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# Confetti of Empire: The Conquest of Everest in Nepal, India, Britain, and New Zealand

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*The Conquest of Everest*, the official film of the first ascent of Mount Everest, opens with the famous summit photograph of Tenzing Norgay holding aloft his ice axe, from which the flags of Britain, Nepal, India, and the United Nations flutter in the wind. Tenzing, a Sherpa raised in Nepal but for twenty years a resident of India, reached the summit with Edmund Hillary, a New Zealand beekeeper, on 29 May 1953, in a British expedition led by Colonel John Hunt. In the film, the summit photograph is followed by the opening credits and the scene in London on 2 June 1953, when news of the ascent was announced on the same day as Queen Elizabeth II's coronation. As crowds wave British flags to the beat of military bands, the Queen's gilded carriage rolls through ceremonial archways on the streets of London. The narrator then announces: "And to add to the cheers, the newspapers reported an extra of extras. Britain had one new victory: Men had climbed Mount Everest."<sup>1</sup>

The film cuts from London to Kathmandu with the following abrupt transition: "A procession in London, another in Central Asia." The Everest climbers are shown walking back to Kathmandu, where they join a parade in honor of Tenzing. In a carriage bedecked with flowers and Nepalese flags, Tenzing stands erect, garlanded with scarves, daubed with kum-kum powder, his hands together in the greeting of *namaste*. Although the film reproduces only a fleeting glimpse of this procession, John Hunt vividly recalled the group's reception:

Tenzing and Ed and I were transferred to the Royal coach with four horses, with Tenzing in the driving seat and us down in the bottom. We began to be showered with flowers

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<sup>1</sup> *The Conquest of Everest*, (1953), National Film and Television Archive, British Film Institute, London.

and coins and wreaths, and goodness knows what, for Ed and I were fairly invisible. And Tenzing was, of course, rightly, the hero. We were quite interested in some of the triumphal arches as we got close to Kathmandu, giving the local idea of what had happened. One I always remember, what looked like an unconscious Ed Hillary being pulled to the top by a triumphant Tenzing.<sup>2</sup>

The film does not depict these arches, but concludes its opening sequence with Tenzing, Hillary, and Hunt waving to the crowd from the balcony of Hanumon Dhoka in Kathmandu.<sup>3</sup> In the weeks that followed, the climbers were greeted by similar adulatory receptions in Calcutta, New Delhi, London, and elsewhere.

*The Conquest of Everest* juxtaposes these parades in order to draw parallels, blur boundaries, and deny differences. In the period that followed, the “conquest” of Everest became a symbol of nationalism in Nepal, India, Britain, and New Zealand. Since each of these nation-states claimed the ascent as their own, the parades took place not merely in parallel, as suggested in the film, but in direct competition with one another. Competing responses to the ascent of Everest present an interpretive challenge. One response has been to exaggerate the differences between them and to reproduce neo-orientalist interpretations of Everest.<sup>4</sup> This article considers the ascent of Everest in light of recent approaches to nationalism, postcolonialism, gender, and subaltern studies.<sup>5</sup> These intersecting perspectives suggest that divergent interpretations of the 1953 ascent of Everest were the contingent results of particular postcolonial nationalisms and masculinities.

When members of the Everest expedition returned to Kathmandu, New Delhi, London, and Auckland, government officials and some of the media represented the “conquest” as a symbol of the nation. At one level, this process varied according to the local traditions, rituals, and regalia of each nation-state.<sup>6</sup> At yet another level, the returns of the Everest expedition members to these cities shared several things in common: state honors, national masculinities,

<sup>2</sup> John Hunt interview, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> See Tenzing Norgay, *Man of Everest* (London, 1955), 284, Ralph Izzard, *Innocent on Everest* (London, 1955), 253; *Observer*, 21 June 1953; *Daily Telegraph*, *Times of India*, and *The Leader* (Allahabad), 22 June 1953. Sherpa names do not follow the conventions of western surnames. Thus the name “Tenzing” could be equivalent to either Hillary and Hunt, or Ed and John, depending on the context.

<sup>4</sup> See Gordon T. Stewart, “Tenzing’s Two Wrist-Watches: The Conquest of Everest and Late Imperial Culture, 1921–1953,” *Past and Present* 149 (1995): 170–97. Cf. Peter H. Hansen, “Debate: Tenzing’s Two Wrist-Watches: The Conquest of Everest and Late Imperial Culture, 1921–1953: Comment,” *Past and Present* 157 (Nov. 1997): 159–77, and Peter H. Hansen, “The Dancing Lamas of Everest: Cinema, Orientalism, and Anglo-Tibetan Relations in the 1920s,” *American Historical Review* 101 (1996): 712–47.

<sup>5</sup> See Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny eds., *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford, 1996), Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997), Ranajit Guha ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995* (Minneapolis, 1997), and Sherry Ortner, *Life and Death on Mt. Everest* (Princeton, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Bernard S. Cohn, “Representing Authority in Victorian India,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger. (Cambridge, 1983), 165–209, and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed., (London, 1991), esp. 163–85.

and imperial legacies. The honors bestowed on the climbers—parades, awards, ceremonies and so forth—claimed the ascent of Everest as a *national* achievement by linking Everest to local images of masculinity, ranging from the brave Gurkha to the effeminate Bengali, the English gentleman to the Kiwi bloke. In addition, these masculinities were legacies of empire, constructed in relation to one another in colonial situations.<sup>7</sup> As Mrinalini Sinha has observed, “English/British masculinity or Bengali/Indian effeminacy cannot be understood simply from the framework of discrete ‘national’ cultures; instead, they must be understood in relation to one another, and as constitutive of each other.”<sup>8</sup> Masculinities remained in a constitutive relationship as nation-states attempted to construct postcolonial national identities in the 1950s and beyond.

But these nation-states were never entirely successful in their attempt to co-opt the history of Everest for the history of the nation. This never happened in part because the counternarratives of other nation-states made it difficult for any one state to attain or sustain control of the “master narrative.” **But an even greater problem for all nationalist histories of the Everest conquest** has been the irreducible subjectivity of the climbers themselves. Subaltern studies historians have suggested a variety of ways to approach this issue. Early works in this field critiqued nationalist and Marxist historiography by adapting the Gramscian concept of the subaltern to recover the subjectivity, agency, and experience of subordinate individuals and groups. This project proved difficult because sources were few and the concept of the “subaltern” could lead in seemingly opposite directions—did it “recover” the autonomous subject, or foreclose the very possibility that the subaltern could “speak”?<sup>9</sup> More recent work, under the influence of poststructuralism and Foucault’s understanding of power, has reformulated the subaltern as “a position of critique, as a recalcitrant difference that arises not outside but inside elite discourses to exert pressure on forces and forms that subordinate it.”<sup>10</sup> Subaltern agency thus emerges in the gaps, margins,



<sup>7</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, (New York, 1995), R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley, 1995), Ashi Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi, 1983), Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham, NC, 1995), idem, “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992): 514–51, John Tosh, “What Should Historians do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-century Britain,” *History Workshop Journal* 38 (Autumn 1994): 179–202, and idem, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: the ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1995), 7.

<sup>9</sup> See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, (London, 1988), 271–313, and Rosalind O’Hanlon, “Recovering the Subject: *Subaltern Studies* and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia,” *Modern Asian Studies* 22 (1988): 189–244.

<sup>10</sup> Gyan Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism,” *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 1481. See the issues of *Subaltern Studies*, and for a related discussion, Judith Roof and Robyn Wiegman eds., *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity* (Champaign, 1995).

and tensions of dominant discourses. While this more recent view has avoided the pitfalls of the autonomous humanist subject, the Foucaultian framework sometimes substitutes “power as the transcending subject” in place of subaltern agency or subordination.<sup>11</sup> By emphasizing the marginality of the subaltern, however, rather than its irremediable subordination or inability to speak, this and other “borderlands” perspectives offer the possibility of exploring the dynamic power relations between subalterns and elites, without reinforcing the dichotomy between them.

This article provides a “linear” narrative of the Everest expedition’s return to Nepal, India, Britain, and New Zealand to the extent that these events occurred in sequence. Like other attempts to write postcolonial histories, this account aims to provincialize Europe and to bifurcate and complicate the dominant nationalist narratives.<sup>12</sup> The comparison of Nepal, India, Britain, and New Zealand highlights the ways in which various nationalists appropriated Everest and responded to counternarratives. In other words, the Everest receptions occurred serially but were related dialogically. Events in one location had an acute impact on what happened in another. In addition, Tenzing, Hillary, and Hunt—the three protagonists after the ascent—often spoke or wrote about these events, and their experiences illuminate the problem of subaltern agency. To be sure, Hillary and Hunt were not “subalterns” in a narrow sense. Yet like Tenzing, they too were constituted as subalterns by the nation-states that appropriated their ascent. Amid the diverse nationalist celebrations, the climbers’ own agency was never completely obliterated. This is not to say that they were autonomous agents in fixed subject positions. On the contrary, their positions changed radically in different contexts. By offering a “thick description” that attends to the agency and subjectivity of the climbers, as well as to broader power relations, discursive structures, and political contexts, it is possible to conceive of their ambiguous position in “structurally embedded agency and intention-filled structures.”<sup>13</sup>

If our own post-orientalist and postcolonial context has made it possible to re-examine these events, the Everest celebrations of the 1950s responded more di-

<sup>11</sup> K. Sivaramakrishnan, “Situating the Subaltern: History and Anthropology in the Subaltern Studies Project,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 8 (1995): 419.

<sup>12</sup> See Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” *Representations* 37 (1992): 1–26, Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago, 1995), Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922–1992* (Berkeley, 1995), Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), and Terrence J. McDonald ed., *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences* (Ann Arbor, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> Sherry Ortner, *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston, 1996), 12. See also idem, *Life and Death on Mt. Everest*, idem, “Thick Resistance: Death and the Cultural Construction of Agency in Himalayan Mountaineering,” *Representations* 59 (1997): 135–62, and idem, “The Making and Self-Making of ‘the Sherpas’ in Early Himalayan Mountaineering,” *Studies in Nepali History and Society* 3 (1998): 1–34.

rectly to the imperial experience in the immediate past.<sup>14</sup> The expedition's return to Nepal, India, Britain, and New Zealand was profoundly influenced by the process of state building in the wake of empire. Britain competed with Nepal, India, and New Zealand to claim credit for the ascent since each of these nation-states had recently become independent. As a result, Tenzing's and Hillary's nationalities became central issues. The Everest celebrations were deeply ambivalent because they highlighted the instability of these national identities. In the former imperial metropolis and the newly independent periphery, national leaders and the climbers themselves used Everest to define a variety of identities at that particular postcolonial moment. As Sir George Middleton, then British envoy to India, recalled of the expedition: "It was a curious thing because empires die and go away but it doesn't happen overnight. There is a lot of confetti lying around still, and the confetti of empire was still very visible in 1953."<sup>15</sup>

### I. THE FIRST DESCENT OF EVEREST

Immediately after the ascent was announced, controversies developed around three issues: who reached the summit first, what was Tenzing's nationality, and how should the climbers be honored? Within hours, rumors circulated in Nepal and India that Tenzing had reached the summit before Hillary. In Kathmandu, a "Tenzing Ballad" was sung in the streets, and placards showed Tenzing hauling a recumbent Hillary the last fifteen feet to the top. After Indian newspapers reported "Tenzing was First Man to Set Foot on Everest," Hunt said in an interview that Hillary had been first on the rope. This led the *Evening Post*, Wellington, to declare "Hillary first to Summit by Ten Feet." While Hunt praised Tenzing's role in the ascent, he added that Tenzing was "a good climber within the limits of his experience." As the climbers made their way to Kathmandu, reporters and "reception committees" badgered Tenzing to sign papers he could not read, certifying that he was Nepali, not Indian, and that he had reached the summit before Hillary. Tenzing also reacted angrily to Hunt's comments, asking: "Is there any living man who has been on Everest seven times

<sup>14</sup> See Gyan Prakash ed., *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton, 1994), Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (Philadelphia, 1993), Nicholas B. Dirks, *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor, 1992), Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (1990): 383–408; Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook, "After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism and Politics in the Third World," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992): 141–67, and Gyan Prakash, "Can the 'Subaltern' Ride? A Reply to O'Hanlon and Washbrook", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (1992): 168–84.

<sup>15</sup> George Middleton, interview for "Reputations: Hillary and Tenzing, Everest and After," broadcast on BBC2, 18 June 1997 (hereafter BBC interview). Many thanks to the "Reputations" staff for transcripts. For cultural approaches to state formation, see Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham, N.C., 1994), and Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: State Formation, Cultural Revolution and the Rise of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1985).

in a total of eleven expeditions?” Hunt soon apologized, and Hillary and Tenzing issued a joint statement that “we reached the summit almost together.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite repeated appeals to end the controversy, this formula failed to satisfy everyone. Tenzing was put under police protection after he was offered bribes and threatened with violence unless he signed additional statements that he was first on top. Hillary also faced a hostile reception on the way to Kathmandu. At one ceremony, an official invited Hillary to say “a few words from the second man on Everest.”

My comments were short, complimentary and inoffensive. As I withdrew to my seat in the rear the only sound to be heard in the whole square was my footsteps on the dais—there wasn’t a clap or even a cough. Everyone in that vast crowd was pouring out hate towards me, not for what I was or had done—they’d probably never heard of me before—but because they feared I might not be happy to remain “the second man on Everest.”<sup>17</sup>

Hunt and Christopher Summerhayes, British Ambassador in Kathmandu, edited Hillary’s articles for the *Times* of London so as not to cause offense in Nepal and India. The political implications of who reached the summit first—a question that had not concerned the climbers on the mountain—silenced them both and rendered Hillary and Tenzing as subalterns. Though Hillary and Tenzing shared the same rope, they occupied distinct subaltern positions. The heavily edited official statement that they reached the summit “almost together,” for example, suggests that the climbers and British officials who drafted it agreed with the underlying assumption that only *one* person could be first. Since Hillary had been first on the rope, they considered him first on top, and thus they arrived “almost together.”<sup>18</sup>

Tenzing’s transnational background also posed a problem. Newspapers referred to him as “Nepalese born, Indian domiciled,” and his predicament was typical for Sherpas, who often migrated between Nepal, India, and Tibet in search of seasonal labor. Several years later Tenzing revealed that, although he grew up at Thami, Solu Khumbu (in Nepal), he was born at Tsa-chu, a village located, although he did not say so, in Tibet.<sup>19</sup> Tenzing’s 1953 comments also

<sup>16</sup> Hunt: *Madras Mail*, 17 June 1953, *Observer* and *Daily Express*, 21 June 1953, *Evening Post*, (Wellington), 22 June 1953; Tenzing: *Times of India*, 23 June 1953; see also Hunt to Tenzing, 8 June 1955, CO 268/7/5, Princeton University Library. For the joint statement, see Tenzing, *Man of Everest*, 28; *Pioneer*, *Statesman*, *Times of India*, 22 June 1953, and EE/90, Royal Geographical Society Archives, London (hereafter RGS Archives).

<sup>17</sup> Edmund Hillary, *Nothing Venture, Nothing Win* (London, 1975), 165–66. See also Pat Booth, *Edmund Hillary* (Auckland, 1993), 50.

<sup>18</sup> On editing Hillary, see EE/83, RGS Archives. The climbers later dropped the “almost,” and Hillary has resumed saying that he was first. See Edmund Hillary interview, 1998; Edmund Hillary, *View from the Summit* (London, 1999), 30–31; and “A View From the Top: Hillary,” (Television New Zealand, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> See Tenzing, *Man of Everest*, 33; see also Peter H. Hansen, “Partners: Guides and Sherpas in the Alps and Himalayas, 1850s–1950s,” in *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel*, ed. Jaś Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés, (London, 1999), 210–31. Thanks to Tashi Tenzing (interview, 1998) for clarifying Tenzing’s place of birth.

suggest that he thought of himself as neither Indian nor Nepali (nor Tibetan) in a more profound sense: he had no conception of citizenship or national identity. The Bombay *Sunday Standard* reported that Tenzing “could not understand the politics of his citizenship, and he knew that both countries were the same to him, and he did not know what difference it made whether he was a Nepalese citizen or an Indian.” The American magazine *Life* recorded similar comments by Tenzing in his own broken English: “For me Indian Nepali same. I am Nepali but I think I also Indian. We should all be same—Hillary, myself, Indian, Nepali, everybody.” Rather than self-identification by statehood, Tenzing vacillated between identifications based on where he was born and where he lived or worked. Together, these more fundamental categories of belonging represented a form of existential resistance to statist classification by citizenship. Tenzing later said of the people who wanted him to be either Nepali or Indian: “I used to think of political speakers that these people have no work to do.”<sup>20</sup>

Tenzing’s ambiguous background and refusal to identify his citizenship complicated the issue of honors for the climbers. In Nepal and India proposals to honor Tenzing included a national holiday, medals, postage stamps, and changing the name of Mount Everest. Gorkha Parishad, a conservative political party in Nepal, suggested renaming Everest “Tenzing Peak.” In India, the Socialist Party of Banaras proposed “Ten-Hillary Peak,” and the letter columns of newspapers in India included many other such proposals. In England, the *Daily Herald* proposed “Mount Elizabeth.” A poll in India, however, went against “Mount Elizabeth” in favor of “Mount Tenzing,” with strong support for combinations such as “Tenhillary,” “Hillarsing,” and “Hilltenthunt.”<sup>21</sup>

The British government quickly staked its claim to the ascent by conferring knighthoods on Hillary and Hunt, and announcing its intention to honor Tenzing: “Since he is not a British subject, this requires consultation, and no immediate announcement can be made.” After rumors circulated that Britain proposed giving Tenzing the George Medal, the highest civilian award for gallantry, the *Manchester Guardian* asked, “Would it not be wiser, since Hillary and he stood on the summit side by side, to honour them in the same way?”<sup>22</sup> Sir Winston Churchill demurred when asked about the issue in Prime Minister’s question time: “Is the Prime Minister aware of the general disappointment that it has not been thought appropriate to offer the Indian subject, Tenzing, an award comparable with that given to the New Zealander?” Churchill’s ambiguous

<sup>20</sup> *Sunday Standard*, 21 June 1953; *Life*, 13 July 1953; and draft of Tenzing’s autobiography in CO 268/7/1, Princeton University Library. See also “Tenzing’s Own Story,” in *Daily Express*, 2–7 July 1953, *Times of India*, 13–17 July 1953.

<sup>21</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 June 1953. See the discussions in *Times of India*, 4, 9, 12, 13, 15, 16, and 18 June 1953, *Statesman*, 4 and 5 June and 12 and 13 July 1953, *Leader*, 9 and 15 June 1953, *Pioneer*, 8 June 1953, *Daily Herald* (London), 3 June 1953, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 June 1953.

<sup>22</sup> For the announcement, *Observer*, *Sunday Times*, and *Times of India*, 7 June 1953. For the *Manchester Guardian*, 15 June 1953.

reply: "That does not entirely rest with Her Majesty's Government." After Tenzing's George Medal was officially announced, *News Chronicle* complained "As Sir Winston Churchill observed during the war, medals not only glitter: they sometimes cast shadows. This medal, by discriminating between white man and brown, casts a particularly unpleasant shadow."<sup>23</sup>

Yet "shadows" come from many sources. It appears likely that the British government consulted Nepal and India, and almost certain that Tenzing was not awarded a knighthood because the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, refused to allow it.<sup>24</sup> The leaders of independent India, now a republic, continued to reject the British honors system that had been central to representing British authority in India under the Raj. A knighthood for Tenzing appears to have been interpreted by Nehru not as a gesture of gratitude by Britain, but as yet another act of political subordination. In addition, Tenzing's citizenship was then unclear, and Nepal and India were still each attempting to claim him. By ensuring that the British did not confer a knighthood on Tenzing, Nehru incorporated Tenzing into the traditions of Indian nationalism, which had emphasized the rejection of British honors as symbols of British domination.<sup>25</sup> For Tenzing, this act of incorporation by India was simultaneously an act of subordination to both India and Britain. He was incorporated into the narratives of Indian nationalism and subordinated to the Indian state when the British government discriminated against him with a lesser award. To become a subaltern in India, Tenzing was required to remain a subaltern in his relationship with the British. As the climbers returned to receive further honors from Nepal and India, the imperial legacy continued to cast a long shadow.

## II. NEPAL

Kathmandu welcomed the climbers with an official parade and state reception at the Royal Palace. Newsreel footage of their arrival shows thick crowds blocking the procession as the climbers acknowledged the cheers. At the Royal Palace, Tenzing, Hillary, and Hunt received the first of their honors. As King Tribhuvan gave Tenzing the Nepal Tara, the Star of Nepal, the highest decoration not reserved for royalty, he told him in Nepali, "you have added to the prestige of Nepal." The Prime Minister, M.P. Koirala, then awarded Hillary and Hunt the Gorkha Dakshina Bahu, Order of the Gurkha Right Hand, First Class,

<sup>23</sup> Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons*, 5th ser., v. 516, 17 June 1953, O/971; 19 June 1953, W/94; on medals, 7 July 1953, O/1049–50. *News Chronicle*, 24 June 1953.

<sup>24</sup> British officials told Hunt that Nehru vetoed Tenzing's knighthood. Tenzing's autobiography also notes opposition from India (and that Tenzing was not concerned about the award). Hunt interview, 1996; Tenzing, *Man of Everest*, 285. British records have been destroyed or remain closed. See the missing gaps in FO 371/106880, or wait for FO 372/7176 to open in 2054, Public Record Office, Kew (hereafter PRO).

<sup>25</sup> Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," and idem, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, 1996).

a lesser award, telling them in English, “You have added to the prestige of Nepal and Great Britain.”<sup>26</sup>

These awards combined British and Nepalese models of the nation-state.<sup>27</sup> The distinction between the award for Tenzing on the one hand, and those for Hillary and Hunt on the other, mirrored the hierarchical British honors that had already been announced, and attempted to reinforce the monarchy’s place at the apex of the Nepalese polity. Only a few years before, in 1950 and 1951, the Indian government had brokered a compromise in Nepal that ended the rule of hereditary Rana Prime Ministers, established limited democracy through coalition governments, and restored Tribhuvan to the throne. Yet in 1953, this post-Rana political settlement was still far from stable. Tribhuvan’s award of the Star of Nepal not only symbolized Tenzing as a Nepali as opposed to an Indian, but also contrasted the new Nepal to the old Rana regime.

Such efforts were necessary because the supporters of the Ranas also attempted to claim Tenzing as their hero. The first proposal to rename Everest “Tenzing Peak” had come from General Bharat Shamsheer, leader of the Gorkha Parishad, a party representing the rump of the Ranas. Shamsheer called Tenzing “the bravest among the brave and the real conqueror of Everest,” and said the peak should be renamed after “the great Gorkha who climbed it.”<sup>28</sup> Such language attempted to use Tenzing to recover for the Ranas both the martial traditions of the Gurkhas and the newer language of Nepali nationalism. In the nineteenth century, the courageous “Gurkha,” recruited in Nepal by the British, came to represent the exemplary martial tradition and masculinity of Nepal. During the 1930s and 1940s, Nepalis living in India had also developed two cultural elements of their nationalism that undergirded their opposition to the Rana regime: the use of the Nepali language and new histories that emphasized *bir* (brave) national traditions. These elements of nationalism were widely disseminated in Nepal after 1950, and many groups, including ex-Ranas, competed to be considered inheritors of “Gurkha” traditions. Thus, at a state reception at the Singha Durbar, the Queen of Nepal gave Tenzing ten thousand Nepalese Rupees, and presented Hillary and Hunt each with *khukhris*, “the famous curved Gorkha knife,” in sheaths encrusted with jewels.<sup>29</sup>

The Cold War led some observers to blame communist agitation for the contentious atmosphere in Nepal. Summerhayes, the British ambassador, reported

<sup>26</sup> *Observer*, and *Sunday Times* (London), 21 June 1953. For newsreels, see 53/47, “Everest Heroes Arrive,” British Pathé, London; and 59279:Iss.1255a, “Everest Conquered,” British Movietone, London.

<sup>27</sup> See Richard Burghart, “The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 44 (1984): 101–25.

<sup>28</sup> *The Leader*, 9 June 1953.

<sup>29</sup> *Times of India and Statesman*, 24 June 1953. Lionel Caplan, *Warrior Gentlemen: “Gurkhas” in the Western Imagination*, (London, 1995), and Pratyoush Onta, “Creating a Brave Nepali Nation in British India: The Rhetoric of *Jati* Improvement, Rediscovery of Bhanubhakta and the Writing of *Bir* History,” *Studies in Nepali Society and History* 1 (1996): 37–76.

“a Communist aided effort to create ill feeling” over the role of Tenzing and “jealousy about Indian claims on him.”<sup>30</sup> A “Tenzing Security Committee” had menaced several Indian reporters at knifepoint, and kidnapped a reporter from the *Times of India* in Kathmandu. Sources in India told the British climbers that Calcutta communists had traveled to Kathmandu to make trouble.<sup>31</sup> To be sure, there were communists in Kathmandu, but Nepali politics were characterized far more by diversity, factional infighting, and Nepali-Indian antagonism.<sup>32</sup> In the fluid context of Nepali politics at the time, every political party celebrated Tenzing. As the climbers returned to Kathmandu, negotiations for yet another coalition government had come to a halt in order to plan the hero’s welcome for Tenzing. Since the Communist Party was then banned, some of the protest attributed to it may have come from the Praja Parishad, a party based in Kathmandu, which had once joined a “United Front” with the Communists. For the fissiparous factions of the socialist Nepali Congress Party, Tenzing may have personified the peasants of eastern Nepal, who were then leading a rent strike in opposition to the government. For each of these parties, Tenzing was such a versatile figure because he was such a marginal figure in Nepal.

As a Sherpa, a religious and ethnic minority, Tenzing was a potent symbol of the Nepali nation. At a large public ceremony at Tundhikhel, a park in the middle of Kathmandu, Tenzing was given illuminated addresses, presents, bags, medals, and, according to Major Charles Wylie, a British climber and Gurkha officer on the expedition, was “publicly declared equal to Buddha.” Tenzing also appeared several times on Nepal Radio. In one broadcast, an ambiguous statement written by the Indian ambassador regarding his own nationality was read for Tenzing: “I am a son of Nepal and as such I consider myself a Nepali first, but I went to Darjeeling years ago to earn my livelihood and settled there. The people have been most helpful and were kind to me.”<sup>33</sup>

Nepal’s relationship with India was also ambiguous and had its own subaltern dimensions. India had helped to overthrow the Rana regime, and the British government advised consulting India before asking Nepal for permission to climb Everest in 1951. Faced with separate Swiss and British proposals to climb Everest in 1952, the government of Nepal vacillated and suggested that the climbers join forces for an Anglo-Swiss ascent.<sup>34</sup> After the British refused to accept a Swiss

<sup>30</sup> Summerhayes to Foreign Office, 24 June 1953; PRO: FO 371/106880.

<sup>31</sup> Interviews with Michael Westmacott (1996) and Charles Wylie (1996).

<sup>32</sup> Leo E. Rose, “Communism Under High Atmospheric Conditions: the Party in Nepal,” in Robert A. Scalapino, ed., *The Communist Revolution in Asia*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1965). More generally, see Bhuwan Lal Joshi and Leo E. Rose, *Democratic Innovations in Nepal: A Case Study in Political Acculturation* (Berkeley, 1966), and Rishikesh Shaha, *Modern Nepal: A Political History 1769–1955*, vol. II, 1885–1955, (Riverdale, MD, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Wylie interview, 1996, and Charles Wylie, “Tenzing Norgay 1914–1986 and the Sherpa Team,” *Himalayan Journal* 50 (1992–93): 70–78. For Tenzing’s broadcast: *Daily Telegraph*, 18 June 1953, *Statesman*, 22 June 1953.

<sup>34</sup> See Foreign Office minutes, PRO: FO 371/92928, 19 June 1951 on permission; and FO 371/101162, 7 January 1952, on Nepali proposals for a joint expedition.

leader or joint-leadership, the Swiss went by themselves. Indeed, Tenzing and Raymond Lambert, a Swiss guide, nearly reached the summit in 1952. Although Nepalis had been uncomfortable with earlier national competition on Everest, Nepali nationalism soon intensified after India sent a military mission in response to an aborted coup by the Rana-dominated military. Some of these Indian troops were still stationed in the vicinity of Everest during the ascent in 1953.

Thus, in contrast to Indian influence, Nepali officials considered Tenzing a “son of Nepal.” Prime Minister Koirala told the climbers that “the Nepalese nation is, of course, proud of Tenzing, proud that we have in our midst today a son of Nepal who has justified the existence of the highest summit of the world on Nepalese soil by climbing to its peak and planting our national flag there.”<sup>35</sup> In the context of Nepal’s efforts to define a post-Rana polity and distinguish itself from India, Koirala was saying that, as a Nepali, Tenzing’s ascent of Everest had justified the existence of Nepal.

### III. INDIA

Tenzing and his family flew to **Calcutta in the King of** Nepal’s private plane, and stayed as guests of the Governor of West Bengal at Raj Bhavan, the palatial residence of former viceroys and governors modeled on Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire. Tenzing said he **was glad to be in his “own province,” but equivocated when asked about his nationality.**

His was not the only homecoming. John Hunt declared on arrival in Calcutta, “I feel as if I have come back home.” Hunt had been born in India and served in the Indian police near Calcutta in the 1930s. Most press coverage and public events in India, however, celebrated Tenzing as an Indian citizen. At a civic reception, the mayor of Calcutta, N.N. Mookerjee, told Tenzing: “We feel proud and elated at your magnificent success, as it is the triumph of a brother from Bengal.”<sup>36</sup>

Soon afterwards, B. C. Roy, the Governor of West Bengal, announced that his **government was establishing a mountaineering institute in Darjeeling under Tenzing’s leadership.** The school had been proposed by Rabbrindranath Mitra, a friend of Tenzing’s in Darjeeling, who had given him the Indian flag to take to the summit. Mitra recalled that he told Roy: “If you start a mountain institute in Darjeeling, it will go down in history that you are the creator of modern India.” Roy forwarded the suggestion to Nehru, and the idea was taken up. In announcing the Himalayan Mountain Institute, Roy appealed to the youth of Bengal: “mountaineering was not a hobby but helped to mould character and instill self-confidence, discipline, initiative, and determination.”<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> *Statesman*, 24 June 1953.

<sup>36</sup> For Tenzing, *Times of India*, *Statesman*, and *Manchester Guardian*, 25 June 1953. For Hunt, *Statesman*, 16 June 1953, and Hunt interview, 1996. For Mookerjee, E2, Alpine Club Archives, London.

<sup>37</sup> Rabbrindranath Mitra, BBC interview. For Roy, see *Statesman*, 27 June 1953. Cf. “Mountaineering,” *Times of India*, 13 July 1953.

The Himalayan Mountain Institute was a legacy of the empire. First, the school re-appropriated the Himalayas from the British. During the Raj, British mountaineering and the “hill stations” of the Himalayas, including Darjeeling, had been visible manifestations of British power.<sup>38</sup> Second, Tenzing’s ascent contested older British representations of the “effeminate” Bengali. During colonial rule, British officials had characterized Bengali men as lazy and effeminate, an image which they gradually extended to describe the rest of the Indian population, especially its educated, middle-class elites. Internalizing this self-image of effete-ness, many middle-class Indian intellectuals began to promote a culture of athleticism to demonstrate their virility. Others responded by developing competing models or emphasizing local traditions of masculinity, of which Gandhian nationalism is perhaps the best known and most important.<sup>39</sup> As the lineal descendants and inheritors of the traditions of Indian nationalism, the leaders of independent India interpreted Tenzing’s ascent of Everest in these terms. Inder Malhotra, a journalist, recalled that Nehru “seized upon this conquest of Everest and the personality of Tenzing as one way of galvanizing India behind adventure, behind mountaineering, behind doing things as spectacular as the conquest of Everest.” The British origins of mountaineering appear to have been a central part of its appeal in independent India. As Malhotra recalled, it was “a focus of national pride that someone from among us has done something which was until recently considered only a white man’s kind of pastime.”<sup>40</sup>

In Delhi, when John Hunt alighted from the Bharat Airways Dakota plane, he waved the Indian tricolor flag from Tenzing’s ice axe. The crowd of five thousand people roared its approval, broke through the police barriers, and swept Tenzing away in tears for a quarter mile down the tarmac before the police battled their way through the crush, swinging lathis to rescue him.<sup>41</sup> In ceremonies at Rashtrapati Bhavan—the former Viceroy’s Lodge and centerpiece of Edward Lutyens’ New Delhi—the President of India, Rajendra Prasad, presented the climbers with medals depicting Mount Everest on one side and the Asoka Lion on the other, with the Sanskrit inscription *Sahase Shri Prativa*

<sup>38</sup> See Dane Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (Berkeley, 1996); J.T. Kenny, “Climate, Race, and Imperial Authority: the Symbolic Landscape of the British Hill Station in India,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85 (1995): 694–714; Peter H. Hansen, “Vertical Boundaries, National Identities: Victorian Mountaineering on the Frontiers of Europe and the Empire, 1868–1914,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 24 (1996): 48–71; and Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: the Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (Chicago, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> See Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*, John Rosselli, “The Self-Image of Effete-ness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal,” *Past and Present* 86 (1980): 121–48, Shahid Amin, “Gandhi as Mahatma,” in Guha and Spivak ed., *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Richard Fox, *Gandhian Utopia*, (Boston, 1989), and Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*.

<sup>40</sup> Malhotra, BBC interview.

<sup>41</sup> See *Pioneer*, *Times of India*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Birmingham Post*, *Manchester Guardian*, 29 June 1953, *Dawn* (Karachi), 30 June 1953. For newsreels, see 53/49, “Everest Conquerors in Delhi,” British Pathé; and 59310:Iss.1256a, “Nepal and India Welcome Everest Victors,” British Movietone.

(Adventure is Glory). In announcing the awards, the Indian government was careful to note that “these are special medals and do not mark the commencement of a special order.”<sup>42</sup>

At one ceremony, Prasad warmly praised the teamwork on Everest and hoped that this “spirit of enterprise and adventure” would guide people “in making the greater and higher conquest of the human spirit, which will enable all of us to live in peace, to help each other in time of need and to live as members of one family.”<sup>43</sup> This call for unity served several purposes. Such language attempted to erase difference in India during a period of continuing sectarian rivalry and active separatism, especially in Kashmir. In place of sectarian strife, Everest taught a didactic lesson to *The Leader*, an Allahabad paper: “In India, the progress of many a nation-building institution is hampered by internal strife and party politics. The local bodies are an instance in point. So Everest training has an educative value also.”<sup>44</sup> In addition, the rhetoric of the human spirit spoke the language of internationalism, of cooperation and comradeship, to a wider audience in the Commonwealth or the non-aligned movement during the Cold War.<sup>45</sup> This rhetoric also assuaged Nepali resentment of Indian claims on Tenzing’s nationality.

If the ascent of Everest was represented as overcoming sectarian discord through masculine adventure, it also recuperated Indian practices of paternalism and protection. Consider Nehru’s relationship with Tenzing. “Since I had hardly any clothes of my own,” Tenzing recalled, “he opened his closets and began giving me his. He gave me coats, trousers, shirts, everything—because we are the same size they all fitted perfectly.” Nehru did not give Tenzing a white Congress Party cap, “for that would have had political meaning, and he completely agreed with me that I should stay out of politics.”<sup>46</sup> If non-partisan, Nehru’s clothes were anything but an apolitical fashion statement. Through this private gesture, Nehru became Tenzing’s patron, and the gifts symbolizing their relationship were examples of longstanding Indian practices of “protection” that again constituted Tenzing’s subaltern position.<sup>47</sup> At later public events, Tenzing stood literally draped in Nehru’s own jacket as a symbol of the secular Indian citizen. Tenzing’s marginality was once again an asset for Nehru, Prasad, and others in India—as it had been for leaders in Nepal—because they each wanted to represent the incorporation of the margins into the nation as a whole.

<sup>42</sup> See *Statesman*, 25, 30 June 1953. *Pioneer*, 25 June and 3 July 1953.

<sup>43</sup> See PRO: FO 371/106880; *Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents*, ed. Valmiki Choudhary, v. 16, (New Delhi, 1992), 422; and excerpts in *Statesman* and *Pioneer*, 30 June 1953.

<sup>44</sup> *The Leader*, 3 June 1953.

<sup>45</sup> For an example of Nehru’s “spirit of humanity” rhetoric in the context of the Cold War and decolonization, see Nehru to Churchill, 8 June 1953, PRO: PREM 11/459.

<sup>46</sup> Tenzing, *Man of Everest*, 289–90. See Ortner, *Life and Death on Mt. Everest*, 87, for a discussion of this exchange as a *zhindak* relationship.

<sup>47</sup> For later examples of similar practices, see Zakia Pathak and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, “Shabano,” *Signs* 14 (1989): 558–82.

Tenzing's poverty before the ascent was also an important symbol of his incorporation into the prosperous "new" India upon his return. The Indian press published many stories testifying to his humble origins, relative poverty, and wish to build a home. After a schoolgirl sent a gift for Tenzing to the president of India, money poured into subscription funds. In Calcutta, *The Statesman* raised twelve thousand rupees for Tenzing and an equal amount for other Sherpas. A wide variety of groups gave him a radio, gramophone, electric stove, wristwatches, pieces of gold, 180 square yards of land, and a Gandhi cap; Tenzing's wife received a sewing machine.<sup>48</sup> Such beneficence more than compensated for some of the more insalubrious offers Tenzing turned down, including a bribe of five thousand rupees to say they never climbed Everest. Before Tenzing left India, the London *Times* estimated that he had been given nearly one hundred thousand rupees (about £7,500 at the time).<sup>49</sup>

Several large ceremonies also distinguished themselves from the precedents of earlier British imperial assemblies.<sup>50</sup> At the Gandhi grounds in Delhi, Tenzing, Hillary, and Hunt sat cramped together with others exposed to the sun on a low stage, only a few feet away from the audience of over ten thousand people. Hunt was given a replica of the Asoka Pillar, while Hillary and Tenzing received models of Mount Everest, with another two thousand rupees for Tenzing. Hunt expressed his thanks for the gifts as "symbols of both ancient and new India."<sup>51</sup> A few days later, the New Delhi municipal government sponsored yet another ceremony before ten thousand people at the National Stadium. As flowers rained down on the climbers and children sang songs composed for the occasion, Tenzing was given five thousand rupees in National Savings Certificates. Tenzing announced that "none of us could have climbed to the summit of Everest alone. Our success was due to our team spirit." Hunt was given an ivory replica of the Qutab Minar, a Moghul tower in Delhi. After switching from English to Hindi in his extemporaneous remarks, Hunt was "cheered at the end of each sentence." The climbers later laid wreaths at the *samadhi* of Mahatma Gandhi (the site of his cremation) at Rajghat.<sup>52</sup>

Although they appeared at each of these events, the climbers themselves rarely spoke. Hunt offered a political reading of the ascent as an expression of the Commonwealth: "Two members of the Commonwealth had 'symbolised the drama of Everest,' among them being 'sathi' (comrade) Tenzing." Chastened by his experience in Nepal, Hillary stayed in the background. Tenzing

<sup>48</sup> See *Statesman* and *Times of India* between 9 June and 2 July 1953. On the gifts, see *Times of India*, *Pioneer*, and *Statesman*, 1–2 July 1953.

<sup>49</sup> *Times*, 2 July 1953.

<sup>50</sup> See Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," and idem, "Cloth, Clothes, and Colonialism: India in the Nineteenth Century," *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, 106–62.

<sup>51</sup> *Statesman*, 30 June 1953. For British newsreels, see 53/49, "Everest Conquerors in Delhi," British Pathé; and 59310:Iss.1256a, "Nepal and India Welcome Everest Victors," British Movietone.

<sup>52</sup> See *Times of India*, *Statesman*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Times*, 2 July 1953, *Pioneer*, 3 July 1953.

also remained uncomfortable in public. When interviewed at the Nepalese Embassy in New Delhi, the *Times of India* noted that “Tenzing showed extreme reluctance to speak.”<sup>53</sup> He appeared several times on All India Radio, however, and the interviewers invariably asked him how he had felt on the summit. In Calcutta, Tenzing said “all the hills and mounts round about looked like gods and goddesses to us and the plains below appeared so many broken pieces of habitation.” Interviewed with his family in Delhi, Tenzing said “the first thing he thought of on the summit was God, and the greatness of His work. Then, of course, he thought of his wife and his two daughters.” In a broadcast with children that aired on the Children’s Hour, Tenzing said that “just as when one meets a well-loved friend after a long absence there is little that can be put into words, so he felt when he reached the top in his seventh attempt.”<sup>54</sup> To some observers, Tenzing’s humility and inarticulacy—his subalternity—were the very qualities that defined his position as a national hero in India. As he left for London, the *Times of India* reported that Tenzing had become “the cynosure of admiration” because “he was the ‘underdog’ in the minds of the Indian people. That feeling, and the fact that Tenzing has borne with humility, detachment, and a sense of gratitude all the adoration that has been bestowed on him, have served to make a national hero of him.”<sup>55</sup>

#### IV. BRITAIN

As Colonel John Hunt stepped off the BOAC Argonaut airliner at London, he waved the Union Jack from his ice axe. He and the other climbers were greeted by the secretary of state for war, Brigadier Anthony Head, “which the Prime Minister had thought fitting, because the expedition’s leader was a Regular soldier. The whole Army was intensely proud of that. ‘The whole Commonwealth,’ he said, ‘is moved, and is proud of your great achievement.’”<sup>56</sup> Five hundred people gave the climbers a rousing but decorous welcome. The only person to break through the police barriers was Charles Wylie’s daughter, who ran across the tarmac with her arms outstretched to hug her father. Similar family reunions all suggested the homecoming that British newsreels and newspapers assigned to the event, “Everest Heroes Home.”

The newsreels contained little overtly “political” narration. Hunt modestly paid tribute to his predecessors on Everest. Hillary emphasized that he and Tenzing climbed together as a unit. Someone off-camera translated Tenzing as saying he had been “very happy” on the summit.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, with Hunt waving the flag and the minister of war glad-handing the climbers, the scene was

<sup>53</sup> For Hunt, *Times of India*, 30 June 1953; for Tenzing, *Times of India*, 29 June 1953.

<sup>54</sup> *Pioneer*, 26 June 1953; *Times of India*, 29 June 1953, and *Statesman*, 1 July 1953.

<sup>55</sup> *Times of India*, 2 July 1953. <sup>56</sup> *Yorkshire Post*, 4 July 1953.

<sup>57</sup> See 53/50 “Everest Heroes Home,” British Pathé; and 59344:Iss.1257, “Everest Victors Here,” British Movietone.

as political as those that had come before it. In a radio interview, Hunt recalled that, when he first learned of the ascent, he had been delighted that Hillary and Tenzing, “representing, in a sense, members of the Commonwealth, had been successful in getting to the top. It was only right and proper.”<sup>58</sup> But newsreel and radio interviews also document the ambiguity of Hillary and Tenzing’s position in London. Hillary’s antipodean accent and Tenzing’s foreign language both suggested their marginality in Britain, signifying the boundaries and limits of this event as a “homecoming.”

Hillary’s place was the least clear. The *Glasgow Herald* thought that any of the climbers, “save possibly Hillary, could be accepted in any Glasgow tea-room as a group of students from the university. The New Zealand **beekeeper** is a tall, raw-boned rug of a man—it is difficult to realise he is not a Scot or an Irishman when looking at that long, bony face and lean jaw and wide grin.”<sup>59</sup> Hillary went from the airport to stay at his sister’s house near Norwich. As part of the diaspora of British settler colonies, **Hillary was white but not quite British when he returned to London**, and his position exemplifies a particular type of colonial ambivalence in the metropolis.<sup>60</sup> British representations of the ascent as a triumph of the “Commonwealth” attempted, in part, to contain this ambivalence by incorporating Hillary, Tenzing, and Hunt into Greater Britain.

A few days later, John Hunt’s return to his home at Llanfair-Waterdine, a village on the Welsh border, celebrated a Welsh/British identity that added another dimension to British nationalism. Hunt recalled that, of all the triumphal receptions he received, “that was the greatest thing of all, coming home.” Hunt stood in a small cart, garlanded with flowers and waving the British flag from his ice-axe, as twenty local farmers towed him up the steep hill to his house. “There was a bonfire, supper party, barbecue, speeches, the mayor, the county council, chairman of the county councilors, all very local, but all the more moving.”<sup>61</sup> Hunt had earlier announced that he had flown the Welsh flag at his camps on Everest. After the Welsh nationalist party announced at a rally that Hunt had sent them a message, the War Office reminded Hunt that political endorsements would break his pledge to remain non-partisan while in the military. Hunt replied that he had merely expressed “my sympathy with the preservation of the culture and traditions of Wales.”<sup>62</sup> To the British government,

<sup>58</sup> See the transcript, EE/89, RGS Archives, and recording T19520, British Library, National Sound Archive, London.

<sup>59</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 4 July 1953.

<sup>60</sup> See Angela Woollacott, “‘All This Is Empire I Told Myself’: Australian Women’s Voyages ‘Home’ and the Articulation of Colonial Whiteness,” *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1003–29. See also Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), Stoler, “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers,” and Antoinette Burton, *At the Heart of the Empire: Indians and the Colonial Encounter in Late-Victorian Britain* (Berkeley, 1998).

<sup>61</sup> Hunt interview, 1996. See also *News Chronicle*, *Birmingham Post*, and *Daily Express*, 6 July 1953.

<sup>62</sup> See War Office to Hunt, 16 October 1953, and Hunt to War Office, 22 October 1953, EE/89, RGS Archive. On the Welsh flag, see *Statesman*, 27 June 1953.

however, such gestures of Welsh solidarity undermined the myth of the unitary British nation.

With Hillary and Hunt ensconced with relatives in Norfolk or at home in Wales, Tenzing attracted much attention as he traveled around London with his family. He stayed at the Indian Services Club, toured London, and gave interviews for newspapers, radio, and television. Although some newspaper coverage portrayed him as the exotic “other” in a world beyond his ken, his own voice could still be heard. When a reporter asked him if he was “thrilled” at seeing the sights of London, Tenzing replied, “I have spent all my life in the mountains and the hills have taught me calm.”<sup>63</sup>

The British government finally paid tribute to the climbers. The climbers joined a previously scheduled garden party at Buckingham Palace attended by eight thousand people in a pelting rain. In the downpour, the climbers jostled with débutantes and dignitaries for limited dry space, as the band gave a soggy rendition of Handel’s *Water Music*. After the Queen briefly appeared, the climbers were ushered into a drawing room in the palace. There, as Hillary recalled, they were invested with their honors:

The Queen came in followed by the Duke of Edinburgh. They were in the clothes they had worn at the garden party. Then a Palace official motioned to Colonel Hunt. He stepped forward a few paces and knelt on a footstool. The Queen touched him on both shoulders with a sword handed to her by an attendant. I did not hear her say anything. Sir John got to his feet and stepped a few paces back—and then it was my turn. I knelt, felt a light touch on the shoulders, got up, and it was all over. It was so quiet, simple, and impressive. I shall never forget it.<sup>64</sup>

The Queen also presented Tenzing with his George Medal. She shook his hand, while he gave her a bow, “the namaskar.” Prince Philip patted Tenzing on the shoulder and said “Well done!” The Queen gave all the climbers coronation medals engraved with the words “Mount Everest Expedition.” In the evening, Prince Philip presided at a small state dinner—for “Men Only”—after which wives and other guests joined them for a large state reception at Lancaster House. Apart from a photo opportunity with a scale model of Everest, organizers excluded the press, since they “might photograph Ministers or other eminent persons in the act of drinking and these photographs might be used against them in later years.”<sup>65</sup>

While the early announcement of British honors had set the example followed by other nations, ceremonies in Nepal and India also created awkward precedents for the British by the time the expedition reached London. Since Tenzing had been given money in Nepal and India, British diplomats were

<sup>63</sup> *Times of India*, 5 July 1953. For Tenzing, see Stewart, “Tenzing’s Two Wrist-Watches,” and Hansen, “Debate: Tenzing’s Two Wrist-Watches.”

<sup>64</sup> *Evening Post*, 18 July 1953.

<sup>65</sup> Government Hospitality Minutes, 6 July 1953, PRO: CAB 124/2924. See also PRO: PREM 11/458 and FO 371/106880.

concerned that Tenzing's wife might expect to receive around fifty guineas in gold from Queen Elizabeth. The idea of a Civil List pension for Tenzing had already been rejected, however, and the Foreign Office recommended against a purse for his wife. Both, it was argued, would devalue the George Medal: "It is not the practice to make monetary awards to foreign recipients of British honours, much less to their wives. To add money to honours would imply that the latter are not by themselves an adequate recognition."<sup>66</sup>

This was an issue of some importance, since to question the adequacy of honours was to question the traditions of British nationalism. By the mid-twentieth century, Britain's peculiar, monarchical form of nationalism had extended beyond the multinational boundaries of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland to embrace an even more diverse, multiethnic empire, and the honors system proliferated to an unprecedented degree.<sup>67</sup> These practices framed the Coronation rhetoric that the conquest of Everest heralded a new "Elizabethan age." The "traditions" of gentility, chivalry, and soldier-heroes to which such language referred, however, dated only from the mid-nineteenth century, when they had been institutionalized as models of imperial masculinity in the public schools and elsewhere. Imperial narratives of military conquest, monarchy, and manly character also competed with other narratives representing empire as exporting liberty, self-government, and economic development.<sup>68</sup> In Britain, the partnership of Hillary and Tenzing joined both discourses together at the very moment that Britain attempted to redefine the Empire as a "Commonwealth."

The coincidence of Coronation and conquest of Everest reinforced the complementarity of monarchy and masculinity in Britain and the Commonwealth. Prince Philip's stag party evoked this tradition, as did a female admirer in Britain who wrote to the expedition: "It is fitting that your team should symbolise for us the vigour, vitality, and high endeavor of manhood, as the Queen symbolises the sweetness, grace and dutiful service of a woman."<sup>69</sup> As the Everest expedition returned to Britain, the Queen completed a royal progress through Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, and was preparing to embark on an extended overseas tour of the Commonwealth, amid complaints that she was ignoring the industrial north of England.<sup>70</sup> Like the royal tours, the

<sup>66</sup> Minute, 15 July 1953, PRO: FO/371/106880/FN2061/62.

<sup>67</sup> See Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy* (London, 1988), Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992), David Cannadine, "The Context, Performance and Meaning of Ritual," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Hobsbawm and Ranger, and David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1990), 297–340.

<sup>68</sup> See Peter H. Hansen, "Albert Smith, the Alpine Club, and the Invention of Mountaineering in Mid-Victorian Britain," *Journal of British Studies* 34 (1995): 300–24, Tosh, *A Man's Place*, Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes* (London, 1994), and J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism and the Victorian and Edwardian Public Schools* (Cambridge, 1981). On the dual discourses, see P.J. Marshall, "Imperial Britain," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 23 (1995): 379–94, and John M. Mackenzie ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986), 183.

<sup>69</sup> Reynolds to Hunt, 2 June 1953, EE/69, RGS Archives.

<sup>70</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 17 and 23 July 1953.

conquest of Everest symbolized the incorporation of the margins of the Queen's realms into the United Kingdom and Commonwealth as a whole.

Consider "The Queen's Journey," a radio program which preceded the Queen's Christmas day address in 1953. The program conveyed Christmas greetings and pledges of loyalty to the Queen, then in New Zealand on her post-coronation journey around the globe. After a Maori Haka dance and greetings from Sydney, the program jumps back "to Britain, to the homeland, cradle of pioneers, discoverers and creators of the Commonwealth." For the next hour, tributes pour in from British territories and former colonies, until the narrator announces "we have girdled the earth and flashed from pole to pole." The year's highlights for the Commonwealth are summed up in the Coronation, peace in Korea, and the conquest of Everest. The narrator concludes: "The Queen's journey is revealing and renewing the strength of the Commonwealth, the reality of shared responsibility and shared freedom under a young Queen. This is a great pyramid of unity, a mountain massive as Everest, a peak still clouded by the future challenges to all men of goodwill and courage."<sup>71</sup> Edmund Hillary, then in Norfolk, sends the final greeting to the Queen, then in Auckland, his hometown, before "God Save the Queen" introduces her Christmas day address.

The Queen's speech expresses her hopes for the Commonwealth and the "Elizabethan" age. Though the Queen did not feel like her earlier namesake, she identified "one significant resemblance between her age and mine." England during the reign of Elizabeth I was "great in spirit and well endowed with men who were ready to encompass the earth." While her forebears had founded an empire, in the Commonwealth "the United Kingdom was an equal partner with many other proud and independent nations. And she is leading other still backward territories forward for the same goal." Unlike previous empires, the Commonwealth was built on "the highest qualities of the spirit of man: friendship, loyalty, and the desire for freedom and peace. To that new conception of an equal partnership of nations and races I shall give myself heart and soul, every day of my life."<sup>72</sup> The Queen did not directly mention Everest, the partnership of Hillary and Tenzing that was the unspoken subtext of her entire speech. She did not have to mention Everest explicitly, however, because "The Queen's Journey" had already done so. In its view, the Commonwealth was "a great pyramid of unity, a mountain massive as Everest."

## V. NEW ZEALAND

When Hillary and George Lowe, his fellow New Zealander on Everest, returned by a Tasman Airways Solent flying boat to Mechanics Bay, Auckland, several

<sup>71</sup> See recording T27351 British Library, National Sound Archive; "Scripts, Queen's Journey," and "Relays/Christmas 1953," BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham. The program was co-produced with Australian and New Zealand radio broadcasters.

<sup>72</sup> Tom Fleming ed., *Voices Out of the Air: The Royal Christmas Broadcasts, 1932–1981* (London, 1981), 72–4.

thousand people greeted them with “the same lack of reserve usually kept for triumphant All Black teams,” the national rugby squad. As the crowd repeatedly broke through the police barriers, Hillary and Lowe strode through an archway of ice axes and alpenstocks held by members of the New Zealand Alpine Club. After radio, film, and television interviews, and a “rip-roaring roast dinner” at Hillary’s home, they attended a civic reception with twenty-five hundred people at the Town Hall. Hillary said “we felt more nervous walking up the stairs here than we did on Everest itself.” The mayor of Auckland, Sir John Allum, gave Hillary a chair in the shape of Everest, and said he had “brought lustre and renown to the country of your birth and nurture. Because your life and work have been in our midst, we feel we have, as it were, some proprietary interest in your accomplishment; in other words it is ‘our’ Hillary who has climbed to the top of Everest.” The minister of defense added that Hillary and Lowe “represent a truly New Zealand effort—two North Islanders who went to the South Island for their training.”<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, for many New Zealanders, Hillary became the icon for a New Zealand identity that replaced the affinity they still felt for Britain. As Hillary later wrote of his first visit to Britain in 1950, “As a citizen of a new country with little history I felt I was being accepted back into the ancestral fold—it gave me an astonishingly warm feeling. In those days, like most of my fellow citizens, I was British first and a New Zealander second—it is only in recent years that we have been thrust firmly out of the family nest.”<sup>74</sup> If imperialism had been a form of nationalism in New Zealand in the nineteenth century, a New Zealand national identity soon developed in the early twentieth. Military sacrifices during the world wars, successful rugby tours, and Hillary’s ascent of Everest each contributed to the consolidation of this new national identity that supplemented and soon supplanted their loyalties as British or Commonwealth subjects.<sup>75</sup>

Hillary and Lowe’s comportment after the ascent was as important as their achievements on Everest had been in representing their New Zealand masculine identity. An editorial in the *New Zealand Herald* noted that, though the two climbers had endured hardships on Everest and been received by royalty in London, “everyone could be sure that New Zealand’s reputation for modesty, good manners and naturalness in her sons abroad had always been safe with them.” Their record “under extremes of circumstances are further proof that the sense of inferiority, of being ‘country cousins,’ which once was attributed to New Zealanders, has gone forever. Two world wars, and now the conquest of Everest have made it seem wholly anomalous.”<sup>76</sup> Precisely the same terms had

<sup>73</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 August 1953. For newsreels, see R.V. 644, “Hillary Returns,” National Archives, Wellington, and “Everest Conqueror in N.Z.: Hillary Welcomed Home,” National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra.

<sup>74</sup> Edmund Hillary, *Nothing Venture, Nothing Win*, 98.

<sup>75</sup> See Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand’s Search for National Identity* (Wellington, 1986), and Geoffrey W. Rice ed., *Oxford History of New Zealand* (Auckland, 1992).

<sup>76</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 10 August 1953; cf. *Evening Post*, 21 August 1953.

been used for years to describe New Zealanders returning from imperial wars and rugby tours. From the early twentieth century onward, New Zealand politicians sustained the myth of the New Zealand male as the gentleman pioneer, combining the larrikin traditions of the frontier with the respectability of middle-class gentility, by staging elaborate welcoming ceremonies for troops returning from war and for the All Blacks. The importance of these myths only increased amid fears of national decadence and effeminacy, as New Zealand became more urbanized and sex ratios more balanced. By the 1950s, the distinctive toughness, versatility, and “mateship” of the Kiwi bloke was further civilized and subdued by new models of the “family man.”<sup>77</sup> Like other New Zealand heroes before them, Hillary and Lowe had been tough, resourceful, and self-confident on the mountain and were quiet, modest, and well-behaved off it. The appearance of Hillary’s apiary in newspaper photographs was visible testimony to his rural roots in the pioneer tradition. Hillary also conformed to the more recent stereotype by announcing his engagement to a childhood sweetheart only a few days after his return, and they were soon married.<sup>78</sup>

Even if earlier images of the New Zealand male had been shaped partly in response to British models of masculinity, tensions between them created ambiguities with political implications by the 1950s. Take, for example, Hillary’s reaction to his knighthood. He told a reception in Papakura, the town outside Auckland where he lived, how he heard the news. As the climbers returned to Kathmandu, “we had long beards and hadn’t washed for about five weeks, and looked extremely disreputable, in fact, like I do in Papakura.” In this disheveled condition, Hillary received a letter addressed to Sir Edmund Hillary, K.B.E., informing him of his knighthood. “Well, my life flashed before me. I could see myself walking down Broadway, Papakura, in my tattered overalls and the seat out of my pants, and I thought ‘that is gone forever. I’ll have to buy a new pair of overalls now.’”<sup>79</sup> In his autobiography, Hillary elaborated on his own reaction to his knighthood: “It should have been a great moment, but instead I was aghast. It was a tremendous honour, of course, but I had never really approved of titles and couldn’t imagine myself possessing one.” Yet like Tenzing, Hillary had been spoken for by others. Since the prime minister of New Zealand had already accepted the K.B.E. on Hillary’s behalf, the latter had no choice: “It would be thoroughly impolite to turn it down now. I went to bed that night feeling miserable rather than pleased.”<sup>80</sup>

<sup>77</sup> See Jock Phillips, *A Man’s Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male, a History*, rev. ed., (Auckland, 1996), and J.O.C. Phillips, “Rugby, War and the Mythology of the New Zealand Male,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 18 (1984): 83–103. See also Graham Langton, “A History of Mountain Climbing in New Zealand to 1953,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 1996).

<sup>78</sup> See *Evening Post*, 14 and 16 August 1953, 4 September 1953.

<sup>79</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 11 August 1953; *Dominion*, 11 August 1953; cf. Hillary, *View from the Summit*, 23.

<sup>80</sup> Hillary, *Nothing Venture*, 163–64; Hillary interview, 1998.

The state reception sponsored by the New Zealand Parliament emphasized Hillary and Lowe's distinctiveness as New Zealand men. Sidney Holland, the Prime Minister, said they were "two of the greatest New Zealanders the country had ever produced." Not to be outdone, Walter Nash, leader of the opposition, said they had shown "the most superlative modesty that could ever be achieved by human beings."<sup>81</sup> Hillary and Lowe once again behaved as modest, plain-speaking blokes, but the link between masculinity and national identity was reaffirmed in yet another way—by the official exclusion of women from the reception. Although local mountaineering clubs had suggested several women for the invitation list, the state organizers crossed them out and women had to gate-crash the event. Mavis Davidson complained to the government that the exclusion of women suggested either a "lack of appreciation of the widespread interest in mountaineering in this country," or "prejudice or acceptance of prehistoric or antediluvian concepts as to the place of women in the community."<sup>82</sup>

New Zealand's commemoration of Everest was based not only on an exclusion, but also on an appropriation. New Zealand's official gift to Tenzing was a volume of newspaper clippings and telegrams about the ascent, bound with photographs of the New Zealand Alps. Embossed in gold on the cover was "the outline of a Maori chieftan, with two huia feathers—a sign of rank—in his head-dress, and holding a taiaha, one of the main fighting weapons of the Maori."<sup>83</sup> One of the Maori members of parliament, Mr. Tirikatene, ridiculed the gift. He wondered what Tenzing would make of newspaper clippings in English, which he could not read, and found a parallel with his own ambiguous status as a New Zealand citizen. "Although I am a citizen of the Dominion I am not permitted to speak in Parliament the Maori language, my own language, because the majority of members have not taken the trouble to acquaint themselves with that tongue."<sup>84</sup>

When the Queen arrived in Auckland at the end of 1953, she was greeted by enthusiastic crowds and images of a fertile land, happy children, and model race relations between indigenous Maori and the "Pakeha," the white settlers.<sup>85</sup> But Maori-Pakeha relations have not remained the model that they seemed in 1953, and Hillary's role in the ascent of Everest is still contested by the New Zealand and British governments. In 1992, Edmund Hillary's face replaced the Queen's on New Zealand's five dollar bill. A few years later, the Queen awarded Hillary the Order of the Garter, the highest order of chivalry at her disposal.

<sup>81</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 21 August 1953. Also L.V. Bryant, *New Zealanders and Everest* (Wellington, 1953), 4, 47.

<sup>82</sup> Mavis Davidson to W.A. Brodtkin, Minister of Internal Affairs, 11 September 1953, IA 1, 152/1183, National Archives of New Zealand, Wellington.

<sup>83</sup> *Evening Post*, 1 September 1953. The New Zealand Alpine Club also gave Tenzing a tartan shirt. See Ephemera B Mountaineering, 1953, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

<sup>84</sup> 17 September 1953, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, v. 300 (Wellington, 1954), 1320.

<sup>85</sup> See Jock Phillips, *Royal Summer: the Visit of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip to New Zealand, 1953–54* (Wellington, 1993).

## VI. HOMECOMINGS

On 8 August 1953, the same day that Hillary returned to Auckland, Tenzing returned to Darjeeling. Tenzing told fifteen thousand people in the market square that “as one faggot does not make a fire, so the credit for the conquest of Everest is not mine alone but that of the whole team.” Tenzing then paid a visit to the Sherpa Buddhist monastery, where “small lighted tapers flickered in front of the image of Buddha as Tenzing and his family bowed low before the altar.” If Tenzing had finally come “home,” he was soon asked to play a political role again in public. His tumultuous welcome to Kalimpong a few days later was compared by many to Nehru’s last visit. “At the entrance to the public ground, Tenzing, with his medals—the Nepal Tara, the George Medal, and the Rastrapati Padak—glittering in the evening sun, performed another feat of climbing. He scaled the 12-foot-high Gandhi Gate and reverentially garlanded the snow-white statue of Mahatma Gandhi surmounted on it.”<sup>86</sup>

Like earlier official homecomings, Tenzing’s return to Darjeeling and Kalimpong were ambivalent ceremonial events. He garlanded Gandhi, but he also bowed before Buddha. As he climbed the Gandhi gate, Tenzing wore on his breast the medals of three nations. Likewise, on the summit of Everest, Tenzing waved four flags, but he also said a prayer and made an offering to the gods. According to the local context, Tenzing “spoke” sometimes in prayers, sometimes in the wisdom of proverbs, sometimes in “political” discourses, and sometimes through his clothing or his climbing. Hillary faced similar dilemmas in Nepal and New Zealand, as did Hunt at Calcutta and Llanfair-Waterdine. At different moments, each of the climbers occupied subaltern positions of difference at the margins of dominant nationalist narratives. Their position illustrates how little these nationalist narratives had to do with a coherent, preexisting nation, precisely because such narratives were constantly working to homogenize disparate factions into a nation.<sup>87</sup>

This problem was particularly acute in the early period of decolonization. Colonial rule had created states without citizenship, and newly independent nation-states automatically classified every inhabitant as a citizen. How long did it take for a sense of citizenship to be understood by people who had never known what it was to be a citizen? Tenzing’s refusal to accept classification by nationality and his sense of “belonging” based on his birthplace and workplace illustrate this dilemma. Hillary also vacillated between British and New Zealand identities, and Hunt identified himself as alternately British, Welsh, and British-Indian. While these multiple positions placed the climbers on the margins and, on occasion, could enable them to resist nationalist classification by citizenship, they were also the very qualities that made Tenzing, Hillary, and

<sup>86</sup> For Darjeeling, *Statesman*, 9 and 10 August 1953, and Kalimpong, *Times of India*, 17 August 1953.

<sup>87</sup> On this theme, see Antoinette Burton, “Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating ‘British’ History,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 10 (1997): 227–48.

Hunt such potent symbols of nation building. Put another way, their marginality was simultaneously what nationalists wanted to incorporate and what rendered such appropriation ambivalent.

One way that nation-states responded to this ambivalence was to honor the climbers as exemplars of particular national masculinities. Each of these masculinities in Nepal, India, Britain, and New Zealand had been shaped in relation to one another during the imperial experience. But, as R.W. Connell has suggested, “masculinities are not only shaped by the process of imperial expansion, they are active in that process and help to shape it.”<sup>88</sup> Indeed, at this particular postcolonial moment, masculinities continued to shape the process of state-building in these nations. This process was pursued in a series of all-male settings—from the expedition itself and Nehru’s private redressing of Tenzing, to Prince Philip’s stag party and New Zealand’s official exclusion of women. The demands by Tenzing’s wife for money and by New Zealand women for inclusion each attempted to break into these masculine political arenas. If the conquest of Everest had its origins in the masculinities of empire, the new ways of imagining masculinity that emerged after 1953 opened up further possibilities. The writer James Morris, for example, who had been the *Times* correspondent with the Everest expedition, recalled that “Everest taught me new meanings of maleness, and emphasized once more my own inner dichotomy.”<sup>89</sup> He later underwent a sex change to become a woman, and, as Jan Morris, became a Welsh nationalist. If Morris rejected hegemonic British nationalism in consequence of rejecting maleness, a less dichotomous view is also possible. Masculinity may be not an analog of nationalism, but rather an unstable condition of its production.

Although nation-states wanted the heroes to embody national masculinities, the climbers’ recalcitrant subjectivity also posed a problem. Nation-states have often attempted to concretize the idea of the nation through what Benedict Anderson has called “logoization.” Logoization usually depends not on any specific symbol, but on an infinitely replicable series, in postage stamps, flags, currency, textbooks and so on. If Nepal, India, Britain, and New Zealand attempted to identify the climbers with the nation in this way through a variety of official honors, Tenzing, Hillary, and Hunt’s individuality and subjectivity also rendered these nationalist representations unstable at the time. Everest postage stamps, for example, were widely proposed. The government of India wanted postage stamps depicting Tenzing on the summit, or with Hillary and Hunt. After the British opposed using the images of individuals, India issued stamps showing Mount Everest in a photograph taken by the Indian Air Force.<sup>90</sup> If

<sup>88</sup> Connell, *Masculinities*, 185.

<sup>89</sup> Jan Morris, *Conundrum* (New York, 1975), 95. See also James Morris, *Coronation Everest* (London, 1958), James Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets: an Imperial Retreat* (New York, 1978), esp. 421–25, 498; and recordings T47655 and LP38350, British Library, National Sound Archive.

<sup>90</sup> On stamp proposals, see *Statesman*, 9, 13, and 27 June 1953; *Times of India*, 14 June 1953; PRO: FO 371/106880; RGS Archives, EE/90; Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 17 June 1953, W/68; and *Evening Post*, 20 July 1953. Indian stamps were issued on Gandhi’s birthday in 1953.

some forms of nationalist logoization were still problematic in 1953, they appear less ambiguous forty years on—the process has proceeded apace, and Hillary now adorns New Zealand’s currency.

One attempt at logoization that celebrated rather than concealed the ambivalence of Tenzing, Hillary, and Hunt as national symbols was the variety of new names suggested for Mount Everest—Tenhillary, Hillarsing, and Hilltenhunt. These compounds celebrated ambivalence by resolutely refusing to choose one name over any other. The origin of these neologisms is unknown, but nationalists certainly did not coin them. The names simply appear in the list of responses to a poll in India, less popular than Mount Tenzing but more popular than Mount Elizabeth, the nationalist alternatives. “Tenhillary” was briefly publicized by a local socialist group, but the party did not take up the name at the national or international level. In “Hillarsing,” at the margins of nationalist discourse, may be discerned an interpretation of the conquest of Everest that is the product of “subaltern” agency.<sup>91</sup> In the playful spirit of “Hilltenhunt,” perhaps we should label these words *concatenations*, to signify an expression of subaltern agency that emerges as humor at the margins of nationalism, only to be displaced once again as the laughter subsides.

Nationalist discourse also displaced competing internationalist narratives. To some observers, the ascent of Everest was interpreted as a sign of cooperation, teamwork, and the “spirit of humanity.” Yet the meaning of this rhetoric varied. In Britain, this teamwork could suggest the unity of the Commonwealth, or, in India, the non-aligned movement. John Hunt had provided a symbol for such interpretations by bringing the United Nations flag to Everest. Afterwards it was reported that “in planting the flag of the U.N. on the summit, [Hunt] said it symbolized the faith of the expedition in that great world organization,” and Dag Hammarskjöld, UN Secretary-General, told Hunt he had “given our U.N. flag new glory.”<sup>92</sup> But the United Nations flag did not inspire the same grandiloquent interpretations as the British, Nepalese, and Indian flags for several reasons. For one, the UN still did not represent “humanity” in its entirety. At the height of the Cold War, troops were then fighting under the UN flag in Korea, and many “nations” (especially colonies) were still not members. For another, it was unclear what kind of masculinity the ascent represented in an “internationalist” interpretation. Any socialist or communist attempts to appropriate Tenzing for their models of masculinity were rendered ambivalent by Hillary’s role in the ascent, as well as by the politics of Tenzing’s nationality.<sup>93</sup> In the

<sup>91</sup> *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 June 1953. The Nepali proposal of a joint Anglo-Swiss expedition in 1952 also should be seen in this context.

<sup>92</sup> *Statesman*, 27 June 1953. Dag Hammarskjöld to John Hunt, 9 June 1953, Acc. 2218, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie.

<sup>93</sup> “Socialist” interpretations were conspicuous by their absence. In Britain, Tenzing received favorable but limited coverage in the *Daily Worker* 8, 16, 19, and 23 June and 18 July 1953. *Red Star*, a military paper, carried the only terse mention of the ascent in the Soviet press (Reuters, 4 June 1953). In 1954, Hunt’s Everest lectures in Moscow were confined to rooms in the British Embassy. See PRO: FO 371/111761 and FO 371/111825.

early 1950s, the process of inventing masculinities was still closely tied to the imagining of national identities during the end of empire and the beginning of the Cold War. In such conditions, “internationalist” masculinities and interpretations were difficult to imagine.

On the summit of Everest, Hillary took a photograph of Tenzing holding aloft the flags of Nepal, India, Britain, and the United Nations. Tenzing then untied the string of flags from his ice axe and carefully placed each end of the string in the snow. As Tenzing and Hillary began their descent together, these pennoncel were still resting on the summit, flapping gently in the breeze. When the Indian Air Force flew over the peak barely a week later, however, there was no sign of the four flags anywhere.<sup>94</sup> They had been dispatched by the proverbial four winds of Everest. In more ways than one, these flags—and the nations they represented—had been confetti of empire indeed.

<sup>94</sup> *Times of India*, 14 June 1953.