

Ritual, Heritage and Identity

*The Politics of Culture and Performance
in a Globalised World*

Editors

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 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON NEW YORK NEW DELHI

First published 2011 in India
by Routledge
912-915 Tolstoy House, 15-17 Tolstoy Marg, Connaught Place,
New Delhi 110 001

Simultaneously published in the UK
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Typeset by
Star Compugraphics Private Limited
D-156, Second Floor
Sector 7, Noida 201 301

Printed and bound in India by
Avantika Printers Private Limited
194/2, Ramesh Market, Garhi, East of Kailash,
New Delhi 110 065

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-415-67796-7

To the SFB 619 'Ritual Dynamik'

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Glossary

<i>akhanda deep</i>	eternal lamp burned without extinction throughout the ritual period
<i>akhanda saubhagya</i>	eternal auspiciousness
<i>anh hùng</i>	hero
<i>antyeshti</i>	last rites of the dead
<i>arati</i>	circumambulation of lighted lamps in the front of the deity to remove the effect of the evil eye
<i>ashvamedha</i>	royal ritual involving the royal horse sacrifice
<i>bà đồng</i>	female spirit medium
<i>balavastha</i>	childhood stage of life
<i>bán sắc văn hóa dân tộc</i>	national cultural identify
<i>bhajan</i>	devotional song
<i>buôn thần ban thánh</i>	to trade in gods and spirits (in the sense of 'commercialising religion')
<i>căn đồng</i>	predestined aptitude for spirit mediumship
<i>chầu văn</i>	musical genre of devotional songs played during <i>lên đồng</i> rituals
<i>chèo</i>	popular opera
<i>chhaya</i>	shadow
<i>chundadi</i>	red tie and dye saree worn by Gujarati brides
<i>chủ nhân</i>	master, owner, proprietor
<i>chui</i>	to sneak in, sneaky
<i>công</i>	merit, service (rendered to the community, the nation)
<i>cung văn</i>	<i>chầu văn</i> musician
<i>đại chúng hoá</i>	'popularisation' (as one of the three principles outlined by Trường Chinh in his 1943 <i>Theses on Vietnamese Culture</i>), in the sense of acting in the interests of the people
<i>dân tộc hoá</i>	'nationalisation' (one of the three principles of Chinh: 1943) in the sense of fighting against foreign influences

<i>Đạo Mẫu</i>	Mother Goddess Religion	<i>jagarana</i>	all night vigil
<i>Đạo Tứ Phủ</i>	Four Palace Religion	<i>jawara</i>	sprouted seedlings of seven grains
<i>đạo</i>	'way', religion	<i>kalasha</i>	copper pot or vessel used in ritual worship
<i>đất nước</i>	country, nation	<i>karma</i>	action
<i>đền</i>	temple dedicated to an ancestor, deity or hero	<i>karmaphala</i>	desired result of the karma or action performed
<i>đẹp</i>	beautiful	<i>katha</i>	story
<i>dharma</i>	that which upholds; duty	<i>khoa học hoá</i>	'scientism', or 'making scientific' (one of the three principles of Chinh: 1943)
<i>dhoti</i>	a pant-like traditional wraparound worn by men in India	<i>kiệu</i>	sedan chair used in ritual processions
<i>di sản văn hoá phi vật thể</i>	intangible cultural heritage	<i>kuladevi</i>	family goddess
<i>di tích lịch sử văn hoá</i>	(state-certified) cultural and historical site	<i>lễ hội</i>	village ritual festivals (also <i>lễ hội làng</i>)
<i>điện</i>	private temple or shrine	<i>lễ khao vọng</i>	ceremonial banquet in order to validate a promotion in social rank
<i>đình</i>	village communal house	<i>lộc</i>	'blessed gifts' from the deities, i.e., offerings taken home for consumption after their ritual presentation to the deities
<i>đổi mới</i>	literally 'change for the new'; policy of renovation or renewal that was promulgated at the sixth national Congress of Vietnam's Communist Party in December 1986	<i>madhha</i>	shrine
<i>đồng bói</i>	diviner-medium	<i>manasputra</i>	achieving a son through the power of the mind
<i>đồng bóng</i>	literally 'medium-shadow'	<i>manasputri</i>	achieving a daughter through the power of the mind
<i>garba</i>	circle dance performed by women in Gujarat	<i>mandavi</i>	cane or wooden structure in which the object symbolising the goddess is placed
<i>garbha</i>	womb	<i>mê tín dị đoan</i>	superstition
<i>gokh</i>	niche created in a wall or cave	<i>moksha</i>	liberation from the cycles of birth, death and re-birth
<i>goyni</i>	auspicious female	<i>nếp sống mới</i>	'new way of life', campaign launched in the early 1950s to create a 'new socialist person'
<i>hầu bóng</i>	literally 'to serve the shadow'; spirit possession ritual	<i>nghệ thuật</i>	art, artistic
<i>hầu đồng</i>	see <i>lên đồng</i>	<i>nghệ thuật diễn xướng dân gian</i>	folk performing art
<i>hầu thánh</i>	literally 'to serve the deities'; spirit possession ritual (see <i>hầu bóng</i> , <i>lên đồng</i>)	<i>ông đồng</i>	male spirit medium
<i>hần tượng</i>	phenomenon	<i>pativrata</i>	a wife who pursues truth, practises a moral and ethical code of behaviour
<i>hội làng</i>	see <i>lễ hội</i>		
<i>hủ tục</i>	'unsound', 'retrograde' customs		
<i>jaag</i>	sprouted seedlings; ritual dancing with the jaag placed over the head of the dancer		

	and demonstrates utmost devotion towards her husband		
<i>phát lộc</i>	to distribute 'blessed gifts' among ritual participants	<i>sinh hoạt văn hoá cộng đồng</i>	communal cultural activity
<i>phép thánh</i>	'regulations of spirits and deities'; divine rules	<i>stuti</i>	poetic verses eulogising the beauty and the glory of the deity
<i>phong thuần tục mỹ</i>	pure and beautiful customs	<i>sumangali</i>	auspicious female
<i>phong trào đồng bóng</i>	'spirit possession movement'	<i>Surya</i>	the Sun
<i>phong tục</i>	custom	<i>suryavamshi</i>	descendants of the Sun dynasty
<i>phủ</i>	palace	<i>tê</i>	formal ritual invocation of a deity
<i>pitambar</i>	yellow silk <i>dhoti</i> worn by men particularly during ritual worship	<i>tejas</i>	brilliance of the light
<i>prasad</i>	blessed food	<i>thân</i>	spirit, deity
<i>preta</i>	ghostly form	<i>thân thành hoàng</i>	village guardian deity
<i>puja</i>	offerings performed for worship	<i>thầy cúng</i>	spirit priest, ritual specialist
<i>quy chế</i>	decree, regulation	<i>thời bao cấp</i>	state subsidised period (from 1945 to 1986)
<i>sắc phong</i>	imperial certificate of investiture by which a deity was assigned a rank in a three-tiered divine hierarchy	<i>tín ngưỡng</i>	(popular) belief (in contrast to <i>tôn giáo</i> , religion)
<i>sankalpa</i>	make a vow	<i>tín ngưỡng thờ thần</i>	spirit worship
<i>sân khấu tâm linh</i>	'spiritual theatre' (in the sense of a stage or an arena for the performance of spirituality)	<i>tôn giáo</i>	(institutionalised) religion
<i>sarjanatmaka shakti</i>	procreative energy	<i>trục lợi</i>	mercenary, self-interested
<i>sat</i>	power of persistent truthfulness; moral, ethical and spiritual purity	<i>tư tưởng</i>	ideology
<i>sati</i>	a female who has acquired the power of 'sat'; living goddess; one who immolates herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband	<i>tư vấn</i>	Confucian scholar
<i>saubhagyavati</i>	auspicious married woman (whose husband is alive)	<i>thuần mỹ</i>	pure and beautiful (see <i>phong thuần tục mỹ</i>)
<i>Shakti</i>	primordial energy	<i>uống nước nhớ nguồn</i>	popular adage 'When you drink water, think of the source'
<i>shaktipitha</i>	'seat' of the goddess Shakti	<i>vaja</i>	vigour; vital power and strength
<i>shradha</i>	ancestral rites performed for the transmigration of the soul	<i>văn hóa</i>	culture
<i>simanta</i>	ritual ceremony performed during the seventh month of the first pregnancy of the mother-to-be	<i>văn hóa dân gian</i>	folk culture, popular culture
		<i>vasana</i>	worldly desires and attachments
		<i>virya</i>	semen
		<i>visarjana</i>	dissolution of the ritual
		<i>vô văn hoá</i>	uncultured, uneducated
		<i>xe giá hồi cung</i>	'the deity's chariot returns to the palace'; song lines sung when the deity leaves the body of the medium and returns to the spirit realm
		<i>yajamana</i>	ritual host
		<i>yantra</i>	sacred geometric pattern carved or embossed over a gold, silver or copper plate

9

Synthesising Practice and Performance, Securing Recognition*

Thangmi Cultural Heritage in Nepal and India

Sara Shneiderman

Introduction

Colourful banners around Gangtok advertised the event: 'Tribal Folk Dances of Sikkim, presented in honour of Shri P. R. Kyndiah, Union Minister of Tribal Affairs'. It was November 2005, and each ethnic organisation registered in India's state of Sikkim as well as the adjacent Darjeeling district of West Bengal had been invited to perform a single 'folk dance' that best demonstrated their 'tribal culture'. I was conducting fieldwork in Darjeeling with the Thangmi community, a Tibeto-Burman language-speaking ethnic group of approximately 40,000 split between their homeland in Nepal's Dolakha and Sindhupalchok districts, and migrants settled in Darjeeling and Sikkim since the British era. I took the opportunity to accompany the Darjeeling-based Bharatiya Thami Welfare Association (BTWA) members on a four-hour jeep ride up to Gangtok for the occasion.¹

In the rehearsal session just before the actual performance, it became clear that the 50-odd dancers from 14 ethnic organisations were well aware of the politically charged environment in which they were performing. These groups were seeking recognition from the Indian government as Scheduled Tribes (ST), and each group sought to capture the minister's eye with a carefully framed performance which demonstrated the 'tribal' nature of their identity in a single dance number. The rehearsing groups received advice in the form of stage directions from the director of Sikkim's Department of Culture, who told them brusquely, 'Shake your hips faster and make sure to flutter your eyelashes! Remember, if you look happy the audience will be happy. And if

they are not happy, why should they watch you? You must make them feel comfortable and familiar with your culture.'

The Thangmi performance troupe — which comprised a combination of young migrant workers from Nepal, who spent several months at a time in India, and slightly older Thangmi from urban Darjeeling with professional dance experience — took the director's suggestions to heart in their performance of what the announcer introduced as a 'Thami wedding dance' (Plate 9.1).

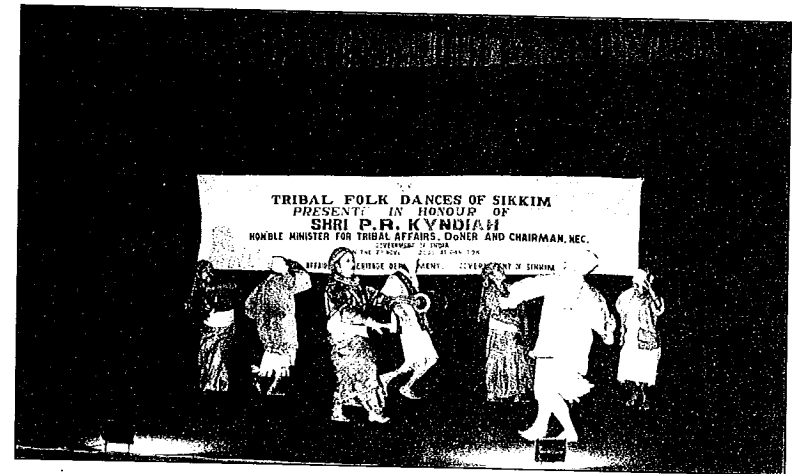


Plate 9.1: Thangmi dancers from the Bharatiya Thami Welfare Association performing on stage in Gangtok, Sikkim, November 2005.

Source: All photographs by the author.

The participation of the dancers from Nepal, who knew how to perform the slow, repetitive steps that characterise Thangmi wedding rituals — and cultural practice in general in rural Nepal — made the choreographers more confident about the efficacy of their performance (Plate 9.2). Most Thangmi in India looked to Nepal as the source of 'original culture' (as they described it in English). On the other hand, the choreographers from India were the ones who knew how to transform these plodding moves into complex Bollywood-style numbers that carried the weight of 'culture' in the generic South Asian sense. The end result as danced for the minister bore very little resemblance to anything one would see in a Thangmi village in Nepal, but the performance was greeted with resounding applause.² Afterwards, the minister



Plate 9.2: Thangmi dancers at a wedding in Sindhupalchok district, Nepal, February 2008.

sent a message to the BTWA expressing his appreciation. The Indian Thangmi members of the group were pleased with the performance, and hopeful that it would serve as a catalyst for their Scheduled Tribe application to be approved quickly.

Although they participated in the event with apparent enthusiasm, some of the members of the group from Nepal later told me that they felt uncomfortable with the way in which the choreographers had manipulated the cultural knowledge of those from Nepal by appropriating elements of ritual practice into an entirely different performative context. The dancers from Nepal found the experience unsettling for several reasons. First of all, the audience for which they were performing was not the assembly of deities propitiated through comparable elements of ritual action at home, but rather the representatives of a state in which they did not have full citizenship. This difficulty could just about be overcome, since although such bureaucratic audiences might require different specific offerings than divine ones, the overall ritualised form of the event was similar. The larger problem was that the performers from Nepal had little to gain from this transformation of practice into performance, since the minister and his colleagues answered to the Indian state alone — Nepali citizens

would not be eligible for any benefits that the Thangmi might gain if the Government of India recognised the group as a Scheduled Tribe.³ Finally, since the performers from Nepal were due to return home after the high labour season in Darjeeling, they might lose control over the future use of the elements of practice that they had contributed to the BTWA's repertoire. They feared that by the time they returned the following year, such performances might be transformed into something entirely unrecognisable.

The Thangmi from Nepal were not outright opposed to the performatisation of practice — a process akin to what Richard Handler has called the 'ritualisation of ritual' (Handler, this volume: 50), following Goffman (1971: 79). In fact, I had seen several of them applaud heartily at a similarly staged performance of a 'wedding dance' at a conference in Kathmandu, Nepal, hosted by the Nepal Thami Society (NTS) earlier the same year. Rather, they felt that the political results had to be worth the phenomenological and ethical trade-offs that such transformation entailed. In other words, the objectification of culture was acceptable — even desirable — as long as it was done in the service of a specific goal, and as long as the resulting field of performance was recognised as a complement to, rather than a replacement for, the field of practice out of which it emerged. Once the dust had settled, the experience in Gangtok prompted some of the initially uneasy performers from Nepal to consider how they might also deploy cultural performance to bolster newly emerging claims to the Nepali state about their rights to special benefits as members of a 'highly marginalised' *janajati* (indigenous nationality) group, claims which if recognised could help create the material conditions necessary to maintain the field of practice itself.⁴ These views were forged in the context of a broader set of ongoing debates within the cross-border Thangmi community about the ownership of cultural knowledge and its power to define ethnic identity. Recent and anticipated political shifts in state paradigms for evaluating and rewarding cultural 'authenticity' in both India and Nepal had compelled Thangmi on both sides of the border to think carefully about the differences in object and audience that defined practice and performance, their relative efficacy in each national context, and the need to balance both fields of cultural production in the overall process of reproducing Thangmi ethnicity.⁵

In this chapter, I argue that Thangmi individuals from diverse backgrounds in both Nepal and India possess a high level of self-consciousness regarding the differences between fields of ritualised action — such as practice and performance — in which they engage, and that they intentionally choose to deploy different types of action within different social ‘frames’ in order to achieve a range of effects (Goffman 1974; Handler, this volume: 51). I further suggest that for the Thangmi, this self-consciousness is engendered in part by the experience of moving regularly between multiple nation-states through circular migration. Familiarity with more than one national frame within which ethnicity is conceptualised and recognised enables Thangmi — both at the individual and collective level — to see the framing machinery through which ethnicity is produced and reproduced in each context, and therefore to take self-conscious, agentive roles in employing appropriate framing devices for their own purposes. These purposes may range from propitiating territorial deities through private household rituals to assuaging skeptical state representatives through public cultural performances, but ultimately all of the ritualised action so framed has a shared referent — Thangmi ethnic identity itself.

In developing this argument, I draw particularly upon Erving Goffman’s (1974) work on the nature of ‘framing activity’ and Maurice Godelier’s (1999) exposition of the sacred, as well as Richard Handler’s (1984; and in this volume: 51) discussions of ‘cultural objectification’. Ultimately, I suggest that ethnicity is a collective production, which synthesises the disparate actions of individuals — who are often bound together by little more than name across nation-state, class, age, gender and other boundaries — into a coherent set of signifying practices and performances. In the Thangmi case, the affective reality of the resultant identity draws its power from the very diversity of its component parts.

Defining Practice and Performance

In this chapter, I define ‘practice’ and ‘performance’ in a specific manner that may diverge from other received definitions. The two are qualitatively distinct, but inextricably linked and mutually influential fields of ritualised activity, which I follow Catherine Bell in defining as, ‘a particular cultural strategy of differentiation linked to particular social effects and rooted in a distinctive interplay of a socialised body and the environment it

structures’ (1992: 8). I acknowledge at the outset that most practice has a performative aspect (Austin 1975; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Butler 1997), and almost all performance can be seen as a form of practice in Bourdieu’s sense (1977, 1990). Nonetheless, I believe that making a distinction between practice and performance can be helpful at the analytical level as we attempt to understand the dynamics of consciousness and objectification inherent in the process of producing ethnicity. At the level of action, there is no question that the edges of these categories blur into one another. However, as I shall argue further, the categories themselves have an ontological reality from an indigenous perspective, which again suggests that they are worth paying attention to.

In my discussion, practice refers to embodied, ritualised actions carried out by Thangmi individuals within an indigenous epistemological framework to achieve localised goals — to stop malevolent deities from plaguing one’s mind, for instance, or to guide a loved one’s soul to the realm of the ancestors. Practices are ritualised actions carried out ‘because we have always done them that way’. Their intended audiences are the syncretic pantheon of animistic, Hindu and Buddhist deities that comprise the Thangmi divine world.⁶ Practices take place within the clearly delimited private domains of the household, or communal, but exclusively Thangmi, ethnic spaces. Practices, then, are the actions encapsulated in what Goffman calls ‘primary frameworks’ (1974).

Performances, by contrast, are framed ‘keyings’, or ‘transformations’ in Goffman’s terms, of the practices found within primary frameworks. Performances are ritualised actions carried out within a broader discursive context created by political, economic or other kinds of external agendas. They are mounted for the express consumption of non-Thangmi audiences, which may comprise representatives of the Nepali and/or Indian states, as at the Gangtok performance with which this chapter began — or members of other ethnic communities, NGO representatives, and endless numbers of others.⁷ Performances take place in the open, in public domains, with the express purpose of demonstrating to both selves and various others what practices look like.

Engaging in both of these forms of ritualised action contributes to contemporary experiences of what ‘culture’, ‘identity’ and ‘ethnicity’ are from the perspectives of the actors who engage in them. I hope to avoid the pitfall of misrecognising *either* practice

or performance alone as the whole of culture, or at least as the sole signifier of cultural authenticity, as seems to happen all too often in academic, policy and popular contexts. I argue that practice and performance, as I define them here, are both essential aspects of contemporary cultural production, and as such are mutually constitutive. Neither can be substituted or subsumed by the other, and both are necessary for groups and individuals to maintain the pragmatic and emotional well-being that derives from a sense of belonging to a shared sacred identity, which is recognised by others within the political context of individual nation-states, as well as within transnational environments shaped by cross-border movements and international discourses of indigeneity and heritage.

Arjun Guneratne's work with the Tharu of Nepal's Tarai provides a key ethnographic touchstone for discussing the dynamics of identity and consciousness in Nepal. Guneratne (1998: 753) distinguishes between two 'levels of group identity':

The first, implicit or unselfconscious, associated with the traditional, local, endogamous group... In Bourdieu's terms, it exists as doxa or the unreflected upon and 'naturalized' process of social reproduction of the community (Bourdieu 1977) ... The 'natural' character of social facts, hitherto accepted as part of the given order, become subject to critique when an objective crisis brings some aspect of doxa — identity — into question. This is a necessary precondition for the emergence of the second level of identity I wish to distinguish. This second or more encompassing level of identity is a self-conscious ... and politically oriented identity that draws together various local communities and groups and endows them with an imagined coherence (Anderson 1991). It is imagined in the sense that the structural linkages ... that help to shape the first level of group identity defined above do not exist at this level.

Guneratne's two levels of identity are in many ways coterminous with the social fields produced by practice and performance as I define them. I extend Guneratne's insights further by suggesting that the two fields of identity co-exist and mutually constitute each other. In other words, rather than seeing the shift from one level of identity to another as a quintessentially modern transformation that moves in only one direction — from a state of 'identity as doxa' to a state of 'identity as political imagination', with the latter eventually eclipsing the former — I argue that both

forms of identity are simultaneously present and influence each other in a multi-directional 'feedback loop'. This reality comes into focus when we turn our analytical gaze to the actions of practice and performance, rather than keeping it trained on the more static notion of identity itself. Practice and performance are mutually dependent aspects of the overall processes of cultural production and social reproduction, a relationship augmented, but not initiated, by the politics of recognition within modern nation-states. Take away practice and there is no cultural content for performance to objectify; take away performance and there is no means for groups to demonstrate in a public forum their 'existential presence' — a phrase I adapt from Laura Graham's (2005: 662) discussion of the indigenous need for 'existential recognition' — as established via practice at the grassroots level.

To sum up the argument, then, practices and performances are distinguished by the types of discursive space in which they are enacted, the objectives with which they are mounted, the audiences for whom they are intended, and the respectively different types of results that they generate. To borrow from Sherry Ortner (1996: 1), we might say that practices 'make' culture, while performances 'construct' culture, yet these two domains are mutually dependent. Or following Charles Briggs (1996: 439), we might see performances as a type of 'metadiscursive practice', which objectifies for an external audience the group-internal field of practice — already a form of objectified action, as I shall explain — to create links with broader domains of discourse and action, such as politics, or, for that matter, heritage.

Ethnicity as Synthetic Action

Focusing on the interplay between practice and performance illuminates contemporary Thangmi ethnicity as a synthetic process, in which these two fields of action, among others, play key roles. Approaching ethnicity as a synthesis of ritualised actions contributes to Felicia Hughes-Freeland and Mary Crain's (1998: 15) call for anthropologists to 'consider identity less as being, and more in terms of doing' by looking in detail at the relationship between processes of cultural production and social reproduction. In a similar vein, I build upon G. Carter Bentley's (1987: 49) practice theory of ethnicity by engaging in 'the investigation of a given case ... broadened in time to show how ethnicity contributes to social

reproduction, and in space to take account of regional and world-scale factors'. Indeed, the cross-border Thangmi case shows how practice and performance can work together to create what Bentley (1987: 35) described as a 'multi-dimensional habitus [in which] it is possible for an individual to possess several different situationally relevant but nonetheless emotionally authentic identities and to symbolize all of them in terms of shared descent'.

Enacting simultaneous, multiple subjective states that are all affectively real requires a degree of self-consciousness and self-objectification on the part of the ethnic actors who practice and perform these identities. I argue that for many Thangmi, this consciousness emerges in the subjective space created by the repeated process of shifting frame (Goffman 1974; Handler, this volume) between multiple nation-states as circular migrants.⁸ For those Thangmi who are settled in one location or another, contact with Thangmi circular migrants — who after all share the same name and system of descent — and their worldviews can effect different, but comparably intimate, shifts in frame. The self-consciousness engendered through this regular reframing is evident in the agentive manner in which individuals recognise the gap between practice and performance, and work to synthesise these disparate fields of action, among others, into a coherent identity that is both productive in the affective sense, as well as constructive in the political sense (Ortner 1996). An action-based approach to ethnicity enables us to see how a wide range of different intentions and motivations, held by as many individuals belonging to a putatively singular ethnic group, can in fact work in concert to produce a multi-dimensional ethnic habitus, of which the recognition of intra-group difference is itself a key feature.⁹

Cross-Border Thangmi Community

The general secretary of the Sikkim branch of the BTWA, a well-educated woman in her late 30s, explained the motivation behind the performatisation of Thangmi practice that I witnessed in Gangtok: 'Thami rituals and traditions are so slow and repetitive. That's OK back in the *pahar*, but here we need something different when we show our culture to others so that the government will notice us.' This statement sums up the differences between the contemporary Thangmi communities in Nepal and India as she saw them. The former group, whom she stereotyped as residing

in the *pahar* — a Nepali language term, literally meaning 'the hills', but used pejoratively to contrast rural Nepal to relatively urban Darjeeling — for the most part continue to speak their own language and participate in ritual practices at which Thangmi *gurus* (shamans) are the primary officiants.¹⁰ With rare exceptions, the latter group has historically not spoken the Thangmi language or employed Thangmi *gurus* as ritual practitioners in their own daily lives — born and raised in India in the post-Independence era, their parents sought to assimilate to a pan-Nepali identity, within which ethnic languages and practices were intentionally jettisoned.

Historically, land and labour exploitation under the Rana and Shah regimes compelled Thangmi in Nepal to remain under the radar of state recognition whenever possible.¹¹ Fear of the state, which Thangmi villagers primarily encountered as a tax collector, encouraged the maintenance of insular cultural practices, with the explicit avoidance of public forms of objectification that might attract curious outsiders. As many Nepali Thangmi elders told me, they were lucky not to have been listed in the Muluki Ain — the 1854 national legal code which codified the position of many more prominent ethnic communities within Nepal's Hindu hierarchy of caste and status.¹² This lacuna — which meant that the Thangmi name remained little known outside their localised area of residence — encouraged Thangmi to misrepresent themselves as members of better-known ethnic groups in encounters with authority. While such behaviour was at some level a strategy of 'dissimilation' (Scott 2009) intended to avoid the potential for additional domination if they were to be noticed and classified by the state, it has over time created a vicious circle in which contemporary Thangmi, who seek employment or education in national arenas, find that there is little or no name recognition of their ethnonym. In response, they have long continued to represent themselves as members of other groups rather than going to painful lengths to explain to others how the Thangmi actually fit, or do not fit, within Nepal's rigidly stratified caste and ethnic hierarchy.

Only since the return of democracy in Nepal in 1990 have some younger Thangmi individuals — who have come of age during the era of *janajati* politics — made a conscious decision to valourise Thangmi identity at the national level rather than retreating from it. It is relatively recently, then, that Thangmi in Nepal have

become concerned with the notions of cultural preservation and national recognition, and found these to be motivations to engage in performance as well as practice. As of yet, however, the Nepali state has no comprehensive system of reservations or affirmative action, no promised benefits for those who can demonstrate ethnic uniqueness, no national forum in which cultural performances are encouraged and accorded political clout, and much less a sympathetic official audience.¹³

In India, by contrast, there has long been a dialectical relationship between indigenous self-representation and state-sponsored ethnography (Cohn 1987, Dirks 2001), which resulted in legally binding ethnic and caste classifications. Within this context, the ongoing need to present culture in a manner recognisable to the state has led to the emergence of cultural performance as a generic mode of cultural objectification, which each group must always have ready as part of its repertoire to display before state actors when key opportunities arise (see also Middleton 2010).

In the mid-1990s, the Indian Thangmi began focusing on securing Scheduled Tribe (ST) status within India's reservations system, which would offer them perceived political, educational and economic benefits.¹⁴ These descendants of Thangmi migrants, who left Nepal as long as 150 years ago (many in response to the negative experiences with the Nepali state described above), for the most part no longer speak the Thangmi language or maintain a knowledge of ritual practice as such.¹⁵ But in the process of applying for ST status, many Indian Thangmi have recently become interested in rediscovering Thangmi 'culture'.

The impetus for this voyage of self-discovery is relatively new; until the early 1990s, most Indian citizens of Nepali heritage in Darjeeling had been focused on building a pan-Nepali identity and agitating for the separate Nepali-speaking state of Gorkhaland within India.¹⁶ During this movement, inter-group difference was played down, and the long-standing practice of inter-ethnic marriage in Darjeeling was valorised as the means of creating a genuinely 'Nepali' nation which transcended hierarchy and difference. The violent Gorkhaland agitation ended in 1989 with the creation of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), an ostensibly autonomous council which was intended to cater to the specific needs of Darjeeling's Nepali-speaking community.¹⁷ The creation of the DGHC was followed in quick succession by

the causally unrelated, but equally important, implementation of the Mandal Commission report in 1990, which revised India's existing reservations system to create a new and improved set of benefits for those groups classified as Scheduled Tribes. With the promise of Gorkhaland fading, and a sense of disillusionment that the leadership had settled too quickly for the DGHC instead of a separate state, many groups of Nepali origin at that time began to pursue the possibility of gaining recognition as Scheduled Tribes as a new way of making claims on the state. This strategy, however, required a complete turnabout in attitude towards ethnic identity. During the Gorkhaland movement, the fight had been for recognition of 'Nepali' (or 'Gorkhali') as a unitary ethnic category, but now the battle was on for recognition of each individual group — Tamang, Limbu, Magar, Thangmi, and so forth — as separate 'tribal' units.

Before applying for Scheduled Tribe status, the BTWA submitted their application for recognition as an 'Other Backward Class' (OBC) in 1992, a designation they received in 1995. Then, inspired by the success of the Tamang and Limbu communities in attaining ST status in 2003, the Thangmi submitted their official application in late 2005. Throughout their long engagement with the OBC/ST classification process, one of the primary ways in which the Thangmi community felt they could legitimise their claim to being a 'tribal' group, and maintain their public profile while the state deliberated, was to mount cultural performances in public domains. Clearly, they were not misguided, since in spring 2006, some months after the Gangtok performance for the minister for tribal affairs that I had observed, similar performances were commissioned by the Cultural Research Institute (CRI), the West Bengal state agency charged with verifying the authenticity of each ST applicant group.¹⁸ The performance committee of the BTWA also presents a set of dances as part of the popular Darjeeling Carnival every year — while not explicitly for government consumption, the carnival gives the BTWA an opportunity to put their identity on display before the general public, hopefully garnering popular support for their political goals.

Thangmi from Nepal and India, respectively, are by turns curious and critical of each other's ways of being Thangmi, and would probably never meet but for the fact that Thangmi livelihoods are defined by the ongoing process of circular migration. Almost every

Thangmi household in Nepal has one or more member who spends up to half the year in India engaged in seasonal wage labour. These migrant workers carry cultural knowledge as well as political consciousness and awareness of state policies — what Peggy Levitt (2001) has called ‘social remittances’ — back and forth with them as they travel between Nepal and India.¹⁹ More recently, members of the BTWA have consciously sought to develop relationships with Thangmi migrant workers, asking them to demonstrate Thangmi cultural practice — in ritual, song and dance — and in some cases even accompanying them back to Nepal to find the ‘source’ of ‘original Thangmi culture’ (these phrases are all commonly used in English) for the purposes of including descriptions of it in their ST application. Migrant workers also carry back to Nepal with them publications, cassettes and videos of performances staged by the BTWA in Darjeeling. Many of these documentary products have become popular viewing as electricity, and therefore TVs, cassette and VCD decks, have spread rapidly in many Thangmi villages over the past few years. It is in such encounters that practice and performance come to articulate with, and mutually influence, each other in the overall process of Thangmi identity production.

Nepali and Indian Thangmi are also bound together by their name. In both countries, last names are crucial markers of social position. Encoding caste, ethnicity, religion, and/or regional origin, the contemporary power of names is a legacy of both indigenous and colonial classification projects: Nepal’s Muluki Ain (Höfer 2004) and the Anthropological Survey of India (Cohn 1987). While in both countries, ‘Thami’ is the group’s official name, and this is what appears on citizenship cards (*nagarikta*) in Nepal and on ration cards in India, the term is an empty signifier both for members of the group themselves, who prefer the indigenous ethnonym ‘Thangmi’, and for most non-Thangmi, from whom both ‘Thami’ and ‘Thangmi’ draw blank looks. Neither name conveys enough information for outsiders to easily categorise those who hold it, since most Nepalis and Indians, including those involved in ethno-political discourse, simply do not know what ‘Thami’, and even less ‘Thangmi’, indexes in terms of ethnicity, religion or region.

‘Thangmi *ke ho?*’ (What is Thangmi?) is a common query which all Thangmi — Nepali and Indian — hear throughout their lives. Unpacked somewhat, the question actually means, ‘How do you

fit into familiar systems of classification?’ This lack of popular recognition of the Thangmi ethnonym derives in part from the history of misrepresentation in which many Thangmi have themselves engaged. This is compounded by the ethnonym’s vague similarity to Kami, a Dalit blacksmith caste name, and Dhami, a name found in western Nepal that usually denotes low-caste ritual practitioners. The result of this homophony is that despite their different citizenships and life experiences in Nepal and India, Thangmi are drawn together by their desire for an ‘existential recognition’ (Graham 2005) of a distinctive cultural presence, which might help fill the discursive absence surrounding their name.

Basant, the general secretary of the BTWA from 2000 until his untimely death in 2003, who had been born and bred entirely in Darjeeling, said:²⁰

In school, other kids would tease me as Kami, so I really wanted to study Thangmi history so I could respond and fight back. The more I studied, the more I realised I couldn’t understand without going to Nepal.

Similarly, Nirmala, a young woman from the Nepali village of Dumkot, whose father and brothers had been to India often (although she had never been herself), explained:

Everyone in the bazaar asks, ‘Thami *ke ho?*’ (What is Thami?) I want to tell them ‘Thami *yo ho?*’ (This is Thami) [pointing to herself]. But that is not enough; we need to know our history and culture so that we can explain. Some of the books from Darjeeling which I have read ... are very helpful in that way.

More than anything else, this common search to explain the content of their name — which, despite other differences, continues to signify shared descent — is what draws Thangmi together across national borders to engage in the collective production of ethnicity. Individual repertoires of practice and performance may be different, but there is a common desire to synthesise these diverse forms of action to create a cultural presence that can imbue their shared ethnonym with meaning recognisable to others.

Framing Cross-Border Subjectivities

It is easy to reify the unit of the nation-state itself, as well as ‘other kinds of groups that spring up in the wake of or in resistance to

the nation-state', as 'primordial individuals-writ-large ... imagined to "possess" cultural properties that define their personalities and legitimate their right to exist' (Handler, this volume: 48). Within anthropological literature, the modern nation-state has been widely recognised as the primary structure shaping processes of ethnicisation.²¹ But does this assessment match with the subjective perceptions of those who experience 'ethnicisation'? Nation-states may certainly be viewed as 'individuals-writ-large' by people who live firmly within the borders of one state or another, and whose subjectivity is defined by such a nationalist ethos in a singular manner. However, the views of 'border peoples', whose subjectivities have long been defined by interactions with multiple states, may be markedly different.²² In the Thangmi context, I argue that the long duration of cross-border circular migration, and the concomitant in-depth experience of multiple frameworks for defining national and ethnic identities, lead to a different view, in which single nation-states are not fixed, self-standing structures which determine the rules of ethnicity, but are rather one of many flexible frames within which ethnic identity may be produced. The cross-border Thangmi experience suggests how nation-states may be seen as flexible identity-framing devices, in relation to which individuals and collectivities produce meaningful cultural content in each context, rather than absolute identity-determining structures, which dictate that content.

This argument leads to an inversion of nationalist perspectives in which 'the group is imagined as an individual' with a homogeneous identity (Handler, this volume: 49). Instead, in the cross-border Thangmi context, collective identity cannot exist without the manifold contributions of heterogeneous individuals, each of whom possesses complementary elements of the overall repertoire of ritualised action required to establish the existential presence of the group within multiple state frames. From the perspectives of those who comprise it, the group is not imagined as a coherent individual, but rather is readily acknowledged as the product of disparate life experiences embodied by multiple individuals in as many locations. As Surbir, a long-term Darjeeling resident originally from Nepal, put it, 'We Thangmi are like the beads of a broken necklace that have been scattered all over the place. And now it's time to find them and put them back together again.' Surbir's statement illustrates that this sense of fragmentation is not

necessarily the desired state of affairs, and many Thangmi ethno-activist agendas focus on synthesising disparate Thangmi practices into a coherent whole. The Nepal Thami Society Second National Convention Report, for instance, echoes Surbir's metaphor with the assertion that the Convention's main objective is 'to integrate the Thamis living in various places ... to make [our] demands and fundamental identity widespread, and to string together all the Thamis' (NTS 2005: 4). Yet, the reality remains that it is the self-consciousness of this process of mixture itself, the ongoing synthesis of disparate experiences, beliefs and ideologies, all held together under the names 'Thangmi' and 'Thami', which together define collective identity at the most fundamental level.

Viewing ethnicity as a collective project to which individuals may make varying contributions in a laterally differentiated manner, rather than as a vertically homogenous 'individual' which requires group members to articulate belonging in more or less similar ways, diminishes the need to wrestle divergent experiences into neat arguments about group solidarity or singular authenticity. I suggest that the quality of 'we-feeling', which, for instance, the Nepal Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act (NFDIN 2003: 7) lists as one of the defining criteria for membership as an Indigenous People's Organisation, may actually be produced through the interactions and communication *among* members of individual groups, across boundaries of class, gender, and perhaps, most importantly, in the Thangmi context, across the borders of modern states. This perspective brings into focus the manner in which multiple fields of action, such as practice and performance — each of which entail different processes of objectification (which I will detail further) intended for different audiences — can comprise complementary aspects of the overall cross-border social field in which ethnicity is produced.

In the course of conceptualising ethnicity as a collective process enacted through a diverse set of ritualised actions across multiple state borders, this argument demands a nuanced analysis of the effects of 'global discourses' like 'indigeneity' and 'heritage', and a concomitantly rigorous use of the concept of 'transnationalism'.²³ While there is no doubt that such concepts exist at the level of international policy, promoted in particular by UN agencies such as the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples and UNESCO, these terms do not necessarily mean the same thing — or anything

at all, in some cases — to people on the ground in various local contexts. The ways in which such concepts are introduced and received by communities in different locations has a great deal to do with the specific ways in which individual nation-states accept, reject, or otherwise filter such global discourses within their own borders. For instance, the Indian government rejects the English word 'indigenous' as an operative term in its minority legislation, preferring to maintain the colonial 'tribal', and has therefore refused to ratify international instruments like the ILO Convention 169 on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.²⁴ In addition, India keeps close tabs on international organisations that it allows to work within its borders, with the Indian state itself providing the majority of economic and cultural support to minority groups. By contrast, Nepal was one of the first Asian countries (second only to the Philippines) to ratify the ILO convention and integrate the term 'indigenous' into its official language, and the state permits a range of international organisations to provide development aid to marginalised groups. These national differences in accepting and implementing the prerogatives of 'global discourse' as propagated by international actors have substantial effects on the way in which groups like the Thangmi envision their own ethnic identity within each state. Globalisation theory has often overplayed the extent to which western-influenced ideological models, conceived of as global discourses, dominate local discourse and practice, leading to analytical models which de-emphasise the ongoing power of individual nation-states to imbue identity production with locally specific meanings. In addition, many theorists have suggested that nations become deterritorialised due to constant border-crossing movements including labour migration, conflict-induced displacement, and cosmopolitan jet-setting, with the result that 'transnational' frameworks eventually supersede 'national' ones in shaping identities (Appadurai 1990; Basch, Schiller and Blanc 1994; Inda and Rosaldo 2002). Contrary to such assumptions, the Thangmi case shows how transnational life experiences in fact bring the specific properties of individual national frameworks into sharp focus, rather than effacing them.

I argue that nation-states remain crucial framing devices in the production of ethnicity, but that these framing machineries are now rarely experienced in isolation, and that they are therefore not taken for granted. Instead, nation-states are experienced as multiple

but simultaneously existing frames, which become visible in the process of switching between them. Each such frame demands and facilitates different forms of ritualised action, manifested in different contexts to produce 'recognisable' (in the most fundamental sense) identities.²⁵ In this formulation, nation-states continue to exercise sovereignty in very real ways, often in manners that attempt to intentionally obscure the locus of their power by casting themselves as 'magical' (Coronil 1997) or all-seeing (Scott 1998). But these state tactics can never become entirely hegemonic in a mobile world where cross-border experiences are increasingly common; anyone who moves across borders on a regular basis knows that sovereignties do not exist in individual, reified isolation. Instead, for people accustomed to dealing with multiple states, their role as framing devices becomes evident, as their absolute power becomes relative. Nonetheless, the ability to control such frameworks in order to produce the desired effects within them is a complicated craft, which requires great care and ritualised attention to the nuances of practice and performance in order to be successful.

Recognising the Sacred: Dynamics of Consciousness and Objectification

The distinction that I am drawing between practice and performance may appear to be academic, but it also has an indigenous ontological reality. Members of the Thangmi community in both Nepal and India differentiate between the aims and efficacy of a practice carried out in Thangmi company for a divine audience, and a performance carried out in a public environment for broader political purposes. Thangmi use the Nepali terms *sakali* and *nakali*, which literally translate as 'real, true, original' (Turner 1997 [1931]: 578) and 'copy, imitation' (ibid: 333) to describe practices and performances respectively.²⁶ Thangmi individuals talk about how one must get carefully dressed and made up, *nakal parnu parchha* — literally, 'to copy or imitate' (ibid: 333) — in order to mount successful performances, while practices require no such costuming.

While viewing the video that I had shot of Thangmi cultural performances in Darjeeling, several audience members at a programme in Kathmandu organised by the Nepal Thami Society

shouted out comments like, *Oho, kasto ramro nakal pareko! Ekdam ramro dekinchha!* (Oh, how nicely they have dressed up [literally 'imitated']! They look really great!)²⁷ After viewing the video, one elderly man commented to me: *Tyo nakali nach Thangmi sanskriti dekhaune lai ramrai kam lagchha, tara sakali banda ali pharak chha* (That *nakali* dance works well to show Thangmi culture, but it's a bit different from the *sakali*). From his perspective, like that of many Thangmi, *nakali* is not necessarily a negative quality in the sense that we might impute from the dictionary definition of 'copy, imitation'. Rather, it can be a positive and efficacious quality, which in its very difference from the *sakali* enables an alternative set of objectives to be realised. Through their demonstrative capacity to 'show' and make visible 'Thangmi culture' to audiences beyond group members and their deities, *nakali* performances do something that *sakali* practices cannot; yet the *nakali* cannot exist without constantly referring to and objectifying the *sakali*.

The difference between *sakali* and *nakali*, practice and performance, as forms of ritualised action, then, is in the strategies and techniques of objectification that each entails. At some level, every expressive action and each ritual is fundamentally an act of objectification — the process of making deeply held worldviews visible in social space. In the Durkheimian (1995: 56) sense, rituals are 'the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of ... sacred objects'. As a set of rules enacted in the public sphere, rituals are by nature objectified forms of social action, articulating human relationships with the sacred.

My argument therefore is not that practice — the *sakali* — is somehow unobjectified, raw or pure doxa lost in the process of objectification that creating the *nakali* entails, but rather that the techniques and intentions of objectification operative in the *sakali* field of practice are different from those operative in the *nakali* field of performance. To put it in Goffman's (1974) terms, primary frameworks are still frameworks. *Nakali* performance simply objectifies in a new and differently efficacious manner the already objectified *sakali* field of practice. Thangmi *gurus* who go into trance to conduct private family ritual practices objectify the set of rules that governs their relationship with territorial deities in the Nepali homeland. In the same manner, Thangmi youth who perform a staged rendition of such practices to a pop music

soundtrack in Darjeeling re-objectify such rituals in order to themselves objectify the rules that govern their relationship with the Indian state.

In other words, each field of action entails intentionally different strategies of ritualisation, implemented with the help of different framing devices — of which the nation-state is one — in order to make claims upon different community-external entities that will yield different results. Yet, one field of action does not efface the other; rather, the *sakali* and *nakali* continue to exist simultaneously and mutually influence each other, and individual Thangmi may employ one, the other, or both in making their own contributions to the collective production of ethnicity. The types of action(s) that individuals choose depend on their experiences and citizenship status in one, the other, or both nation-states, as well as their age, gender, economic and educational status, and other idiosyncrasies of life history and personal outlook.

The constant that links these disparate forms of action together is the enduring presence of the 'sacred object' of ritual attention, which requires that certain rules of conduct be set out in ritualised form. A more nuanced discussion of what in fact is the 'sacred object' in the case of Thangmi practices and performances is required here. Handler (this volume) closely follows Durkheim by suggesting that the sacred object of heritage performances may be the 'social self'. I take this notion a step further by proposing that in the Thangmi case (and perhaps others), the sacred object is identity itself. Ethnicity, then, is one set of 'rules of conduct' which govern behaviour in the presence of this sacred object — a synthetic set of ritualised actions produced by disparate members of the collectivity, which taken together objectify the inalienable but intangible sacred in a manner simultaneously recognisable to insiders and outsiders.

This argument emerges from my reading of Maurice Godelier's (1999: 169) exposition of the sacred:

For the sacred — contrary to the views of Durkheim, who made too stark a separation between religious and political — always has to do with power insofar as the sacred is a certain kind of relationship with the origin, and insofar as the origin of individuals and of groups has a bearing on the places they occupy in a social and cosmic order. It is with reference to the origin of each person and each group that the actual relations between the individuals and the groups which compose a

society are compared with the order that should be reigning in the universe and in society. The actual state is then judged to be legitimate or illegitimate, by right, and therefore acceptable or unacceptable. It is therefore not objects which sacralize some or all of people's relations with each other and with the surrounding universe, it is the converse.

I take Godelier to mean that people's relations with each other across the collectivity — as enacted in ritualised moments of practice and performance — objectify human connections with their origins as sacred, along with their concomitant position in social, political and cosmic orders. This sacred combination of 'original' knowledge (by which I mean knowledge of one's putative origins) and positionality vis-a-vis contemporary states is ethnic identity itself, and it is produced through a range of diverse but simultaneously existing fields of action maintained by the disparate individuals who comprise the collective.

In Godelier's terms, sacred objects are those which cannot be exchanged (as gifts or commodities), 'cannot be alienated', and which give people 'an identity and root this identity in the Beginning' (1999: 120–21). For the Baruya, whose society provides the content upon which Godelier builds his theory, sacred objects are in fact tangible objects as such. These objects act as an inalienable extension of the human body in their ability to simultaneously contain and represent identity. In the Thangmi case, however, such tangible sacred objects are almost non-existent. There is no distinctively Thangmi material culture — no icons, art, architecture, texts or costumes — which might be objectified as sacred. In the absence of tangible signifying items, identity must serve as its own sacred object. This is why the objectifying actions of both practice and performance are so important for the Thangmi; identity itself must be objectified as sacred and presented to the powers-that-be — whether representatives of the divine or the state — since there is little else in the material world that can stand in for it.

The lack of distinctive material culture is one of the most noticeable features of Thangmi life, and is universally noted by the few previous researchers who have engaged with the Thangmi (Furer-Haimendorf 1974 (field diaries), cited in Shneiderman and Turin 2006a: 110–11; Peet 1978; Stein, personal communication).²⁸ Precisely because there is little to notice, this absence of material

culture has contributed substantially to the problems of recognition that the Thangmi now face at the political level in Nepal and India. When asked about the content of their culture by outsiders, whether Nepali or foreign, Thangmi in the homeland area often respond with statements like 'we have no culture' or 'there is no such thing'. These self-representations as 'lacking culture' are voiced in acknowledgement of the lack of visible cultural objects which would make the Thangmi easily recognisable within national systems that have advanced overly essentialised notions of 'culture' as a static, pure and clearly bounded thing maintained by discrete, homogeneous and easily identifiable groups. Moreover, for generations, Thangmi intentionally retreated from the gaze of the state rather than engaging with it, and the Thangmi ethnonym remains largely empty of meaning to anyone but Thangmi themselves. Accordingly, to an outside eye, there is nothing to distinguish a Thangmi individual or village from the next person or place.

This apparent absence of recognisable culture or ethnonym from an outsider's perspective is belied by a rich cultural presence enacted through practice within the community itself. Thangmi identity is thus indeed a sacred object in Godelier's (1999: 175) sense, 'gorged with signification ... in which man is both present and absent'. There is in fact an enormous amount of Thangmi cultural content, but it is all contained in the intangible aspects of practice: origin myths; propitiation chants to pacify restless territorial deities; the chanted names of places on the migration route that the Thangmi ancestors followed on their way to Dolakha, and eventually onwards to Darjeeling; the memorial process of reconstructing the body of the deceased out of everyday foodstuff; the way in which offerings to the ancestors are made of chicken blood, alcohol and dried flowers of the *bandalek* tree (T; Latin name: *Oroxylum indicum*).²⁹ These ritualised actions are primarily conducted in the Thangmi language, a Tibeto-Burman tongue related to both Newar and the Kiranti/Rai languages (Turin 2006). *Guru*, or shamans, remain the primary ritual practitioners in the Thangmi world, and establish their spiritual authority on the basis of their ability to mediate between the human and divine worlds through trance. Such practices are deeply syncretic in the sense that they incorporate both Buddhist and Hindu motifs within the framework of indigenous shamanic practice, but they result in a

synthesis that is uniquely Thangmi. The statement that 'Thangmi have no culture', then, is not absolute, but rather contextual, taking on meaning only at the nation-state level in relation to perceived nationalist visions of 'culture'— and therefore ethnicity — as inherent only in widely recognisable, objectified forms that can be used to easily classify discrete ethnic groups for state purposes.

For Thangmi *guru*, as well as laypeople engaged in practice, the continuation of Thangmi culture as an oral tradition transmitted through bodily practice is conceptualised as the immutable outcome of the actions of their ancestors, who, due to extreme hunger, swallowed the religious texts granted to them by the deities at the point of creation.³⁰ As a senior *guru* explained, 'Having swallowed our texts, we must practice our traditions from our *man*.' The Nepali concept of *man* is a complicated one, but here the implication is of an internal, non-intellectual, non-discursive embodied essence, in which the stuff of Thangmi culture and identity resides.³¹ Once the texts were consumed, they became indelibly imprinted on the collective Thangmi *man*, and contemporary Thangmi are bound to live out that fate by maintaining the oral, embodied nature of Thangmi practice. Such practices engender a clear sense of shared identity among all those who participate in them, from *guru* and sponsoring householders to curious children looking on from the corners.

It is telling that the only notable exceptions to the generally accurate statement that the Thangmi have no material culture, are the ritual implements of *take* (T; literally, drum) and *thurmi* (T; literally, wooden dagger). However, these are both pan-Himalayan implements also used by the shamans of other groups across the region, and as such have little sacred power as identity-signifying objects per se. They only become sacred when used in the specific context of Thangmi ritual language invoked by Thangmi *guru* to marshal the power of exclusively Thangmi territorial deities. But as soon as such rituals are over, the *take* and *thurmi* become generic objects, not particularly Thangmi, or particularly sacred. In order to work, *take* and *thurmi* (Plate 9.3) must be used by a *guru*, who received these ritual implements from his own father, or otherwise his own shamanic teacher, suggesting that in the appropriate context, such objects may also work as signifiers of shared descent — but not in an abstractable manner beyond the *guru*'s lineage itself.



Plate 9.3: Thangmi *guru* Lalit Bahadur uses his *thurmi* during a propitiation ritual for the territorial deity Bhume in Dolakha district, Nepal, May 2008.

This is why the Bharatiya Thami Welfare Association's use of a *thurmi* image for their logo, along with the more complex diagram of one submitted as part of their ST application (Figures 9.1 and 9.2), are viewed by *guru* as *nakali* uses of the object. Recall, however, that *nakali* is not necessarily a negative attribute — rather it implies the re-objectification of the *sakali* in a new context for a different purpose.

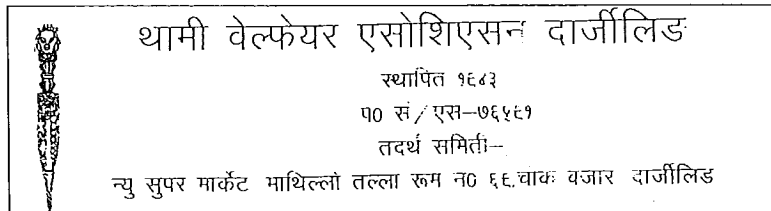


Figure 9.1: Letterhead of the Bharatiya Thami Welfare Association, with *thurmi* image in the left-hand corner.

Source: Image courtesy of the BTWA.

As the late Latte Apa, Darjeeling's senior Thangmi *guru* at the time of my fieldwork, put it:

I always think it's strange when I see the *thurmi* on the BTWA certificates. It is not a 'real' [in English] *thurmi*. But then I think, the government doesn't know us yet, but we must make them know us. If they see the *thurmi*, they will know, 'That is Thangmi'.

Such statements show how the sacred object of Thangmi identity remains constant, although it may be objectified in a diverse range of *sakali* and *nakali* forms. The *nakali* use of the *thurmi* as a logo for the Thangmi ethnic organisation does not efface its continued *sakali* use by Latte Apa in ritual practice; he acknowledges the value of the former, yet continues with the latter. The audiences who reaffirm the sacrality of the *thurmi* in each context may be different, but each plays a comparable and equally necessary role.

Along these lines, Godelier (1999: 108) suggests that:

Objects do not need to be different in order to operate in different areas ... It is not the object which creates the differences, it is the different logics governing the areas of social life that endow it with different meanings as it moves from one domain to the other, changing functions and uses as it goes.

Practices ensure that deities come to 'know' the Thangmi, and validate their special relationship with their homeland territory.

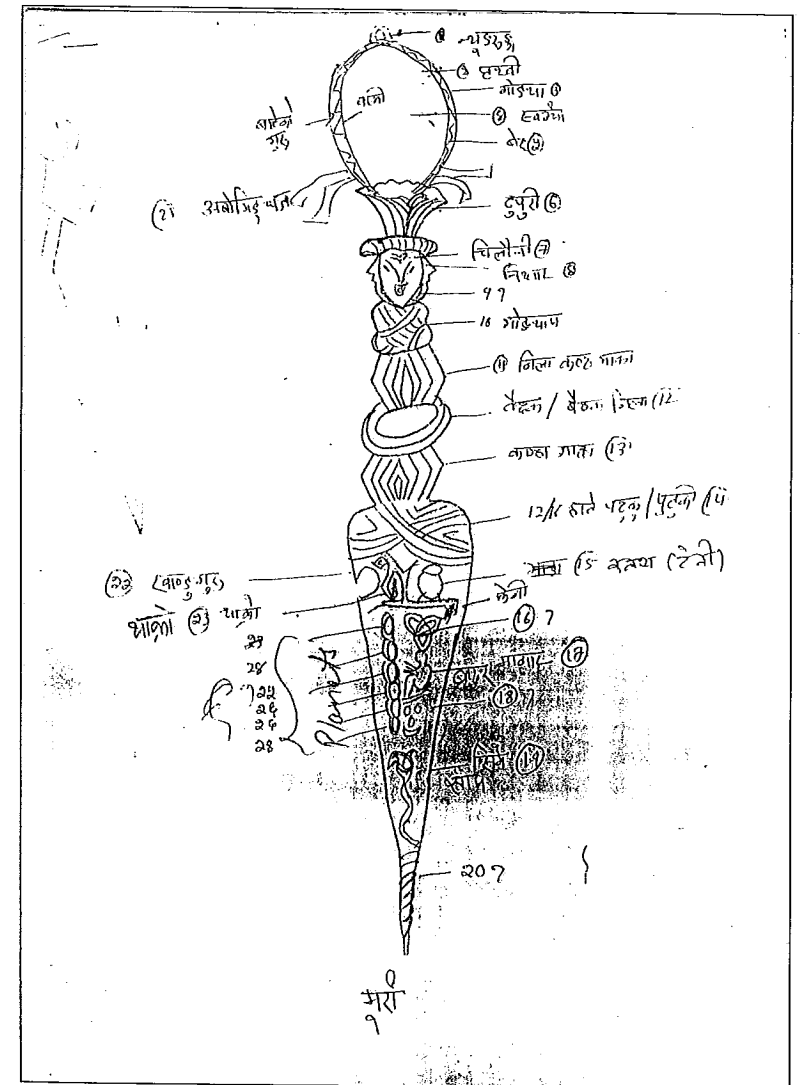


Figure 9.2: Diagram of a *thurmi* submitted as part of the documentation for the Thangmi Scheduled Tribe application in India.

Source: Image courtesy of the BTWA.

By contrast, performances — the full range of *nakali* strategies of representation — ensure that state officials and other outsiders come to 'know' the Thangmi as a community worthy of recognition.

The mechanisms of recognition are different, but both realms of ritualised action serve to regulate key areas of the social world in which the sacred object of Thangmi identity is reproduced. This is why someone like Latte Apa, for instance, may be both a practitioner and a performer, without a sense of internal contradiction — the sacred object which is the focus of ritualised activity never changes, and both fields of ritualised action reaffirm its primacy.

A concern with the issue of recognition runs throughout Godelier's discussion of the sacred. He asks, 'To what extent do humans not recognize themselves in their replicas? To what extent do they believe in their beliefs ...?' (1999: 178), and soon answers, 'To be sure he can *see himself* in these sacred objects because he knows the *code*, but he cannot *recognize* himself in them, cannot recognize himself as their author and maker, in short as their origin' (1999: 178–179, emphasis original). Although Godelier accords his subjects the power to *see* themselves, he stops short of granting them the ability to *recognise* themselves, therefore suggesting that ritual behaviour cannot be fully self-conscious. Handler similarly hedges his bets, suggesting first that actors may have a certain level of self-consciousness: 'Audiences, too, will have differing kinds of awareness of the frame and the contents of heritage rituals. And, of course, both actors and audiences will be more or less aware of each others' interpretations of such issues' (Handler, this volume: 52). Soon after, however, he returns to a more classical Durkheimian position by suggesting that 'modern social groups worship at the altar of their own identity, but they do not consciously realise that the idea of identity itself, like the idea of god, is a social production' (ibid.).

Such arguments allude to larger anthropological debates over authenticity and the role of objectification in constituting the modern 'culture concept'. Crediting Cohn (1987), Handler defines 'cultural objectification' as a quintessentially modern process, which is 'the imaginative embodiment of human realities in terms of a theoretical discourse based on the concept of culture' (Handler 1984: 56). Along with this argument comes an assumption that engaging in the process of objectification somehow removes one from the realm of 'pure', un-self-conscious, and, by implication, non-modern culture. Recall also Guneratne's separation of Tharu identity into two distinct domains — that of un-self-conscious doxa versus that of self-conscious political posturing — a formulation

which draws upon Bourdieu's dichotomous separation of the fields of 'practice' and 'theory', and their respective identification with worlds of the 'native' and the 'analyst' (Bourdieu 1990).

These arguments entail two strange paradoxes regarding the self-consciousness, or lack thereof, of cultural actors. The first: on the one hand, those who do not engage in objectification — 'natives' in whose world 'rites take place because ... they cannot afford the luxury of logical speculation', as Bourdieu (1990: 96) puts it; or non-modern actors in Handler's terms — do not see the frames within which their social world are produced, instead taking 'identity' and 'culture' for granted, as absolute, sacred realities without self-consciously recognising themselves as the authors of these phenomena. On the other hand, those who do engage in objectification — analysts and modern cultural actors — may be able to see the frames within which social reality and identity are produced, yet they perceive the resulting cultural objects as real and sacred, without self-consciously recognising the role of their own actions in reifying the frames within which such objects are created.

Second, any sign of consciousness in the manipulation of cultural forms on the part of cultural actors is portrayed negatively as a fall from non-objectified, genuine grace — such 'calculating, interested, manipulated belief' comprises acts of 'bad faith' in Godelier's words (1999: 178) — while at the same time, consciousness on the part of those who attempt to identify instances of such manipulation is seen as positive evidence of social science at work.

There are two problems with such arguments. First, they assume that there is a moment of rupture, an 'epistemological break' (Bentley 1987: 44, citing Foucault 1977), at which social groups — conceived of as coherent, homogeneous individuals — make the transition, never to return, from non-objectified to objectified cultural action, from identity as doxa to identity as politics, from practice (in Bourdieu's sense of the word, not mine) to theory. Take Guneratne's (1998: 760) description of the Tharu community's transition between these two domains as an example of this type of argument:

While the cultural practices of their elders become in one sense marginal to their everyday concerns, in another sense they undergo a reification

and reappear as an essential aspect of their modern identity. It is no longer culture as *doxa* in Bourdieu's sense but culture as performance, a tale that Tharus tell themselves about themselves.

Second of all, regardless of how and when that moment of rupture occurs, individuals are not portrayed as gaining genuine self-consciousness through that transition; rather, they simply move from a state in which they lack self-consciousness entirely, to a state in which total belief in their analytical capacities — belief in the power of objectification inherent in the modern culture concept — obscures their real inabilities to comprehend their contributions to the production of sacred objects like identity. In Handler's view:

People believe that they are discovering what their culture has been and is. They assume that culture is a real-world entity and that by analyzing its objective properties they can preserve it. But, as I see it, they are neither documenting nor preserving a culture which exists independently of them (1984: 62).

I would like to revisit this set of assumptions by suggesting that the dividing lines between the types of actors discussed earlier in the chapter (modern/non-modern; native/analyst) be questioned, since all of them in fact engage in processes of objectification; by asserting that all such actors (rather than none of them) may act with a substantial level of self-consciousness; and, finally, by arguing that there is no single moment of rupture when groups shift from one form of objectification to another. Rather, multiple forms of objectifying action, each with different intended audiences and effects, may be employed simultaneously by a range of individuals in the synthetic production of sets of social 'rules' like ethnicity. By refocusing on the entire range of things that individuals belonging to a collectivity — defined by name and the associated implication of shared descent — actually *do* to objectify various parts of their social world, and the ways in which these multiple fields of ritualised action, such as practice and performance, co-exist and inform each other, we can see that culture as *doxa*, or practice, does not necessarily give way in an evolutionary manner to culture as performance.³² Furthermore, acknowledging that there is a range of simultaneously available objectifying actions, which people may employ to express their relationship with the sacred object of identity, allows us to see that

there is a modicum of choice — and therefore self-consciousness — in the decisions that people make about which forms of action to employ in which circumstances, and thus come to recognise themselves as creators of their own social world.

I am not suggesting that people make fully rational, strategic choices about how they represent their identity for purely expedient political and economic reasons. Rather, actors are conscious of, and make choices between, various forms of ritualised action, which articulate different aspects of their relationship with the sacred — in the Thangmi case, identity itself — to different, but equally important, audiences. Each form of action occasions recognition from a public larger than the individual or the ethnic collectivity itself, whether that be the divine world or the state, and that experience of recognition leads to a powerful affective experience of affirmation of the social self.³³ For some, this strong experience of validation might come from material evidence that the divine exists and has a special relationship with his people: natural wonders, deities speaking in tongues through possessed shamans, or other 'miracles'. For others, affirmation might come from evidence that the government notices and has a special relationship with her people: constitutional provisions for special treatment, political and educational quotas, or other such policies. The objectifying actions necessary to secure each form of recognition and its evidence are different, but the affective results are comparable. For many, a complete sense of recognition may come from a combination of both.

The desire to gain either one or both of these forms of 'existential recognition' (Graham 2005) cannot exist without a minimum sense of self-recognition as a legitimate subject for recognition from others. That basic level of self-consciousness, and the ensuing confidence that external recognition will be forthcoming, is the necessary impetus for individuals to undertake the often expensive, as well as mentally and physically arduous, ritual tasks of propitiating deities (multi-day rituals often require participants to go without sleep for close to a week) or submitting government applications (a process which often takes years, several visits to government centres, and a great deal of personal expense). Indeed,

It is because men know that they might not be heard, and that their wishes and desires might not be answered, that they are often very

strict about the performance of their rites. If beings in the invisible world are to consent to interrupt what they are doing and lend an ear to the please of men, these must be formulated in a language and according to procedures that are understandable and appropriate (Godelier 1999: 186).

Without a minimum level of self-consciousness and confidence, the challenges of securing recognition from such beings would be insurmountable. Even if such obstacles can be overcome, the relatively small pragmatic benefits would not in themselves be worth such heroic efforts without the concomitant psychological benefits that come along with 'existential recognition'.

On Politics of Heritage and Cross-Border Frames

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998: 18) has argued that in the performance of heritage, 'people become living signs of themselves'. This statement resonates with Godelier's assertions that through ritual activity,

People generate duplicate selves ... which, once they have split off, stand before them as persons who are at once familiar and alien. In reality these are not duplicates which stand before them as aliens; these are the people themselves who, by splitting, have become in part strangers to themselves, subjected, alienated to these other beings who are nonetheless part of themselves (1999: 169-70).

Although Godelier's 'duplicate selves' are supernatural beings, while Kirshenblatt-Gimblett refers to human performers, the underlying idea is similar. In the process of engaging in ritualised action, people objectify their own self-consciousness — in a sense 'alienating' themselves from themselves — but at the same time, through such self-replicating, signifying action, they create the potential for a reflective awareness through which they can make sense of these processes of subjectification and alienation in a manner that allows the 'double selves' to stand without contradiction. In the end, the sacred self is inalienable. The experience of becoming 'a living sign' in the process of performance, and/or watching other members of one's community become one — as many Thangmi are now doing — generates a consciousness of the different objectifying tools of practice and performance, and their different, but equally important, efficacies. In a diverse cross-border community shaped by the historical experience of circular

migration between multiple nation-states, such consciousness emerges in part from intimate knowledge of the differences in paradigms for cultural objectification in each country, and the ability to see such national ethos as frames within which one's own action unfolds.

During a shamanic ritual to protect a Darjeeling household from bad luck, Rana Bahadur, a young Thangmi from Nepal who had lived in India for several long periods, described this effect: '*Yaha ko rajniti alagai chha, tyaha ko pani alag chha. Pharak rup le sanskriti chalaunu parchha*' (The politics here is distinct; the politics there is also unique. In each place culture must be circulated in different forms). As a respected shaman's assistant who often played an important role during ritual practices, as well as a cultural performer who wrote and sang many of the lyrics on a BTWA-sponsored cassette of Thangmi language songs, Rana Bahadur was one of many Thangmi whose experiences of both Nepali and Indian national frames effected a conscious recognition of the differences in technique, efficacy and audience that defined practice and performance. Within this diversity of experience, the constant is a curiosity about the embodied effects of each form of ritualised action, and a sense that the relationship between them enables the ethnic collectivity to synthesise a coherent presence across borders and disparate life experiences.

In one direction, this curiosity manifests in the desire of Thangmi from Nepal who are seasoned cultural practitioners to watch, and even participate in, stage-managed cultural performances, like the one in Sikkim with which this chapter began. In the other direction, many Thangmi in India talk about opportunities to observe cultural practices, such as death or wedding rituals, with the same reverence with which they might discuss an audience with Sai Baba or the Dalai Lama. The increasing exposure of practitioners to performance, and performers to practice — through cheaper and easier cross-border travel and the trend of local VCD production — has generated a debate within the community as a whole about what constitutes Thangmi culture, and what elements of it should be standardised for future reproduction.

The fact that this debate is actively taking place within the community itself, within certain parts of which practice itself is still very much alive and a key component of identity, sets this case somewhat apart from other discussions of the production of 'heritage' in the global economy. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995: 369)

defines 'heritage' as, 'the transvaluation of the obsolete, the mistaken, the outmoded, the dead, and the defunct', and as '... a mode of production that has recourse to the past' to 'produce the local for export'. In the Thangmi case, practice remains very much alive, but it has increasingly come into relationship with performance. The two co-exist. Rather than fetishising dead practices, the relatively recent emergence of the desire to demonstrate 'heritage' through performance for political purposes within the Indian context has in fact encouraged the continuation of practice in Nepal, and even the re-rooting of it in India, from where it had previously disappeared. For the Thangmi, 'heritage' has not yet been entirely detached from living practice, commodified by outside forces and reconstituted for the express purpose of consumption by others. I suspect this is not so unusual, and may also be the case in other places and for other groups, but the analytical obsession with dichotomising the authentic and inauthentic, practice and theory, and so forth, may have obscured such dynamics. Instead, although oriented towards external audiences, performance is produced by Thangmi, for Thangmi purposes, in constant interplay with practice itself.

Aesthetics, Affect and Efficacy

The process of performing heritage sometimes has unexpected effects on the performers: many Thangmi in India told me that the experience of performance gave them a hint of what practice might be like, and encouraged them to seek out practice experiences in the company of Nepali Thangmi, which in turn gave them a different feel (at the level of the body) for what it meant to be Thangmi. Such inter-linkages begin to show how and why ethnic actors themselves view both practice and performance as integral to their own identity, within an indigenous frame of reference that includes individual states, their policies, and the borders between them.

When I asked Laxmi, one of the choreographers of the Sikkim performance, how she and her colleagues had put together these dances and conceptualised them as particularly Thangmi ones, she shrugged her shoulders and said, 'We just choose whichever steps look good. We want to create something that people will want to watch, and will make them remember, "those Thangmi, they are good dancers"'. That will help us'. When I pushed further to ask

what made these dances particularly Thangmi, she said, 'Well, we have Thangmi from Nepal in the group, and they know how to show *sakali* Thangmi culture, so we just trust them.' For her, the very presence of the dancers from Nepal — who were stereotyped as having some experience with practice due to their Nepali background — was enough to provide an aura of authenticity, although she admitted that she did not know what constituted it. Clearly, she was aware of the aesthetic differences between what she had created as performance and Thangmi practice as such — and their concomitant efficacy in different contexts — but she seemed unconcerned with the affective differences between them.

The dancers from Nepal, on the other hand, knew that they *felt* different performing these choreographed dances on stage than they did when they participated in practice conducted by *gurus* at home. The bodily techniques entailed by each form of ritualised action were substantially different, as were the intended audiences and objectives: performance required highly stylised, external movements recognisable by outside others who could help forward political objectives, while practice required an internally-oriented, almost meditative focus that appealed to deities who could help forward spiritual objectives.

The discomfort that the dancers from Nepal felt at the Sikkim performance (and presumably at others in Darjeeling) derived not from the dissonance between the two experiences. In fact, they were perfectly familiar with the distinction between the two modes of cultural production in Nepal as well. Their discomfort emerged rather from the sense that for some Thangmi in India, performance had eclipsed practice entirely to the extent that they did not recognise the value of the relationship between the two. Many Thangmi from Nepal, like Rana Bahadur, feared that the repeated, exclusive engagement with the field of performance might cause it to subsume the field of practice entirely; in essence, that what Thangmi in India valued as *sakali* in the Nepali Thangmi practice would in the course of time cease to exist as it became exclusively appropriated as *nakali*.

Perhaps these concerns were unnecessary, for many Thangmi in India were on their own learning curve. The choreographer, Laxmi, confided that she had been overwhelmed by the experience of the funerary rituals that Latte Apa had conducted after the recent death of her brother Basant, the general secretary of the BTWA quoted earlier. Basant's funeral was the first time that Laxmi had

participated in a full-blown Thangmi ritual practice conducted by a Thangmi *guru*, since her family had until recently been in the habit of using Hindu *pandits* instead (as had been typical for generations of Indian Thangmi). She was surprised by the positive effect that participating in the ritual as a practitioner, and following the instructions of a *guru*, had on her own fragile emotional state in the wake of her brother's death — very different from the orchestrating role that she was used to playing as dance choreographer. She saw these serious, complicated practices as an entirely separate domain from the upbeat dances that she choreographed, but she was beginning to recognise both as important features of Thangmi cultural production that deserved to be maintained and mutually supported.

In the contemporary national and transnational politico-cultural economies that shape Thangmi lives, maintaining the pragmatic socio-economic conditions in which practice can be reproduced necessarily entails mounting performances. Those performances, in turn, must be able to allude to the ongoing life of practice in order to establish their own legitimacy as representations of a culture worthy of recognition. It follows that those with the *sakali* skills of performance cannot advance their own projects without collaboration from those with the *nakali* knowledge of practice, and vice versa. The combination of competence in both fields of ritualised action in a single individual is extremely rare, although perhaps that is changing, as the examples of relatively young Thangmi like Rana Bahadur and Laxmi show. For now, in order to advance their shared goals of reproducing the sacred object of Thangmi identity and securing existential recognition from a range of audiences, Thangmi with a diversity of life experiences — Nepalis and Indians, circular migrants and settled residents of both countries, young and old, *guru* and activists, practitioners and performers — must work together in a collaborative manner to maintain the rules of conduct that govern Thangmi ethnicity.



Notes

- * This chapter draws upon research conducted with funding from the Fulbright Foundation (1999–2000), the National Science Foundation (2001–2005), and the Social Science Research Council (2005–2007).

Additional support was provided by the Department of Anthropology and the Einaudi Center for International Studies at Cornell University. I thank Bir Bahadur Thami and Mark Turin, as well as the Nepal Thami Society, the Bharatiya Thami Welfare Association, and all of the individual informants cited in this chapter for their contributions. David Holmberg, Kathryn March, Viranjini Munasinghe, Janak Rai and Mukta Singh Tamang have contributed to my analysis over time. I thank Pushpa Hamal, Hikmat Khadka and Suren Thami for help with translation. Comments from the participants at the workshop on 'Ritual, Heritage and Identity' out of which this publication emerged were invaluable, and I am especially grateful to Richard Handler, Christiane Brosius and Karin Polit for their feedback throughout the writing process. Any errors of course remain my own.

1. The etymonym that members of the group use to refer to themselves in their own language is 'Thangmi', but official documents in both Nepal and India refer to them as 'Thami'. I therefore use the term 'Thangmi' except when citing direct quotations in which the term 'Thami' is used, or when referring to the Nepal Thami Society and the Bharatiya Thami Welfare Association — these are the official names of the ethnic organisations which represent the group in Nepal and India, respectively. See Shneiderman and Turin (2006a), and Shneiderman (2009) for further information about the Thangmi.
2. Other groups performing at the same event, such as the Magar, did not have such carefully choreographed dances, and were actually booed by the audience.
3. There is an extensive literature on the history of Scheduled Tribes and Castes in India; see especially Galanter (1984) and Jenkins (2003). Several recent works that effectively address the broader politics of tribal classification — of which the Thangmi experience is just one example — are Jaffrelot (2006), Shneiderman and Turin (2006b), Shah (2007), Kapila (2008), Middleton and Shneiderman (2008), and Middleton (2010).
4. All italicised terms are in the Nepali language, unless explicitly noted with (T) for the Thangmi language. Although used since the early 1990s by activists working to bring Nepal's ethnic minorities together in a united movement, *janajati* was first introduced into official Nepali government parlance in 2002 by the National Foundation for the Development for Indigenous Nationalities Act. In 2004, the non-governmental Nepal Federation for Indigenous Nationalities, acting as an umbrella group for 59 'indigenous people's organisations', introduced a five-tier classification system which designated groups as 'endangered', 'highly marginalized', 'marginalized', 'disadvantaged' and 'advantaged'. For more details on the history and politics of these classifications see Gellner (2007), Hangen (2007) and Middleton and Shneiderman (2008).

5. Here, I use the term 'authenticity' to represent a set of policy statements made by both the Indian and Nepali governments regarding the criteria they use to determine whether groups should be officially recognised as 'tribal' or 'marginalised' communities respectively; see Middleton and Shneiderman (2008) for details of these rubrics. Otherwise, I intentionally avoid using 'authenticity' as a key concept, although the arguments made in this chapter clearly contribute to ongoing anthropological debates over this issue. Rather than using such an abstract, unquantifiable concept to define the reality or legitimacy of cultural productions, I focus instead on the multiple fields of action through which Thangmi individuals themselves produce the social world in which they live.
6. I follow Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart in defining syncretism as 'the politics of religious synthesis' (1994: 7).
7. Many discussions of heritage focus on the commodification of local cultures for tourist consumption, but for the Thangmi, tourists are not important interlocutors. The Thangmi homeland area is not on one of Nepal's tourist trekking routes, and the decade-long civil conflict between Maoist insurgents and state forces between 1996 and 2006 has kept any prospective tourism development at bay. Far more important in Nepal are development workers, both Nepali and foreign, who visit the Thangmi area regularly. Although Darjeeling receives its fair share of tourists, the Thangmi community there has had little interest in engaging with them, preferring to focus their cultural performances on attracting representatives of the state.
8. In addition to the Thangmi communities in Nepal and India, there is also a small Thangmi community resident in Nyalam county of China's Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). For many Thangmi, the TAR is also an important stop on the annual route of circular migration. See Shneiderman (2009) for further information.
9. Although I build upon Bourdieu's work in particular, and practice theory in general, I avoid aligning my approach too closely with Bentley's 'practice theory of ethnicity', because I want to reserve the word 'practice' to describe only one component of the range of actions entailed in the production of ethnicity.
10. See Hutt (1998) for a helpful discussion on the term *pahar* in literary representations of migration from Nepal to India.
11. See Shneiderman and Turin (2006a) for a more detailed discussion of these historical dynamics for the Thangmi in particular; and for general discussions of land tenure and state/local relations in Nepal, see Caplan (2000), Regmi (1976), and Holmberg, March and Tamang (1999).
12. See Höfer (2004), Burghart (1984), Levine (1987), Holmberg (1989), and Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton (1997) for more details on the historical processes of ethnic classification in Nepal.

13. The situation in Nepal is changing rapidly; at the time of writing this chapter, in May 2008, the first-ever elected Constituent Assembly was meeting for the first time. Some of the major items on the agenda for deliberation during the assembly's two-year tenure were federal restructuring along ethnic lines, and developing a system of affirmative action.
14. See note 4.
15. See Hutt (1998) for a more extensive description of the motivations for Nepali migration to Darjeeling. Kennedy (1996) provides a more general history of Darjeeling.
16. The formation of Nepali national identity in Darjeeling in the literary sphere has been well documented by Onta (1996, 1999), Hutt (1997, 1998) and Chalmers (2003). Subba (1992) has written a comprehensive social history of the Gorkhaland movement. The name 'Gorkhaland' was chosen by the movement's leaders to emphasise the distinction between Nepali citizens of Nepal, and the Indian citizens of Nepali heritage (also known as 'Gorkhalis') who would live in the putative Indian state of Gorkhaland. Since 2008 the call for Gorkhaland has been revitalised, with effects that I cannot fully analyse here.
17. See van Beek (2000) for a broader discussion of the autonomous hill council concept and its implementation in Ladakh.
18. At the time of writing in May 2008, the Thangmi application for ST status was still pending, with no clear resolution in sight.
19. The Thangmi case differs from the Dominican case that Levitt discusses, in that she suggests that social remittances flow in only one direction — from place of migration to homeland — while I suggest that ideas and information flow in both directions as part of the feedback loop created by regular circular migration.
20. Unless otherwise noted, all informants cited in this chapter share the last name 'Thangmi' (when they introduce themselves) or 'Thami' (when they write their name on official documents). I therefore refer to individuals by their first names only.
21. On the process of ethnicisation within the nation-state framework in general, see Williams (1989), Verdery (1994), and Harrell (2002); as well as Holmberg (1989), Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton (1997), Fisher (2001) and Guneratne (2002) regarding Nepal in particular.
22. My use of the terms 'border people' and 'cross-border community' derive from Wilson and Donnan's (1998) reframing of the 'border concept' in pragmatic ethnographic terms; see also Scott (2009).
23. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *Friction* (2004) explores these global-national-local relationships in the domain of environmental discourse in Indonesia. I suggest the need for similar analyses of the discourses of indigeneity and heritage in specific areas of the world.
24. Convention details available at www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/convdisp1.htm (accessed 27 May 2008).

25. My discussion of the politics of recognition draws upon Taylor (1992), Povinelli (2002) and Graham (2005).
26. These are Nepali, not Thangmi, words, and are also used by Nepali speakers of other ethnic groups. Thangmi speakers regularly insert these Nepali terms into otherwise Thangmi discourse, as they do with all sorts of other loan words. I do not suggest that the way in which Thangmi use these terms is unique, but I do think that these terms articulate particularly well with the sensibility shared by many Thangmi, which recognises the differences between, but complementary nature of, these two domains.
27. I have long used digital video as an ethnographic methodology; in this case, I used it to show members of the Thangmi community in one location, examples of practice and performance from other locations.
28. The other consistently noted Thangmi cultural feature is a system of parallel descent, in which men and women have their own distinct clans.
29. As explained in note 5, all italicised terms are in the Nepali language, unless explicitly noted with (T) for Thangmi language. Mark Turin (2003) provides a comprehensive list of Thangmi plant names. For more details on death rituals in particular, and the form of Thangmi ritual practice in general, see Shneiderman (2002).
30. See Oppitz (2006) and Scott (2009) for comparative discussions of such myths across the Himalayan and Southeast Asian massifs respectively.
31. See Kohrt and Harper (2008), as well as McHugh (2001) and Desjarlais (2003) for more detailed descriptions of how the concept of *mann* is conceptualised across Nepal and the Himalayas.
32. This argument revisits some of the territory covered by the debates over 'change' versus 'continuity', 'tradition' versus 'modernity', debates that characterised much of the earlier work on questions of cultural objectification and authenticity. Rather than focusing on cultural objects themselves, foregrounding the forms of ritualised action which people use to produce their cultural world and the constantly shifting interplay between such forms — which are not necessarily attached to certain chronological moments or evolutionary phases — helps move beyond such limiting dichotomies.
33. Here I diverge somewhat from Povinelli's analysis of the politics of recognition in Australia. She suggests that 'before we can develop a "critical theory of recognition", or a politics of distribution and capabilities, we need to understand better the cunning of recognition; its intercalation of the politics of culture with the culture of capital. We need to puzzle over a simple question; What is the nation recognizing, capital commodifying, and the court trying to save from the breach

of history when difference is recognized?' (Povinelli 220: 16–17). Although clearly tactics of recognition can be used as instruments of state domination, I believe it is important to evaluate the dynamics of recognition in other domains, such as the sacred, at the same time, and to therefore move beyond seeing the subjective desire for recognition as an exclusive creation of the 'cunning' neoliberal state.

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