

Slaves, Souls and Subjects in a South Asian Borderland

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War has rewarded historians of South and Southeast Asia.¹ Yet histories that relate captivity with settlement, semiotics and memory are underdeveloped in the postcolonial South Asian academe. This essay addresses a special set of relationships – of masters and slaves - as these, reconstituted under colonialism, remain differentially available to memory and history.

I locate these relationships in a region identified as Lushai Hills in British colonial records of the 19th century. For want of space, I will not detail the ways in which military-political structures of precolonial regimes had shaped captive-settlement and militarization of a range of migrant populations, nor outline the ways in which narrations of ‘female captivity’ initiate all contemporary narrations of ‘history’ in these hills. I can only refer readers to older chronicles of neighboring kingdoms of Sylhet, Tripura, Cachar, Manipur, Burma², Assam and Chittagong³ all of which claimed parts of these hills at various times between the 17th and 19th centuries. The region was fashioned into a ‘borderland’ only gradually through the nineteenth century. From its base in the plains of Bengal, the British East India Company worked out tax-collection and legal arrangements with neighboring kingdoms by the early nineteenth century. These in turn led to enhanced but indirect colonial influence in these kingdoms and thus over different parts of the hills each kingdom claimed. In 1874, the northern hills were administered under the Assam Inner Line regulations, which prohibited the ingress of plainsmen to the region, and exempted concerned bureaucrats from liability for non-application of the Indian Penal Code. British annexation of Upper Burma in 1885, fiercely resisted by many segments of the polyglot

and heterodox groups living in contiguous hillsides of the region, was crushed by British arms in 1894-6.⁴ The westernmost hills associated with the Burmese kingdom were promptly segregated, attached to the hills of northern Arakan and the hills of erstwhile ‘native states’. Thus was born a new region - the Lushai Hills.

Fiscal shortages in British imperial administration determined that this new administrative unit would be governed by a militarized form of indirect rule. The highest authority was a British Superintendent, whose orders were to be implemented by Burmese-style village headmen who were henceforth called ‘chiefs’. Such conversions may have been prompted by the gradual ossification of such offices through the 19th century into semi-hereditary ones. More important, since such men decided local disputes over wealth and life, British officials viewed these chiefs as critical to pacification. Therefore they proliferated the numbers of such chiefs after 1894 (including anointing helpful local commoners as ‘chiefs’ of sedentarized villages, as with Dara of Pukpui village) while limiting and fixing the amounts of lands available to each chief for *jhums* (swidden agriculture).

Enter the Sap [local pronunciation of ‘Sahib’/lord]

Alongside these changes went the invitation to the nearest missionary church.⁵ Since the Welsh Calvinist Methodist Mission had been active in the Khasi Hills since 1841, and had become part of the colonial educational administration from 1854,⁶ two of its missionaries (Edwin Rowlands and David Evan Jones) arrived in the newly annexed hills in 1897-8. Disarmed locals described these unarmed white men carrying their own luggage as ‘two real big fools’.⁷ After the latter had disbursed highly-valued and scarce salt in payment for labor, they

were accepted as ‘Zosap’ (governors of Zo/ hills). It distinguished them from the armed British Superintendents, the ‘Borsap’ (high governors). When another two Baptist missionaries (Frederick W. Savidge and J. Herbert Lorrain), sponsored by the Arthington Trust at Leeds, arrived in the region and set about transcribing one of the region’s thirteen dialects – Duhlien – as *the* local language from 1903, they found ready collaborators among the headmen’s dominant clans.⁸

Yet much was also lost in the process. None of the war-songs (*bul-hla*) nor the poetic forms in which the *puitiam* (lit. ‘great knower’, diviner) conversed with the sentient entities of the natural world, were translated. Furthermore, Duhlien-language terms were translated without reference to the five different tonal levels that helped to distinguish different meanings for identical arrangements of consonants and vowels.⁹ Thus right from the outset, there is cause to wonder about alternate meanings of the word that was to cause much grief to colonial officials in the early twentieth century. This word and some basic sentences were first transcribed and taught to Thomas Herbert Lewin in the late 1860s, who wrote them down as ‘*boi*, a slave: *boi-nu*, a female slave’.¹⁰ While Lewin’s vocabulary suggested that these were adults, the gendered nouns reported around the same time by a polyglot assistant surgeon as *bay-pa* and *bay-nu* (slave-boy and slave-girl respectively) implied that the subjects referred to were either biologically ‘children’, or were not considered ‘social’ adults.¹¹ Such gender-and-age-based distinctions were shared by other languages spoken in the region, and included prefixes indicative of the first, second or third person possessive.¹² However, when the Baptist missionaries wrote the root word down as *boih/ boi*, (and the sexed nouns as *boih-pa* and *boih-nu*),¹³ usage turned the root word into the sole word for the status. So ‘*boi*’ functioned as a composite of genderless individuality

and as a condition, referring to both (sexless) slave, a plurality of such ungendered beings, and the status of slavery. Furthermore, the Roman script chosen for the language left tonality out altogether. It accommodated pronunciation through drawing out, adding, or shortening vowels. So from the turn of the century British colonial officers began to write the sound of ‘aw’ for ‘o’ - producing *bawi* (for *boih*).¹⁴ Pronounced with a broad vowel, the word becomes indistinguishable from the English euphemism for male slave, and in the later nineteenth century for the apprentice - ‘boy’.

These shifting semantics were shaped by an emergent colonial political economy which divorced kinship from politics, focusing instead on the extraction of labor and taxation-regimes, to refine older hierarchies. Earlier Burmese and Assamese taxation structures had grouped commoners into those who owed labor service (or could commute for cash) to the state and those who did not. With British ‘pacification’ came a regime of labor for uplands populations that was *neither* optional nor commutable. The Superintendent and his assistants were authorized to collect taxes at given annual rates: Rupees 2 in cash, or 20 seers of cleaned rice or 1 maund of unhusked rice per house, *in addition* to each house supplying one porter’s (*coolie*) services for carriage and transportation or road-construction for ten days each year.¹⁵ This *additional* taxation (in labor-service) destroyed older grids of social respectability. All labor services, especially in sections of *jhum* (swidden) cultivation, were limited to activities not performed by commoners who paid fixed amounts of grain to the chief.¹⁶ It was left to female and male bondsmen, descendants from captives settled in particular villages as clients. By demanding that every household supply both cash or grain *and* labor service, colonial rule appeared to many commoner hillmen to assimilate ‘commoner’ to the status of ‘slave-to-the-British’. Having

collapsed and erased the distinction between subjection, labor-provision, and the particular clanlessness marking slave lives, British military officers often encountered widespread resistance to such ‘corvee’ demands from many populations in the hills at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

This political economy tied Christian missionaries and village headmen/chiefs alike to colonial military Superintendent, the new king of the hills. The model for all officials was John Shakespear, the Intelligence Officer (or spy) during the Chin-Lushai expedition in 1889-90, after which he became Superintendent of these regions (1898- 1905). It was he who supervised the translations of the Bible into Duhlien.¹⁸ His encounter with the various ‘chiefs’ and their households and villages was significant for revealing accounts of servants in individual headmen’s households. Shakespear’s tour diaries referred to these servants as having been in the master’s house

ever since they were children and had been fed at his expense till they were able to contribute towards the labor of the household, and Saipuia [the chief] had given the man his wife. This form of parental slavery is a Lushai custom that I see no reason to interfere with. *They are not captives*, but merely people who from one cause or another have sought the shelter of the Chief’s house; and in return for their keep work in the Chief’s jhooms &c.¹⁹

Yet his later entries proved that there was no divide between ‘captive’ and ‘slave’: runaway servants turned out to be prisoners taken during much older wars.²⁰ Erstwhile masters demanded compensation from those with whom the fugitives sheltered. This was consonant with older Burmese legal codes which legitimated both retaliation (on the basis of vicarious and joint responsibility for damages) and restitution.²¹ Instead of following any particular or uniform code

of law, Shakespear dealt with each household and each group of captives differently. While he insisted on repatriating the Mrung (from Arakan) held hostage in one household, he left very old captives of thirty-year-old wars in the villages in which he found them; at the same time, he insisted that infant, young and young female captives were relinquished to the British officers by their masters.²² Given this prehistory, Shakespear's officially sponsored ethnography of the region published in 1912 considerably condensed the past in declaring that 'considerable numbers of Paihte or Vuite and Khawtlang... captives or descendants of captives made in war... all have availed themselves of the Pax Britannica to return to their own people.'²³

Semiotics of 'Feeding'

Colonial officers like Shakespear were generally well-informed about the gendered and age-based differences among such captive/hostage individuals and corporate groups that made up the *boi* in chiefly households and villages. Perhaps it was the awareness that such individuals and groups needed access to cash incomes in order to 'ransom' themselves that predisposed individual British superintendents – from Lewin in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, to Shakespear in the Lushai Hills and James Johnstone in Manipur – to characterize their own domestic employment of such figures as instances of Christian charity.²⁴ Perhaps too this awareness made them all ardent votaries of a Biblical theology that elevated acts of feeding and sheltering of the poor as charity, and to extend the mantle of saviorhood to the 'chiefs' as well as to most Christian missionaries. Structurally, the conjunction of saviors resulted in a peculiar circulation of bodies and cash between local chiefs, Christian missions and colonial 'public works'. Most young men who first enrolled in the Welsh Calvinist mission schools were indentured to the imperial forces as servants for cleaning the sepoys' utensils, as messengers, road-makers, blacksmiths and

carpenters; the wages earned from government service, in turn, were given to the missionaries as ‘payment for rations’.²⁵

Official assimilation of ‘feeding’ with paternal authority was most sharply articulated with reference to solitary women and children thus

Widows, orphans, and others who are unable to support themselves and have no relatives willing to do so, form the bulk of this class of *boi*... are looked on as part of the chief’s household, and *do all the chief’s work in return for their food and shelter*. The young men cut and cultivate the chief’s jhum and attend his fish traps. The women and girls fetch up wood and water, clean the daily supply of rice, make cloths, and weed the jhum, and look after the chief’s children.... he can only purchase freedom by paying one mithan or its equivalent in cash or goods.²⁶

Where official pronouncements argued for equivalent exchanges, local meanings and practices often implied that *excess* established the dominance of the feeder, and the subordination of the recipient. Codes of generous hospitality set ‘chief’ apart from commoner, the honorable from the dishonored. The most honorable of men was the *thangchhuah* or one who had hunted down the predators of the forest (tiger, elephant, boar, man) and fed the spirits of all human and animal ancestors with livestock of his own hoarding, and given numerous feasts to the living which could not be reciprocated immediately or entirely by the participants. Notions of equivalence inverted local equations between food, shelter, and the creation of binding obligations.²⁷

Relations of indebtedness and reparation were *initiated* when food and drink was offered to corporeal guests and invisible spirits alike.²⁸

Regardless of these inversions of local meanings, an official semiotics of food was

consolidated as policy just as the famine of 1908-9 began to bare its fangs. Instead of accepting administrative responsibility for famine relief in the hills, H.G.W. Cole a former policeman now appointed as Superintendent, declared that ‘payment for rations’ also applied to the category of compensations demanded by chiefs from fugitive boi.

What they call *bawi* (slavery) in the Lushai Hills is not ‘bound’ slavery. By paying ransom money they can be free according to their pleasure; they can go wherever they like; for that reason it does not appear that they are real slaves. So because they can do as they desire, it is only “Membership of the Household”. Henceforth without calling it “Slave Price” (*Bawi man*) it is called “Payment for board of household members” (*Chhungte Chawm man*). So whoever wants to ransom himself if he gives to the chief payment for board of household members (chungte chawm man) – forty rupees or a gayal [cow], one family will be allowed to ransom themselves.²⁹

Within five years, these semantic strategies assumed a solidity of their own. Imperial fiat ensured that the ‘use of the word ‘bawi’ should as far as possible be discontinued’.³⁰

The conjuring with words should be understood as another chapter in a long history of not calling a slave a slave – a policy enshrined as colonial law in Act V of 1843. Such conjuring ‘indigenised’ the visage of imperial extraction. For some, this was the strongest incentive in what would come to be called the ‘maintenance of native customs’. For instance, Cole’s administration was associated with unprecedeted levels of taxation amidst a crippling famine. In 1908-9, just as the flowering bamboo presaging ruined rice-crops began to appear, Cole demanded Rupees 32, 371 as taxes. Every household had to raise the house-tax in cash: exemptions were only allowed to **males** who served in the Lushai Labor Corps, the Army Bearer

Corps or the Burma Rifles.³¹ Elevated levels of assessment acted as a pincer, driving the more vulnerable of local hillmen into imperial portage or, failing this, into ‘closer’ ties with local chiefs.

Old Histories and Colonial Conditions

Those who were being driven ‘closer’ to their masters were descendants of erstwhile prisoner-of-war clan-groups (Hualhang/Hualngo, Hmar/Pnar in Meitei, Vaisal, Khiangte); like in 1891, these remained a major source of *boi* in villages and chiefly houses in 1909 -12.³² Some of these descendants identified themselves as such to the doctor who became a missionary for the Welsh Presbyterians in 1908, Peter Fraser.³³ For instance, a 23-year old man began his narrative thus ‘In the time of Hualngo war, my ancestors were captured for slaves’.³⁴ Another went ‘I am Lalbura’s … When the Sailo and Hmar made war between each other my father was among the Hmar. He came to the Sailo… asked forgiveness of the Sailo to become their slave.’³⁵ Or, as an assistant to a chief described himself, ‘I am an old slave. All we, the Hualngo and Hualhang are old slaves. When we fought with the Sailo clan (i.e. when they were becoming rulers of the country) we lost, and they made us captives. A few Hualhang and Hualngo ran away to the Pawi country, some to the Sailo (villages) we all who were with the Sailo chiefs became slaves.’³⁶

Patrilineal descent from defeated warriors tied descendants to individual headmen, turning them into *inhrangboi* clients, bound to give tribute in meat, grain and contribute to labor-pools when required by the chief. Young female descendants of such men were in a category apart. Reared in the chief’s households as ‘daughters’ of the chief, the bridewealth demanded for the marriage of such girls was much greater than the goods demanded as bridewealth of

commoner daughters. Hence such ‘daughters’ were gifts that never stopped giving – raising, cleaning and carrying grain as children, and generating guns, gongs, goats and gayal (*mithan*) from the groom’s kin upon their marriage. Even if they died, incomplete bridewealth transfers for such daughters continued as debts between the groom’s lineage and the wife’s *pu/* patron and his descendants. Collections of such young ‘daughters’ therefore broadcast the leadership qualities of the chief. T.H. Lewin observed how a chief, ‘foolish enough to use force towards several young slave girls of his household’, lost control over the rest of his *boi* to his brother.³⁷

The best constraint on chiefly excesses was flight. Thus young female *boi* began to seek out the household of newly arrived Zosaps. For instance, in 1902 Rowlands reported finding in the village of Zote three adolescent (12-14 year-old) female slaves called Hnunziki, Pawngi and Chal-lian Kuki.³⁸ The first was a member of a household ‘taken over by the chief’ and the second had been delivered to the chief ‘because her father had fled to the Chief’s house for protection’.³⁹ The first two sought out the two-roomed hut that housed Rowlands and constituted the church. Ziki was then redeemed out of funds donated to the mission by the Justice of the Peace of Abergele, W. Ellis. The claims upon Pawngi, afflicted with ‘facial paralysis’⁴⁰, were allowed to drop. Another three-year-old was brought to the missionary by villagers the morning after her ailing grandmother died, for they had been told of her anxieties that ‘the little child would be taken and brought up a little slave girl’.⁴¹

Such flight gathered momentum as famine dug deeper into the land around 1908 and young girls between the approximate ages of 8 and 16 emerged as subjects of fierce struggles between the chiefs and others. In 1909, there was the approximately 10-year-old Thangtei, the daughter of a dead *inhrangboi* father and a widowed mother (Pangi), herself daughter of another

inhrangboi father and one who tried to claim her daughter from her husband's master and failed. Another was the 8-year-old Hauvei (or Hawthangpui) whose elder sister made three separate attempts to get her away from the chief's household before she succeeded.⁴² Another young woman told Fraser that born to an *inhrangboi* father, she had been given in marriage to a husband already indebted to a chief for prior bridewealth payments: 'my husband had much rice, but the chief was rather short of rice, and he often took rice from my husband, claiming it as a marriage price of his (my husband's) late wife.'⁴³ Creating such debts, erstwhile securities for the future, began to fail especially anti-colonial chiefs, who were now required to pay fines as well as taxes to colonial masters. The attempt simultaneously to recover from famines and to pay fines imposed by a colonial Superintendent led one chief to cash in his holding in a female slave by handing her over to a commoner, a tacit admission of poverty.⁴⁴ Another chief was found trying to raise money by a form of 'putting out' of a blind 15-year-old slave girl: her impregnator was to be mulcted for cash.⁴⁵

So even though colonial superintendents consistently invoked the maintenance of 'chiefly authority' for various policies, the terms of colonial pacification had rapidly eroded the observance of such authority. Young male *boi* were also affected by such changes. In 1906, a 10-year old boy fled from his chief's house to another chief, who preferred to return the fugitive rather than pay compensation for him. The child waited till January 1910 to walk 90 miles to the Mission Compound.⁴⁶ Another 18-year-old boy recounted that in 1908, even though his father fell short of food and 'entered the chief's house', he had tried to evade the same fate for himself by eating at his relatives' houses. But his father's patron threatened to fine anyone who took him in. Eventually, the boy gave up the struggle, and 'entered'.⁴⁷ But as diminished lands and

sedentarisation enhanced the effect of famine, such males in chief's houses (*vanlungboi*) found their expectations unmet

Even though we raise much rice, we cannot spend any as we like, it belongs to the chief
... when the rice is scarce the chief does not like to buy from other villages, we sometimes fast, even when we live in the chief's house, but the chief has food for himself.⁴⁸

Famines also compounded the effects of colonial 'laws' by raising the levels of repayments required for redemption. In an economy where wages were still pegged at 13 rupees per year for a coolie, the amounts of ransom asked by headmen and upheld by colonial superintendents was 40 rupees. As former masters attempted to renegotiate and maximize returns from such dependents, those who thought they had paid adequate ransoms found out otherwise. Thus, writing after the onset of famine in November 1911, the doctor Fraser recorded having to medicate a slave who had been severely beaten with a cane by his chief 'because the ransom he had paid was not considered sufficient by the chief'.⁴⁹ Mary Fraser reported at the peak of the famine that Pangi, the mother of a slave-daughter to whom she had lost all claims, was 'breaking her heart for her child. She walked into my bedroom the other day and wept, with her head on my breast a broken hearted mother who has paid the ransom years ago and cannot get her very own child'.⁵⁰

Dispossession and Spirit-Beings

As the story of Pangi and the child she could not mother reveals, debts compounded of unpaid bridewealth and food eaten at the home of masters and their ancestors were increasingly transforming the living into the socially dead. As another woman, an epileptic widowed mother

of two young daughters claimed by the chief was told, “Do the women in our Lushai Hills ever take possession of their children? You will not take possession [of your daughters]”.⁵¹ Indeed, the denial of parenthood, the symbol of dignity and personhood in many contemporary societies in the period and region, occurred precisely as a result of having accepted food or shelter from the chief or headman. Adult *boi*, along with their sons and daughters, lost all claims to belong to ritual and social networks both *within the village* and *outside* of the chief’s household. For instance, young *boi* males could not participate in the bachelors’ dormitory (*zawlbuk*) where non-*boi* bachelors learnt codes of communication, and collective and cooperative civic behavior summed up as *tlawmngaina*.⁵² Thus ‘individualised’, young *boi* grew into biological adulthood but could neither establish their social maturity through warfare in the post-pacification period, nor could they hope to ‘father’ future generations. Whether or not the chiefs paid the bridewealth for their marriages, children born of such union remained for the chiefs to claim. Such claims were often enacted when a *boi*-father died and his former master, rather than the son, received the funerary prestations (*lukhaung*). When the daughter of a *boi*-parent was married, the bridewealth payments (*manpui*) had to be made over to the chief whose food s/he ate. Giving up the *lukhaung* by the son as well as the *manpui* by adult *boi* was especially damaging since it amounted to a renunciation of their place within a clan-group and the potential for accumulating wealth of their own. Both forms of dispossession reproduced indignity for future generations. Material impoverishment reinforced their inability to repay ‘debts’ and ‘ransoms’, ritual exile from sacrifices spelt out their lapse from networks of kinship between the living and the dead.

Dispossession of kin was rendered legible as single names and in terms of address. While non-*boi* locals valued clan names (*phun*), ‘*boi*-hood’ stripped the descendants of captives and

debtors of clan names, and transformed them into the ‘anonymous ones’.⁵³ Instead of Rialte Dara, a *boi* would be known simply as Dara. Such clan-lessness would have been reiterated particularly for those living in chiefly households, when the latter conducted ceremonies which required the participants to belong in that particular clan and lineage as it negotiated with the protector-spirit of the clan (*sakhua*). Additionally, in a society in which successful personhood was best expressed through teknonymy (as ‘mother/father of x’), the terms of address for the socially ‘childless’ adult meant that he/she was addressed by the name given her/him in infancy.⁵⁴ This in turn was hazardous because being addressed by a name acquired in childhood (such as Pang) constituted a public invitation to seizure by the many *huai* (sentient beings or ‘spirits’ of place) listening to all human talk. Since the name of a being also encapsulated the soul (*thlarau*) of the being, enunciations of such being-descriptors were akin to handing the named beings over to predatory creatures.

Local ways to avoid seizures were thus also appropriately verbal; while walking in forests, they substituted ‘tho-hna-pa’ [medicine] for ‘goat’ [mi] to avoid the spirits housed in the trees.⁵⁵ Contemporary observers of other upland populations also recorded that if a man escaped a tiger attack, he ‘changes his name so that the animal may not know him again. If he is killed all his relatives change their names to escape the same disagreeable recognition’.⁵⁶ This reveals a semiotic ideology⁵⁷ where the descriptor of being (or nomenclature) constituted its reality, with no difference between sign and referent (and would remain important in explaining the mimetic responses to the Bible, for which see below). Under such semiotic conditions, it was striking that ‘named’ *boi* females were identified as ‘possessed’ by evil spirits. Ziki, the adolescent *boinu* who was eventually ransomed, had had an earlier life marked by both illness and ‘trances’ in

which she would be possessed by a *huai* ‘who had caused the death of ten persons in the village’.⁵⁸

Mediumship to predatory *huai* was considered worthy of quarantine (*hril*), exclusion and eventually, a punitive death. Its Lushai Hills form may have been more fatal to the women than has been allowed for in the scholarship so far.⁵⁹ Called *khawring* in the northern Lushai hills, ‘evil spirits’ angered by non-performance of sacrificial offerings were believed to take over the bodies of the non-sacrificers and cause in them a ‘craving’ to destroy/consume neighboring humans and livestock.⁶⁰ Such accusations were tantamount to those of murder. When leveled against the deserted wife or clan-less “orphans”, who often lacked the means to make restitutions to their accusers, or conduct ‘animal sacrifices’ necessary for the recovery of the ill, they often had to seek refuge at the chief’s house. Yet such accused persons, by becoming the *sutpuivanboi* of the chief, accepted the loss of social personhood enacted in ritual terms through the life-cycle. Thus corporeal death did not restore such a *boi* to personhood either. With no family to dig the grave, feed the ‘spirits’ that caused death with flesh or fruits of the earth, or conduct the annual ‘rakhatla’ ceremonies, the dead person’s spirit remained excluded from the blissful condition to which skilled hunters and warriors were gathered (Pialral) as well as the commoner ‘Dead Man’s Village’.⁶¹

As Aung-Thwin points out, Hindu-Buddhist notions of transmigration embedded in doctrines of karma coexisted with the veneration of sentient entities/ ‘spirits’ in many Southeast Asian societies precisely because there were always some deaths, which had not been ‘fed’ the appropriate libations by living kinsmen, and hence were believed to trouble the living.⁶² Women *boi* remained especially vulnerable not merely to charges of ‘assault sorcery’, but to charges of

remaining hungry spirits roaming the forests on earth in multiple temporalities. The vestigial traces of such undignified deaths are encased in late twentieth-century tales which entwine captivity, food-production and freedom into a single narrative. Such as the one in which a mother spirit (*phungpuinu*) whose spirit children were killed and who, herself captured by men, had to buy her freedom by conjuring up implements that produced plentiful food for her captors.⁶³ Without the ability to conjure food for themselves, and at death, remaining unfed by the living, female and male *boi* (Saibuanga, Liana and the woman Buangi) alike expressed to Fraser their fears of ‘dying a slave’.

Boi and God’s Word

Perhaps that explains why the earliest members of the Welsh Presbyterian church were *boite*. One can certainly speculate about the attractions of a Christian eschatology which assured a cashless redemption, and a ritual world where every being was baptized with two names, every death was mourned and the attainment of paradise was assured to each believer. As an elderly Mizo pastor would recall years later, he had first heard of the Gospel as a ‘serf’ in a chief’s house; after reading the four books of the New Testaments (Luke, John, Matthew in 1906, Corinthians I and II by 1907), he wanted to “believe” God’s word (*Pathian thu*).⁶⁴ In some instances, the particular words that beckoned the young boi were pointed out by contemporary missionaries as Corinthian, I, VII: 73/23: Ye were bought with a price, become not bond-servants of men’ (*mana lei in nie mihring bawi lo ni shuh u*).⁶⁵ Rather than the liberationist logic of the texts, it is the disposition to mimesis that is worth exploring here – why were these words understood as charters?

The historiographical debate on conversions in South Asia, as distinct from the anthropology of the region, has yet to configure just how the processes of translation and conversion studied by Rafael, Cannell and others resonated with the multiple vernaculars and dialects of the South Asian past.⁶⁶ My study of the Lushai Hills records suggests that it is necessary to begin with the semiotics of spirit discourse itself. It was a particular kind of ‘vernacular’ conversation with spirits (*ramhuai bia*) that was widely acknowledged as both communication and performance. There were a variety of communicants and performers – every clan’s male *bawlpus*, every village’s male *puithiam* and *sadawt* (diagnostician – diviners, such as Parima, a 35-year-old *boi* male reputed to be a ‘great healer’ whose ‘prayers with and for the sick’ were preferred in many villages to the missionary’s medicines⁶⁷). Above all these were the mediums to the good spirits (*khuavang*) noted by both Lewin and Shakespear to endow these invariably female *zawlnei* with great status.⁶⁸ *Zawlnei* were subject to trances, and according to Lewin, were believed to have ‘inherent knowledge of medicines, simples’ including the cure of female infertility. Noticeably in the descriptions of such cures, there was no separation between ‘oral’ and ‘performative’ in and *thumvor* (conversation between *zawlnei* and *khuavang*): Lianthangi *zawlnei* was communicated the cure for an epidemic which required that each house-owner display a clay metna (mithan) outside his or her house, and observe *hril*. Spirit-Words commanded performance; rituals followed a dialogic mode and ‘spoke’ back. ‘*Ti*’ represented both ‘to do’ and ‘to say’. Thus various embodied states (dancing, trembling, ‘trance’, unconscious) and words were dialogically related with each other, as were all signs of the natural and the human world. This was a vernacular shared by all village-residents, and proven displays of utterance (oratory, chanting) and embodiment were characteristics of the well regarded.

Like other first missionary efforts elsewhere, a great deal of this coherent system of communication was mis-translated in the Lushai Hills in the early twentieth century. Christian missionaries took up the term denoting evil spirits to describe their sole god – Pathian. When, as Rowlands' translation of 1903 put it, this god's invisibility was explained in terms of his spirit-being, (*Thlarau a ni avangin, Pathian kan hmu thei lo*) or the Christian concept of god-the-father was translated in terms of a demanding and judgmental ancestor spirit (*Van a kan pa, Pathian a ni*), it was entirely comprehensible to the hillmen in terms of their epistemic, social and political structures.⁶⁹ Indeed, the Christian notion of god-as-king only reconfirmed the relation between a demanding spirit and oppressed subject: dwellers of Chin Hills used the term ‘siangpahrang’, the name by which king Thebaw of Burma was known in those parts, to speak of god-the-king.⁷⁰ Thus instead of rendering kings into gods, hill dwellers of this region appear to have initially cast ‘god’ in the spirit of oppressive kings, demanding chiefs and unfed ancestor spirits.

But this began to change around 1906-7, a watershed in the Christianization of the Lushai Hills.⁷¹ Till this point spirit-possession had been entirely individual phenomena (or as Lambek would put it, a triadic form of communication between host-spirit-interpretant); there are no descriptions of a mass spectacle of possession. But news of a Welsh ‘revival’ (1904-5) came with a Welsh missionary to the church at Cherrapunji (Khasi Hills) where it aroused local congregants. ‘Revival’ became the first instance of mass possession; amid the audiences in 1906 were ‘orphans’ (Khuma and Thanga) and three ex-*boi*: Pawngi, Vanchhunga and Parima.⁷² What they saw was ‘scores, if not hundreds, praying, singing, shouting, and weeping at the same time. Many were in a trance, and received messages to the congregation direct from God’. ⁷³ In this environment, the Lushai visitors were also touched: ‘heavenly fire descended upon them with

remarkable power, causing each one of them to weep aloud. One of them rose to pray...*his* body meanwhile trembling violently under the influence of the spirit. One or two men had to support *him* to prevent *him* falling to the ground.⁷⁴ Unremarked on by all, ‘revival’ had allowed socially emasculated men to enter the largely female domain of spirit-work, and become thereby hosts of ‘good spirits’ themselves. From 1907 onwards, the spirit that possessed was that of Jesus, the sacrificed son, the ritual lamb.

Though no later commentators addressed this issue, all the missionary records suggest that when these boi returned to the Lushai Hills and their communications with the living led to many baptisms, quarantine (*hrilh*) measures usual for dealing with death-inducing disease were put into place by many chiefs. It is obvious from the responses of many locals that the Christian’s ‘Jesus Spirit’ was another epidemic, manifesting itself in strange new signs – such as the newly expanded mission schools, and writing. Something of the ominous import of such signs was suggested by the responses that Lushai visitors to the mission school had to seeing boys ‘doing a problem in geometry, or a sum in Arithmetic on the blackboard... wonder what the meaning of all the marks and signs can possibly be’.⁷⁵ Since mission schools appeared to be the sites of ritual initiation for diviners of the new signs of disease and death, it was also the place which boi sought out. 1909-10 was the year in which the largest numbers of young male and female *boi* sought the knowledge-power composite available at the mission compound. As Fraser counted them at one point, 49 boi fled from the chief’s houses to enroll as “schoolboys”; his resources allowed him only to commence building a small schoolhouse to house only 12 of these boys “who are, or have been, slaves”.⁷⁶

Such enrolment was often translated in English as ‘giving of the name’, and implied

something like a sacrificial dedication/oblation of the soul/embodied self to the Holy Spirit.

Coming to the mission school thus began to resemble a widely dispersed practice of young boys entering Buddhist monasteries for a short period in their lives, during which they practiced living and learning as novice monks. The historical model of monks available to local courtly societies during the 18th and early 19th centuries combined both physical valor and intellectual potency.

These were the military ascetic Shaivite *jogis-acharyas*,⁷⁷ and Buddhist *bhikkhu* patronized by Burmese courts.⁷⁸ One may recall too that when missionaries arrived in these hills, they too represented a version of masculinity that combined the physical vigor of their working-class backgrounds with a textualised knowledge regime perhaps akin to that of ‘deviant’ or forest monks well known to local societies. Accounts of the reception of missionaries suggest a combination of such cognitive forces at work. The younger brother of J.H. Lorrain became a missionary to the Lushai hills after a youth spent in indentured service to a greengrocer, and a series of hard-scrabble jobs including those of a cowboy and navvy in turn of the century America.⁷⁹ A century later, locals recounted to me with absolute conviction that this man had ‘fought with Satan’ and overpowered him in his own study.

I speculate that male boi, emasculated and denied the path to self-redemption as skilled warriors in post-pacified circumstances, were willing to pledge an allegiance to individual missionaries and therefore to pay attention to the leader these missionaries spoke of as ‘Jesus’. This leader was one who had beaten death (thus defeated ‘evil spirits’) and appeared especially manly.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the muscular Christianity characteristic of the 19th century evangelists, with its program of physical exercises to reinforce moral restraint and self-strengthening was directly implemented in the Lushai Hills missionary educational program. Along with basic

English and Arithmetic, young boys and the few girls who could commit themselves, were then trained in Scripture and memorized hymns, secured and carried wood, dug the lands around the schools, built the first churches.⁸¹ For a population accustomed to following skilled warriors, the presentation – in language- of a daring leader called forth the appropriate response of followership, especially those in impoverished chief's houses and villages. Not for nothing was the first cohort of such converts keen to name themselves 'Kraws Sipahi' [Soldiers of the Cross], and the words of the gospel as direct communications from Jesus.

Yet the bois' predisposition to the gospel as embodiment of literal truth entirely confounded their employers and supervisors, especially when it came to the command of the Sabbath. For instance, U Mon, who had been carried away and sold as a child, but who redeemed himself and worked as a coolie (porter) had apparently shamed the Chaplain at Gauhati by refusing to work for the latter on a Sunday.⁸² It was no surprise that some of these missionaries in turn tried to plead on behalf of their converts. The local British Superintendent recalled an incident in 1899 when he dismissed a group of missionaries who had appealed to him on behalf of Christian coolie-porters to lay off "Sunday Labour", exulting that he had "defeated them by saying that ... the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath".⁸³ Yet another officer refused to give any credence to the Christian bois' attempts to stop work on Sundays. He justified this denial of rest on the grounds that this constituted a 'special consideration' to one religion. Missionaries who converted slaves to Christianity, he argued, should be fully apprised of the impossibility of preferential treatment to any one religion as a special 'favor'.⁸⁴ In the 1930s, when another round of revivals led to another village 'giving up working', the Superintendent arrested the ringleaders.⁸⁵

Memory and History

As the evidence suggests, officialdom was not amenable to easing the conditions under which it deployed *boi* in colonial road-building and portage projects in the hills(till the Second World War). So when Peter Fraser appealed for a declaration of abolition of the system, he failed.⁸⁶ The executive committee of the Welsh Calvinist Mission, under pressure from the Superintendent to muzzle this non-conformist doctor, asked Fraser to leave the Lushai Hills and work in the Khasi Hills instead.⁸⁷ An ill and tormented Fraser refused, and left for Wales to face an enquiry.⁸⁸ He never returned to the hills, and died in 1919.⁸⁹

Curiously, while the archives are dotted with the records of his failure (amounting to about 500 pages of typescript across three administrative entities), there is a strong contrary tradition in the hills. When I visited in 2004-5, many locals sang snatches of a song said to have been composed by (Upa) Thanga in 1913 as commemorating the abolition of slavery due to Fraser's work.⁹⁰ If there was such an abolition, or a declaration thereof, I have not been able to find it. All that I have found suggests a murkier picture. The first (and last, and pitifully flawed) census of *boi* living in chief's households found that a disproportionate number were women and children. Among the limited number of villages that were surveyed, census-takers found 119 indwelling *boi*, of whom 96 were women and children while only 23 were males between the ages of 16 and 60. Extrapolating from the overall census figures for the hills (of a total population of 91,204) administrators then estimated that the total number of the indwelling *boi* in the district approximated to 550, of whom 101 would have been males, and 440 women and children.⁹¹

Since all my current informants believe that 'slavery' was abolished long ago, they

cannot consciously remember the predominance of the *boi-nu*, who continued to live in the older villages as the socially dead for a considerable stretch of the twentieth century. Yet, despite the fact that Fraser worked in the hills for a very short time compared to many other missionaries, both men and women celebrate Fraser's memory as 'the great liberator'. How can we understand the gendered and raced nature of memory and history in these hills? Why are *boi-nu* left unnamed while Fraser's spirit recalled? I think there are two distinct and coterminous forces at work here, and both have a great deal to do with changed semiotic landscapes.

For one, colonial and missionary semiotics together made *boi-nu* status unspeakable. Together they shifted the meanings of *boi-hood* so substantially that it became impossible to locate the memory of *boi-nu* in the reshaped language in the region. For instance, colonial officers referred to male *boi* returning from the First World War as '*orphans*' or prior to going to France had been living in the houses of *people who were no relations of theirs* and on their return went back to their former homes.⁹² Well into the 1920s, colonial officials insisted that terms *bawi* and *bawiman* could not be used to describe local social relations in the hills.⁹³ *Boi-nu*, once lost during translation early in the century, were repeatedly displaced from 'naming' even in camouflage, perhaps because they had neither worked directly for, nor against, colonial armies. They thus remained invisible in most post-Fraser missionaries' translations too, such as that of the Epistle of the Romans Chapter 5 to 8, containing references to Christian 'bondservants to righteousness'. One of these wrote to his parents that the word for bondservant was 'bhoi' [sic], and imagined a model of Christian discipleship in which local students could identify themselves as "God's bhois".⁹⁴ While such a translation would have been perfectly consonant with the *bhakti* and Sufi sense of the 'slave of the lord', as well as with the Burmese Buddhist sense of the

‘servant of religion’, these were comprehensively rejected by the largely male students. Several claimed instead the status of being “God’s Sons” (i.e. Jesus!). If these schoolboys would have nothing to do with boi-hood to god, was it because it had remained a female phenomenon?

Certainly, the predominance of female captives in Zo ‘folklore’, the single-named female figures ‘Nui’ and ‘Saii’ mentioned among the first females in mission schools teaching other girls to become Christian (along with Pawngi), the association of an elderly Nui with the ‘revival’ of 1937,⁹⁵ the puzzled missionary reports of a majority of elderly ‘destitute’ women in the first ranks of the church suggests that this was the case.⁹⁶ By that reckoning, Christianization was not merely led by the *boi*, but by the *boi-nu*, whose interpretations of bridewealth marriage, monogamy and love have remained entirely uninvestigated in colonial ethnographies and reiterated by postcolonial and logocentric histories of ‘the Mizo’.⁹⁷ Thus neither mentions the names of dispossessed mothers like Pangi, spirit-possessed daughters left behind in chief’s households, the ‘debts’ of marriage-prestations connected to these figures, nor the missionary wives working in the upland societies are invisible. In a language where ‘*hre*’ referred to both faculties of hearing, knowing and understanding, not hearing about the *boi-nu* simply abstracted them from attempts at understanding the past, and left unexplored their centrality to transformations in family and faith. Written histories in ‘Lushai’, even when organized around formal Rankean conventions, displace these female pasts to those other forms of communication that manifest themselves as ‘revivals’ in these hillsides.

However, Fraser’s fate was different precisely because colonial semantics attempted to transform him into an ‘evil spirit’. For all their concerted efforts at erasing the language of slavery, colonial administrators hated all signs of ‘independence’ in the societies they governed.

From Cole in 1909 to Anthony G. McCall in the late 1930s, all alike excoriated the politics of self-government, federalism or democratic representation that was gradually articulated by the plains nationalists during the same period, and finally promised under the Government of India Act of 1935. Like Cole had upheld ‘chiefs’ in 1909, McCall too was associated with efforts to transform impoverished chiefs into ‘princes’ complete with manly entourages, and attempts to restore ‘custom’. Thus prompted, chiefs were found yearning for a time when they could ‘keep *bawis* permanently for service in their jhums etc as in the old days when such bawis could not redeem themselves or be redeemed by others’.⁹⁸ Missionaries who had re-educated the desires of erstwhile subjects were inevitably condemned; McCall thus vilified a ‘Doctor A’ for having misunderstood the *bawi* system.⁹⁹ The Superintendent had learnt nothing about the historical practices of naming and anonymity, whereas most locals deciphered this as a reference to Fraser, who they still remembered.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, it might even be suggested that in calumniating Fraser’s spirit, the superintendent had resurrected it. For McCall’s reputation – the ‘good name’ that every *thlawmngaihna* cherished - was ‘eaten up’ when he was associated with using coercive means to procure portage from these populations under the Defence of India rules during the Second World War.¹⁰¹ Thereafter, Fraser’s memory appears to have been embellished with each fresh assault of postcolonial Indian armies on these hills. When the state of Mizoram was finally established in 1987, it was as givers of written laws and freedom that the missionaries Lorrain, Savidge and Fraser were celebrated as ‘founders’ of a Mizo nation.

Unlike Lorrain and Savidge however, Fraser’s status as a national ancestor was concretized when his name was given to the institution to which every young woman living in and around Aizawl comes at some point. This is the main obstetric and paediatric clinic in

Aizawl, the ‘Fraser Clinic’. Harried local nurses within, distracted by clamorous mothers and wailing infants, nevertheless instruct curious visitors in the achievements of Peter Fraser. It is not mere happenstance that Fraser’s name should be given to the site where genealogical connections are produced and confirmed through the embodied labors of many young and middle-aged women. This is how a distinct historical consciousness asserts itself in these hills – where the past and present do not necessarily displace each other but where the spirit of a dead doctor and those of the living mothers-and-infants continue to cohabit.

Was this cohabitation of memory and historical consciousness itself produced by colonialism? It is certainly worth exploring this possibility given the distinctly different semiotic conditions laid out by colonial translations, colonial ethnographies and newly devised languages (English, as much as Duhlien) and scripts. While writing created one kind of temporality, it left open others. The multiple temporalities and heteroglossia that marked spirit discourse of the 19th-early 20th centuries remains relevant to any analysis of the historical consciousness of inhabitants of these populations in the early 21st century for yet another reason. The dreams dreamt by past superintendents for ‘the chiefs’ continue to energise commoners today. Thus I was led to an 85-year-old man (Khiangte Dohruma) who had served as an ambulance worker during the Second World War and amassed entire ranges of hillsides as orchards and plantations of his own – the typical track for chiefship under colonial conditions. Responsible for the supervision of all the orchards and plantations was a man who was claimed by the elder Mizo as his ‘boi’. The latter lived among the orchards with a wife (a former domestic servant in the master’s household) and two young children and told me, through an interpreter, that he had run away from his village in Burma, crossed the border by road, labored in the quarries owned by his current employer, from

where he had been ‘taken into the house’ as a servant, and then ‘resettled’ with a household of his own. Perhaps, the new chiefs will yet fulfil their dreams of boi-entourages as the civil war in Burma continues to push scores of very poor men and women to seek livelihoods in the old Lushai Hills, the new state of Mizoram in India. Resettled populations thus continue to be incorporated into the Zo, and war – this time in a contiguous terrain - continues to reward social historians of South Asia.

In conclusion, war, captivity, settlement and semiotics have left an inextricably entwined imprint on societies that postcolonial historians have inherited as ‘borderlands’ of nation-states in South Asia. As my study of the Lushai Hills ethnographies suggest, the latter deserve greater historicizing than they have been given for this reason. The greatest gains of such historicizing lie in complicating the histories of gender, place, linguistic and sectarian identities – the core of ‘ethnic’ politics in the present. This study suggests that ‘ethnic’ identities contained within them captive gender and clan-identities summed up in the naming practices of the pre-Christian populations. Christianity itself was to reinscribe spirit-discourse at work in these populations; thus reports of Christian missionaries deserve the same historical scrutiny as other forms of spirit- discourse has been given by anthropologists of more contemporary formations. These methods, I believe, will in turn refresh the ways in which historical consciousness itself is rendered available to us as an object of analysis for the terrain as a whole.

Notes

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Abbreviations: CMA= Church Missionary Archives, Commr.=Commissioner, NAI= National Archives of India, Delhi; NLW=National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth ; Offg.= Officiating OIOC= Oriental and India Office Collections, British Library, London.

¹ Jos J.L.Gommans and Dirk H.A.Kolff eds. *Warfare and Weaponry in South Asia 1000-1800*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, Introduction; David Kilingray and David Omissi eds. *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c 1700-1964*, Manchester University Press, 1999; for recent additions to history of warfare in Southeast Asia, see *JESHO*, 46, 2, 2003; for South Asia, see *JESHO*, 47, 3, 2004, Special Issue edited by Jos Gommans to honor Dirk Kolff; Vijay Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, Cambridge University Press, 2006;

² For the Burmese conscription of labor from Arakan in 1790s, see Hall, op cit., xxviii., and G.E.Harvey, *History of Burma from the Earliest Times to 10 March 1824*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1925, 280-283. For reports of Burmese captives taken by Manipuri armies from Upper Burma, see Harvey, 208. For the Burmese occupation of Manipur and Assam, and conscription of labors by all the armies, see H.K.Barpujari, *Problem of the Hill Tribes of North East Frontier, 1822-42*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Gauhati, 1970, vol. 1, 26-7; S.L.Baruah, *Last Days of Ahom Monarchy: A History of Assam from 1769 to 1826*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 219-228

³ Upendrachandra Guha, *Kachharer Itibritta*, Dacca, n.d., Padmanatha Bhattacharya ed. *Herambajer Rinaadan Vidhi*, Silchar, n.d., Achyuta Charan Chaudhuri, *Srihatter Itibritta*, Kolkata and Silchar, 1317-1324/ 1920-27, 2 vols., Kailashchandra Singha, *Rajamala ba Tripurar Itihasa*, Kolkata, 1896, Kaliprasanna Sen, *Rajamala*, Agartala, Royal Press, 1920-27, 3 vols., and *Tripura Buranji or A Chronicle of Tipperah written in 1724 by Ratna Kandali Sarma and Arjun Das Bairagi*, ed. S.K.Bhuyan, Government of Assam, Gauhati, 1938; for Manipur, see 'Diary of

Manipur: Typewritten at the State Office by Nithor Nath Banerjee, 1904', MSS. Eur. D 485, British Library , OIOC. According to a letter of T.C. Hodson, 28-10-1946, this was the titled *Meithei Ningthanrol*. Yet another chronicle, identified as the *Cheitharol Kumbaba* or the Manipur Chronicle (From 33 A.D. to 1897 A.D.), is L. Joychandra Singh compiled and edited, *The Lost Kingdom (Royal Chronicle of Manipur)*, 1995, said to have been originally compiled in 1897 by the secretary of the last Maharaja of Manipur, Bama Charan Mukherjee, who led 14 local pandits in collecting all recensions and in translation. A shorter version of chronicles kept by the royal scribes is *The Court Chronicle of the Kings of Manipur: The Cheitharon Kumpapa*, trans Saroj Nalini Arambam Parratt, Routledge, London and New York, 2005. For a larger discussion of these histories, see S.N. Pandey ed. *Sources of the History of Manipur and the Adjoining Areas*, National Publishing House and Manipur University, Delhi and Imphal, 1985, 79-121. For Assam, the many different Burunjis authored by Harakanta Sarma, Anandiram Gagoi, Hemchandra Goswami, Srinath Duara Barbarua, Padmeshwar Phukan and edited and annotated by S.K.Bhuyan and others, also Yasmin Saikia, *Fragmented Memories: Struggling to be Tai-Ahom in India*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2004

⁴ See Ni Ni Myint, *Burma's Struggle Against Imperialism 1885-1895*, Universities Press, Rangoon 1983, esp. 123-137 for Kachin Hills, 138-154 for Chin Hills till 1894; also Michael Adas, *The Burma Delta: Economic Development and Social Change on an Asian Rice Frontier, 1852-1941*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1982; Michael Aung-Thwin, 1985; for the ethics informing resistance, see Mikael Gravers, *Nationalism as Political Paranoia in Burma: An Essay on the Historical Practice of Power*, Curzon, Richmond, 1999, 10-30; Parimal Ghosh, *Brave Men of the Hills: Resistance and Rebellion in Burma, 1825-1932*, Hurst and Co, London, 2000, 83-101; Mary Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2003, 26-27; Than Myint-U, *The Making of Modern Burma*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, 198-254.

⁵ This corresponds with the patterns noted for other parts of South Asia; see Saurabh Dube, *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles*, Duke University Press, 2004, 56-57; Richard M. Eaton, 'Comparative History as World History: Religious Conversion in Modern India' in idem, *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, Oxford University Press, 2000, 53-4; and Robert E. Frykenberg ed. *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*, Michigan, W.B.Eerdmans, 2003.

⁶ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India 1707-1858*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, 352-54.

⁷ Chautra, 'The Two White Fools', cited in Mangkhosat Kipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 194.

⁸ These were Suaka of Durtlang village, Khamliana of Lungleng village, Thangphunga of Chaltlang village, cf. Lalzuala Khiangte 'The Work of the Holy Spirit Among the Mizo Church', MA Thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, Dallas, 1985, 29.

⁹ See Eugenie J.A. Henderson, 'Notes on the Syllable Structure of Lushai', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 12, nos. 3-4, 1948, 713-725.

¹⁰ T.H. Lewin, *Progressive Colloquial Exercises in the Llushai Dialect of the Dzo or Kuki Lanugage With Vocabularies and Popular Tales*, Calcutta, Calcutta Central Press Company, 1874, 14 and passim.

¹¹ Brojo Nath Saha, *Grammar of the Lushai Language To Which are Appended a Few Illustrations of the Zau or Lushai: Popular Songs and Translations from Aesop's Fables* Calcutta, Bengal Sectt. Pres, 1884, 6. Saha's linguistic skills and medical knowledge impressed another visitor for which see Emil Riebeck, *The Chittagong Hill_Tribes: Results of a Journey Made in the Year 1882*, trans. A. Keane, Asher and Company, London, 1885, 3.

¹² Vrajagopal Simha, *Manipuri O Kukibhasha Shikkhar Sahaja Upai*, Published by Self, Koilashahar, Independent Tripura, 1326 Tripurabda/C.E. 1916, 3, footnote 128, 28. The Bengali word *dasa* (for male) and *dasi* (female) are translated as *naai* (male) and *naainupi* (female) in Manipuri and *chhelpa* (male) and *chhelnu* (female).

¹³ J. Herbert Lorrain and Fred W. Savidge, *A Grammar and Dictionary of the Lushai Language (Dulien Dialect)*, first ed. 1898, this reprint, Firma KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1976, 3, 63. The word already reveals the extra aspirate sound that missionaries were warned against adding by their Lushai teachers, for which see E.Lewis Mendus, *The Diary of a Jungle Missionary*, Liverpool, Foreign Mission Office, (1956) 22. Entry for 1922. Curiously, the word is entirely absent from the contemporary Edwin Rowlands, *Mizo Leh Sap Tawng Hma-Bu Or A Lushai-English Primer*, Shillong, Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1903.

¹⁴ This is suggested by a passage protesting the need for a single sound for short and long vowels in the introduction of J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, Calcutta, Asiatic Society, 1940, vii-viii .

¹⁵ Assam Regulation of 1 October 1897, quoted in Lalrimawia, *Mizoram: History and Cultural Identity, 1890-1947*, Spectrum Publication, Guwahati, 1995, 91-92.

¹⁶ A. W. Davis, *Gazetteer of the North Lushai Hills Compiled Under Orders of Chief Commissioner of Assam*, Shillong, Assam Sectt. Printing Office, 1894, 8-12.

¹⁷ Stuart Blackburn, 'Colonial contact in the "hidden" land: Oral history among the Apatanis of Arunachal Pradesh', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 40, no. 3, 2003, 335-366.

¹⁸ For generally unfavorable accounts of missionary translation efforts, see John Shakespeare to A.G. McCall, 25 June 1934, MSS Eur E 361/5, British Library OIOC, folio 5 B; also Shakespeare to Lewin , 15 November 1912, Ms 811/II/57, T.H.Lewin Papers, Senate House Library, University of London.

¹⁹ Official Tour Diary of John Shakespeare, Diary for Week ending 20 June 1891, in Memo of Offg. Commr. Chittagong, 29 June 1891, MSS Eur/ Photo Eur/ 89/1, OIOC, f. 89.

²⁰ Diary from 22 Aug to 31 Aug 1891, in Memo of Offg Commr. 9 Sept 1891, ibid, f. 106.

²¹ One master's son demanded eighteen rupees and a pig as the price for a male adult runaway in 1891, see D.O from R. S. Hutchinson, Asst District Superintendent, to Superintendent of South Lushai Hills, 15 Nov 1891, OIOC, MSS Eur/ Photo Eur/ 89/ 1, f. 127. Official discussions two decades later suggest that ransom had been stabilized at forty rupees for both single individuals as well as for an entire family.

²² Diary for Week Ending 4 July 1891, in memo of Offg. Commr 19 July 1891, and Diary of Week ending 22 Aug 1891 in Memo of Offg. Commr 31 Aug 1891, OIOC, MSS Eur/ Photo Eur/ 89/ 1, ff. 92, 104.

²³ Lt. Col. John Shakespeare, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, Published under the Orders of the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam, London, Macmillan and Co., 1912, 41. In a letter to T. H. Lewin after its publication, Shakespeare indicated that fear of official editors had led him to

self-censorship, cf letter dated 15 Nov. 1912, Ms 811/II/ 57, T.H.Lewin Papers, Senate House Library, University of London.

²⁴ James Johnstone, *Manipur and the Naga Hills*, (Reprint, New Delhi, Gyan Publishing, 2002), 112-13

²⁵ David E. Jones and Edwin Rowlands, Report of the Lushai Hills for 1902-4, in Thanzaauva ed *Reports*, pp. 18-20.

²⁶ Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans* , 46-7.

²⁷ This is suggested by sentences on ‘feeding’ translated in Rowlands’ *Primer* in the chapter on verbs, 41-51; also see Hayami Yoko, *Between Hills and Plains: Power and Practice in Socio-Religious Dynamics Among Karen*, Kyoto University Press and TransPacific Press, Japan and Australia, 2004, 103

²⁸ F. K. Lehman, “Can God be Coerced? Structural Correlates of Merit and Blessing in Some Southeast Asian Religions” in Cornelia Ann Kammerer and Nicola Tannenbaum eds. *Merit and Blessing in Mainland Southeast Asian Comparative Perspective*, Yale Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph No. 45, 1996, 20-51; also Penny Van Esterik, ‘Nurturance and Reciprocity in Thai Studies’ in E. Paul Durrenberger ed. *State Power and Culture in Thailand*, Yale Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph no. 44, 22-46.

²⁹ Copy of Government Order, November 1909, in Chanchinhu Newspaper, November 1909, f. 213 in Collections of the Anti-Slavery Society, Rhodes House, Oxford.

³⁰ Chief Secy. to Chief Commr. of Assam to Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign and Political Department, 2 February 1914, Assam Administration, Political Dept, Political Branch, P/ 1097/1914.

³¹ Lalrimawia, *Mizoram*, 93.

³² David E. Jones’ Response to Cole, undated, in NLW, CMA 5, no. 27,318, ff.14-17

³³ Peter Fraser to Rev. Williams, Nov. 13, 1908, NLW, CMA 5, no. 27, 315, f. 247.

³⁴ Statement of Kapchhunga, slave of Hrangvunga, 14 Dec. 1909, in Peter Fraser, *Slavery on British Territory: Assam and Burma*, Carnarvon, Printed by W. Gwenlyn Evans and Son, 1913, 46.

³⁵ Statement of Saibuanga, 24 November 1910, in Fraser, *Slavery*, 52.

³⁶ Statement of Vanchhunga, n.d., in Fraser, *Slavery*, 32.

³⁷ Lewin, *Progressive Colloquial Exercises*, 80.

³⁸ Edwin Rowlands in Report of the Foreign Missions of the Welsh Calvinist Methodists for the Year ending December 1901, Presented by the Executive Committee to the General Assembly held at Liverpool, 1902, NLW, CMA, GZ/84-8, 56.

³⁹ Edwin Rowlands, Report for 1902 in K. Thanzaauva ed *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram 1894-1957*, 17.

⁴⁰ Edwin Rowlands to Reverend Williams, Dec. 10, 1907, NLW, CMA 5, file no. 27, 314.

⁴¹ Edwin Rowlands to Reverend Williams, Dec. 10, 1907, NLW, CMA 5, file no. 27, 314.

⁴² Letter of Mary C. Fraser to J.W. Williams, July 9, 1910, NLW, CMA 27, 314

⁴³ Statement of Biakthuami, 13 December 1911, in Fraser, *Slavery*, 53.

⁴⁴ Case of Dimi, slave of Letzekaia, 27 August 1912, in Fraser, *Slavery*, 38.

⁴⁵ Statement by Hauchhunga and W.R.Roberts, 20 October 1910, in Fraser, *Slavery*, 33.

⁴⁶ Peter Fraser to Mr. Lorrain, 13 April 1910, in Fraser, *Slavery*, 22.

⁴⁷ Statement dated 11 December 1909, in Fraser, *Slavery*, 55-56.

⁴⁸ Statement dated 8 October, 1910, in Fraser, *Slavery*, 55.

⁴⁹ Peter Fraser to Dr. Williams, 3 Nov. 1911, NLW, CMA 5, no. 27, 318, f. 326.

⁵⁰ Mary C. Fraser to Mr. Williams, June 21, 1912, NLW, CMA 5, no. 27, 318, f.192. This part of the letter is crossed out in the original, as though the letter-writer did not intend to convey this ‘sad news’ to her director of missions.

⁵¹ Statement of Chhaungtei, 2 September 1910, in Fraser, *Slavery*, 49-50.

⁵² Evidence of K.Zohra, ‘The Role of the Lakher Pioneer Mission in Maraland: A Case Study in Historical Perspective’, Unpublished Manuscript, Government Saiha College, 2004, 6. I am grateful to the author for sharing his manuscript with me.

⁵³ Cited in Sakhong, *Religion and Politics*, 112

⁵⁴ Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 19

⁵⁵ Reginald A. Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungles for God and Empire*, first 1912, reprint Spectrum, Guwahati, 1988, 121.

⁵⁶ Rev. William Carey, *A Garo Jungle Book or the Mission to the Garos of Assam*, The Judson Press, Philadelphia, 1919, 24.

⁵⁷ I borrow the term from Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*, University of California, Berkeley, 2007, Introduction, 59 and passim.

⁵⁸ Cited in Shakespear *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 66.

⁵⁹ The exception is Andrew Strathern and Pamela J. Stewart, ‘Feasting on my Enemy: Images of Violence and Change in the New Guinea Highlands’, *Ethnohistory* 46, 4, Fall 1999, 645-69.

⁶⁰ Note by Rev. J.M. Harris Rees, n.d. in NLW, CMA 27, 187.

⁶¹ Reginald A. Lorrain, *Five Years in Unknown Jungles*, 1912, 95.

⁶² Michael Aung-Thwin, ‘Divinity, Spirit, and Human: Conception of Classical Burmese Kingship’ in Lorraine Gesick ed. *Centers, Symbols and Hierarchies: Essays On the Classical States of Southeast Asia*, Yale University Southeast Studies Monograph 26, New Haven, Connecticut, 1983, 45-85

⁶³ Laltluangliana Khiangte, *Folktales of Mizoram*, 16-18; also see Lalrunga, ‘Hero of Mizo Folktales’ in Soumen Sen ed., *Folklore in North-East India*, Omsons Publication, New Delhi and Gauhati, 1985, 191-94.

⁶⁴ J. Merion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram (Harvest in the Hills)* Synod Publication Board, Aizawl, Mizoram, 1991, p.103. Lloyd, a missionary of the Welsh Presbyterian Church arrived in 1944, and knew most of the Mizo leaders from the early years.

⁶⁵ Cited in John Vanlal Hluna, *Church and Political Upheaval in Mizoram*, Mizo Historical Association, Aizawl, 1985, 31-32.

⁶⁶ Paucity of space precludes my acknowledging the entire body of scholarship that has shaped my interpretation: the books and articles directly used here are Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Manila University Press, 1988), Fenella Cannell ed. *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Duke University Press, 2006), Michael Lambek, ‘Sakalava Poiesis of History: Realizing the past through Spirit Possession in Madagascar’, *American Ethnologist*, 25 (2) 1998, 106-27

⁶⁷ Rowlands’ Report for 1901, NLW, CMA GZ/86.

⁶⁸ Lewin, *Progressive Colloquial Exercises*, 82; Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki Clans*, 110-11.

⁶⁹ Rowlands, *Mizo Sap*, 95.

⁷⁰ Chhangte Lal Hminga, ‘Christianity and the Lushai People: An Investigation of the Problem of Representing Basic Concepts of Christianity in the Language of the Lushai People’, M.A. Dissertation, Manchester University, 1967, 114.

⁷¹ Khipgen, *Christianity and Mizo Culture*, 216-17

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Report of the Lushai Hills, 1905-6, in Thanzaauva ed. *Reports*, 29

⁷⁴ Ibid, 34.

⁷⁵ Report of the Baptist Missionary Society for 1905 in the South Lushai Hills, 21.

⁷⁶ Fraser to Williams, October 29 1909, NLW, CMA 5, no. 27, 315.

⁷⁷ William C. Barnhart, ‘Evangelicalism, Masculinity, and the Making of Imperial Missionaries in Late Georgian Britain, 1795-1820’, *The Historian*, 712-732; also William Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics*

⁷⁸ Michael W. Charney, *Powerful Learning: Buddhist Literati and the Throne in Burma’s Last Dynasty 1752-1885*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan and Centers for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 2006

⁷⁹ Unpublished Diary of Reginald Lorrain and Enclosure of Apprenticeship Indenture dated February 8, 1897. I am grateful to Reverend Mark Hla Pe and Violet Hla Pe for allowing me to visit the Lorrain home in Serkawn, Mizoram, and read documents in their custody.

⁸⁰ Geoffrey M. Troughton, ‘Jesus and the Ideal of the Manly Man in New Zealand After World War One’, *Journal of Religious History*, 30, 1, February 2006, 45-60.

⁸¹ For descriptions of girls in mission schools continuing to work at cutting jungle, weeding gardens, husking and winnowing their own rice, cooking their own food, drawing their own water, and gathering wood for their own fuel, spinning cotton, weaving cloth and learning to sew, see Report of BMS for 1907, 42-43.

⁸² J.H.Morris, *History*, 159.

⁸³ John Shakespeare to McCall, 25 June 1934, MSS Eur. E 361/5, British Library OIOC, f. 5a.

⁸⁴ Note by R.W. von Morde, Asst Superintendent Lushai Hills 23 Dec 1909, on Case no. 4, Lalbuta Chief against Tekawla and others, NLW, CMA 5, no. 27, 318, unpaginated.

⁸⁵ Letter from Mrs. Mendus to friends, January 2, 1938, in NLW, CMA HZ1/3/39.

⁸⁶ See discussion in ‘Semantics of Slavery’ in I. Chatterjee and Richard M. Eaton eds *Slavery and South Asian History*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2007, chapter 11

⁸⁷ Letter from Rev. R. J. Williams, 3 Feb. 1911

⁸⁸ E. Williams to Rev. Williams, 29 October 1912, no 27 314.

⁸⁹ Last Will and Testament of Peter Fraser, probated on 9 April 1920, in St. Asaph’s Diocese, NLW, *Wills of 1920*, 132.

⁹⁰ This song is now published in Laltluangliana Khiangte ed. *Mizo Songs and Folk Tales*, Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 2002, 11-12.

⁹¹ B.C. Allen, Chief Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Secretary to Government of India, Foreign and Political, 23 June 1915, OIOC, L/PS/11/95, P 2973/15.

⁹² N.E.Parry, *Handbook on Lushai Customs*, Shillong, Assam Sectt., 1928, 61-2.

⁹³ Unsigned Letter from the India Office, dated 8 March 1927, in MSS. Brit. Emp. S 22, G352, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

⁹⁴ Journal of E.Lewis Mendus to his Parents, April 5, 1923, NLW, HZ1/3/38, no. 1.

⁹⁵ Letter from D.E.Jones, August 2, 1945 in Private Papers of E.L.Mendus, CMA, HZ1/3/40.

⁹⁶ This feature is noted in all missionary records and newsletters of the 1930s-50s, but remains unexplained thus far. Yet all women informants insist that their maternal ancestors were responsible for converting their clans to Christianity.

⁹⁷ Among the most prominent is Lal Dena, *Christian Missions and Colonialism: A Study of Missionary Movement in Northeast India with Particular Reference to Manipur and Lushai Hills 1894-1947*, Shillong, Vendrame Institute, 1988.

⁹⁸ Memo to A.G.McCall by B.M.Roy, Assistant Superintendent Lushai Hills on Complaints of Chiefs, 16 May 1940, in OIOC, MSS Eur E 361/27.

⁹⁹ A.G.McCall, *The Lushai Chrysalis*, Chapter V.

¹⁰⁰ Mary C. Fraser to Mr. Williams, February 17, 1925, no. 27, 314. As a widow, she spent the rest of her days teaching music in the mission school in Shillong, from where the last letter from her that can be found is dated August 1931. In the course of this period, she reported on various groups who ‘tell me they can never forget him [my husband] and his tender prayers’. When I visited the region in 2004-5, I was shown a plaque dedicated to Fraser in the central Presbyterian church at Aizawl, and regaled with numerous stories of his patience by descendants of patients he had cured.

¹⁰¹ A.G. McCall to HE the Governor of Assam, March 8 1942, OIOC, MSS Eur E 361/45, ff. 1-4.