped could be put to authoritative use in their representations to the government. Having already shared some of my earlier work on their ethnic contemporaries in Nepal, as well as a bibliography of academic sources, I told them there was little else I could provide. Clearly though, they wanted more out of their affiliation with me.

Having parried their pleas, I ventured back out into the halls. Soon small clusters of men in dapper tweed coats, three-piece suits, and polished shoes formed in various rooms where small talk, rumors, and old-boy jokes flowed freely. Eventually, we were let into a nearby language institute, where the 25 or so ethnic association leaders took their seats in rows of tables typically used for pupils. My research assistant and I found a discrete place in the corner, from where we observed the entirety of the three-hour meeting.

To start, the General Secretary of the GJMS welcomed those present, framing their purpose as follows:

“We are late. However, the GJMS and I welcome all the members of all the different communities. The agenda of this meeting is that, as we all know, the members of the CRI are coming to Darjeeling and will be conducting an inquiry with all the communities regarding their culture, traditions, etc. So since the CRI is coming I would like to say how we should present ourselves to them and what are our tribal traits. What should we exhibit, what we ought to present, this is what I would like to discuss today. It will be neither easy nor as simple as we think. It has to be deliberated and presented very cautiously by

us, and by the different communities. For instance, the issue of where the different communities would like to take the CRI team and make their presentation about their own culture, religion, tradition and customs. The details of all of this have to be finalized today.”

He then turned the floor over to the Executive Officer of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs of the DGHC.<sup>10</sup> Mr. Koli explained how the ‘spot visit’ came about. Months earlier a delegation traveled to Kolkata with hopes of expediting the review of the ‘left out’ communities’ ST applications. The delegation, along with Darjeeling’s three MLAs,<sup>11</sup> met various representatives and ministers of the government, including the CRI anthropologists themselves. “We asked them to come. We told them, ‘You have the files of all the communities with their demands for tribal status. These submissions must be gathering dust, so please bring them out from your shelves and come and make spot inquiries,’” Mr. Koli explained to the meeting. A second DGHC representative next took the floor to divulge more insider information:

“There is one other very important thing: that is the Hindu dharma or our being Hindus. We have spoken about that earlier too and whether the Hindu dharma has been imposed on us or not. And also our being Gorkhas. That is also to be proved. These are the two important issues. Birth, death and ceremonies, we need to prove our ‘adivasi’ [aboriginal] traits in these three things. In this regard whatever little we have studied and what we know, we will have to present this. This is the opportunity for the communities to do their best. Our effort should be to score a goal in the first match so that the CRI won’t have to come back again and again. Whatever resources you have, we have to apply.”

The two DGHC representatives then excused themselves, leaving the ethnic leaders to deliberate their strategies. With collaborative zeal, they discussed where the CRI team

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<sup>10</sup> Mr. Koli was in attendance both as a representative of the local DGHC administration and as the leader of *The Gorkha Janajati Ka.Da.Sa Sangh*, an organization he founded with the expressed interest of converting the Kami, Damai, and Sarki groups from Scheduled Castes (a status they had enjoyed since 1950) to Scheduled Tribes. Extended analysis of Mr. Koli and his role within the DGHC can be found in Chapter III.

<sup>11</sup> Members of the Legislative Assembly.

should be taken, what rituals should be shown, which traits should be concealed, and how to best engage with the anthropologists.

It was at this point that an ethnic leader seated against the wall to my right secretly slipped me a note. Torn from the corner of a page, it read:

“For how many days are you in Darjeeling? We could give you the authentic documents which prove that the Khas and Gorkhas are tribes according to the Mahabharata and some of the old epics?”

Intent on not disturbing the meeting, I whispered to him that perhaps we could talk afterwards. Each of us quickly refocused our attention to the meeting. But the note, and in particular its claims of “authentic documents” proving a community’s ‘tribal’ character, shook me from my erstwhile fly-on-the-wall vantage point. Why would he care to show *me* these documents? Was I, the western anthropologist, to somehow corroborate, or be a comparative benchmark for, *his* research? Why the compulsion to prove to *me* his community’s worthiness of becoming a Scheduled Tribe? I would face similar, more difficult scenarios of implication in the days and months ahead.

After an hour of deliberation, the ethnic leaders began finalizing their list of ‘model communities’ to be studied. As the secretary went down the roll eliciting each community’s final decision, someone piped up to suggest that each ethnic group might want to have back-up locations in mind, should the anthropologists demand a sudden change of course. Silence. The mere mention that the CRI team might want to see something other than the carefully chosen and equally well-prepared ‘model communities’ drew stunned, worried looks from those present. For several seconds, no one spoke a word. Eyes glanced from face to face searching for answers. Finally, the General Secretary broke the silence. “Well, in that case we will fail!” he erupted, “We ask them to go to one place and then they choose to go to another. In that case we will

not be able to fulfill their criteria.” It was a sobering moment for everyone in the room.

Later in the meeting, the General Secretary (GS) struck upon more deep-seated anxieties. He cautioned the leaders not to let their constituents make a mistake that had purportedly been made by similar Gorkha (Nepali-speaking) groups seeking ST status in Sikkim, the state north of Darjeeling:

“In Sikkim, they were also demanding tribal status and when asked ‘To which community do you belong?’ they replied, ‘Nepali’. They were then told, ‘If you are Nepalis, then you should go to Nepal.’ We might also face such a situation if we are not careful. So what we are telling the anthropologists here in Darjeeling is that the Gorkha itself is a tribal community. Here we are trying to say the word ‘Gorkha’ or ‘Gorkhas’. But then, they [government officials] are trying to tell us that the Gorkhas are followers of Hinduism. Therefore Nepalis are foreigners and Gorkhas are Hindus. You need to note this point. It is very important. They are calling this a ‘diplomatic process’. [But] they are trying to make this Gorkha word a failure, so that it won’t fulfill the tribal criteria. This ‘diplomatic process’ will also become their policy to divide us.... Tomorrow, if we are destroyed, the entire Gorkha community will be destroyed. And this is what they want! That is why there is a delay for one and rush for another [seeking ST status]. The GJMS was formed by the beliefs, will, and understanding of all of us to stall the black days of the future for our community. For our tribe! For the entire hills! We have a moral and social responsibility to do this!” [very animated]

That the GS would end with such an impassioned, firebrand flourish was typical of his character. In an earlier political life, he had fought as the commander of a guerilla unit of the Gorkha National Liberation Front. And as he often reminded me with pride, his unit was one of the last to surrender its arms to the Indian government. The struggle for Gorkha rights was therefore, for him, like so any others, deeply personal. Today, however, he carried on his person not the makeshift guns of struggles past, but a briefcase seemingly always overflowing with memorandums, academic books, and the latest findings of his ongoing research into the culture and history of his people.

The GS's biography and his words to the meeting signaled the histories and affects that these groups were bringing with them to the ethnographic encounter. Tied into the people of Darjeeling's anxieties over belonging in India is a general suspicion—and for some, even a hatred—of Bengalis. Historically, these sentiments spawn from decades of internal neo-colonization of Darjeeling by Bengalis, most viscerally rehashed through the traumatic memories of the GNLFF agitation in the 1980s when military and para-military forces of the Government of West Bengal were involved in many of the atrocities of the separatist war. Ongoing discriminations between the 'people of the hills' versus the 'people of the plains' only extend the antagonism. For many, the fact that the district of Darjeeling remains within the state of West Bengal is a painful reminder of these histories of domination. For the GS and others it was not an insignificant feature of the Ethnographic Survey that the civil servants adjudicating their claims were themselves Bengali. That subject-position alone was seen as an egregious imposition of irony—one that re-aggravated feelings of political injustice and anxious belonging at the very moment when positive discrimination offered a modicum of historical retribution.

Thinking through these pre-field strategies and sensibilities, we see then how the dynamics of ethnographic encounter were largely prefigured long before the first 'tribal' traits were performed and expertly recorded as 'data' in the files of the state.

### **A Day in the Field.**

Day One of the Ethnographic Survey began early on the morning following the CRI's arrival to Darjeeling. For the community to be investigated, it began even earlier. Having the previous day drawn the unfortunate straw to be studied first, the Lekh Hitkari Ethnic Association (LHEA) had little time to prepare their 'model community'. In the dead of the night before, ethnic leaders from around the district

raced to the remote village of Laharā Gāũ, some three hours drive on gruelingly deteriorated roads from Darjeeling town, to begin preparations. Come sunrise, many had been up all night coaching the locals and making the necessary arrangements. (Figure 5 shows the community on the day of the study.)



**Figure 5. The Subject Community.**

It was thus with great anticipation that the anthropologists arrived in their government hire jeeps. The ‘village’ community, which was actually an assemblage of villagers from around the area, greeted them in a mixture of tattered clothes and festival attire—men to one side, women to the other. Ethnic association leaders immediately garlanded the anthropologists, as the crowd swarmed around them. Over the cacophony, the leaders did their best to impress upon their certifiers their intended plans.

The community sprung into action. Before the certifiers could get their bearings, they were whisked away to a ‘jungle house’ a kilometer up the road. There, a treacherous footpath led to a ‘primitive’ home, in which a man lived with his several head of cattle, chickens, and a small garden. The owner was bedecked in traditional

Nepali attire, brandishing a large *khukuri* (Nepali knife) in his waste-sash. But as the anthropologists began investigating the home, he spoke hardly a word. Instead, suit-clad ethnic leaders—many of whom the man had never met—conversed in Bengali (a language the owner could not speak) with the researchers about the particulars of the home. Their animated explanations quickly began to fill the hitherto blank pages of the CRI's notebooks.

Upon their return to the village proper, the anthropologists found troops of young women singing folk songs and milling grain. The men, for their part, concentrated on the ritual next up on the docket: the *go.ṭh-pujā*. Here, the anthropologists were led to a manure-floored cowshed, where a local shaman had set up a small shrine. Smoke bellowed under the low-hanging roof, as anthropologists stooped inside to have a closer look at the ritual accoutrements—documenting the most minute of details. Again it was loud, so ethnic leaders had to sometimes shout their explanations into the ears of the anthropologists. With the shaman standing by in full-ritual regalia, several of the researchers engaged him directly—but because they did not speak Nepali, and he neither adequate Bengali nor Hindi, their conversations were translated by the ethnic leaders. With nearly a dozen people crammed in the shed, the scene grew all the more chaotic as a troop of adolescent boys began circling the cowshed with bows and arrow, howling savage cries into the thick monsoon skies.

A brief meal of indigenous snacks was then served by the women of the village. This quieter time, afforded ethnic leaders the opportunity to convey additional information. Having sampled the local fair and listened to a barrage of 'native' ethnological opinion, the anthropologists announced they would break off into two teams. One team would commandeer a house to conduct interviews throughout the afternoon; the other would follow the course of planned demonstrations. To translate, interpret, and otherwise mediate the locals' interviews with 'these big men of

government from Kolkata’, the Lekh’s foremost native intellectual stayed behind to help in whatever way possible. The rest of us began a long hike up the mountain to a cave where drums had already begun to sound. The profundity of the spectacle was just beginning to set in.

As we walked up the trail, the aforementioned General Secretary of the GJMS pulled me aside. Now that we were out of earshot of the anthropologists, it seemed he needed to get something off his chest. “Towns,” he began, “To fulfill this tribal criteria, this is a ridiculous thing! You know Hegel? Hegel said man has reached the heights of civilization. But now look at us! We are going back to the cave!”

It was an honest, if awkwardly timed, assessment. For him, the fact that his community would have to be ‘backward’, ‘primitive’, and all the rest in order to progress through the channels of positive discrimination was a paradox so glaring and so obvious that it could not go unacknowledged—at least not between the two of us. Nevertheless, he knew full well that if his community were to join the national mainstream as STs, they would necessarily have to satisfy modernity’s demands of anachrony, precisely as they were institutionalized and bureaucratically elaborated by the Indian state. Given our less than private location, I felt compelled to stymie this line of critique before others could hear. I quickly assured him that the irony was not lost on me either. Clearly though, given his personal history, there was no way I could embody the paradox with equal intensity. My acknowledgement seemed to satisfy him, though. So he grabbed me by the arm and we once again scurried up the trail together—to where else but the *cave* where his community waited to perform their ‘tribal’ nature. (See Figure 6.)



**Figure 6. The Mouth of the Cave.**

The hillside into which the cave was etched was far too steep to accommodate the hundred plus spectators gathered for the show. Space was nevertheless made so that the anthropologists and others like myself and the Lekh's cameraman could be privy to what was about to occur: the *Masta/Diwali Pujā*. Inside the cave three shamans danced in full ritual regalia, barefooted, with their drums in hand. Their bodies shook to the syncopated rhythms; their eyes rolled back in their heads; they chanted their sacred texts in a signature cadence—all the signs of possession that I had come to recognize through my earlier work on Himalayan spirit-mediumship. This display, however, was especially virulent.

With anthropologists clinging to the rocks trying to get a better view, suddenly a charcoal colored goat appeared from the crowd. The shamans and their attendants quickly circled around it, focusing their intention. The drums intensified and shamans' dance became wilder. Within seconds, the *khukuri* was raised overhead, coming down mercilessly on the goat's outstretched neck, sending its decapitated head bouncing down the hillside. Several men immediately hoisted the still-writhing torso into the air,

and up to the lips of the shamans, who voraciously drank the spewing blood. Three times this scene played out as charcoal colored goat after charcoaled colored goat lost its life to the spectacle. Eventually the tour moved on, with the shamans continuing their trance in their now blood-speckled gowns.

Next up was the farmhouse, where various ‘primitive’ agricultural instruments and cookwares were assembled for viewing. But this was no static exhibition, for soon a full-fledged exorcism was underway. The rite of *moch marne* began just outside the house where a woman, purported to have undergone a miscarriage, was huddled over a hole dug into the ground.<sup>12</sup> Above the hole hung an-upside-down chicken (still alive); in the hole lay the skull of a dead dog. On the porch behind her, another shaman had assembled a small shrine. With hundreds of villagers surrounding them, the anthropologists rushed to record the details of the ritual before the final act was completed. The cadence of the shamans’ mantras soon quickened though, and in one fell swoop, the chicken was beheaded, falling atop the dog’s skull. Suddenly villagers rushed in to kick and stomp dirt into the hole before the evil spirit could escape. Others carried the woman upstairs where should would lay ‘ill’ until the anthropologists were gone.

Following these swift events, the anthropologists once again toured the home, documenting the various artifacts laid out before them. Meanwhile, one of the researchers slipped away to a bench on a nearby path to set up an impromptu interview session with several of the village men. Relying on an ethnic association leader to translate, he drew questions from a printed form, as each interviewee dutifully provided their particulars (name, occupation, education, etc). During the 45 minutes or so it took for the researchers to gather their information, women occasionally (and

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<sup>12</sup> On a follow-up visit to Laharā Gāū a year later, I learned that the woman had had her miscarriage months prior to the Ethnographic Survey. Tradition calls for the ritual to be conducted much sooner. Having not carried out the exorcism in the course of her normal life, the Survey apparently provided an apt venue to do so—however belatedly.

somewhat begrudgingly) stepped forth into the courtyard to dance for the cameras and ever-wandering ethnographic eye. Their performances were a bit lackluster, so the men took it upon themselves to recapitulate the performative zeal with a spirited round of *deusi khelne*—a call and response song and dance that engulfed the anthropologists with a parting taste of festival time in the hills.

Having completed their respective tasks, the two teams of researchers reconvened for a late afternoon lunch hosted by the LHEA. Only the CRI research team, ethnic association leaders, and other VIPs were invited inside. The fair was abundant, savory, and whenever possible ‘indigenous’, except of course for the bottle of Royal Challenge Whiskey which sat atop the tables. (The local hooch, it was safely assumed, would be a bit too biting for these government men from the city.) The anthropologists, citing official duty, refrained from the whiskey; other’s like myself lacked such an easy out and thus submitted to the Royal treatment.

The meal marked the end of a long, pivotal day for the Lekh community. By the time we emerged from lunch, most of the locals had returned home. The anthropologists were subsequently escorted down the hill to where their jeeps waited to take them back to Darjeeling town. With the sun making a welcome monsoon visit, the General Secretary, several others, and myself stuck around to unwind and revisit the day’s events. For everyone, it seemed a great relief that the CRI team was gone and that the study had finally ended. Eventually we too made our way back to the road, where our vehicles were waiting. Just before we left, several of the ethnic association leaders huddled together with a dozen or so local men—most of them branch representatives—to give a final word on their performances. The leaders from Darjeeling expressed great thanks for the locals’ wholehearted efforts, and while they could not prophesy the fate of their ST application, they were unanimously satisfied

with the day's events. With only the occasional hiccup, their strategy had been executed to virtual perfection.

And with that our vehicles started up, and we pulled away from the remote hamlet of Laharā Gāū. For the Lekh, their moment to shine ethnographically was complete. As for the anthropologists of the CRI, their ethnographic obligations had only just begun. Come morning, they would begin anew with another study of yet another community seeking inclusion into the list of Scheduled Tribes of India. Such were the demands of ST certification.

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From a meta-ethnographic perspective, this 'day in the field' deserves some extended consideration. First off, it is worth noting that, at the time of the study, neither the LHEA leaders, nor the villagers they selected for study knew what the official criteria of ST certification were.<sup>13</sup> The performances put forth were therefore engineered toward *perceived* criteria. As the General Secretary's reference to Hegel suggests, it was generally understood that 'tribes' should somehow exude 'backwardness', 'primitiveness' and other anachronistic qualities; it was furthermore understood that they should portray a 'unique', 'pure', and somehow untouched socio-cultural identity. And at all costs, they should not be Hindu. But given the super-abundant meanings of the term 'tribal', satisfying the unknown criteria was largely a matter of performative guesswork. It was in the interest of covering all the perceived bases, that the Lekh chose to so vividly demonstrate their 'savage', 'animistic', 'primitive' traits, while continually insisting on the uniqueness, singularity, and indigeneity of their practices.

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<sup>13</sup> This is one of the reasons why the leaders begged me to share whatever information I was able to glean from the CRI research team. It was only later in the application process when the groups learned of the official criteria.

Given the rigidly inductive structures of certification, such excessive displays of ‘tribal’ qualities may seem off the mark. There is indeed an important disconnect between what these colorful performances were *supposed* to convey and the official criteria of ST recognition. But as the following section will show, while there are only five criteria for becoming ST, ‘tribal’ certification involves a multitude of informal—and oftentimes highly subjective—factors. *In ethnographic practice*, the lines between the official and the personal, the formal and the informal, blur significantly.

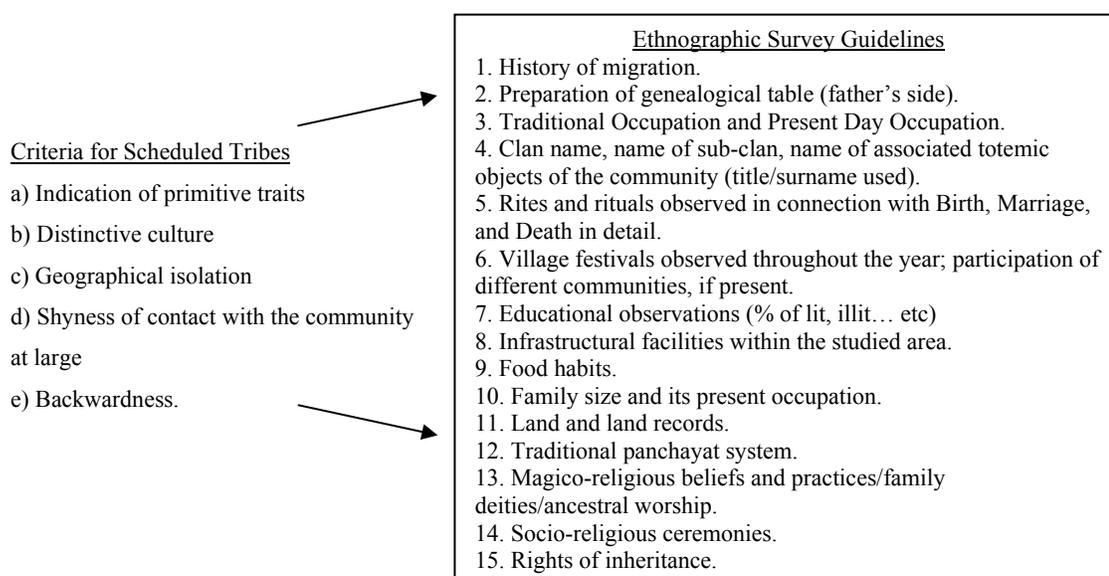
### **On Government Duty.**

Officially, the task of ST certifiers is simple: Tribal Research Institutes (in West Bengal, the CRI) are to conduct ethnographic studies to verify the applicant community’s compliance with the criteria of ST recognition.<sup>14</sup> Once the ethnography is complete, the certifiers are to write a report synthesizing their ethnographic findings with secondary sources (governmental and academic). Typically these reports incorporate materials submitted by the groups in question (consisting of native ethnologies often written exclusively for ST purposes, samples of language scripts, photos, video materials, as well as bibliographies and extensive referencing of academic sources). The report is then submitted to the state government—in West Bengal, via the Backward Class Welfare Department (BCW)—before being forwarded on to the Centre, where it is circulated through numerous departments and ministries before eventually being introduced as a bill in parliament. By design then, the expertise of certifiers is principally confined to the production of ethnographic knowledge. Once they submit their report to the state government, it becomes ‘a policy matter’, as they like to say, and is largely out of their hands.

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the official ‘Modality for Scheduling Tribes, 1999’ says little about the actual ethnographic procedures for verifying the criteria—only that the criteria are to be verified. The process I chart here obtains within those states with TRIs.

Certifying ‘tribes’ becomes infinitely more complex when put into practice. On top of the five criteria, the CRI drew up their own set of fifteen ethnographic guidelines prior to their arrival in Darjeeling—leading to the scenario depicted in Figure 7:



**Figure 7. Juxtaposition of Official Criteria and the CRI's Ethnographic Guidelines.**

The juxtaposition signals the mushrooming complexity as government anthropology moves from design to ethnographic practice. The CRI's research protocol further included quotas of questionnaires, demographic tables, interview templates, and other predetermined mechanisms of study. These complicating factors say nothing of the inherently social and subjective dynamics of the ethnographic encounter. And yet—and this is crucial—despite the myriad contingencies of ethnographic experience, the empirical observations *by the very design of certification* must be processed vis a vis the established criteria. Paradigmatically, these strictures of certification over-determine the ways in which the community is engaged and rendered as an object of

ethnographic knowledge. Not surprisingly, certain members of the research team chafe at this bit of hyper-inductive reasoning.

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The second day of the Ethnographic Survey was held at a village on the tea-estate where I was living. Throughout the morning, the community under investigation demonstrated their ‘tribal’ qualities, while the CRI team dutifully recorded their performances. Lunch was held at a community hall a few minutes walk from the clearing where the morning’s demonstrations had been made. The fair was standard Nepali *dāl-bhāt*, enough to feed an entire community. Inside, chairs lined the walls of the vacuous community hall, except for several, which were set around a table on the stage at the front of the hall. The researchers were to be served there.

To my chagrin, ethnic association leaders insisted that I too take my meal on stage with the other anthropologists. I pleaded to remain on the ground where the locals ate (some of whom were my neighbors), but ultimately I could not deny the leaders’ request. Thankfully, with the locals eating in small clusters on the ground, we were not the center of attention, but I was up there with *them* nonetheless. Talk was small and I ate rather uncomfortably. As lunch was coming to an end though, I noticed several (but not all) of the anthropologists quietly getting up from the table. They did not excuse themselves, nor did they act in accord with one another. Instead they absconded without either ado or notebooks. One by one, each proceeded to amble his way across the room and quietly find a seat amongst the locals. Their body languages suggested a certain humility as they leaned into ongoing conversations or struck up new ones. Within minutes they were fully engaged in conversation with the men, women, and children of the community. For once not hounded by pesky interlopers, from a distance these anthropologists seemed to almost vanish into the community.

Meanwhile, the civil servants who remained on stage sat back in their chairs and began picking at their teeth. Already feeling awkward, I hurried to finish my meal. But before I escaped the stage, I took a moment to appreciate the vantage point. On my right, civil servants sat on stage, their bellies full, chatting amongst themselves at a comfortable remove from their subjects. To my left, on the ground below, civil servants—perhaps of a more ethnographic ilk—had found places among the community. From where I sat, there was no telling what linguistic struggles were being overcome, nor what was being discussed, but smiles and genuine communication were plain to see from across the room. The juxtaposition stayed with me as a poignant glimpse of the *bureaucratic* versus *ethnographic* dimensions of ‘tribal’ certification—and in particular the different kinds of persons, personalities, and dispositions that ‘people’ these aspects of the state.

One of the researchers that pardoned himself from the protocols of certification that day—if only for a fleeting moment—was the Director of the CRI. Months later, he explained his calling in the following terms:

“I am not an administrator. I am here for the research. It is part of my blend. Because to know these things, you have to know the essence of the field. Whether it’s an arranged or a natural situation, whatever. There are the cultural components, belief systems, ethical values attached to the materials that you are seeing, and all these things are all tied together, and to know them... [pause] You can’t just understand all of these things without getting in real touch with these aspects. Only through the flavor of the ethnos can one get into the situation.”

Ethnographic research may have been “part of his blend”, but as the Director and certain of his colleagues would often lament, the requirements of certification—and government duty more generally—severely constrained their abilities to know the proverbial “essence of the field”. What is more, the formalism at hand clearly affected

how their subjects chose to represent themselves as the objects of research—thereby compromising the anthropologists’ romantic ideals of ethnography further.

### **Polished Goats.**

During the Survey and afterward, the anthropologists were deeply concerned by the contrived nature of the socio-cultural forms they were tasked with analyzing. Getting to the bottom of such obviously stilted affairs became a nearly impossible task. And yet, the duty of certifiers is precisely that: to arrive at a clear, well-evidenced description of a community’s empirical fulfillment of the established criteria.

Several months after the Survey, the Director and I were sitting in his office discussing these issues when he guided my memory back to the first day of the Survey when the charcoal colored goats were sacrificed. “Most of those things we saw that day were arranged,” he told me:

“Like up there in the cave with the sacrifice ritual of the three goats. You see, I touched two of the goats, and when I looked at my fingers, there was black stuff on my fingers. So what they had told me was that you had to sacrifice black goats. But you see, [leaning toward me and lowering his voice as though revealing a secret] they couldn’t find any perfectly black goats. So they had to put shoe polish on the goats. But you see a goat, when it is naturally black and one that is made to look black, they don’t look right. So that is why I touched the goats with my fingers!” [erupting in laughter]

Humor aside, the fact that aspiring communities would go so far as to polish a goat is remarkably telling. To best satisfy the criteria of ‘tribal’ recognition, the Lekh felt compelled to *do* exactly what their anthropologies *said*. Their anthropological representations to the government said that the goat should be black, and so it was made black. In this rather Baudrillardian moment, the simulacra of the ethnological

word came to precede its referent.<sup>15</sup> In other words, ritual ‘practice’ was made to conform to its ethnological representation. As I have also shown in Chapter I, the primacy of representational form has become a signature feature of ethnic renaissance in the hills, as have the concomitant logics of ethnological singularity. Enacted within the contexts of the Ethnographic Survey, the beheading of a *black* goat was subsequently held forth as an emblematic component the Lekh’s socio-cultural singularity: viz—we, and only we, do it this way and only this way. The rite, performed in perfect accord with the ethnological word, subsequently became a metonym for a ‘culture’ uniquely their own. It signaled, as the criteria would have it—‘cultural distinctiveness’. The gruesomeness of the rite would furthermore connote ‘primitiveness’, ‘backwardness’, ‘animism’, ‘savagery’, ‘nature-worship’ and other qualities of the ‘tribal’ ideal-type as it has been formulated in India and beyond.<sup>16</sup>

Chicaneries like the polishing of goats are cause for serious concern on the part of government anthropologists, who themselves maintain their own ideals of ‘authentic’ ethnographic data. (Recall “the essence of the field/flavor of the ethnos” comment from earlier). They frequently complained about how the mediational tactics of ethnic leaders impeded their access to the ‘real’ people. Contending with these politics of (im)mediation was tiring, frustrating work made worse by the clearly compromised nature of the data put before them. They complained on several occasions, “Nothing was raw. Everything was cooked.” In this Levi-Straussian inflected complaint we can glean their desire for data, if not perfectly ‘natural’, then certainly less politically ‘cultured’ than was being put forth in the stilted contexts of the Ethnographic Survey.<sup>17</sup> Ultimately though, given the logistics and time constraints

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<sup>15</sup> See Baudrillard 1994, especially Chapter I, “The Precession of the Simulacra”.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed history of this category, see Chapter III.

<sup>17</sup> Levi-Strauss 1964.

of the Survey, there was only so much that could be done to cut through the confusion.

As one research team member put it to me:

“You went there; you saw it. We were brought into an area where they had everything arranged. It was all arranged for us. They led us in. So if you come to visit my family and I introduce you to all of the people in my family and I have told them what to say to you, then what you see is what I want you to see. That is how it was! We only met the people they [the ethnic leaders] wanted us to meet. And they had told them [the villagers] what to say. So what could we do?”

The dubiousness of their material was not limited to the ‘field’ per se.

Throughout 2006 and 2007, ethnic delegations from Darjeeling made frequent visits to the CRI’s offices in Kolkata, often bringing with them stacks of books and specially written essays ‘proving’ the ‘tribal’ character of their communities. These face-to-face exchanges between ethnic delegations and the CRI did indeed make a difference, but not always in ways intended by the delegations. The CRI researchers came to know certain ethnic leaders as pushy and full of cunning, whereas others were respected as earnest and helpful intermediaries. Some cases were flagged as inherently problematic, not because they did or did not comply with the ST criteria, but because of the questionable tactics of their leaders. Trust thereby became an important factor in weighing the integrity of any given community’s literary and ethnographic presentations.

Complementing this subjective ‘feel’ for their informants, the anthropologists also called upon secondary sources to crosscheck the authenticity of their data. Some material was deemed spurious; some was deemed acceptable. Ultimately though, the certifiers could not possibly corroborate every piece of evidence submitted before them. From time to time, they floated the idea of making a surprise visit to Darjeeling to check the ‘facts’ submitted before them. This, in turn, triggered several panic-inflected rumors in Darjeeling that a surprise-visit was imminent. Ultimately though, it

never happened. The official Ethnographic Report was therefore written solely on the basis of the Ethnographic Survey in 2006, in which each community was allotted one day of ethnographic study.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Problem of Hybridity.**

At the point of ethnographic study, communities are acutely concerned with showing, and certifiers acutely concerned with knowing, those ethnological traits that render a community ‘culturally distinct’, ‘isolated,’ and discrete. Hybrid socio-cultural forms are subsequently deemed highly problematic. Both sides see them as adversely affecting the prospects of ST certification.<sup>19</sup> Recall the Emergency Meeting: the communities under study were to avoid Hindu-inflected identifications of any kind. “To score a goal in the first match,” so the logic went, the studied would need to put forth the purist aspects of their identity.

A similar logic held for the anthropologists. For the certifiers, hybridity was an ethnographic problem. The Director of the CRI framed the issue as follows:

“It’s a matter of if acculturation and assimilation have occurred. If the majority of the people have changed their way of life or not. Like if they still retain their ancestral worship, life rituals, and these sort of things. If all of these criteria are being changed, then they are no longer tribes, but if they have kept these traits, then they should get it [ST status].”

The problem of hybridity—and in particular the blurry lines between ‘tribes’ and ‘Hinduism’—has dogged ethnology on the subcontinent since colonial times.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The text blended large amounts of secondary source data (academic, governmental, and native) with the ethnographic material garnered from the Survey of 2006. Often, these ethnographic and secondary source materials were indistinguishable. I return to the Report later in the chapter.

<sup>19</sup> As was shown in Chapter I, these logics extend beyond the ethnographic interface, where cultural engineering programs to eradicate the syncretic trace—especially that of Hinduism—have become central to ethnic revitalization in Darjeeling.

<sup>20</sup> As was argued in the previous chapter, the emergence of the ‘problem of hybridity’ was part and parcel to the development of increasingly technical rubrics for classifying colonial subjects beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and extending well into the 20<sup>th</sup>. As Timothy Mitchell has argued through his work in

Empirically undeniable, the inherent messiness of socio-cultural life, to this day, continues to unsettle and perturb the state's classificatory rubrics.

While observing the Survey, I could not understand the apparent fixation with seemingly trivial empirical details—be they etchings on a bamboo stick or the names of each herb used in ritual practice. To my eye, they had little to do with the five criteria being checked. But to the state anthropologists, they had a different epistemic value. Evaluated as possible retentions of a community's pure antecedent [read: tribal] past,<sup>21</sup> seemingly irrelevant ethnographic details transformed into nuggets of historical insight. “As a group moves from one point to another, from A to B to C to D, minor cultural traits are retained... They are retained in their present culture, maybe in rudimentary form, but they can be there,” the Director explained, “To see their tribal origin, you have to study the minutia, the very detailed differences.” Taken to be clues into the pure, original identities of the communities under investigation, ethnographic details thus became keys to unlocking the riddles of hybridity.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike the communities they studied, the anthropologists did not try to deny the inevitable mixing of cultures, religions, languages, etc, that communities undergo through time. Instead, they sought ways to cut through the classificatory obfuscation. Traces of ‘tribal’ origin were said to be present in the details of current socio-cultural practice. By a twist of allochronistic logic then,<sup>23</sup> these contemporary relics of the past

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Egypt, technocratic knowledges often create their own intellectual problems *vis a vis* the object of their analysis. Hybridity has proven one such problem for colonial and now postcolonial anthropology. See “The Character of Calculability” in Mitchell 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Here I borrow wording from Young's work on hybridity (1995). On the ‘tribe: hindu’ binary and its colonial and postcolonial valances, see Chapter III.

<sup>22</sup> This logic echoes through academic anthropology on the ‘tribal’ problem in India. Andre Beteille, for instance, has argued, “In today's India, therefore, tribes which answer to the anthropologists conception of the ideal type are rarely to be found. What we find are tribes in transition... Only by going to the antecedents of a group can we say with any confidence whether or not it should be considered as a tribe.” Beteille 1977: 14.

<sup>23</sup> On allochronism, see Johannes Fabian's celebrated work *Time and the Other* (1983). Though Fabian focuses primarily on how academic anthropology denies coevalness to its object communities, his insight is especially potent when brought to bear on state anthropology in postcolonial India.

were crucially part of what made any given community ‘culturally distinct’, ‘isolated’, ‘primitive’, and ‘backward’—in sum, ‘tribal’. Per this logic, the essence of ‘tribal’ culture is ‘out there’ hiding in the modern day; it is merely a matter of deploying the right techniques, the right kinds of expertise to bring it to light. In this rational empiricist pursuit of ‘tribal’ origins, the anthropologists of the contemporary ‘ethnographic state’ indeed share a great deal with their colonial predecessors.<sup>24</sup>

### **Hinduism: The Elephant in the Room.**

*“Moral regulation: a project of normalizing, rendering natural, and taken for granted, in a word ‘obvious’, what are in fact ontological and epistemological premises of a particular and historical form of social order.”*

—Corrigan and Sayer<sup>25</sup>

Several days into the Ethnographic Survey, the CRI researchers were once again led to a cave high on a hillside. To honor the sanctity of this ‘holy place’, everyone was asked to walk barefoot through the forest as we approached. When we arrived, the scene was far less dramatic than the shamanic sacrifice witnessed on Day One. The ‘cave’ was but a minor rock indentation. The shamanic priest who looked after the cave was not dressed in ritual attire. There was no drumming. And the crowd paled in comparison to the hundreds who had gathered for the vibrant display of the Lekh. Though the scene was far more subdued, the anthropologists were no less interested. In fact, the working environment was more conducive to their data-gathering purposes. Seldom did ethnic leaders intervene, and for once the anthropologists could carry on a conversation without having to shout or shield their

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<sup>24</sup> This is not to suggest perfect continuity. As I argued in the previous chapter, there are important distinctions between colonial and postcolonial knowledge.

<sup>25</sup> 1985: 4.

notes. With the priest patiently explaining the ritual ornaments tucked into the various crevices of the cave, the CRI's notebooks filled with ease.

Months later this rather unspectacular scene came up in conversation at the CRI offices in Kolkata. Three members of the research team and I had been talking for some time about the Survey and what role (if any) religion played in determining ST status. The Director harked back to the setting of the small cave to describe the relationship of Buddhism, Hinduism, and 'tribes'.

Director: You went to that 'gomba' [Buddhist temple], and what did you see? There was the beautiful hillside, and us, remember, we had the naked legs. And what did you see in that little cave?

Amit: If I may interrupt, you saw the trisuli [Shiva's trident], and the mirror. These are all, of course, objects of Hinduism.

Director: Yes, so there was the tribal element out in the jungle. And then there was the Hindu elements. So [along with it being a 'gomba'] there were all three elements. There was the coexistence. Or like [that day] down in the tea estate. There was assimilation there. You know where the trail went way down, and that person got hurt when the dog charged them? [I nod remembering] There were the bamboo carvings. The fine little etchings. Yes, well if it had been Hinduism it would have been different. But then there was the bridge [referring to a small bamboo model that was part of the ritual], and that is a Hindu thing. And also the egg. Do you know what the egg symbolizes? Two things: one is the fertility cult, and the other is Buddhism.

Towns: Okay, so this brings me to a big question. As anthropologists of the government whose job it is to classify people, how do you deal with mixture? That is, what challenges does it pose for you as you try to determine whether a group is tribal?

Director: Yes, this is a very relevant question for our work. Well, there are two things. The first is: To what extent the tribal characteristics have been maintained as yet in the current culture? And the second is whether these groups also maintain a position in the caste system, in the general Hindu caste system. In other words, whether there is a relevant hierarchy that *we* maintain, whether this is applicable. Because in the details of

their culture, they might maintain their tribal traits. There is exclusivity in these fine aspects of their culture. It may just be as an undercurrent that this identity is maintained. It may just be an undercurrent. [emph. mine]

Having spent considerable time researching the misgivings hybridity engendered for colonial ethnology, this was a question I had long wanted to put to the CRI research team. More so than their empiricist presumptions that ‘tribal’ identity was somehow hiding in the details, their response struck me most pointedly in their use of the first person: viz—the issue of whether the communities of Darjeeling maintained the kind of “hierarchy that *we* maintain”. The anthropologists with whom I was speaking (as was the case with the entire eight-member research team) were predominantly of upper-caste Hindu descent. Was then, the use of the first person ‘we’ a subtle indexing of a Hindu identity from and against which ‘tribal’ alterity was being rendered? Later, as the conversation turned to the history of the Gorkha peoples, the issue surfaced once again.

Director: [Within the history of the Gorkhas], there are dual religions in place, the Brahmanical and the tribal. The Great Tradition and the Little Tradition. [In the history of these groups in Darjeeling] there was religious assimilation, but due to lack of proper institutional support, a proper cultural assimilation couldn’t take place. It was, if I may say so, not a proper assimilation.

Amit: Yes, they are trying to make their own Great Tradition with this ‘Gorkha’ identity. So there is an attachment to that, as though it’s a form of Hindu practice. [In their past] they have been saying, ‘Let us all be known as Gorkhas to become part of the Hindu fold’. They think that it is to be boiled down as a melting pot, but it doesn’t work like that *here*. [emph. mine]

Note, first and foremost, how the talk of ‘Great’ versus ‘Little’ traditions clearly marks Hinduism (or the Brahmanical) as the established center against which ‘tribal’ alterity (or lack thereof) is being judged. Second, note the concluding statement: “It doesn’t work like that *here*.” The deictic ‘here’ tacitly marks Kolkata—home of the Hindu

‘we’—as the orthodox center of ethnological distinction. Such statements casually deny Gorkha identity on the grounds that it violates the norms of the ethnological first-person and *his* homeland. These, of course, were not official rulings in any sense of the term. Instead, they were off-the-cuff expressions of subjective sensibilities. But as the previous chapter illustrated, the Hindu-centricity of ethnological distinction has a deep history, which has subsequently conditioned contemporary prejudices of understanding.<sup>26</sup> At once enabling and problematic, subjective sensibilities of this kind are endemic to ethnographic understanding writ large. Insofar as ‘tribal’ certification relies upon ethnographic techniques, they remain integral to the government’s administration of positive discrimination.

The official Modality states an ST “may profess any religion”.<sup>27</sup> In a formal sense, it is classically secular. However, when we comb through the nuances of ethnographic knowledge production, religious sensibilities clearly inform anthropological judgment. That government anthropologists adjudicate difference through their own subjectivities, from their own subject positions, comes as no surprise. Reflexive anthropology has for a long time now harped upon this very issue. But when enacted through the ethnological organs of the state, classificatory prejudices transform ethnography into a mechanism of what Corrigan and Sayer have called *moral regulation*. Along these lines, ‘tribal’ certification becomes a means through which historically entrenched social orders are naturalized. At the point of ethnographic encounter, government anthropologists operate as the human face of state classification, at once animating and legitimating the state’s classificatory capacity with moral sensibilities that continually exceed the provisionally ‘secular’

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<sup>26</sup> It was Gadamer who invited us to think about prejudices as something more than pejorative, blinkered ways of thinking. Gadamer’s framed prejudices in a more ethically neutral way; they are inevitable and necessary conditions of understanding itself. See Gadamer 1997: 277-307.

<sup>27</sup> Point 12.1.1(iv) of the Modality for Scheduling Tribes.

and formalist workings of positive discrimination.<sup>28</sup> Understood accordingly, state ethnography functions as more than a means of recognition; it becomes an experiential arena for the instantiation of the state itself. Only the state does not appear here as the ‘secular’, objective entity that it professes to be—but rather an ideological apparatus in and of itself.<sup>29</sup>

The aforementioned deictics, uses of the first-person, and off-the-cuff judgments offer subtle clues to these ideological underpinnings. Other clues are less subtle. Documents obtained from one high-level source in Delhi denied one community’s application for ST status on the following grounds:

“Though [the community] had tribal origin, with the passage of time and due to their contact with exogenous people and their contacts with the Hindu tradition, they are gradually assimilating into the Great Tradition. It will be then a retrograde step if they are included into the list of Scheduled Tribes.”

Clearly, this ruling represents a breakdown in secular logic—no matter how ‘secularism’ is construed.<sup>30</sup> Expressing logics of the ‘Great Tradition’, its vested teleology, and associated assessments of hybridity, the statement both echoes and recapitulates the persuasions casually hinted at earlier—albeit with far more authority. Even if we were to ignore the links between this ruling from Delhi and my conversations with the CRI team, the ruling clearly contradicts the policy that “religion is no bar to becoming tribal.” Whether articulated in the halls of government or on the street where anthropological distinction is often rendered on more corporeal

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<sup>28</sup> As Corrigan and Sayer emphasize, “Moral regulation is coextensive with state formation and state forms are always animated and legitimated by a particular moral ethos.” (1985: 4)

<sup>29</sup> Althusser 1971. The work of Althusser and Gramsci (1971) has been instrumental in tracing out the ideologies of the modern state. In many ways their radical critiques of modern states redeploy Marx’s original insight that the “ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.” Marx (1978/1845: 172).

<sup>30</sup> This ruling was not final. As I discuss later, the community’s application was sent back to the state of West Bengal for further review. As of 2009, the community’s case was still pending. As has been discussed in the debates over secularism in India (and elsewhere), secularism can take various forms. On these debates, see Nigam 2006.

registers, judgments of this kind should be of concern for a nation that at present is still struggling with its own ‘crisis’ of secular nationalism.<sup>31</sup>

### **Recognizing the Nation.**

As I discussed in Chapter II, the people of Darjeeling harbor deep-seated anxieties about belonging in India. Their proximity to, affinities with, and heritage in, Nepal have led to perennial questionings of their place within the Indian nation. Even their own leaders have convinced them that their Indian citizenship is dubious at best. These anxieties have fueled their longing for rights, recognition, and security as Scheduled Tribes of India. So too have they affected how these groups choose to represent themselves as objects of the state’s ethnographic gaze.

Recall the General Secretary’s warning at the Emergency Meeting to avoid identification as ‘Nepali’. In Darjeeling, the term is used primarily as a linguistic and historical identification; as a signifier of self, it is never used in a national sense. Nevertheless, to avoid confusion, and perhaps most importantly to avoid any resonance with discriminating logics that view Gorkhas (that is, the Nepali speaking peoples of India) as foreigners, the term was to be avoided around the anthropologists. The same held for the topic of migration. Some groups went so far as to deny any sort of migrational history from Nepal. These claims to autochthony were dubious at best and often times undermined the credibility of the given group’s application in the eyes of the anthropologists.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, many ethnic leaders believed that presenting

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<sup>31</sup> The ‘crisis of secular nationalism’ has prompted considerable debates over the paradoxes of positive discrimination. An excellent overview of the debates (and the volatile identity politics that spawned them) may be found in Nigam 2006.

<sup>32</sup> In making these claims, groups borrowed from an emerging historical revisionist movement in Darjeeling. These native historians argue against the widely held understanding that most ethnic groups of Darjeeling migrated from Nepal beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They refute all British sources that claim the area was virtually uninhabited in the 1830s (save for the Lepcha, a few Bhutia, and a scattering of others). Their opinions are admittedly politically motivated. Not coincidentally, many of these historians are actively involved in their respective community’s quest for ST status. The CRI anthropologists, for the most part, refused to take such claims to autochthony seriously.

their constituents as ‘sons of the soil’ would bolster the chances of attaining ST status. Such an ascription would work to conceal the problematic transnational histories at hand, while appealing to the widespread imaginings of the wild, ‘aboriginal’, ‘tribal’/’adivasi’.

Given the pervasive sense of anxious belonging in Darjeeling’s, the CRI’s historical inquiries struck a particularly sensitive chord. While the anthropologists dug through their history in Nepal primarily in hopes of tracing back to a pure antecedent ‘tribal’ past, the communities being studied feared that the historical investigations were being conducted with more exclusionary designs. This was one of the many misunderstandings that spanned the ethnographic interface. Though over-indulged and misdirected, the people of Darjeeling’s fears were not wholly unfounded.

One day after the Survey, the Director and I began discussing why it was necessary to explore the history of these groups, even if that meant venturing into the history of Nepal. He began by telling me that “All the peoples of Darjeeling are immigrant peoples.”

To which I responded, “Do you think that will hurt their chances of becoming STs since their ancestors were immigrants and have origins in Nepal?”

“Maybe.”

I continued, “Because I know there is a lot of insecurity in Darjeeling about being labeled as immigrants. But if India is a relatively young country, and they were all in Darjeeling when the nation was formed...”

The Director cut me off before I could finish, “No,” he told me, “India is a very old country. It’s just our geographic borders have shifted recently.”

The comment caught me off guard. In no way was he denying Indian citizenship to the people of Darjeeling. That was clear. But his statement did seem to index a highly typical form of primordial nationalism. To say “India is a very old

country” skated blithely over the rocky decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through which British India became not one but two independent nation-states. Even in the most generous reading, the statement ventured a dangerous, but increasingly commonplace, conflation of the ‘nation’ and ‘civilization’. In the right-leaning politics of India today, this conflation tends toward auto-orientalism. Although the Director was not a man to profess *Hindutva* (Hindu nationalism), his opinions do bespeak the centrality of both Hinduism and the nation in the state’s systems of recognition.<sup>33</sup>

It stands to reason that inclusion into the list of Scheduled Tribes *of India* would be predicated on the concept of the nation. But for marginalized populations with transnational histories like those of Darjeeling, the truism is anything but inane. For them, the very issue of being-in and being-of the nation induces feelings of great anxiety. Thinking through *their* histories as well as those of their certifiers, the question thus becomes: Through what histories—colonial/postcolonial, national, and personal—are conceptions of the ‘nation’ being construed and subsequently employed in the practices of recognition? If agents of the state are unable to think historically sans the vehicle of the nation, then to what extent would that skew their ability to examine the transnational histories of contemporary citizens of the modern nation-state? Importantly, these are not merely etic questions to be formulated meta-ethnographically by researchers like myself. They were emic concerns, harbored by the very people who subjected themselves to the state’s anthropological scrutiny in hopes of winning its coveted recognition.

### **Supplication.**

Several days into the Ethnographic Survey, with his research team hard at work, the Director and I struck up one of our first conversations about our mutual craft

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<sup>33</sup>On how conceptions of the nation subtend recognition within it, see Munasinghe 2002; Williams 1989, 1991.

of ethnography. It didn't last long. Soon a message arrived, notifying him that he was wanted for an important meeting. Not wanting to abandon our conversation, he invited me along.

We were led down a trail to a small one-room schoolhouse where two well-dressed ethnic leaders were waiting. They greeted the Director nervously, and then had a quick word with the teacher. Seconds later, she and her Class II students vacated the schoolhouse. With the building suddenly empty, we found ourselves searching out seats amid rows of benches and long tables. One plastic chair sat at the front of the room, but the Director refused to sit there saying, "That is for a real teacher." So we sat down together at one of the child-sized tables.

The ethnic leaders clearly had an agenda. But within seconds, the Director launched into a long lecture about state anthropology in India. Clearly, it was a continuation of the conversation we had begun just minutes before.

"You see the type of anthropology that you practice in America and the type we are doing here in India, there is something different there. Ethnography is about capturing the minutia of culture...the very fine things. This coming to Darjeeling is nothing new. I have been here fifteen or so times. All of the people of the hills started submitting petitions to be recognized as STs back in 2000, no maybe 1999... But you see ethnography is about the minutia. In America, or the UK, there are all the great writers there, whether it is Margaret Meade or Malinowski.

[The ethnic leaders nod along, unsure of where this lecture is leading.]

What we do as anthropologists is we are specialists in observation, so we observe these things. Whether it is participant observation or what have you. You know, participant observation like Malinowski! But here [today] we cannot do this. We have been given petitions from these hill communities and we have been sent here to perform studies, so how can we do participant observation? Like these rituals and things that you have laid out for us today, you see these are just 'duplicates' of culture. They are not the original culture.

[The ethnic leaders try to interject, but he speaks over them.]

They are duplicates! They are not the original form of the culture.

[He is becoming argumentative, as the ethnic leaders again try to claim otherwise]

No, you see in the original you may only have three vases, or you may not use this or that type of fruit because of your economic condition. But today you put out seven vases, and all the different types of fruit. In the original form, you would not do this. And each thing has special relation to your culture or religion. You see this is not original... The only way to know what is the original is to do participant observation and stay with a community for some time. Like Malinowski. So you see, what is the role of the anthropologist? What is the role? He is not an administrator or a policy maker. These groups submit these petitions to the government, and then the files come to us and we have to go out into the field to observe these groups. You see if you file a case in a court of law, you submit it to the government and then you have a lawyer, and he is an advocate. So what is the role of the anthropologist? He is not an administrator or a politician. He is an advocate. We are advocates for these groups, [a thoughtful, agonizing pause] if the criteria are fulfilled.”

“But sir, we are a vanishing tribe,” one of the leaders pleads desperately.

“No! I don’t agree,” the Director replies sternly, “This term vanishing tribe should be taken as a derogatory term. You are not vanishing. Your population is not decreasing. How can you say you are vanishing?”

The leaders struggle to find ground to stand on. “We have been so oppressed,” one of them states pleading for sympathy, “Look at me, I have graduated with a degree in mathematics, but I am the first and only one in my whole family who has done this.”

“Yes, he is the exception,” the other adds.

The Director listens to them, a cigarette in hand, shaking his head. He acknowledges their economic condition but tells them, “If you can light the fire of aspiration in your people, you will reap the fruits in the form of your children, and your tribe will not vanish. It is this ascriptive orientation that will lead to achievement. The main function of your association should thus be to motivate people. You have to do the role of the catalyst.”

The conversation grows tense, and their appeals more desperate. “Let me express our experiences here in Darjeeling. He and I, *we are doing the role of catalyst,*

but we have been oppressed—economically and by population. So we are thinking that you can help save our community”

The Director continues shaking his head denying them.

“You are our savior! You are not our inspector,” the ethnic leader begs, his hands pressed together in prayer position.

“No!” the Director retorts with visible anger, “I am not a man to be prayed to!”

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By this point, the conversation had taken a dark turn. Though the leaders begged for sympathy several more times, their pleas were futile. With nowhere left for the conversation to go, the meeting ended abruptly and awkwardly. As we got up to go, the ethnic leaders looked devastated. Their special meeting had gone very badly.

As we climbed back up the hill, the Director seemed especially irked.

“Sometimes so much is said,” he told me as we labored upwards, “Perhaps I have said too much...but ahhh...” [giving it a shrug and carrying on up the trail.]

In the remaining days of the Survey, I personally witnessed the Director countenance several other scenarios along these lines. Ethnic leaders constantly wanted to have a private word with him, constantly wanted to pull him away from his research to persuade him by other, more affective means. Both artful and heartfelt, these demands were difficult to manage. They tugged on sensibilities that belied the prescribed formalism of state ethnography. And in this case, they elicited a likewise response. The tinge of regret—“Sometimes so much is said...Perhaps I have said too much,”—suggests as much. As I watched these exchanges, I could not help but note this decidedly humanized ‘face’ of the state. Inexorably social and undeniably political, the Ethnographic Survey was continually proving to be an interface in the most literal sense of the word—a face-to-face encounter of different desires, frustrations, responsibilities, and contending anthropologies.

One of the anthropologies present was, of course, western, academic anthropology—and, like it or not, I came to stand in as its representative. I have little doubt that my presence in the schoolroom altered the interaction significantly. For one, it seemingly threw a wrench into the ethnic leader’s plans for convincing the Director of their ‘tribal’ eligibility. Likewise, I was clearly an impetus for the contentious lecture delivered by the Director. As was so often the case throughout my research, here again my professional identity seemed to instigate the performance of ‘anthropology’ itself. Only this time, it was not the consummately ethnological stuff of ethnic song and dance being performed, but instead a powerful narrative of expert identity and ethnographic authority.

These implications merit further reflexive, historiographic, and ethnographic consideration.

### **The ‘Foreign’ Presence.**

As was discussed in the previous chapter, ethnologies of the colonial era were largely responsible for constituting the very possibility of ‘tribal’ recognition. Particular conditions of the postcolonial era have since shaped the matter of ‘tribal’ recognition into its current form. The ‘tribal problem’ as it has come to be known in overlapping academic and governmental circles has spawned extensive literatures since independence.<sup>34</sup> Not unlike the arguments that cropped up during the Constituent Assembly Debates, the debates have formed under an overarching liberal modernist framework. On the one side have been the assimilationists, who believe that ‘tribal’s’ entry into the national mainstream should be facilitated by government. On the other

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<sup>34</sup> References are too extensive to list. Exemplary studies include: S.C. Dube 1960; Ghurye 1963; Singh 1972; Thapar *et al* 1977; Gupta 1998; Chattopadhyay 1978; and Praharaj 1988 among others. The ‘tribal problem’ has been taken up in other contexts by the likes of Helm *et al* 1968; Sahlins 1968; Fried 1968, 1975; Southall 1970; Godelier 1977.

side, are the protectionists, who champion ‘tribal’ cultures as inherently valuable yet *vulnerable* self-contained systems deserving of governmental protection.

The policy that has emerged out of these debates has in large part tried to split these differences. Entering into these debates is not my concern. What concerns me here, rather, is the way in which the entire ‘tribal’ problem (and the government’s administration of it) has been structured by western modernist and academic discourses. The assimilationist’s versus protectionist’s positions bare the unmistakable marks of modernization theory and structural functionalism, respectively. We need only look to the criteria of ‘backwardness’ and ‘primitiveness’ on the one hand, and ‘distinctive culture’ and ‘geographic isolation’ on the other to appreciate the lingering influence of these disciplinary tropes.

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In the dynamics of ‘tribal’ certification, the influence of (western) academic anthropology plays out in other ways as well. Aspiring ‘tribals’ and government certifiers covet academic literatures on the groups in question. Throughout my time in Darjeeling, I was bombarded with requests for academic literatures on the ethnicities with whom I worked. Having access to a range of academic sources unavailable in Darjeeling, I became a conduit of ethnological texts—many of which went directly into the growing libraries of the different ethnic associations. “Please bring whatever you can,” they would tell me. When I would note that most of the literature on their ethnic group was based on research in Nepal, not India (the latter was my job), they opined that that was even better, as Nepal was the home of precisely the ‘original’, ‘authentic’, and ‘pure’ ethnic culture which they sought. If the literatures were written by European or American scholars, they carried additional authority.

This engendered the rather bizarre but increasingly common circumstance in which native subjects turn to the writings of foreign anthropologists for the

authoritative word on their own ‘culture’. This is not to downplay the importance of native ethnologies; neither is it to cover over the critiques that these native ethnologies often level at their foreign counterparts. Instead it is to highlight what brand of knowledge is privileged within this system of recognition. It is not only the *content* of the ethnological word that matters here, but also the *origins* of one’s intellectual sources. When and where western academic sources can bolster a party’s ethnological claims, they are invariably co-opted—but not without a conspicuous citation.

The same holds true on the government’s side of things. The CRI researchers were continuously looking for more contemporary, *western* academic sources to augment the heavy dose of colonial ethnology and governmental sources upon which they typically relied.<sup>35</sup> Again I was called upon to provide such sources. When the official Ethnographic Report was finally written, it contained extensive citations and a lengthy bibliography to substantiate its claims. These sources not only rounded out what was necessarily limited ethnographic content (bear in mind that each community was only granted one day of ethnographic study), they also lent the report an intellectual authority that would assuage its passage through the various organs of government where the file would be scrutinized for its intellectual integrity and legal standing.

In both state ethnology and the ‘ethnologies of the governed’ then, the academic citation plays a conspicuous role in substantiating the claims put forth. Especially when it hails from the western academy, the citation carries symbolic value

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<sup>35</sup> For both sides, governmental sources like the census and colonial ethnologies are inherently valuable insofar as they are the government’s word, so to speak. But given the convoluted rubrics used through the years, any claim that the census from, say, 1931 enumerated a given community as a ‘hill tribe’ is easily refuted by the census or colonial ethnology from another time, when the group was enumerated differently or not at all. Though they relied upon colonial histories and ethnologies, the CRI researchers at times expressed their dissatisfaction with colonial representations. Similarly, while they relied upon native anthropologies (often in classic cut-and-paste fashion), they looked upon native anthropologies with suspicion. Academic anthropologies, especially of the western variety, on the other hand were granted exceptional authority in the adjudications of identities ‘tribal’ and otherwise in Darjeeling.

in and of itself. Put to use in the certification of ‘tribes’, it comes to function something like ‘a symbol that stands for itself’—as Roy Wagner would have it—that is, a ‘*relatively* self-contained, self-signative’ marker of ethnological expertise, authority, and thus veracity.<sup>36</sup>

The *de facto* prestige of western academic anthropology affected my impact on the ethnographic interface in important ways. To conclude this examination of the ethnographic interface, let me then briefly recount what happened in the final moments of the Ethnographic Survey of 2006.

Having completed an all day ethnographic study replete with shamanic rituals, caves, and lengthy interview sessions, the community under investigation was about to bid farewell to the CRI team. Some thirty or so members of the ethnic group stood back as the CRI team prepared to climb into their jeeps. Since I had caught a ride to the site with the team, I too was just about to climb aboard, when from the crowd stepped forward the president of the ethnic association. There in front of the audience—the government anthropologists on one side and the local community on the other—he grabbed my hand in what would be a protracted, unrelenting handshake. “So Mr. Townsend,” he said to me but for all to hear, “Having seen the demonstrations of all the different communities, what do you say about our performance here?”

All eyes were on me, just as he intended. Standing there, his hand still clutching mine, it was clear that he wanted my expert opinion. More than that, he wanted the authoritative endorsement of a western academic anthropologist verifying that yes, his community was ‘tribal’. Realizing my compromised situation, I scrambled for a diplomatic answer. “Well in my opinion, I think the format is

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<sup>36</sup> Wagner 1986: 6.

somewhat unfair to everybody including the anthropologists and communities like yours,” I said.

Seeing that I was being elusive, he responded, “Well, just what is your opinion then? What do you think?”...still gripping my hand, unwilling to let go.

“Well having seen the others I would say that you have done well for yourselves, and that your community has done a good job today.”

Realizing he was not going to get the definitive answer he wanted, he cracked a smile and began shaking my hand vigorously, saying “Okay, thank you very much sir, thank you very much,” seemingly parlaying my response in his community’s favor.

Finally, he released my hand and I turned away, my eyes down, embarrassed by the expectations put upon me, and somewhat disappointed by my inability to help the people staring at me, awaiting some authoritative claim to bolster their case. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw as the anthropologists quickly diverted their attention away from me. Somewhat sheepishly then, I made my way toward the vehicles and bid ‘namaste’ to the local community before climbing into the back of the jeep—itsself a compromised position.

As we rolled away, the CRI team began to poke fun at the situation I had just endured, laughing about how I had been put on the spot. The ribbing seemed to be an expression of their growing familiarity with me and perhaps an inclusion of me into their group. I feigned good humor until the jokes trickled off, and then settled in for what was to be a long ride home. Unlike the morning’s ride, which was filled with excitement to be ‘crossing-over’ the lines of ‘tribal’ recognition, the return trip left me only with the somber task of coming to terms with my own illusions of staying above the fray of my always-already anthropological subject matter.

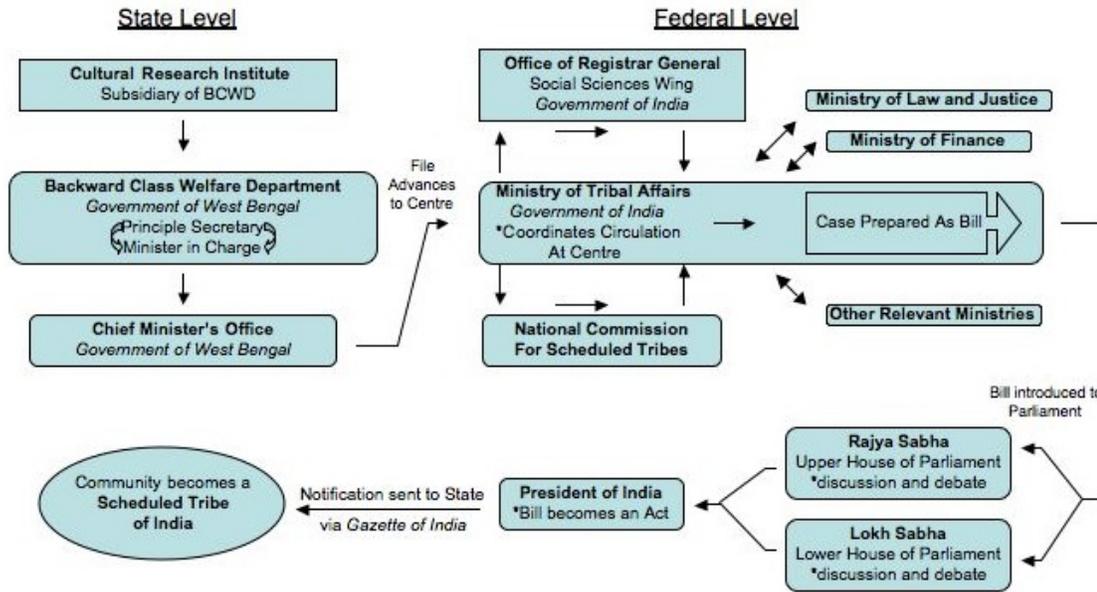
### **Post-Field Dynamics.**

The official Ethnographic Report, once complete, was a sprawling 200+ page document comprised of both qualitative and quantitative data. Because there is no template for these reports, the CRI was left largely to its own designs in presenting its findings. A short introduction described the nature of the study, after which followed one chapter per community. The descriptions borrowed heavily from the ethnological materials written and submitted by the communities. The chapters contained discussions of classic ethnological topics like: rites associated with birth, marriage, death, etc; religious belief and practice; dress; material artifacts; language; etc. Appended to these descriptions were numerical tables compiled by the statistical division of the CRI enumerating metrics such as population, average income, education levels, and literacy rates.<sup>37</sup>

The Report took nearly a year to complete. In the Fall of 2007, it was finally sent from the CRI to the Writer's Building, where it would be processed by the Backward Class Welfare Department (BCW) of the Government of West Bengal. Now that it was a 'policy matter', the cases were largely out of the anthropologists' hands. The institutional life of their ethnological knowledge, however, was just beginning. From the CRI to the Government of West Bengal and on to the Centre in Delhi, the Report would begin a convoluted bureaucratic journey passing through numerous technocratic camps of government. Figure 8 maps the typical path of a successful ST application.

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<sup>37</sup> The quantitative portions of the report were based on a series of survey-forms sent out to the applicant communities. These are the same 'census forms' discussed in Chapter I.



**Figure 8. The Bureaucratic Path of an ST Application.**

Anthropologically speaking, the case faces its largest test in the *Social Sciences Wing* of the Office of the Registrar General (RGI), where a team of social scientists will crosscheck the ethnographic findings against available literatures on the community in question. These existing literatures often date back to colonial ethnology. When interviewed, a social scientist of the RGI explained:

“Before independence there were these reports, because when they were taking the census, there would be supplemental ethnological enquiries. Like back in the 1890s, there was the *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, published by, published by...[a searching pause]... His name was Risley. Yes Risley. And there you will find very detailed ethnographic information on all of these groups... What we do is try to see if these groups were traditionally tribal. Because nowadays you will not get that level of primitiveness, so what we do by consulting these literatures is to see the *traditional* tribal characteristics. So the question is: *at that time* were they primitive tribals?”

Should the social scientists of the RGI or any other government institution along the way find significant problems with the case, the file may be returned to the state level for further review, where it once again is taken up by certifying institutions like the CRI. To address the problems, the certifying body (CRI or TRI) conducts

further enquiries and/or revises their earlier work. The file then is circulated through the system again. If it fails for a second time, the case will be terminated.

From start to finish, the process takes years, often decades. Lost, found, shelved, scrutinized, passed over, and passed on, the bureaucratic life of these files provides telling glimpses of the state, its technocratic complexity, and its seemingly interminable temporality. For groups waiting out the bureaucratic duree', these conditions prove exceptionally difficult to manage. Considered in this light, tracking the fate of ST files reveals more than just a bureaucratic circuitry; it brings to light conditions that fundamentally shape how communities experience the Indian state.

### **The Partial State.**

*“The state is a unified symbol of an actual disunity. This is not just a disunity between the political and the economic, but equally a profound disunity within the political.”*

—Philip Abrams<sup>38</sup>

In July of 2005, the RGI found problems in two of the ST cases it was processing. The files belonged to two communities of Darjeeling who had applied for ST status in the 1990s (much earlier than the ‘left-out’ communities surveyed in 2006). Nearly a decade after these groups’ cases were initiated, the RGI therefore returned their files to the CRI with fourteen points that needed to be re-addressed. Among these were outstanding questions of: the origin and dubious autochthony of the groups; evidence of religious, economic, and cultural change since the days they were “nomadic pastoralists, hunters, and shifting cultivators”; their lack of isolation in Darjeeling; the presence of modern amenities such as radios televisions, and cinemas;

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<sup>38</sup> Abrams 1988: 79.

and the aforementioned opinion that their “gradual assimilation into the Great Tradition” meant that it would be “a retrograde step” to recognize them as STs.

The CRI members were upset to have their work returned to them as unsatisfactory, but they addressed each point in earnest. Drawing extensively from their ethnographic work, the CRI’s response contested many of the RGI’s claims. Conceptually, where the RGI cited Dalton (1872), the CRI called upon Malinowski, S.C. Dube, Pignede, and a lengthy bibliography of others to undermine many of the points put forth by the RGI. In their written response, the CRI opined, “Assimilating into the Great Tradition does not mean the eradication of Tribal characteristics.”<sup>39</sup> They took the RGI to task further by noting, “The question of retrogression...is perhaps value loaded and bias.” The revised Ethnographic Report went on to provide specific evidence substantiating the communities’ fulfillment of each of the five criteria for ST designation. Having laid out the case, the response closed with the “hope, [that] considering all the above points with empathy, the authority would agree with the recommendation of the State Government to include [these communities] as the two new Scheduled Tribes of the State of West Bengal.”

The exchange between the RGI and CRI evinces what may be deemed certain *partialities* of the Indian state. On the one hand, the mentions of the ‘Great Tradition’ and ‘retro-grade steps’ suggest a strong religious bent to these ostensibly ‘secular’ practices of governance. As we saw earlier, these kinds of prejudicial partialities clearly inform the processes of ‘tribal’ recognition. On the other, the exchange between the RGI and CRI suggests the partiality of the state in a second sense: namely partiality as in not whole; incomplete; incoherent. Here we might recall Abrams, who

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<sup>39</sup> Dube 1960. Pignede 1993. Though Malinowski is referenced by name, the CRI response gives no other bibliographic information.

convincingly called the bluff on the state's professed unity, coherency, etc.<sup>40</sup> The discrepant opinions of the RGI and CRI, in this regard, signal the rampant inconsistencies, disconnects, and incoherencies that mark the 'tribal' recognition process. In highlighting these respective partialities, what is most intriguing is the way the biases and systemic disunities of the state enable and inform one another. Together, these respective partialities condition experience on both sides of 'tribal' certification. I will deal with the communities' side of things first.

The aspiring STs of Darjeeling have learned the hard way about the prejudicial and systemic partialities of the state. The confusion, *duree*, and paradoxes of the ST recognition process convincingly put to rest any held beliefs in a consistent, coherent, rational bureaucratic state.<sup>41</sup> The biases and incoherency of the Indian state have instead proven to be the very conditions within which these communities must operate if they are to realize their aspirations of recognition and social justice.<sup>42</sup> In turn, these partialities have proven equally as generative as they are limiting to the kind of identity politics that have emerged in Darjeeling and elsewhere.

Achieving ST status demands exceptional political agility—typically in realms from which these minorities have been, by definition, marginalized. Once they have cleared the hurdle of the Ethnographic Survey (itself demanding its own set of tactics), the challenge has proven two-fold. First, ethnic associations must locate their files (no easy task given the convoluted path charted above). Then they must develop effective

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<sup>40</sup> Abrams debunks the proclaimed unity of the state by retraining the study of 'the state' to the myriad political practices through which the *idea* of the unified, singular state gets produced. Others such as Blom Hansen and Stepputat, in their work on postcolonial states, have gone on to note that states are "amorphous and bereft of any unifying and encompassing rationale" (2001: 29). They subsequently push for research on how communities come to experience the state. As I argue here, experiencing the state often involves coming to terms with its fundamental biases and incoherencies—or what I am calling its partialities. See Blom Hansen & Stepputat *et al* 2001; Corrigan 1994; Corrigan & Sayer 1985. My own thoughts along these lines profited immensely from a discussion with Akhil Gupta in 2008.

<sup>41</sup> On rational bureaucracy, see Weber 1978: 957-1002.

<sup>42</sup> Following Chatterjee, we may recognize these partialities as indelible aspects of Indian political society (2004).

strategies for lobbying the given department, ministry, collective, or individual. The tactics of the Tamangs (who achieved ST status in 2003) illustrated the need for political savvy, innovation, and, above all, persistence. They made 77 delegational visits to Delhi alone over a 22 year period, augmenting these efforts with hunger strikes, underground political networking, and the submission of various ethnologies of the ‘tribal’ self to relevant parties.<sup>43</sup> For groups still struggling for ST status, these tactics set a powerful example on how to engage the various organs of the state in different places and with concordantly different techniques.

As intermediaries between the Indian government and their ethnic constituents, ethnic associations face the additional challenge of understanding and then explaining to their constituents the confounding status of their files. Here they are encumbered with the unenviable burden of making sense of the state’s incoherency. Delegations frequently return from Kolkata and Delhi with news that directly contradicts their previous updates. Amid their constituents’ rising impatience and unrequited demands, it is ethnic association leaders that often bear the brunt of the state’s inconsistencies. Despite associations’ pleas for patience and support, mounting frustrations may induce political tensions within ethnic groups—effectively translating the partialities of the state into the fabric of everyday life.

On the government’s side of things, consider again the exchange between the Cultural Research Institute and the RGI-Social Sciences Wing. We need not look further than the names of these agencies to appreciate the shared technology of governance they specialize in. Yet despite the fact that both agencies are staffed by anthropologists and other social scientists, we find each questioning the intellectual integrity of the other’s knowledge. The question thus arises: If agencies this closely aligned have troubles with agreement and mutual intelligibility, what may be said of

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<sup>43</sup> For more on these tactics, see Chapter I.

the epistemological and technocratic differences that ethnological knowledge must span as it circulates to the non-socially scientific branches of government?

The journeys of ST files are indeed marked by notable disconnects in communication, logic, and specialization as they move through the various technocratic camps of the Indian government. These ‘expertise gaps’—as I shall call them—open up at sites of sometimes-radical epistemological difference within the state’s bureaucratic structures. Blom Hansen and Stepputat have noted how along with the spread of modern forms of governmentality, “the practices and sites of governance have also become more dispersed, diversified, and fraught with *internal* inconsistencies and contradictions.”<sup>44</sup> ‘Expertise gaps’ are one kind of these ‘internal inconsistencies’. They are part and parcel to the technocratization of modern states.<sup>45</sup> The irony is that these fracture in the state accrue in the name of an ever-specialized ‘science’ of governance. Crucially though, while these ‘gaps’ debunk the myth of the coherent state, they are precisely the sites where individual agents imbue the secular state with religious and epistemological biases (viz: the teleological underpinnings of the “retrograde step” ruling). Viewed in this light, ‘expertise gaps’ prove integral to the state’s ideological functioning.<sup>46</sup>

The effects are palpable. To survive the long and complicated path to official recognition—itsself fraught with crosscutting critiques leveled by various governing bodies—a community’s official Ethnographic Report must bridge numerous ‘expertise gaps’, some of them much more pronounced than that between the CRI and RGI. This challenge entails more than sustaining mutual intelligibility. It often involves

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<sup>44</sup> Blom Hansen & Stepputat 2001: 16.

<sup>45</sup> Though he does not refer to it as such, technocratic expertise plays a significant role in Weber’s analysis of bureaucracy (1978). Weber pegs the basis of bureaucracy to “the development of administrative tasks, both quantitative and qualitative” (968), but does not account for the communicative discrepancies that obtain between expert camps within the state. Timothy Mitchell offers a rigorous examination of the development of technocratic governance in Egypt (1988, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Althusser 1971.

explaining and defending the very nature of ethnographic knowledge production more generally. The fate of ST files, and the experiences of the anthropologists who produce them, suggests mixed results at best.

### **Soft Science in Hard Places.**

Late in 2007 (toward the end of my fieldwork) I found myself whiling away a warm Kolkata day at the CRI. As it usually did when I came around, conversation turned to Darjeeling. I wanted to know what had become of the Gurung's file, now that it had been rebuked by the Centre and returned to West Bengal for re-assessment. Having waited more than a decade for a definitive answer to their ST bid, the Gurungs with whom I worked in Darjeeling were asking the same question. Rumor had it that there was some sort of 'problem' with their application, but only a few ethnic leaders knew the extent of the rejection. The Director brought me up to speed:

“Well, I submitted the reply [to the RGI] within four months [in February of 2006], and after so much work, you see what happened. The man says, ‘Okay this is a policy matter, so I will take that.’ [mimicking the man taking a pile of documents from his hands and putting it on a shelf] And what did he do? He shelved it! It has been a year and nothing. The groups want to know what has happened to the report. And they ask me. And I am so frustrated because I do all of this work and then what happens? It is shelved. But you see, this is all the political circumstances, because they have their political issues. To tell you the truth I am so frustrated. You can call this an expression of my frustration.”

The Director's “expression of frustration” soon segued into the lack of progress on the cases from the 2006 Ethnographic Survey (examined in this chapter):

“These policy makers have their own political issues. So [the Ethnographic Report] is in their hands now. They have not done anything with it. It is difficult because all these associations come here and pressurize us because we are who they know. We are the ones who they met during the Survey and all. But it is the bureaucrats at the Writers Building that have it.”

“Yes,” Amit concurred, “The local bureaucrats have their own political games they are playing.”

This was November of 2007, fifteen months after the Ethnographic Survey, and still the Report had yet to be sent to the Centre. Why had it not cleared the Government of West Bengal? Everyone assumed the delay was tied to the pending Sixth Schedule issue. Granting the ten left-out communities ST status would be a key measure in making ‘tribals’ the demographic majority in the hills. (Recall that, to date, Darjeeling’s population was only 32% ST.) The expedited timing of the Ethnographic Survey in 2006 suggested the cases were being fast-tracked as part of a larger political agenda. But now, with the file unaccountably being held at the Writer’s Building, no one, not even the CRI members, could rule out the possibility of a back-door deal, either to make these groups STs, thereby sweeping through the increasingly controversial Sixth Schedule, or denying both outright.<sup>47</sup> Along with the people of Darjeeling and myself, the CRI members, thus it seemed, could not ‘know’ beyond certain closed-doors of the state. Such were the difficulties of studying—and, apparently, being agents of—the state.<sup>48</sup>

Responding to Amit’s mention of the ‘political games’ being played by local bureaucrats, the Director further griped, “They just want us to go up there and write reports based on what politics they have in mind. Instead of the actuality of what is there, so that is where the problem arises.”

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<sup>47</sup> I have no evidence of such back-door-deals being made in other cases. What I should stress here is that even the civil servants of the CRI did not rule out this possibility.

<sup>48</sup> Here I borrow phrasing from Abrams seminal essay, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State” (1988) to suggest how the conditions of state secrecy also apply to those who work for the state. If, as I have argued earlier, the state is partial, then here we see this partiality translating into the CRI civil servants’ inabilities to know and influence events beyond their bureaucratic cum expert jurisdiction. Their access and integration into the state is, in other words, partial. Interestingly though, even as the coherency of ‘the state’ is disrupted, its mystique (even ‘within’ bureaucratic life) lives on by way of deferral: decisions are being made/ ‘political games’ are being played behind proverbially closed doors.

But as we saw with the polished goats, the ‘actuality’ of the field is admittedly dubious when it comes to certifying ‘tribals’. Yet despite the field’s problems—its epistemological quandaries, its politics, its over-determinedness, logistical fetters, etc—the ethnographic field was *theirs* nonetheless. Accordingly, it was a ground of expertise worth defending.

Amit opined, “You see the real problems arise when they [the policy makers] want us to create data to fit their decisions. Because that is what they do! They want us to go up there and take our surveys and they want us to provide reports that fit their politics.” [becoming more and more animated]

With the Director and Amit playing off of each other’s frustration, it was clear that, for them, political pressure within the state became unbearable precisely at the moment it encroached upon the hallowed ground of their expertise, ethnography. Remaining in the political dark was one thing; subjecting one’s craft to political pressures was another. What quandaries lay in the ‘field’ was their problem and would be dealt with accordingly; but when bureaucrats tried to sway or undermine the anthropologists’ ethnographic commitments, they crossed sacred lines.<sup>49</sup>

When asked for an example, they spoke of a superior within the Government of West Bengal who had recently won his post despite lacking any formal training as a social scientist. Aping this figure of technocratic otherness, the Director explained:

“He even said so himself: ‘This anthropology is not like aviation. It is not a skill.’ So he goes up there and visits a community and within ten minutes just by looking at someone says, ‘Yes he is a tribal....so make the report and make them tribal, what’s the problem? It’s as easy as that. Anyone can do it, this noting down of what rituals they do. Write the report and make them tribals. Why can’t you just make them all tribals?’ That really happened! He really did that! So they just want us to provide the data for their policies, so actually this whole process is just a hoax! That’s what it is!”

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<sup>49</sup> These dynamics of defending one’s field of expertise against encroachment/transformation are reminiscent of Bourdieu’s work on professional expertise within the university. See Bourdieu 1984, particularly Chapter IV “The Defense of the Corps and the Break in Equilibrium.”

A hoax: it was as a potent choice of words. I had always thought more along the lines of ‘ethnographic ruse’. Certain ethnic leaders in Darjeeling preferred ‘eye-wash’ or ‘*dekhāwaṭi*’. In weighing the Director’s words, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which ‘hoax’ referenced the difficulties of fieldwork or those he and his staff suffered as government practitioners of soft science. Knowing him as I did, and considering the earlier parts of the conversation, I sensed all of these factors were fueling his frustration. To serve under a ‘bureaucrat’ who so clearly lacked appreciation of the nuances of ethnographic knowledge production, who could chide ‘This anthropology is not like aviation. It is not a skill,’ was an insult to the CRI team. Furthermore, that such a bureaucrat would use his position to exert political influence upon their ethnographic practice was taken to be a grievous affront to both the integrity of their craft and their expert identities.

Indeed, as soon as the word ‘hoax’ had left the Director’s lips, Amit confirmed as much crying out, “This is an identity crisis for us! An identity crisis!”

The Director, for his part, simply closed his eyes and began rubbing his temples in agony, “I am just so scared for the discipline these days. Because all the bureaucrats...[long pause, eyes still closed]... To be quite frank with you, at this point I am just counting down the days until my retirement.”

Having served the department for 32 years, the Director was slated to retire in March of 2011. Knowing he had a sick wife at home and had recently been passed over for promotion, I sensed his anguish as he uttered these words. Exhausted of emotion, the conversation trailed off soon thereafter. It was, after all, getting late, so we called it a day and began gathering our things. As several of the CRI members and I struck out for our respective bus journeys to various corners of Kolkata, the Director, like he did everyday, began his commute home. At the end of a long day at the office, a jam-packed bus-ride across town, then a 45-minute train ride, and finally a 5km

bicycle ride would take him from the concrete monolith of the CRI to the village he called home.

### **Conclusion.**

Backed by a lifetime of experience on the frontlines of ethnography and governance, the Director's commentary—spoken and unspoken—offers a fitting way to end this analysis. As he made clear, the dynamics of the ethnographic interface and the post-field conditions of state anthropology inform and undermine one another in important ways. Accordingly, this chapter has examined these respective domains of state anthropology with an eye toward understanding the links between them.

The Ethnographic Survey of 2006 was a moment of great promise both for the groups under study and for Darjeeling writ large. The lure of positive discrimination, as well the pending status of the Sixth Schedule, shaped much of what happened within and around this classificatory moment. Examining the practices of ethnographic knowledge within these politically laden contexts, we see, furthermore, how the paradigmatic structures of certification structured the ethnographic encounter in crucial ways. With researchers and ethnic associations alike expressly concerned with the criteria to be checked and fulfilled, the entire encounter thus became an exceedingly “cooked” affair, rife with politics—many of which were geared precisely toward controlling the means of ethnographic knowledge production.

Caught in the middle of this tussle were, of course, the designated objects of the study, the everyday residents of the given model community. Scrutinized by anthropologists and likewise held forth by ethnic associations as the certifiable examples of the ‘tribal’ subject, they became the consummate anthropological objects: the real-types that confirm the ideal-types; the living embodiments of ‘distinctive culture’, ‘geographic isolation’, ‘primitiveness’, ‘shyness’, ‘backwardness’ and all the

rest. Yet precisely at the moment they were thrust into the crosshairs of the ethnographic gaze, their voice and ability to challenge the conceptual schemes mapped onto them were seemingly eviscerated by the exigencies of recognition. *Exempli gratia* status here entailed its own degree of subalternity. Such were the politics of ethnographic (im)mediation.

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What then may be learned in pursuing an ethnography of the state through a study of state ethnography? Examined from the meta-ethnographic perspective, ‘tribal’ certification may be best understood as a site through which ethnological knowledge and the state reify and mutually constitute one another. Through ethnography, the state becomes a real presence in people’s lives by the profound act of adjudicating their socio-political identity. Meanwhile, ethnography substantiates official classificatory schemas by ostensibly confirming the empirical (human) existence of these normative conceptual forms. As a state process, ethnography subsequently becomes a mechanism of moral regulation, at once naturalizing what are in fact historical and ideological forms of social order. Importantly, this naturalization and reification happens as much through the paradigmatic structures of certification as it does through the inherently informal, social, and subjective conditions of ethnographic knowledge production. In effect, these formal and informal adjudications of alterity smuggle back into the system many of the historical inequities and prejudices that positive discrimination has been designed to counter.

That ‘tribals’ could be ethnographically certified at all speaks volumes about the ways in which ethnological knowledge has come to saturate postcolonial governance and modern socio-political imaginaries. Importantly though, the testimonies of both the recognized (“To fulfill this tribal criteria...is a ridiculous thing!”) and the recognizers (“You can call this an expression of my frustration.”) ask

us to see state ethnography as a deeply paradoxical affair—at once fraught with promise and impossible demands.

For aspiring communities it mandates and reifies ethnological forms that are virtually impossible to fulfill. And yet, it is the nevertheless the case that in Darjeeling, these schemas have become prescriptive of ethnological difference, at once shaping communities' practices within and beyond the point of ethnographic study.<sup>50</sup> So too have the terms and conditions of recognition reified existing relations of power over *and within* marginalized groups.

In related but different ways, government anthropologists are also enabled and plagued by the conditions of 'tribal' certification. Where ethnography is uniquely equipped to document the complexity and contingency of socio-cultural life, the strictures of certification deny the craft its deductive capacities. In fact, the contingent and opaque conditions of ethnographic understanding make the knowledge vulnerable to precisely the kinds of attacks and manipulation that the CRI anthropologists have faced from technocrats of other epistemic and political orientations (viz: "This anthropology is not like aviation. It is not a skill... Write the report and make them tribals.") In the face of such critiques, the 'you are there, because I was there'<sup>51</sup> authority of ethnographic knowledge faces difficulty in defending itself against those who question the objectivity and scientific basis of the craft. Even when it is able to hold its own, policy-minded bureaucrats often demand more black-and-white answers than this soft science is apt to provide.

In sum: the involution of ethnography and governance engenders paradoxes on both sides of the interface of 'tribal' certification. Yet despite its problems and

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<sup>50</sup> The irony here is that when pressed into the service of governance, ethnological knowledge has proven transformative of the 'real' objects of its analysis. This is an argument made by Mitchell in his work on cartographic knowledge in colonial Egypt (2002). While this chapter focuses primarily on the dynamics of the ethnographic encounter, Chapter I has shown how these prescriptive logics have played out in the ongoing movements of ethnic revitalization in Darjeeling.

<sup>51</sup> Clifford 1983: 118.

impossibilities, state ethnography is nevertheless a site of great possibility for civil servants and aspiring minorities. For anthropologists, it affords a stable, if not luxurious, career. As one of the CRI members admitted to me with a chuckle and wry grin, “Anthropology in India is a colonial product...and we are its subjects. But we don’t mind.” For aspiring STs, ethnographic certification of their ‘tribal’ identity stands as a rite of passage into the world of liberal rights, recognition, and perceived social justice. As I was told time and time again in my work with the people of Darjeeling, attaining ST status would be nothing short of the apex achievement of their ongoing ethnic renaissance.

By attending to the various demands and opportunities of ‘tribal’ certification, I have tried to show the ethnographic *interface* to be just that: a meeting-place of various subjects, subjectivities, epistemic practices, and tactical logics. Doing so, I have found it necessary to look at more than simply the knowledge practices of government anthropologists and their subjects. I have also sought to account for the strategies, politics, fears, and aspirations that inform both sides of their ethnographic encounter. It is *precisely as an interface*—at once inherently social, subjective, and political—that ‘tribal’ certification offers its most compelling glimpses of the ways in which human difference is being rendered (and rewarded) in India today. Examined accordingly, state ethnography comes into view as not only an instrument of positive discrimination in India, but also one of its profound cruxes.

## CONCLUSION.

### On Finding Anthropology

*“The uncanny (das Unheimliche, ‘the unhomely’) is in some ways a species of the familiar (das Heimliche, ‘the homely’).”*

—Freud 1919<sup>1</sup>

Things change quickly in Darjeeling. Others do not. By the final months of my fieldwork (Fall of 2007) Subash Ghisingh and the GNLF were in serious jeopardy. Once the savior of the Gorkha people, Ghisingh and his political wizardry had become increasingly threadbare. The Sixth Schedule, which at the outset of my research seemed a political boon for the GNLF, had now started to become a political liability.<sup>2</sup> Throughout 2007, the public had begun to question exactly what kind of autonomy this designation would bring. Certainly it was no Gorkhaland. Moreover, if it really was to be a “full and final settlement” as the MoS stated, then neither could it be a step in that direction. As the critiques mounted, people began to question Ghisingh’s capacity—and indeed commitment—to deliver the kind of rights and recognition they longed for. The Old Man’s increasingly bizarre and imperious ethnological agendas to make Darjeeling ‘tribal’—Durga and the rock being but one example—had many questioning his very sanity.

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<sup>1</sup> Freud 2003 (1919): 134.

<sup>2</sup> The details of the Sixth Schedule were extremely opaque. At times, even Ghisingh seemed unaware of what exactly it would mean to bring this form of ‘tribal’-based sovereignty to Darjeeling. The year 2007 saw several initiatives to study the details of the Sixth Schedule. A “Citizens Social Forum” was held consisting of prominent intellectuals, politicians, and bureaucrats to scrutinize the plans and make the concerns public. Intellectuals ran numerous articles in the local papers, while concerns were increasingly voiced by the public. Ghisingh and the GNLF did not take kindly to these initiatives. Indeed, the critiques had to be leveled with considerable tact so as to not appear subversive to the ever-paranoid GNLF eye. Meanwhile, Ghisingh continued to work on the details of the Sixth Schedule behind closed doors in Delhi and Kolkata in hopes of pushing it through parliament before the local critiques gained traction. The bill finally reached parliament in December of 2007 but was immediately shelved with an order for additional inquiries to be made. In Darjeeling, it was presumed that the order for additional inquiries were born out of the said critiques. To date, the bill remains in limbo.

Then, on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, popular culture twisted fate. When Bollywood star John Abraham reached into his magic box and declared Prashant Tamang, a ‘son of Darjeeling’, to be *Indian Idol 2007*, he triggered a most unlikely watershed in Darjeeling politics. For one fleeting moment, the Gorkhas it seemed had finally won a claim in the nation. Yet within a matter of days, jubilation turned to rage, as epithets led to protests, and protests to ethnic riots in the streets of Siliguri—once again reminding the people of Darjeeling of their liminal place in the nation.<sup>3</sup>

From these experiences arose Bimal Gurung and the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM)—the Gorkha People’s Liberation Front. Borrowing a page from Ghisingh’s book, Gurung seized the moment, harnessed the anxieties at hand, and redirected them toward the consummate object of political desire: Gorkhaland. The newly founded GJMM party immediately went to work framing the Sixth Schedule and ‘tribal identity’ as the fantasies of a madman, Ghisingh, who had grown out of touch with the people. The two parties thus began a protracted battle for control over an increasingly torn public. Massive rallies were staged by both parties drawing participants from each and every village. Soon, administrative officials began resigning and/or shifting loyalty to the surging GJMM. Local GNLFF branches were disbanded, renamed, and/or replaced by GJMM equivalents. The familiar green, yellow, and white flags of the GNLFF were taken down; in their place was mandated the new flag of the GJMM—it too green, yellow, and white. Confusions grew by the day. Hot-blooded youth began prowling the hills in jeeps chanting “Gorkhaland! Gorkhaland! We want Gorkhaland.” Inter-party skirmishes foretold greater violence to come. Agitated in ways unseen since the 1980s, Darjeeling seemed on the brink of political upheaval. Yet no one was sure exactly when and how the tables would turn. These were the uncertain conditions in which I left the field.

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<sup>3</sup> I discuss this sequence of events in depth in Chapter II.

Important transformations followed soon thereafter. Within months, the GJMM usurped the longstanding power of Subash Ghisingh and the GNLF. The regime change has brought likewise shifts in the politics of ‘identity’, recognition, and belonging—many of which bear directly on the subject matter (and subjects) of this thesis. At first glance, these shifts seemingly challenge many of this dissertation’s findings. But when analyzed carefully, the ‘new’ regime in Darjeeling appears revolutionary neither in its politics nor its fashionings of ‘identity’. Instead, these recent developments prove to be but the latest articulations of the ‘age of ethnology’ in Darjeeling. It is this *perpetuation* that concerns me here.

To bring out the continuities at hand, let me then briefly revisit two scenes from my time in Darjeeling, and one from since I left. Recapitulating the themes developed in this study, these scenes provide some concluding glimpses of ethnological knowledge at work in the hills. They, moreover, move the analysis toward the present in Darjeeling and beyond. With an eye toward the future, the dissertation thereby concludes with an open-ended discussion of the various kinds of anthropological knowledge being perpetuated in the world today, and what we—all of us—might make of them going forward.

For now though, a scene from my first year in Darjeeling.

### **Water and Oil.**

In the Fall 2006, the enthusiasm for making Darjeeling ‘tribal’ was at an all time high. The Sixth Schedule seemed well on its way to becoming a reality, and with the recent visit of the CRI to Darjeeling, there was reason to believe that the remaining ‘left-out’ communities would soon be conferred ST status. Both ‘fronts’ were exceptionally dynamic. Still, the local administration and the various ethnic groups seeking ST status were leaving nothing to chance. On the occasion of Phulpāti, the

local administration called for an elaborate display of ‘tribal’ identity. Upon the orders of Ghisingh, the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs (DICA) issued invitations requesting the presence of all ethnic associations and their members—who, as it turned out, were by and large eager to comply with the ‘tribal’ imperative.

Come the morning of Phulpāti, thousands had gathered just outside of town for what was to be a veritable parade of ‘tribes’. Almost all ethnic groups were in attendance with their performance troops and an ample contingency of their members. As was made clear to the young girls with crestfallen eyes (from Chapter III), this parade was not to evince any signs of Hindu influence whatsoever. DICA would insure compliance with a heavy hand. Whereas just a mile down the road, the Darjeeling Police Unit (under the aegis of the Government of West Bengal) was sponsoring its annual Phulpāti celebration replete with Brahmans, sacrifice, and idols of the blood-thirsty Durga, these facets of Hinduism were to have no place in the ‘tribal’ parade. Instead, the ethnic groups would proudly display their unequivocally ‘tribal’ identity. With thousands of participants no longer able to contain their enthusiasm, the parade of ‘tribes’ thus began its boisterous march through town on its way to *Chow Rasta* where the infamous rock awaited its purported devotees.

The ‘tribal’ parade arrived late in the morning. Jeeps with loudspeakers blaring and GNLF banners flying overhead led the way. Slowly, the procession worked its way into Chow Rasta where a massive audience awaited. Following the lead vehicles were shamans bedecked in full ritual attire, various troupes of ethnic performers dancing and dressed in their signature styles, and a train of ethnic association members stretching far back into the recesses of town. Given the size of the parade and the equally impressive size of the crowd gathered to witness it, the parade inched its way slowly through the audience toward the center of Chow Rasta, where a performance

area had been cordoned off with rope. It was here that ‘tribal’ culture was to be displayed for all to see. The rock meanwhile sat dumbly on the stage above.

Just minutes later, the bag-pipes of the Darjeeling Police Marching Band announced the coming of a second parade—this one originating from the Hindu celebration put on just down the road from where the parade of ‘tribes’ had begun. Though the numbers could not compare to their ‘tribal’ counterparts, the thunderous roar of the marching band, accompanied by the iconically enraged idols of Durga made for a rather formidable foe. The clashing sounds of the bag-pipes, the drums, and the blaring loudspeakers lent the confrontation an even more frenetic feel. Tourists and locals alike began jockeying for position. I, for one, found a perch atop a concrete pillar, clinging to a lamppost for balance. With people scrambling to and fro, the scene grew increasingly chaotic as the crowd surged this way and that. For a moment it was unclear how exactly the encroaching parade would proceed. Then something peculiar happened. DICA officials (the very organizers of the ‘tribal’ parade that had already arrived) jumped forth to manage the showdown. Holding their arms out wide, they quickly put themselves between the parade and the audience, creating space between the two. At first glance it seemed as though they were trying to help their rivals. But as the officials struggled to keep separation between the crowd and the encroaching parade, their intentions were laid bare: they were acting as human shields to hermetically seal off the Hindu parade from the masses. If the Hindu parade were to enter their carefully contrived space of ‘tribal identity’, it would necessarily do so as ‘matter out of place’, at once polluting and dangerous.<sup>4</sup>

The DICA officials were grossly overmatched by the moment. As Durga cut away her obstacles and the giant sling of offerings known as the *Doli* followed her suspended horizontally on a pole, the crowd surged forward. Suddenly individuals

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas 1966: 166.

began darting out from every direction, tossing offerings into the Doli and diving under the sling to receive the cherished blessings of Durga. The audience erupted in cheers, as individuals flitted back and forth across the ill-fated barriers, smiles beaming. The crowd pressed in more and more, cheering on their fellow revelers, as more and more individuals took their chance and made a break for the Doli. Amid the clamor, the DICA officials did not buckle in their intention—indeed, their duty—to maintain distinction. Their arms outstretched, they sidled along with the enemy parade as it made its way slowly through the throng of people. The parades—one ostensibly ‘tribal’, the other ostensibly ‘Hindu’—slid through and around one another like water and oil, their distinctiveness penetrated only by the desires of individuals and the unruliness of the present.

At the time, the scene struck me as exemplary of the times. Seen through the lenses of my research, it bespoke how ethnological knowledge was and was not affecting life for the people of Darjeeling. On the one hand, the water and oil logics of distinction demonstrated the ways in which the imperatives of singularity, purity, and authenticity were coming to structure the knowing and fashioning of modern ‘identity’ in the hills. In this regard, the scene was indicative of how ethnological schemas were being politically impressed upon the realm of the social. But on the other hand, the clash of the two parades told a different story—namely, of the inability of ethnological schemas to contain, corral, and capture the multifarious dynamics of socio-cultural life. Just as it was individuals that created the ostensible barriers between different ethnological types, so too was it individuals that broke through these quite literally *human* barriers of ethnological form. Coming early in my research, the scene set a striking example of both the imposition of ethnological forms and their imminent limitations in shaping the social world to their likeness.

## **Water and Oil II.**

A year later, similar logics and tactics were in play as the incumbent GNLF and the upstart GJMM vied for control over the hills. Fresh off the Indian Idol-ethnic riots saga (discussed in Chapter II), the public was especially on edge. Having launched his new party on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Bimal Gurung and GJMM were gaining steam. With the holiday season fast approaching, the GJMM made their position on ‘tribal’ identification strikingly clear. Whereas in earlier years Ghisingh and the GNLF had used the local administration to enforce ‘tribal’ culture (including the eradication of Hindu influence from public view, dress-codes, and the engineering of ‘tribal’ ritual practice), Bimal Gurung and the GJMM invited the people to celebrate Durga Pujā, Diwali, and the various holidays of the 2007 season in their ‘traditional’ way—in other words just as they always had: in their usual festival garb, with vermilion *sindur* streaking their hair in the familiar Hindu way, with *ṭikās* on their forehead, and, of course, with Durga watching over them all. Letters were subsequently issued to the various ethnic associations requesting their participation. And posters were pasted on the town walls, defining and inviting authentic practice. The public meanwhile found themselves caught in a political crossfire. Cultural lines were clearly being drawn.

No different that the year before, the GNLF again called for an exuberant display of ‘tribal’ culture on the occasion of Phulpāti 2007. The parade of ‘tribes’ was to follow the same route as in 2006, ending again at the sacred rock, sitting on its pandal in Chow Rasta. That same morning (October 18<sup>th</sup>), the upstart GJMM called for its own procession: only in this parade, people would be ‘free’ to wear whatever they liked; Durga would be there wielding her knives; and the people would be encouraged to sing and dance her praises. Ethnic groups (many of them who either were, or wanted to become, Scheduled Tribes) were cast into awkward positions, as was the populace writ large. Not knowing ‘which way the political wind was blowing’

as they liked to say, many found ways to back out of both processions. Others made their political loyalties clear by joining one or the other.

At about 10:00am, the two parades struck out from their respective corners of Darjeeling—one ‘tribal’; the other celebrating in the local, Hindu-inflected tradition. Following their own circuitous routes, each was to eventually arrive at Chow Rasta. For nearly two hours, the parades snaked through the streets of Darjeeling town, carefully avoiding one another. I spent much of the morning following each parade, noting *who* was participating and how. This was, after all, a test of sorts for ethnic groups’ cultural and political allegiances. With cultural/political divisions carving up the polity, the numbers and enthusiasm of both processions paled in comparison to the parade of ‘tribes’ the year before. After some time following the two parades, I headed to Chow Rasta where they would inevitably confront one another.

The ‘tribal’ parade arrived first. Just like the year before, jeeps flying GNLFF banners led the way with their loudspeakers pumping out commanding decibels. Unlike the year before though, the parade was less than robust. Following the lead vehicles, only a paltry showing of shamans, ethnic associations, and their constituents followed. The rock was of course waiting once again to greet them, but the vibrancy of the parade was clearly diminished.

Minutes later the GJMM parade arrived with idols of Durga cutting her path through the crowd. The numbers were even less than the ‘tribal’ parade, but the showdown was no less telling. As Durga and the Doli penetrated the space of ‘tribal’ identity, once again space was carved out for this polluting and politically dangerous presence to move through without incident. As the crowd parted, Durga and the Doli were followed by hundreds of drunken young men, their shirts removed, dancing wildly, drunk, and dazed alongside the furious icons of Durga—all of them moving to the surging drumbeat of the GJMM. These were the subjects that would form the

lifeblood of the new party. These were the dissatisfied young men that would soon begin prowling the streets with their calls for Gorkhaland. For now though, just as they had all morning, the two parades moved through and around one another like water and oil—keeping a safe and impenetrable barrier of distinction.

### **The ‘New’ Regime.**

The serpentine journey of the parades and their eventual confrontation at Chow Rasta portended the political upheaval to come. On February 28, 2008, shortly after I finished fieldwork, Subash Ghisingh was forced from office—ending twenty years of GNLFF rule in the hills. The GJMM stormed to power over the local administration, effectively running off GNLFF loyalist and demanding political conversion for those who wished to retain their posts. Similar effects rippled through everyday life, where political conversion and Gorkha ‘identity’ quickly became the order of the day. Under the authority of the GJMM, a second Gorkhaland Movement has been launched, radically disrupting life in the process.

The changes bear upon this research in important ways. For one: the synergy between the two fronts of ‘tribal’ becoming has been eviscerated. On the first front, there have been no significant changes in the ethnic groups bids to become Scheduled Tribes of India.<sup>5</sup> They remain committed as ever to this form of recognition. On the second front—that of making Darjeeling a ‘tribal area’ as per the Sixth Schedule—there has been considerable change, however. When Ghisingh was forced from office, with him went the prospects of the Sixth Schedule. The bill has since slid into political limbo and is unlikely to be recuperated given the transformations afoot.

Under GJMM rule, cultural politics have shifted markedly. Gone are the GNLFF’s attempts to engineer the ‘tribal identity’ of Darjeeling writ large. Replacing

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<sup>5</sup> As of September 2009, there has been no notable progress of their applications on the side of government.

them are the GJMM's declarations of 'Gorkha identity' and its perpetual crisis. This recent turn has introduced new contradictions to the identity politics of Darjeeling. Whereas earlier, Ghisingh's GNLF administration and individual ethnicities were each pursuing their own form of 'tribal' identity and recognition, now the aspiring STs find themselves largely at odds with the new GJMM administration and its mandates of Gorkha identification. Mobilizing the resources of the local administration and augmenting these powers with palpable socio-political intimidation, the GJMM has subsequently re-asserted 'Gorkha identity' and its crisis in non-negotiable terms. To this crisis, there is said to be one and only one remedy: Gorkhaland. Exercising a familiar carrot and stick logic, the GJMM has proclaimed socio-cultural singularity to be a requisite for achieving Gorkhaland. The local administration has subsequently recommitted itself to producing a singular 'identity' for all of Darjeeling's people—only this time it is not 'tribal' but 'Gorkha'. If anything, the tactics of the GJMM have proven more severe than those of their predecessors.<sup>6</sup>

The GJMM is now demanding nothing short of Gorkhaland. Unlike the guerilla tactics deployed during the 1980s, the GJMM has declared this Agitation to be a 'non-violent' movement. Yet the channeling of Gandhi has only gone so far. Since the GJMM has come to power, the hills have been marred by rampant inter-party violence, unsubstantiated imprisonments of political rivals, and palpable political intimidations of various sorts. Not the least of these political tactics has been the overt pressure to conform to particular ethnological paradigms. Whereas before, the administration mandated 'tribal' cultural performance, 'tribal' religious practice, 'tribal' dress, etc, the orders of today are for authentic and pure 'Gorkha' culture, 'Gorkha' religious practice, 'Gorkha' dress, etc. From the 1980s until now, the pendulum may have swung from 'Gorkha' to 'tribal' and now back again, but the

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<sup>6</sup> I return to these tactics later in the conclusion.

paradigms through which ‘identity’ is being fashioned remain largely the same. Herein lies the troubling perpetuation.

Despite the political tumult of the past thirty years, ‘identity’ remains by and large the only game in town. For the people of Darjeeling, the concept reaches both far and deep. It summons histories of suffering, inequality, and anxious belonging that date back to their arrival in 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial India. Yet the idea of ‘identity’—and in particular that of ‘Gorkha identity’—does more than summon these affects of history. It sublimates them into a near millenarian determination for rights, recognition, belonging—the true realization of which, many believe, shall arrive only with the promise-land of Gorkhaland. Belying words, these feelings suffuse the discursively produced forms of ‘identity’—be it that of the ‘Gorkha’ or the overtly ethnological notion of the ‘tribal’—with an intensity that is unarguable. Indeed, the opposition is hard-pressed to get a word in otherwise, lest they be labeled enemies of Gorkhaland. Internal critiques of development, administrative efficacy, justice, and corruption are hamstrung in combating the lure of Gorkhaland. Such critiques are subsequently funneled into, or else trumped, by the crowing of ‘identity’ and its perpetual crisis in the hills. The political spectrum has thus been reduced to a virtually singular obsession with ‘identity’ and its rightful recognition.

When the GJMM first emerged in 2007, many savvy commentators predicted the new party would amount to nothing more than old wine in new bottles. To date, even if we could look beyond the familiar faces and colors of this ‘new’ regime, the adage has proven largely true. Under the auspices of the GJMM, the “style in which the community is imagined”—as Anderson would have it—may have shifted from ‘tribal’ to a resurgent notion of the ‘Gorkha’, but these contending ‘styles’ have been fashioned through the same operative logics and techniques of social implementation. Conspicuously *ethnological* in nature, these most recent developments are alarmingly

consistent with the findings put forth throughout this thesis. These dynamics suggest that it is the *perpetuation* of particular paradigms of thought and practice, more so than the ephemeral banners under which people agitate, that beckons critical attention in the contemporary study of identification, recognition, and the politics thereof.

There is no denying the impress of modular ethnological forms upon the people of Darjeeling. Following Anderson, the tactics of ethnic associations, the GNLF, and now the GJMM clearly participate in what may be seen as normative—and increasingly global—epistemologies of identity. And yet, lived tradition, the affects of history, and the sheer contingency of socio-cultural life continue to inform, contest, and undermine these prescriptive designs of the ethnic subject. These dynamics have generated innumerable tensions for the people of Darjeeling. Coming to terms with these tensions involves finding analytic space to heed the points of both Anderson and Chatterjee.<sup>7</sup> That space, my ethnography suggests, is none other than the lifeworlds of contemporary subjects. Turning there, we may come to see the tensions between modular and lived forms of community life to be endemic to modern ‘identity’ formation in Darjeeling and beyond.

By focusing on these tensions, my research has ventured a different set of questions concerning the real pressures exerted upon communities and individuals to conform to established ideal-types, the opportunities and unintended consequences that arise through such compulsions, and the fascinating (and sometimes troubling) ways that subjects are finding relation to normative schemas of human difference. Thinking historiographically and ethnographically about these matters, we can begin to appreciate the emergent ‘instrumentality’ of ethnological knowledge in Darjeeling, while at the same time retaining a healthy skepticism towards its claimed efficacy in

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<sup>7</sup> For more on these debates, please refer back to this dissertation’s Introduction.

fully representing—and even remaking—the ethnic subject. Here it is worth remembering Richard Handler’s cautionary point that:

“Nationalism and ethnicity are social phenomena constituted not merely by cultural differences, but by a Western theory of cultural difference. Moreover, the culture theory of nationalist ideologues and ethnic leaders neatly matches that of mainstream anthropology, which envisions (and authoritatively depicts) a world of discrete, neatly bounded cultures. Given such deep-seated agreement between scientist and native, outsider and insider, observer and object, students of nationalism and ethnicity must take special care to ensure that their respect for their subjects’ world view does not degenerate into a romantic desire to preserve inviolate the other’s subjectivity.”<sup>8</sup>

Handler’s intervention remains as instructive as it was prescient for the study of ‘found’ anthropology. Along these lines, my findings productively unsettle the “deep-seated agreement” of which Handler speaks. This owes largely to my ethnographic willingness to engage with, and give voice to, subjects that empirically challenge the paradigms of recognition at hand. In this regard, the anthropology offered in these pages differs markedly from those that it has studied. In this way, I hope these findings may contribute to a broader refunctioning of ethnography<sup>9</sup>—one that can recalibrate the possibilities of anthropological knowing for both ‘scientists’ and ‘natives’ alike. For now though, the forceful reification of particular ethnological forms goes on relatively unabated in Darjeeling.

This merits a final return through Darjeeling.

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<sup>8</sup> Handler 1985: 171.

<sup>9</sup> Much of the recent work on para-ethnography has been taken up with an eye toward the ‘refunctioning of ethnography’. Sharing similar concerns, my findings speak to interests articulated by Holmes and Marcus 2005, 2006; w/ Westbrook 2006; Boyer 2010; and Westbrook 2008.

## **Blackface.**

On the eve of holiday season 2008, the now-dominant GJMM announced a strict dress code to be in force from Durga Pujā through the end of Diwali.<sup>10</sup> Turning against the ‘tribal’ imperative of years past, the dictate proclaimed the official and only authentic dress of the Gorkhas to be *daurā suruwāl* for men and *chowbandi choli* for women. The order sparked immediate protests from groups like the Tamang, Lepchas, and others, who noted that as discrete ethnicities (and formally recognized Scheduled Tribes) they had their own authentic ethnic attire; and that, moreover, they maintained their own socio-religious practices, which did not allow for the celebration of holidays like Dusshera and Diwali. Thus in no way would they adhere to the GJMM’s mandates of pan-Gorkha singularity.

The GJMM President Bimal Gurung responded to the dissenting groups as follows:

“Lepchas, Sherpas, and Tamangs want to wear their respective dresses, but I insist that they wear *daurā suruwāl* because being the inhabitants of this place they are Gorkhas... I am not interfering in your faith or culture like Subash Ghisingh and neither asking you to shed blood for Gorkhaland. We have to prove that we share no cultural or linguistic affinity with West Bengal and hence are demanding a separate state... These communities should don the traditional Gorkha attire to show solidarity with the Gorkhaland Movement.”<sup>11</sup>

After several days of controversy, exceptions were eventually granted to these communities.<sup>12</sup> The order was subsequently relaxed from a “compulsion” to a “request”. Terminology notwithstanding, the GJMM redoubled its efforts to ensure compliance. The *Nari Morcha* (Women’s Wing of the GJMM) organized a “Dress

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<sup>10</sup> This was precisely two years after the exuberant GNLF-led displays of ‘tribal’ identity in the Fall of 2006, and one year after the respective parades of the GJMM and GNLF (mentioned earlier) snaked their way around one another in the streets (Fall of 2007).

<sup>11</sup> “‘Gorkhaland’ to have a dress code?” *The Statesman*. Sep 11, 2008; “The Gorkha dress code of discord,” *The Statesman*. Sep 12, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> “Dress code row goes on.” *The Telegraph* Sep 23, 2008; “Dress code relaxation for Lepchas.” *The Statesman*, Sep 13, 2008

Code Road Show” to demonstrate authentic Gorkha dress. Signaling their growing propensity for moral policing,<sup>13</sup> the campaign was then taken door-to-door to impart first-hand lessons of proper Gorkha attire. It was furthermore made known that GJMM cadres found not wearing the prescribed attire would be suspended from the party for three months. Considering the widespread compulsion to join the GJMM, this rule extended over an exceptionally large swath of the population.

On the morning of October 14<sup>th</sup>, in the thick of holiday festivities, a poster went up in Darjeeling warning the public that violation of the dress code would be equated with opposition to Gorkhaland. Importantly, the poster bore the signature of the *Gorkha Janmukti Yuva Morcha*, the Youth Wing of the GJMM. Just hours later, havoc broke out on the streets as a gang of GJMM cadres rushed about *Chowk Bazaar* brandishing paintbrushes and buckets of paint, blackfacing violators of the dress code. Those not wearing the ‘traditional’ attire immediately fled public spaces to the safe-haven of their private homes.<sup>14</sup>

As news of the incidents spread, outrage rippled through the community. By late afternoon, the leadership of the GJMM uniformly condemned the incident—taking to task the rogue doings of their alleged party cadres. The Secretary of the party promptly issued a statement denouncing the incident, but not without reiterating its logic: “Those wearing traditional dresses,” the statement claimed, “Are helping a cultural revolution, which is aimed at establishing the difference between us and the rest of Bengal.”

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<sup>13</sup> “GJMM ‘road show’ to enforce dress code.” *The Statesman*. Oct 13, 2008. Since the GJMM has risen to power the Nari Morcha has become one of its more austere bodies. At the forefront of the current Gorkhaland Movement, their operations have increasingly taken the form of policing: often quite literally blocking traffic for protests; gherao-ing offices (organized harassment); conducting hunger-strikes; administering threats to the opposition; and the creating of ‘jails’ in which to ‘imprison’ drunk men. See “Drunks go to ‘Jail’ for 7 Hours”, *The Telegraph*. June 2, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> On the blackfacing incident, see “Faces Blackened after dress code defiance.” *The Telegraph*. Oct 15, 2008; “Dress code diktat keeps people in doors” *The Statesman*. Oct 16, 2008. These events sparked an online discussion of prominent journalist, intellectuals, and activists from Darjeeling, the thread of which I found extremely helpful in piecing together these events.

A new poster was subsequently pasted directly over the Youth Wing's earlier warning, condemning the vulgar acts of blackfacing that had transpired earlier in the day. Faced with such sudden public backlash, GJMM leaders were clearly trying to distance themselves from the incidents. The facts of the matter, however, proved not so easy to paste over. Pictures of the incidents that emerged in the days after clearly showed leading members of the administration among the dozen or so well-dressed older men administering the black-face to unsuspecting citizens, shaming them for their non-compliance with the mandate of Gorkha 'identity', marking them in the darkest way—and just as the 'Youth's' poster warned—opponents of Gorkhaland.

### **Fundamentalist Knowledges.**

*“Ethnic absolutism. This is a reductive, essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable.”*

—Paul Gilroy<sup>15</sup>

Ethnic absolutism has never been far from the subject matter of this work. Neither have the kinds of violence to which it often gives rise. To appreciate this nearness in the emic sense, we need only recall from this dissertation's Introduction, the memorandum submitted to the government on behalf of the 'left-out' communities seeking ST status. The "Prayer for Inclusion", as it was titled, promised "chaos" and "inevitable unrest" should the government not provide a satisfying answer to "this burning and seriously sensitive matter." Reprised here, these firebrand warnings are especially noteworthy in that they were penned by the very ethnic leaders who so stridently preach socio-cultural singularity to the Indian government *and* to their

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<sup>15</sup> Gilroy 1990: 115.

ethnic constituents. In their warnings we catch glimpses of a darker side to ethnic rebirth, *jātitwa*, pure ‘identity’, and the like. Indeed, many of the dynamics described in this thesis, when read with a wary eye, signal something more sinister on the horizon. It is worth thinking a bit more then about the links between knowledge and fundamentalisms of various kinds.

Gilroy’s definition of ethnic absolutism points us in a useful direction. It is the “reductive, essentialist *understanding* of ethnic... difference,” and the “absolute *sense* of culture” that seals communities apart in hermetic fashion—not unlike say, water and oil. Building upon Gilroy, the problem that arises is one of *fundamentalist knowledges*. Defined here, fundamentalist knowledges are those that posit an absolute commensurability between conceptual and empirical form—or in more anthropological terms, between conceptual and socio-cultural form. In the context of ethnic absolutism, this relationship between the conceptual and the socio-cultural is operationalized in two ways. On the one hand, ethnic fundamentalists evoke particular understandings of the social world in order to define the self and other in terms of absolute distinction. This is what Gilroy points to when he speaks of ‘essentialist understandings of ethnic...difference’. *Fundamentalist knowledges* here function as a way of understanding the world. On the other hand, fundamentalist logics hold that the socio-cultural world (in its empirical form) must conform to these conceptual designs. Thus, when and where socio-cultural life overruns the normative schemas mapped onto it, the perpetrators are held in violation of the correct order of things and made to suffer accordingly—be it as ‘heretics’, ‘mixed-bloods’, the ‘culturally impure’ or enemies of whatever the ‘cause’ may be. Here *fundamentalist knowledges* forcibly order the world. We may say then that fundamentalist knowledges are those that predicate themselves on the imminent commensurability of conceptual and human,

empirical form. They define the world-as-it-must-be. Such knowledges are at the core of fundamentalist projects—ethnic and otherwise.

Importantly, the credence of such absolute claims does not emanate solely from the minds of fundamentalists themselves. Rather, these knowledges are oftentimes supported by the systems of recognition and value in which fundamentalist knowledges take root. ‘Tribal’ recognition in India is a case-in-point. This form of positive discrimination does not just privilege singular socio-cultural forms, it demands them. What is more: these forms must fulfill particular ethnological tropes (e.g. ‘cultural distinctiveness’, ‘isolation’, ‘primitiveness’, ‘backwardness’, etc), and be rendered through established anthropological practices (ethnography, secondary source research, certification, etc). While academic anthropology has now generally accepted ‘culture’ to be contested, temporal and emergent,<sup>16</sup> this view offers little purchase in the contemporary politics of identification and recognition. The fluid, contested version of ‘culture’ simply does not ‘cut’ as sharply as a static, fixed notion of ‘culture’. For aspiring ‘tribals’, cultural variance, hybridity, and other transgressions of ‘pure’ ethnological forms are sure to undermine their chances of attaining recognition and all that it brings with it. This is why the aspiring ‘tribes’ of Darjeeling have chosen to downplay—if not outright deny—traces of the inevitable crosspollination of cultures. From these ethno-logics of purity and singularity spring the all too familiar programs of cultural purification and social engineering that we see in Darjeeling—not to mention the more grotesque phenomena of ethnic cleansing that have appeared elsewhere. Assessing the agents and contexts of ethnological knowledge production in Darjeeling, we see that it is not just the champions of ‘tribal’ identity that mandate a perfect commensurability between conceptual and socio-cultural form. The strictures of recognition, in similar fashion, tolerate little in the way

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<sup>16</sup> Clifford 1986: 18-9.

of slippage between these realms. No matter how much they betray the experiential complexity of life, these are the hard realities of recognition in India and much of the world.

Fundamentalists, of course, have their own ways of resolving the tensions between conceptual and empirical forms. Where subjects are not (empirically) what they should be (conceptually), the powers-that-be may quite literally and forcibly *make them that way*. In Darjeeling, this has been carried out through epistemic maneuvers whereby the socio-cultural (and even demographic) vagaries of a population are smoothed over, tidied up, or otherwise removed from ethnological representation.<sup>17</sup> Or, they may be taken up through other registers of control. The blackfacing incident of 2008 is a prime example of how the commensurability of conceptual and empirical forms may be negotiated (and not negotiated) through overtly social and political means. Whether inscribed on the page or the ethnic body, fundamentalist knowledges offer a potent way of fixing the self and other into relations of absolute ethnological difference.

We would do well to evoke Liisa Malkki's point that the objects of ethnological knowledge (i.e. humans) are uniquely equipped with the power to "categorize back".<sup>18</sup> But the realities of ethnic revitalization in Darjeeling are that the impositions of ethnological form operate through oftentimes-insurmountable gradients of political power, class inequality, and ethnological expertise.<sup>19</sup> Its saturation of

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<sup>17</sup> Analyses of these tactics can be found in Chapters I, III, & IV.

<sup>18</sup> Malkki 1995: 8.

<sup>19</sup> Consider, for instance, the three school-room scenes discussed elsewhere in this thesis. In the first, a booted-and-suited Tamang ethnic leader marched into a tea-estate village to preach the imperative of socio-cultural and hence political singularity. Given the lauded achievements of his ethnic association (including the attainment of ST status in 2003), villagers tried, but were ultimately ill equipped to challenge him and the structure he represented with any real consequence. The second school-room scene found twenty-some ethnic leaders—all educated, upper-class, men—huddled together in an 'emergency meeting' formulating a strategy *on behalf* of their constituents as to how they should ethnographically satisfy the government's criteria. The third and final scene, saw the Director of the CRI lecturing ethnic leaders on the history of anthropology and the questionable integrity of their ethnographic demonstrations. Men who were deemed cultural experts within their community could

common-sense aside, the institutionalization of ethnological knowledge in India—manifest most palpably in governmental systems of recognition—has endowed particular kinds of representation and certain ‘styles’ of community with unprecedented socio-political potential. For the average person, ‘categorizing back’ against this discursive juggernaut and its local agents may be neither possible nor desirable. Many could not compete if they tried. Even were they to escape the politically and materially loaded contexts of recognition, alternative forms of belonging and community simply lack the terms—and the terms, the political sanction—to stand up against the normative lexicon that ethnology has bequeathed to the contemporary.

Locating fundamentalist knowledges at the heart of ethnic absolutism is one thing. Challenging them is another. The ability to make claims about and on behalf of the self is a crucial instrument for the pursuit of rights of all kinds. As a means to articulate, represent, and produce the self, it deserves utmost protection. We must also not forget that the ‘freezing’ and abstraction that occurs when empirical content is rendered in conceptual form is endemic to identification and subject-formation writ large. Deconstructionist and poststructuralist analyses can belabor the built-in instabilities of these knowledge-making processes, but when brought to bear on minority’s struggles for rights, recognition, and social belonging, analytic devices of this kind should be used with extreme caution. Following Chatterjee, it would be as

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hardly get a word in otherwise. Instead they were to left begging for ST status. “You are our savior! You are not our inspector,” they pleaded.

Each of these scenes may be read as articulations of a greater system of ethnological thought in India. Tellingly, each entailed its own degree of subalternity. Whether the tea-estate villagers, those ethnic constituents who were not present at the Emergency Meeting but would nevertheless be held forth as the ‘tribal’ examples in the days to come, or the ethnic leaders left desperate and dumbfounded by the Director’s diatribe: in each of these instances subjects are made unable to ‘speak’—in the Spivakian sense. (Spivak 1988). In its social actualization, the language of ethnology here does not give voice to its subjects, but rather takes it away. In multiple ways then, these interactions signal the political, economic, and expertise derived inequities through which systems of ethnological thought are impressed upon subjects in Darjeeling. It is only apt that they would unfold in the classroom—the site of knowledge-power par excellence.

“unrealistic and irresponsible to condemn all such political transformations as divisive and dangerous” as it would be to undermine the grounds upon which subjects (collective and individual) are seeking to produce themselves.<sup>20</sup> That said, the propagation of obligatory ethnological ‘truths’ over a people deserves to be red-flagged and scrutinized. Prescriptive ethnological schemas and mandated syntheses of conceptual and socio-cultural form remain hallmarks of ethnic absolutism. They call for careful critique. And it is here where the anthropology of knowledge offers important insights into the problem of ethnic absolutism. Through its lenses, ethnic absolutism and fundamentalisms of various kinds may be seen to boil down to the fundamentals of knowledge and the troubling ways epistemic forms are pressed upon the social world.

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Encounters with ‘found’ anthropology hold lessons for all parties involved—whether ethnic leaders, government bureaucrats, born-again ethnics, disinterested villagers, or academically trained anthropologists like myself. The differences and similarities at hand may be both exciting and unnerving. Senses of the uncanny may be mutual. As a research platform, these encounters present both an impetus and opportunity to remind ourselves and others of the possibilities and impossibilities of anthropological knowing. The questions that arise concern how *we*—all of us—navigate and translate between the great enframers of this craft: be it between the general and the particular; the conceptual and empirical; ideal-types and real-types; or at a most basic level of social understanding, between the self and other. Entering into these interactions, we would be well-served by carrying with us Judith Butler’s point that “if translation [between these realms] remains a necessity, then this act will be one

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<sup>20</sup> Chatterjee 2004: 75.

that works precisely through *failing to establish a radical commensurability between the terms it seeks to relate.*"<sup>21</sup>

In the long term, advocating for such a tolerance between conceptual and socio-cultural form may, in fact, help refigure the very problem of 'identity' itself. As Butler continues:

"It is this kind of impossibility and necessity that constitutes the kind of reading that does not always return us to the ground we already knew. The rift in the subject is paradoxically its capacity to move beyond itself, a movement that does not return to where it always was, identity as movement in the promising sense."<sup>22</sup>

The starting point for a study of "identity as movement in the promising sense", in other words, can be subjects themselves. In this light, Butler's point can be read as something of an ethnographic axiom. Indeed, the method offers an effective counter to fundamentalist claims over *the* subject by providing real-world evidence of the ways subjects are constantly moving beyond themselves in their processes of perpetual self-production. Through the ethnographic looking-glass, we can find—and perhaps most importantly convey—how subjects are always in flux and lacking definitive closure. Mitigating against those *exempli gratia* logics that hold forth the subject as the exemplary proof of the normative anthropologies of the day (e.g. "Ahhh...you see. There is a *tribal* community!"), the task here may be not so much to advocate the synthesis of ethnography and anthropological theory, but rather to reconstitute their distinction. Precisely because of its deductive and descriptive capabilities, ethnography may help offset those fundamentalist anthropologies that claim a collapse of the empirical and conceptual in their subjects. Given the grim perpetuation of

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<sup>21</sup> Butler 1995: 447.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

fundamentalist knowledges in the world today, working against such logics may well have humanist repercussions

### **Anthropological Futures.**

In his recent book *Against Race*, Paul Gilroy charts a compelling, if utopian, vision for what he calls a “planetary humanism”. Central to this new humanism, Gilroy avers, will be a “*postanthropological* version of what it means to be human.”<sup>23</sup> I take exception.

The historical underpinnings of Gilroy’s idea are sound. The discipline of anthropology has played an important role in naturalizing various schemas of human classification—many of which continue to upset the humanist agenda. But to equate ‘race’, ‘caste’, ‘tribe’, ‘gender’ and the like with ‘anthropology’ itself is to confuse particular facets of anthropological thought with the general kind of knowledge (and discipline) from which they emerged. Confining the ‘anthropological’ to these terms or any others, we are left with a rather hopeless, occluded notion of ‘anthropology’. This, it seems, is the understanding of the ‘anthropological’ that Gilroy jettisons from the humanist horizon.

My concerns are three-fold: First, this view of ‘anthropology’ ignores the explosion of interests within the discipline of anthropology over recent decades. Second, it blinds us to anthropological developments beyond the walls of the academy. And finally, shackling anthropology to its admittedly problematic pasts forecloses its abilities to help shape a more desirable future. Contrary to Gilroy’s suggestions of a “postanthropological” age to come, I maintain that anthropology—and in particular ethnography—can be an integral part of the humanist project. Staying true to our subjects, the method is uniquely poised to bring to light hitherto

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<sup>23</sup> Gilroy 2000: 15. By ‘postanthropological’ Gilroy seemingly means ‘postracial’, though elsewhere he mentions ‘ungendered humanism’.

unrecognized ways of being-in-the-world of great social promise. From *them*, we may learn starting points for a new humanism. The question going forward is: what particular kinds of anthropological knowledge will we endow to the future?

Modern systems of recognition and identity politics suggest that the world will be haunted by the ghosts of anthropological pasts for a long time to come. Any attempt to think our way out of this anthropologically-effected present must be realistic. Across the board, the vested interests are formidable. Quandaries abound. It would be utopian and irresponsible to propose wholesale changes. The ways forward instead will be necessarily slow, dialogic, and fraught.

‘Found’ anthropology offers a humble place to begin. Precisely as a confluence of different anthropologies—themselves replete with diverse social, political, and epistemic commitments—here we enter into an arena for mutually deliberating the epistemic qualities and social possibilities of anthropological knowledges. If I may speak from my research experiences in Darjeeling, semblances of the disciplinary self are likely to be found lurking in the other. But here, the uncanny need not cast such an ominous shadow over these encounters. Instead it marks an opportunity to talk about and across the various similarities and differences of our anthropological mindsets. In venturing these conversations, there is no reason to believe that anthropology cannot sustain its ethnographic commitments to its subjects. Whether ‘ours’ or ‘theirs’, anthropology’s strongest appeals to the present may well lie in its ability to give voice to the myriad ways people world their worlds. Here, anthropology (however conceived) has a promising role to play in helping realize new “versions of what it means to be human.”

### **On Final Words.**

These chapters on knowledge and belonging in Darjeeling do not tell a singular story, but rather a set of stories about a people and a kind of knowledge that I recognize as ethnological in a specific sense and therefore anthropological in a broader sense. A simpler story was waiting for me in Darjeeling—a story of ethnic revitalization, ethnic rebirth, newfound senses of ethnic belonging, etc. This story of ‘identity’, singular and pure, wanted to be told and indeed *was* told to me in terms that were potent and seductively familiar. My research, however, does not corroborate any such story. Instead, my findings steadfastly resist any singular conclusion—any final words, as it were—on the ways ethnological knowledge is affecting social belonging in Darjeeling.

To deny a definitive relationship of knowledge and belonging, however, is not to deny the causal links between the people of Darjeeling’s anxieties about belonging, ‘identity’, etc and their newfound fascination with ethnological knowledge. Anxieties over belonging in India *have* galvanized their struggles for rights, recognition, and ethnic awakening. And, as an integral part of these quests, ethnological knowledge *has* opened up new social, political, and subjective possibilities. For certain individuals, anthropologies of the ethnic self have even conjured senses of belonging long denied by their history in India. However, in telling stories of ethnic renaissance in Darjeeling, a fundamental difference emerges between my anthropology and many of those that I encountered in the field. Unlike the champions of ethnic rebirth who wielded their own theories of ethnic subject-formation, my anthropology posits no singular relation between ethnological knowledge and the ethnic subject, only relations. Some of these I have tried to present here.

Given the divergent goals of our work and the different systems of recognition by which our anthropological renderings of the people of Darjeeling will be judged,

my anthropology without question can better afford to bear the contingencies, complexities, and vagaries of life in Darjeeling than can those of aspiring ethnic groups. My deductive findings challenge the kinds of anthropological knowledge practiced by and upon the people of Darjeeling. But let me be the first to admit that my findings are not *solely* a deductive outcome of my research. The different ‘stories’ I tell in these chapters have emerged out of the interests and methods through which I engaged the circumstances at hand. By focusing on the social life of ethnological knowledge and its relations to belonging, my approach largely skirted around the heuristic requirement of ‘identity’ itself.<sup>24</sup> Resisting ‘identity’s’ lure was for me a necessary step toward questioning the constitutive relation of anthropology to the problem itself.<sup>25</sup> Neither taken-for-granted, nor presupposed, ‘identity’ and its reification were thus not built into the frameworks of the enquiry. In this regard, my research has diverged significantly from traditional ethnic-based studies.

From the start, my multiattentional approach has involved incommensurability.<sup>26</sup> Neither in a philosophical sense, nor in my ethnographic findings, do *knowledge* and *belonging* resolve perfectly into one another. The epistemic and affectual dimensions of life in Darjeeling are indeed mutually constitutive, but never in an absolute sense. Rather, anxieties over belonging seem to always be there *with* the ethnologies of Darjeeling—animating, exceeding, and otherwise unsettling the various attempts at conceptual capture of ethnic subjects. In significant but never singular ways, ethnological knowledge continues to shape not only what it means, but also *how it feels* to be a (ethnic) subject in Darjeeling.

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<sup>24</sup> This is an issue framed by Judith Butler, who suggests that “reading identities as they are situated and formed in relation to one another means moving beyond the heuristic requirement of identity itself.” Butler 1995: 446.

<sup>25</sup> Along these lines, this work enters into a scattered conversation seeking ways to rethink ‘identity’ as we know and ‘find’ it today. The radical critiques of Paul Gilroy (1990; 1993; 2000) and Fanon before him (1967); the work of Judith Butler (1995) and Derrida (1998); and to a certain extent Marx (1843/1978) have asked us to rethink ‘identity’ in various ways.

<sup>26</sup> This is an important facet of multiattentional methodologies. See Boyer 2010.

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Thinking through the optics of *knowledge* and *belonging*, we are left to wonder what the future holds for the people of Darjeeling and the various other subjects of ethnology. The intended and unintended ways that ethnological knowledge has come to shape life in Darjeeling seemingly returns us to Marx's deceptively simple insight that "objectification is the practice of alienation". Likewise, we may recall Fanon who asked us to consider how systems of objectification introduce their own degrees of misrecognition, over-determination, and alienation from the ways subjects might otherwise choose to be. In the Fanonian sense, it may be uncanny indeed the way subjects are made strangers unto themselves. Clearly, anthropologies of the ethnic self have generated new possibilities for the people of Darjeeling. But in weighing how these knowledge forms can engender rights, recognition, and senses of belonging to a nation, a community, and a veritably 'ethnic' self, it is worth considering also how this 'age of ethnology' has ushered in its own kinds of misrepresentation, misrecognition, and non-belonging. In its prescriptive forms, ethnological knowledge may well close down as many possibilities as it opens up.

To conclude: the lessons of 'finding' anthropology remain an open-book. For academic anthropologists, coming to terms with these forms of knowledge may unsettle notions of who we are, what we do, and how we should be known. Certainly, finding anthropology has induced similar feelings among the people of Darjeeling. Nevertheless, for them, particular paradigms of ethnological thought are now indelible and highly politicized facets of life. That salience alone gives pause to seriously consider the potential and realized effects of anthropological knowledge in the world today.

Given the forces that animate and haunt the contemporary, getting beyond this current 'age of ethnology', should we wish to do so, will not be easy. It will require a

Careful questioning of those forms of anthropological knowledge that continue to condition the styles, possibilities, and impossibilities of modern communities in India and beyond. Coming to terms with the anthropological present may well be an important step in charting a more humanist anthropological future. In fact, when given the slightest turn toward the future, the ‘problem’ of ‘found’ anthropology transforms into a site of great possibility. After all, if anthropological knowledge can be so clearly found in the lifeworlds of contemporary subjects, then along with them, we might think creatively and critically about what kinds of recognition we are able to develop for the future and how these may affect the horizons of human possibility. In such a future stirs the possibility that we—all of us—may discover social forms and forms of anthropology beyond recognition.

Whatever this reckoning holds, the endeavor should prove to be something more than academic.

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