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TRAVERSING SOCIAL SPACE: GURUNG JOURNEYS¹

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Introduction

Nepal is inevitably characterized as a mountainous place. Almost proverbially, it is a “small landlocked country.” It is often pointed out to be a place in which many people suffer poverty. It is also a place where much movement occurs, movement not unrelated to these three facts of topography, geopolitical situation and socioeconomic conditions. Whether one thinks of local movement up and down steep hillsides in the course of agricultural labor, of internal migration from hills to plains and countryside to cities, or of the constant transit to and from sites of labor abroad, people are frequently on the move.

To characterize these journeys, commonplace occurrences in many peoples’ lives, it is essential to keep in sight the conditions—topographical, geopolitical and socioeconomic—that constrain or enable them. But tracing surface contours of peoples’ movements, and the large-scale conditions that define them, does not tell one everything. The journey of a newly married woman enroute to her *māita*, and that of a woman heading to Hong Kong with her new soldier-husband traverse very different social geographies and are embedded in complex local histories. One’s manner of departure and travel, the length and distance of a trip, and one’s destination all acquire much of their meaning from the social construction of place, and of belonging, mobility and displacement.

All these issues are relevant to the journeys that many Gurung men make in the course of careers as Gurkha soldiers. In most ethnographies of recruited communities, it has been primarily the economic aspects of soldiery (Macfarlane 1976) or the interplay of wealth and social status (Messerschmidt 1976b) that have warranted attention. These are indeed important topics, but I would argue that they cannot be wholly treated *in situ*; the economic significance of soldiery at home cannot be divorced from the social significance of the journeys it entails. To be a *lāhore*² is first of all to have mobility and to experience displacement. Such wealth as *lāhores* acquire is imported, and this is ingredient to its local significance. Just as *lāhores* themselves must mediate between places, the money, commodities and knowledge they acquire abroad must be turned into locally relevant currency.

Soldiery has brought many hill communities firmly into contact with what we like to call the developed world—both with one of its characteristic institutions and with many of its places. While I was studying the history of Gurkha soldiery in the large Gurung community of Kōta,³ development workers often questioned me about why ex-soldiers had not been a greater force for change in their home communities. By change they meant progressive modernization, measured by latrines, vegetable patches, trips to doctors, and water systems. The tone was often sharp because, as one man pointedly told me, “Gurkhas ought to know better.” Their failure to have become self-appointed modernizers, as judged by these standards, was explained by reference to that often attributed set of Third World characteristics: irrationality, traditionalism, and its local manifestation, Asian fatalism (cf. Pletsch 1981).⁴

In Kōta some people have responded to development initiatives in ways that have evoked just these kinds of explanations.⁵ They have rejected improved hybrid seed from a nearby agricultural development center and opposed a forest management project, despite the fact that they recognize a developing ecological crisis. Yet they think of themselves as rational and pragmatic, do not imagine themselves to be held in thrall by their religious beliefs, and perceive organization, not chaos, in their political practices. I had been struck, moreover,

by the pervasive concern with the relative merits of “modern” and “traditional” lifestyles, commodities, and beliefs that people evinced in their talk and their actions.

These accusations therefore seemed to me misguided, but my responses were unconvincing. I pointed to water systems installed by former Gurkha engineers, the occasional large vegetable patch, and a local ex-Gurkha who gave injections. I knew that what required questioning was their premises: i) that ex-Gurkhas should (naturally) become agents of change and ii) that “modernizing” must have such particular outcomes, producing the societal version of Third World copies of Western commodities. At the time I could only argue these points in the abstract, which converted no-one from their vegetable-patch-and-latrine realism.

There have been many critiques of Western paradigms of modernization, and these I could draw upon in making my argument. But there has been much less attention to what “modernizing” might mean to those who have so often been the objects of reform and the subjects of debate. It was this sort of answer, grounded in local conceptions of “modernity”, that was required. While this paper does not reflect on responses to development initiatives, it does attempt to provide part of that more grounded answer.

The first section sets out a social geography from the vantage point of Kōta. It is necessarily an ideal-typical portrait, which would gain nuance and variation in any individual’s usage in particular circumstances, but it is an available framework whose overall contours many take for granted. The following section considers how *lāhores* traverse this social geography in their efforts to make their labor abroad locally meaningful.

It must be stressed that follows concerns Gurungs only, and in particular Kōta Gurungs. To lump Gurungs, Magars, Rais and Limbus together in a discussion of the consequences of soldiery is to reproduce the British image of them all as “Gurkhas”. One should have at least as much sense of differences among them as the British have in fact had for recruiting purposes, but not necessarily the same sense of differences. While I will only discuss Gurungs below, some general points can be made. Whether one is concerned with effects within communities or with how men have coped with army life, one must grant more cultural specificity and individual identity to them than the label “Gurkha” would allow.⁶ Gurungs’ extensive systems of reciprocity and exchange, traditions of communal labor, and agro-pastoralist lifestyle have much to do with how Gurkha soldiery has affected their communities and with how they have dealt with the changes brought about by it. In asking about men’s experience of the army one must equally attend to Gurung moral sensibilities, and to their ideas about health and death, about hierarchy and equality. To view their experiences as interchangeable with those of other Gurkhas is to be mesmerized by the institutionalized effacement of civilian identities that seems so apparent to those who view military establishments from the outside.⁷

Sacred, social, physical geographies

The conceptual geography of village, country and indeed the world is intricately bound up, for many Kōta residents, with the fact of Gurkha soldiery. One cannot say precisely what it might have been before recruitment began in the late nineteenth century, but the traces of differences across generations give some idea of how soldiery has transformed it. This transformation has taken place through the journeys men have made, as traversing spaces beyond the familiar has brought grief, joy, gain and loss, and has transfigured people’s sense of their place in the larger scheme of things.

When young men have left Kōta and traveled to the recruiting depots was this simply the first of many route marches across difficult terrain? This question requires some inquiry into Gurungs’ sense of place. I begin with an ideal-typical account of local geography. This is a view of the landscape that probably very few hold in its entirety, and certainly none hold only this view. But its elements are evocative to many, describing the contours of a local knowable world.

There is a phrase used today mainly by elderly people, *Tamu yul*, which in Gurung means “Gurung country”. This is not the area of Gurung ethnic concentration that one might find on an ethnographic map of Nepal. There are many *Tamu yuls* within that space. It is rather a locale of belonging, relatedness, and ancestry within which Gurung ways prevail. The notion of *yul* combines a natural geographical formation—often a river valley and its surrounding hills—, a related population, the idea of a historical homeland, and

perhaps most importantly, a sense of fit among people, land and cosmology. The *hāwāpāni*⁸ of one's own *Tamu yul* best suits one's constitution. As a sacred space, it is the area within which Gurung cosmological beliefs prevail. It is peopled not only by Gurungs, but by Gurung deities, demons, ghosts and ancestors. Within it Gurung rituals are efficacious, and Gurung notions of the body, soul, health and illness best explain an individual's condition.

One *Tamu yul* is the area within which people usually intermarry, language and customs are seen to vary only slightly, and whose parameters are protected by the same Gurung deities. Within this local world one knows how to greet people. Work is organized and economies of exchange and reciprocity operate through kin relations. If there are disputes and tensions (and there are many), there are also well-defined means for resolving, suppressing and eliding them. If there are dangers, physical and spiritual, there are also measures to be taken against them. This conception of *Tamu yul* is one of a place where people have, by and large, a deep sense of self-sufficiency, a sense of knowing-how and being-able.

Kōta lies at the social and conceptual center of one such *yul*. As one of the oldest settlements, and the largest and wealthiest village in the area it is, for its inhabitants, the focal point of local affairs. Within this *yul* one travels through a landscape of named fields and communally owned forest and pasture lands, passing the homes of Gurung, village, lineage, and household deities in waterfalls, streams and rock formations. One might say that the conceptual geography of the *yul* is one of nested locales, moving outward from the most familiar and personal. Thus one lives in one's own family's *dhir* (house), in a hamlet comprised of one's own *tah* (local patrilineage),⁹ within a Gurung *nasa* (village), within a Gurung *yul* (country).

This is the social and geographical space that many Kōta residents traverse in much of their daily activity. It is a terrain that residents know intimately in many senses. They can traverse the region on obscure pathways chosen on the basis of a finely detail knowledge of geography, agricultural cycle and seasonal climate. Rituals to keep human activities in balance with nature are well known and assiduously practiced by many. The intimate social geography of the village and environs make every task also an exercise in sociality. The current tendency in anthropology to attend to fragmentation of ordered world views, and to displacement from neatly bounded cultural worlds, should not lead one to underestimate the coherence of this image of the *yul*. But it is, nonetheless, an ideal-typical depiction, not equally shared by all, and not the only experience of any of Kōta's residents, for Kōta Gurungs also live within a nation-state, and often travel far beyond it.

There is an old tale, which I have heard related both by foreign ethnographers and urban Nepalis, that hill people will speak of going to Kathmandu as "going to Nepal".¹⁰ One might say they are simply being historically precise,¹¹ but the point of the tale is to mark the conceptual distance of hill people from modern Nepali sensibilities. It is meant to convey either that they are so peripheralized in the political-economy of Nepal, or that they are so uneducated that they think of the very center of Nepalese economic and political life as a foreign country.

But let me turn this formulation around and look at the conceptual geography of Nepal again from the perspective of a *Tamu yul*. In Kōta, the word *yul* is never used to speak of Nepal or any other nation-state. Whenever I asked for a translation of the Nepali word *deś* (country) people told me there was no such word in Gurung, "we just say *deś*." As I began to hear the term *yul* in the talk of older people, and in stories about the area to the north of the village, I began to inquire more closely. The depiction of a *yul* above derives from these conversations.

Deś is, as I understand it, is a distinct concept in three senses. First, it is a place in which non-Gurung political and administrative structures are dominant. In Nepal *deś* Gurungs are, collectively, a *jāt* and, individually, citizens. In *Tamu yul* they are *mai* (people).¹² Second, it is the site of other cultural and social practices. To traverse the space from *yul* to *deś*, at least along the routes that Kōta Gurungs usually travel, is to move into the space of caste Hindu culture and society. Third, a *deś* is a place in which Gurung cosmology is of questionable efficacy. It is a matter of speculation whether a Gurung ghost can follow one outside *Tamu yul* or whether Gurung deities can protect one there. Similarly, it is doubtful whether Gurung healing practices will be efficacious beyond the bounds of *Tamu yul*.¹³

When speaking of Kōta Gurungs at least the old tale begins to look like it contains a grain of truth but, I would argue, the wrong moral. From the perspective of *Tamu yul* “going to Nepal” is a movement, not from periphery to center, but from center to beyond the boundaries of everyday life, the well-known world, the site of maximum competence.

Finally, there are, beyond *Tamu yul*, and beyond Nepal *deś*, *bideś*—foreign countries. When one travels from *yul* to *deś* the significance of being Gurung changes, from an attribute that signifies commonalities and relatedness to one which marks difference, often to the disadvantage of Gurungs who are assigned a middle place in the caste system, and are lumped with others in contexts where *pahāre mānche*—hill person—is derogatory. Moving beyond Nepal *deś* into *bideś*, the significance of being Gurung recedes, replaced by national affiliation—Nepali—or by “Gurkha” or migratory laborer.

This vision of nested locales, from the most local in which one has the most fully developed social identity and the most power over how one is defined, to the most foreign where one is defined by the barest attributes of nationality and occupation, and where one has the least power to define oneself remains a powerful local image. But today Nepal *deś* and many *bideś* are not blank maps, rather they are places where satellite communities exist. As a community, Kōta now extends into other parts of Nepal and countries around the world. The counter-movement to traversing foreign social space has been the creation of Gurung space. No one imagines they can reconstitute a *Tamu yul* somewhere else, but they can constitute communities in which being Gurung signifies, even if the contexts in which it does are restricted to domestic life.

This ability to transform the foreign, to forge a space within it, is quite recent. Only since the late 1960s have Kōta Gurungs settled in any numbers in other places. It is, furthermore, a sense held only by those who have been most fluent in traversing social space and by those who have themselves traveled little but who imagine their relatives to have been successful elsewhere. For many of Kōta’s oldest residents even Pokhara, the nearest market town, remains essentially a foreign land. And many *lāhores*, while they have a sense of competence, having gotten along in other places, have an acute sense of the limitations of their knowledge and ability to shape their lives when they leave *Tamu yul*.¹⁴ A local repository of knowledge about other places has been built up over the years. Few Kōta Gurungs now go where no-one before them has gone. Before departing for Singapore one could now acquire detailed instructions about how to navigate the subway system, although it might be outdated. During World War II knowledge of places to the south of *Tamu yuls* was limited both in extent and in distribution. When men left they moved beyond the realm of people’s imaginations. If they returned, they came back within the limits of social life. Even for former soldiers and women who had lived in army lines at Dehra Dun or Quetta, this sense was strong. Singapore, Italy, Burma were beyond their ken. Even today the majority of people have only a vague knowledge of where a soldier might be. He has “gone to Bharat” or is in Hong Kong or Brunei. Unless it is somewhere they have themselves been the central feature of the place is that it is far beyond the borders of *Tamu yul*.

For young men making such a journey has been both dangerous and adventurous. Until the 1960’s soldiery was not popular in Kōta. Young men often left secretly, and once beyond the bounds of *Tamu yul*, *lāhores* could depend on little but one another. For today’s *lāhores*, departures are carefully arranged, marking the passage out of *Tamu yul*, and arranging for it to take place on auspicious days. The routes they travel within Nepal, moreover, now contain satellite communities of Kōta Gurungs with whom they may stay. But once they embark on the journey to Hong Kong, they too find themselves in a foreign land with little to depend on but one another.

Wage Labor: A Convertible Currency

In order to understand the significance of wage labor in other locales, one must first have a sense of what it is to work and live at home. Gurungs were once semi-nomadic shepherds, annually traversing the Himalayan passes between summer pastures near the Tibetan border and winter ones on the southern slopes (Messerschmidt 1974, 1976a). But today, while high altitude villages like Kōta still have significant herds, Gurungs are mainly sedentary agriculturalists, sowing and reaping by hand on the intricate terraces carved out on the steep slopes of the Himalayan foothills. This shift roughly coincides with Gurungs’ incorporation within the Nepali state

in the early 19th century, which made it necessary to establish permanent claims to fixed pieces of property (Regmi 1972).

For over a hundred years, Gurung men of this area have also been recruited by the British as soldiers, becoming the most valued members of the famed Gurkha regiments.¹⁵ Foreign soldiery was their first extensive engagement in wage labor, and it remains the most important source of cash in this and many other areas of the hills. But today, many men also seek out other kinds of wage labor, within and outside of Nepal. Those who have been soldiers often return with their pensions, only to seek work in the cities and southern plains, the cities of India, or even the Middle East.

While cash has thus become an essential component of the regional economy, wage labor remains something one goes elsewhere to do. Very few labor transactions within the village include the exchange of money.¹⁶ Gurungs have long-standing and elaborate systems of cooperative labor exchange, organized variously among residential neighbors, among kin, and among unmarried teens by gender (Messerschmidt 1981; Andors 1976). These systems are not merely efficient (though they are that), they also mark the contours of people's relations with one another, display a satisfying degree of cooperation, make public statements about shifting alliances, and do many other kinds of cultural 'work'. More informal exchanges of goods and labor are similarly complex cultural acts, a continuous working out of the kind of social person one is and wishes to be seen to be, and an affirmation of social embeddedness. At the same time, such labor exchanges make heavy demands on people's time and energy, and while there is reciprocity, there are also potentially limitless demands on one's finite capacity to work and to give.

Gurungs place great value on reciprocity, generosity and social harmony. In the hard business of survival, even among the poorest, the struggle to adhere to this aesthetic of life has an importance nearly equal to that of meeting one's physical needs. For if one cannot survive as a properly Gurung person, valued and respected by others, life has little point. To simultaneously achieve real generosity within one's limits, and the appearance of limitless generosity, to simultaneously maintain autonomy and fulfill one's social obligations are the tasks of life. To achieve these aims with grace and competence is part of an aesthetic ideal to which people aspire (cf. McHugh 1985, 1989).

Thus the ideal picture which people hold of themselves and of their community is one of kin working harmoniously and cooperatively, giving with generosity in an never-ending round of reciprocal exchanges. Reality, of course, often falls short of the ideal. Coexistent with this ideal is an equally nuanced attention to hierarchy. Age, gender and kin relation together dictate precise measure of respect and deference, and particular kinds of obligations. To maintain an image that closely resembles the ideal is the first order of business. But to manage one's actions and talk in such a way that this does not appear mere hypocrisy is the true art.

Gurungs value their systems, appreciating them as practical arrangements that work well to achieve their intended ends, and as aesthetic achievements that give pleasure. Indeed, they speak of these systems in a way that would have delighted the functionalists of yore, and sent them scrambling for their notebooks. But people also expect that these systems can never be wholly realized, and that while they provide the ingredients for a good life, it is in their innovative combination that the art of life itself consists. Differential relations to the *bikāsi* (developed) world and differential access to *bikāsi* goods,¹⁷ have added a new layer of complexity to the management of hierarchy and reciprocity in Kōta. Thus far, it is *lāhores* who have had the most precipitous path to traverse.

When men depart for wage labor work elsewhere, they leave their community, and enter into systems with practices and values very different from those at home. When they join the military—often the first such excursion—they enter a system defined, not by reciprocity, but by hierarchy alone. Nonetheless, the value Gurungs place on surface harmony, on competence and on meeting one's obligations serve them well in a military context, and this aesthetic, as it manifests in an ethic of conduct is, as I have argued elsewhere (Des Chene n.d.), why they are such fine soldiers. Indeed, Kōta Gurungs can even find reciprocity in military arrangements, not in their relations with officers, but in the exchange of their labor for wages. Far from seeing wage labor as fundamentally different from reciprocal exchange, they see it as a *kind* of reciprocal exchange,

or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, a *detour* in the course of maintaining ongoing exchange relations at home. For wages are a kind of token until they are converted into goods that can enter into local systems of exchange back home. Thus converted, they do the same work as does direct labor exchange, and the exchange and giving of locally produced commodities.

I called soldiering for wages a detour. Indeed, soldiers conceive of their time in the army—often fifteen or twenty years—not as the centerpiece of their lives, as the British have imagined, but as a *hiatus* in them. When I began this research, I was disappointed, even a bit alarmed, by the responses to my first, clumsy attempts to explain my interests. Telling men I wanted to know about the history of soldiers and about their lives in the army, all responses were much like the following, one of the few that I bothered to record:

We went. For fifteen or sixteen years we stayed, then we came back. We drank some *rāksi* (liquor) and our money was finished. Other things too, a little sugar, oil, and *dāl*, we brought back to give, and our money was finished. After we return again we work in the fields as before. That's it.

Such statements encapsulated fifteen or twenty years of a man's life in a three-part movement—going, being there, returning—passing over years in the army in a few words, as that which separated leaving and returning. Some months later, after my first involvement in a Gurung funeral had led me to think about Renato Rosaldo's argument that "deep" meaning need not correspond to greater elaboration (Rosaldo 1984), I attended to these stories in a new way. After many and varied conversations about their army lives, I came to see that what men were telling me in these short tales was that time in the army was a hiatus, a long interlude in their lives.

To say that time in the army is thought of as a hiatus, is not to say that it was empty or meaningless. Men's experiences varied, as one might expect: pleasurable, horrific, tedious. But whatever an individual's particular experiences, time in the army is conceived of as a hiatus in two senses, both of which have to do with absence. First, it is an extended period of separation undertaken in the interest of long-range plans for bettering one's own and one's family's life circumstances. Second, time spent soldiering is a time of cultural and social limbo, during which one neither comes to belong in the countries one migrates through, nor lives in the society—one's own—in which one does belong. The first sense of hiatus folds the whole period of army service into one long moment, while the second unfolds it into a day-by-day experience of difference and absence.

Former soldiers struggled to convey the first sense of hiatus to me, turning conversations I had directed to abstract issues back to the tedium of daily routine, to the difficulty they had in lending purpose to their endeavors. They said it was hard to explain this because I had never been a soldier. But the second sense, of being separated from one's community and cast into a foreign environment, they expected me easily to understand. "Like me", one man told me, "your work has stretched your life across different places. It's very hard".

While young men first join the army for diverse reasons, and while their motivations have changed over time,¹⁸ most men *continue* to serve in the army after their first three year stint in the interest of reproducing the life they value at home. We may find irony in this situation. A man must leave his family and community in order to do his part to ensure their well-being and continuation. He must enter into wage labor arrangements in order to support the exchange relationships he values. Gurungs see the paradox in this, but do not construe it as ironic. It is rather one instance, among others, of the *dukkha*—hardship and suffering—that a *pahāre mānche*—hill person—must endure just to live, first of all, and then, all the more so, to live up to an ideal.

Many British writers have imagined that when Gurkhas return home they settle in to a comfortable life of relative wealth as political leaders and "big men" in their villages, regaling the children with tales of adventure and the wonders of the wider world. The relative wealth of soldiers in fact varies a great deal.¹⁹ Nor do these writers take account of the fact that, when a person's resources increase, so too do the obligations to share them. Former soldiers, far from being automatically esteemed, must be highly skillful in the arts of giving yet retaining if they are to materially increase their own family's well-being while being respected by others. One who has been away has great obligations to show that he remembers his social place. He does so by reentering systems of exchange, using the wages acquired in the army to do so. Handling the many competing

obligations placed on him with skill and grace, as much as the fact of entering into exchange relations, shows that he remembers the arts of life. His initial visits, the order in which he makes them, and his initial gifts and the manner in which he presents them, tell people what status he claims, who he cares about, how graceful he remains in the art of juggling often irreconcilable obligations. When he returns from the army, a man returns to the joys and difficulties of skillfully working Gurung systems. This is not a matter of “reintegration”. It is the end of a long detour, a realization of the purpose for which one labored elsewhere. But for those who retired after the late 1960s, this return has often proved to be merely a sojourn, the prelude to further journeys.

“I Have No Address”

When Gurkhas have “retired” from the army, their working lives are usually far from over. A man may retire with a pension in his mid-thirties. Changes in the political-economy of Nepal since the 1960s have made a cash income increasingly necessary for survival in the hills. Many soldiers foresee a day when their children may not be able to survive as farmers at all. And throughout the hills a complex set of attitudes about the relative merits of following a *bikāsi* lifestyle, leads people to seek, among other things, education for their children.²⁰ Much army income goes into providing that education. Some soldiers have relocated their families in towns, where they think the schools are better. Some even send their children to boarding schools as far away as Darjeeling. Families, then, may be split across many locales. And former soldiers often pursue further wage labor in order to pay for these expenses.

It may appear then that soldiers’ concern is not with reproducing Gurung life, but with guiding its transformation. I would argue that they see these as one and the same task. Clearly circumstances are changing, and those who leave the village for wage labor are, more than anyone else, conscious of this. The experience of absence only heightens their appreciation for the style of interaction and the kind of community I have sketched. Their effort is directed at reproducing the heart of Gurungness—generosity, systems of reciprocity and artful innovation—however much the outward forms of life and work may change.

Thus, when relocating within Nepal, Gurungs have created enclaves that reproduce, in an attenuated form, the communities of the hills. The first time I went to Bhairawa, a town on the Nepalese border, I was shown this in graphic form. Immediately upon my arrival at the house of a migrated village man, a former soldier, I was taken by him to his rooftop. Pointing at one house after another, he named their villages—Mohariya there, Dhampus over there, Thak to the left—letting me know that I was not in a wholly foreign land in those hot plains. In kaleidoscopic form, he had shown me a mirror of the social geography surrounding his village in the hills. The young boy I had brought from the village, a relative’s son, who would live there in order to attend school, was incorporated into a Gurung community. Not as ordered and closely related as one might wish, but one that people could work, with skill, to make meaningful.

Similarly, men who travel to India or the Middle East generally do so in company. Routes have developed, work being found for relations, until there are tiny Gurung communities in Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and, until recently at least, Kuwait. These are yet more attenuated, being all male and without land. But these men have already coped with this in the army, and do so again. Here they labor, often at menial jobs that do not make use of their army skills, for wages. Most can return home only for one month out of the year, a month, they say, of “family life”. But they make this sacrifice in order to enable the reproduction of the lifestyle they value. When they return for that brief period, wages are converted into goods for exchange, marking their places in local systems, and into education for children who they hope will thereby retain the autonomy to choose a Gurung lifestyle, different in form, but enduring in its moral attributes.

The men who carry these hopes, as they traverse the places across which their work has scattered their lives, give up for themselves what they wish to reproduce for others. The sense of hiatus that they experience in the army often becomes an enduring condition, conveyed to me most forcefully in the words of one man whose life embodies this dilemma. A former soldier, he had served in Malaysia, Borneo, England, Hong Kong and Cyprus, among other places. His wife and children lived in town, while his current work for an agricultural development center took him throughout the hills surrounding the village. He kept a small room in his brother’s house for those few days when he could enjoy his “home”. But the lack of a real home within the village only

accentuated his own displacement. On a day when I felt particularly displaced, he offered me wise advice about how to deal with living between two worlds. We talked late into the evening. The next day he would again leave the village. As we parted he turned back, muttering to himself, "Talk is not killed". Then, with a pained expression, he said to me, "I understand, I too have no address".

Notes

¹ Some of the ideas in this paper were first presented at the 1990 meetings of the American Anthropological Association. I thank the audience there, especially Bill Fisher, and the panel discussant, Kathryn March, for insightful comments.

² The term '*lāhore*', which has its origins in military service under Ranjit Singh at the beginning of the 19th century, predating British recruitment, is the common term for a "Gurkha" soldier in Nepal.

³ I use the Gurung (or Tamu) name of the site of my research to retain anonymity for those with whom I worked. Those who will know this name would be likely to be able to deduce the place whatever I called it.

⁴ I speak here mainly of Western development workers, but educated, urban Nepalis also echoed these sentiments. Some bought into the idea of Asian fatalism, while others made finer distinctions, differentiating themselves from "backward" hill peoples.

⁵ In each instance there were other reasons for rejection, but I will not pursue these here.

⁶ Among Tamangs, for example, who were excluded from recruitment until World War II, the first cohort of soldiers in some places became a new local elite. See Höfer 1978.

⁷ The point here is not to deny that Gurkhas were processed and utilized in much the same way within the army, whatever their cultural background, but rather that uniform treatment does not entail uniform experience of that treatment. A reading of a selection of memoirs from any given war will make this point clear enough.

⁸ Literally, air or wind and water, sometimes translated as environment.

⁹ Since residence after marriage is patrilocal this is strictly true only for men and unmarried women. But the preference for cross-cousin marriage among linked pairs of clans means that married women usually share clan affiliation, and sometimes lineage affiliation, with many other married women in the hamlets to which they move after marriage.

¹⁰ Old people where I worked do indeed say this, but as will be seen below, from their point of view there are quite other reasons for doing so than those that usually go with the tale.

¹¹ See Slusser 1982 on the historical Nepala of the Kathmandu Valley area.

¹² At this conceptual level the many finer distinctions, of clan, lineage and so on, made among Gurungs recede before the distinction between "us" and "others". Gurungs, of course, also recognize many distinctions among "others".

¹³ Where Gurungs have congregated in numbers and settled permanently this doubt recedes, but in the army where Gurungs are immersed in a foreign lifestyles and an multiethnic community, it does not. It would seem that it is only when people have laid claim to a space of their own, developed a history in that place, and can reconstitute localized descent groups that a new *Tamu yul* begins to be created. This is a speculative point, based on experience with migrants to Kathmandu, Pokhara and Bhairawa.

¹⁴ While this statement rests on many and varied conversations, it was clearly exemplified to me in a long series of debates among former soldiers concerning a journey to India. A village man employed in a large Indian city by the Government of India died of tuberculosis. The question of whether his widow and children were due a pension was hazy, and the consensus was that someone must go in person to handle the matter. Candidates were put forward, carefully analyzed for their qualifications, and dismissed one after another. All agreed that it must be a former *lāhore*, with competence in Hindi, knowledge of bureaucracies and widely traveled. The bid by the deceased man's younger sister to go was met with derision, nor was his father, an untravelling shepherd, considered suitable.

¹⁵ Since 1947 Nepalis have been recruited by both the British and Indian armies.

¹⁶ Those that do are transacted between Gurungs and Hindus of untouchable caste, not between two Gurungs. Even these transactions are usually exchanges of grain and meals for labor. Many Gurungs have a modified form of *jajmani* relation with particular untouchable households.

¹⁷ On ideas about *bikasi* goods and places see Pigg 1992.

¹⁸ See Des Chene 1991 for details on cohorts of soldiers, changing recruitment patterns, and changing attitudes towards soldiery.

¹⁹ During the two world wars, for example, recruitment was expanded enormously. Very few of these war recruits were able to continue to serve until eligible for a pension. And it is only since the late 1960's that army service (in the British army only) could make anyone truly wealthy in local terms. This possibility coincided with a drastic cut in the number of Gurkhas in the British army, and so there are very few men who have become wealthy in the ways that British writers have imagined, through their military service.

²⁰ See Ragsdale 1989 for a discussion of the value Gurungs place on education. He argues that Gurungs see a direct link between formal education for their children and the maintenance of a strong ethnic identity and a distinctively Gurung lifestyle. The *forms* of that life may well change. What they wish to preserve is its ethos—and, I would add, its aesthetic.

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