

1 Coming into View

Trade, Violence, Coercion (1870–1899)

A tribal settlement comes into view in Figure 1.1. Bayonets clatter. An officer signals. Rifle fire erupts, echoing down the valley as defensive stockades splinter. This is a political annexation in progress, and agents of the British Raj – sepoys under the command of an officer called Lieutenant Cole – dominate the scene.



Figure 1.1 Lalshima's village, 1890. © Illustrated London News Ltd./Mary Evans.

But what if we shift our standpoint? Peering through the palisades towards the troops, concepts like ‘political annexation’ begin to break down. To the upland people within the stockades, this was the ‘time of foreign invasion’ (vailenlai), an Indigenous periodization that itself merits attention. The state’s occupation of these hills did not benignly preface later decades of cross-cultural contact and transformation. Instead, the vailenlai was a violent and complex process in its own right, deeply disruptive to upland lives, with outcomes shaped by local inhabitants in profound but newly constrained ways.

To understand this process, we need to begin even earlier in the hills. A trickle of colonial trade goods crept into the mountains from distant plains and ports, hinting at the existence of the remote Raj somewhere beyond the northern, western, and eastern frontiers of the highlands. People in this region did not originally encounter the official representatives of an imperial state. They saw competing – and often erratically violent – foreign chiefs who needed to be understood and reckoned with. This was, most of all, an era of both exceptional and everyday violence. Invaders unleashed disorienting panic, rumours, forced-labour regimes, disease, and turmoil across the hills and into the routine of highland lives.

Today, modern narratives of the colonial past in Mizoram occasionally internalize the old tropes of imperial improvement by using the operative verb ‘awp’ to refer to the colonial era, evoking a maternal hen incubating her immature eggs: ‘sap in min awplai, or “the time when white men/sahibs ruled over us”’.¹ The melancholy pasts uncovered in this chapter, however, leave little room for nostalgia or triumphalism.

1.1 ‘Coming into View’²

Highland populations encountered the vai only through a dark lens. In outlying riverside bazaars, uplanders and lowlanders had long exchanged chemical compounds: polymers of natural rubber, and crystals of salt and of sulphur.³ But in a time of invasion, information about the invaders’ identities and intentions was hard to come by – a situation that must have been particularly alarming given the newcomers’ access to superior firearms, their red uniforms (a colour associated with both status and spiritual power in the hills), their ability to control elephants, and their apparent proclivity for heads and souls.⁴

¹ Pachuau and van Schendel, *Being Mizo*, p. 86, italics removed.

² I borrow this subheading from Pachuau and van Schendel, *The Camera* (p. 24), but reverse its spatial orientation to operate hill-outwards, rather than plains-inwards.

³ S. Thangboi Zou, ‘Riverine bazaars, trade and chiefs in the colonial Lushai Hills’, *Asian Ethnicity*, 22.4 (2019), pp. 563–82.

⁴ In 1890, the invading force commanded some forty elephants which uplanders called sai; see Woodthorpe, *Lushai Expedition*.

There was very little to go on except hearsay. Surveying often one-sided documentary evidence, historians have long recognized the difficulty in reconstructing these sorts of Indigenous pasts. But a lack of solid evidence on highland perceptions of these earliest encounters places historians in a very similar position to highlanders engaged in the chaos and panic of discovering the British Raj: we too can only hazard our best guesses.⁵

Deep in zo ram heartlands, the first signs of the vai often came in the form of strange material goods – little fragments of foreign worlds sometimes gleaned by uplanders from debris left behind in the invaders' abandoned camps or looted from the bodies of the invaders themselves. In 1888, for example, some highlanders from Rangamati in the Chittagong Hill Tracts carried a small, silvery implement eastward across what would become the Lushai Hills District. We know that the item travelled some 400 or 500 kilometres, stopped in multiple villages, and had at least three different owners over seven years. In length if not in heft, the object resembled a thimkual – the brass hairpins worn by men – except it was fashioned out of a white metal and featured a longer shaft, additional prongs and the strange, etched shapes 'JFS'.⁶ This item was eventually discovered and confiscated by a British political officer in Burma's Chin Hills in 1895 and sent back to the officials in Lungleh, the nascent headquarters of the South Lushai Hills District.⁷ Such materials – in this case a fork marked with the initials of Lieutenant John F. Stewart, the British official killed by uplanders near Rangamati in 1888 – would have been the first puzzling evidences of the newcomers that many people encountered.

A trickle of foreign goods soon became a surge. Figures 1.2 and 1.3 depict the vai fording a stream and moving cargo. A vast retinue of labourers carry their material goods – a bizarre scene to migratory peoples accustomed to travelling light and acquiring only essential goods. As an observer noted in the 1870s, uplanders on the move generally 'brought nothing but arms and enough rice for the journey; a fresh joint of bamboo at each new camping-ground serving every purpose[, from] water-jug [to] cooking-pot'.⁸ By contrast, a single Welsh missionary arriving in the North Lushai Hills headquarters of Aijal in 1897 required twenty bullock carts for his luggage and arranged for the 'coolie' portage of at least fifteen additional loads.⁹ Later, when the Welsh doctor Peter Fraser required

⁵ I draw upon comparative work in colonial North America; see Gregory Evans Dowd, 'The panic of 1751: The significance of rumours on the South Carolina-Cherokee frontier', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 53.3 (1996), pp. 527–60 (p. 527); and Richter, *Facing East*, p. 11.

⁶ For an illustrated survey of Mizo material culture, see Lianhmingthanga, *Material Culture of the Mizo* (Aizawl: Tibral Research Institute, 1998).

⁷ Shakespear, 'Diary', 1–8 February 1895, MSA, p. 1.

⁸ Woodthorpe, *Lushai Expedition*, pp. 48–9, quoted in Pachuau and van Shendel, *Camera*, p. 148. On this earlier conflict, see the 'Copy of further correspondence on the subject of the Looshai raids', London, 1872, Leiden University Library Special Collections (LUL), Leiden, 1890 E19.

⁹ James Herbert Lorrain, *Logbook*, 10 September 1897, ALA IN/PSI/1/6/1–20.



Figure 1.2 ‘How the officers travel in Lushailand’, 1896. Used by kind permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent’s Park College, Oxford.

twelve local people, seven mules, and four ponies to carry his belongings, highlanders joked that the imported goods would last more than a lifetime.¹⁰

Highland populations’ awe at these goods – their wonder at British material sophistication – is a standard colonial narrative of expansion into the hills.¹¹

¹⁰ Peter Fraser, ‘From the mission field. I. Letter from Dr. Fraser’, *The Monthly Treasury*, 10.6 (Carnarvon: D. O’Brien Owen, 1909), p. 112.

¹¹ For examples of officials soliciting wonder with imported goods and animals (mechanical toys, lanterns, ponies), see John Shakespear, ‘Lushai reminiscences’, *The Assam Review*, 2.4 (June

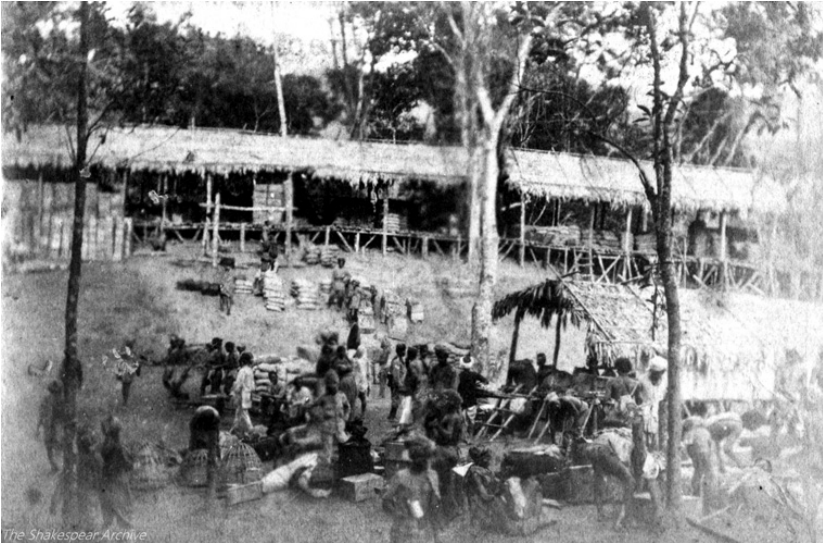


Figure 1.3 Lower Lungleh, 1889. The Shakespear Archive, Vienna (hereafter SA).

But, far from overawed, uplanders immediately set about scavenging, adopting, trading for, and repurposing foreign items to Indigenous purposes to make everyday life easier. Discarded cans of condensed milk as well as ink and vinegar bottles became storage and drinking cups that were more durable than their customary bamboo joints.¹² When a fledgling government dispensary in Aijal began giving out bottled medicines free of charge, people availed themselves of the offer but emptied the suspect contents of the prized bottles.¹³

Migratory highlanders – who had good use for sturdy containers – gave hospitality to touring European missionaries in return for boxes and cans. Others acquired and refashioned metal tins into bases for their smoking pipes or flattened Europeans’ discarded kerosene oil tins to plug gaps in thatched roofs or safely contain cooking fires.¹⁴ The gold and green labels from glass bottles of pickles and brass sardine tins made life visually richer, acting as

1929), p. 270; Shakespear, ‘Diary’, 2 January 1892, MSA, p. 1; R. S. Hutchinson, ‘Summary of . . . week ending 8 April 1897’, MSA CB-5, G-52, p. 4.

¹² For instance, see the note on the reverse of the photograph entitled ‘A Lushai woman carrying water’, c. 1910, Denbighshire Archives, Ruthin (hereafter DA), DD/F/48.

¹³ David Evan Jones, *A Missionary’s Autobiography: D. E. Jones (Zosaphluia)*, trans. by J. M. Lloyd (reprint, Aizawl: H. Liansailova, 1998), p. 50.

¹⁴ J. H. Lorrain, ‘A holiday trip of 4000 miles: In Assam, Bengal & Central India’, May 1896, ALA IN/111, BMS Acc. 250, n.p.; Jones, *Missionary’s Autobiography*, p. 21.

colourful hair accessories akin to the more typical iridescent wings of the tlengtle beetle (*Chrysochroa vittata*). Newspapers transformed into ‘a large fan or hood’ to make headgear more impressive.¹⁵ Besides hot commodities, the new goods became hot topics. The first sermons of Christian missionaries in the region were often interrupted by queries on topics that resourceful listeners clearly thought were more pressing, like ‘how glass bottles were made’.¹⁶

Uplanders often valued imported materials in ways manufacturers never intended. Umbrellas were sometimes broken down into constituent parts because the metal spines made great head-massagers.¹⁷ With little use for fences, hunters acquired fencing wire (and, later, the discarded metal type from the first printing presses in Aijal, depicted in Figure 1.4) to hammer into



Figure 1.4 ‘Mission Printing Press, Aijal, Lushai Hills’, c. 1920s. J. M. Lloyd Archive, Aizawl Theological College, Durtlang, Mizoram (hereafter JMLA).

- ¹⁵ Woodthorpe, *Lushai Exhibition*, pp. 184–5. Frank Dikötter has called these sorts of processes ‘creative appropriation’, while historian David Arnold – borrowing from Arjun Appadurai – refers to the highly contingent ‘social lives’ or ‘cultural biographies’ of objects; see Frank Dikötter, *Things Modern: Material Culture and Everyday Life in China* (London: Hurst, 2007), p. 8; and David Arnold, *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India’s Modernity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 5.
- ¹⁶ Frederick W. Savidge, ‘A preaching tour in South Lushai’, *The Missionary Herald* (London: Baptist Missionary Society, 1911), p. 235. All quoted editions of *The Missionary Herald* and *The Herald* were viewed at the ALA.
- ¹⁷ Shakespear, *Lushei Kuki*, p. 13.

makeshift bullets for their flintlock guns.¹⁸ Gurkha troops congratulated themselves on their guile in trading copper coins to gullible locals in return for whole rupees (as legal tender, the coins were hardly worth a sixth of a rupee). But locals were taking advantage of gullible Gurkhas, too; attaching more value to aesthetics (the copper coins looked better in necklaces) and practicality (the copper coins could be pounded into better bullets), highlanders traded inferior rupees for superior copper coins.¹⁹ For upland hunters in particular, the homemade, lighter copper bullets flew further and faster without any increase in precious gunpowder, increasing both range and damage to animal prey.²⁰

Trade was just one route among many into expanding, often unpredictable or improvised everyday relationships with the newcomers. Highlanders learned to play tug-of-war against sepoy (and even emerged victorious).²¹ They laughed when officers cracked their knuckles.²² In far-flung villages, local populations mixed with the Gurkha soldiers on initial tax-assessment tours, together ‘singing songs round a fire, with laughing and applause’.²³

Genuine curiosity often fuelled interactions.²⁴ In 1904, a man called Lalhrima from the village of Seshong interrogated a visiting superintendent with probing questions: how many hnam (clans) made up the foreigners? How expansive was the ocean? How populous was London? How could people live in boats for ‘days if the sea was salt’?²⁵

People most often greeted touring officials hospitably with cups of rice beer.²⁶ In the 1870s, an officer’s sketches helped warm interactions with

¹⁸ Jones, *Missionary’s Autobiography*, p. 62; Beatrix M. Scott, ‘Indian panorama’, Lady B. M. Scott Papers, box 1, Cambridge South Asian Archive (hereafter CSAA), p. 148.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Anthony G. McCall, ‘Accounts of Lushai’, draft, n.d., BL Mss Eur E361/91, p. 15. Also see William Williams, ‘A visit to the Lushai Hills’, in *The Monthly Tidings* (Carnarvon: General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, 1891), p. 160. All quoted editions of *The Monthly Tidings* were viewed at BU.

²⁰ A softer metal than the silver rupee, copper was more easily pounded into spheres and the spheres more easily perfected to better afford what physicists call ‘gyroscopic stability’. The result was bullets that shot straighter. An unintentional benefit to the hunter was that, unlike manufactured bullets of lead, homemade copper bullets imparted no toxicity to the target animal’s flesh.

²¹ Shakespear, ‘Diary’, 25 December 1893, MSA, p. 1.

²² See Lorrain, *Logbook*, ‘Miscellaneous notes’, ALA. Lorrain offers no specific date, but the reference is to one Zakhama’s memories of Captain John Shakespear during the *vailen* of the early 1890s.

²³ F. C. T. Halliday, ‘Peregrinations of a peripatetic policeman’, 1898, BL Mss Eur C407/1, p. 77.

²⁴ ‘Men, women and children never wearied studying our movements and demeanor’, recorded Emil Riebeck in 1882. Riebeck was a collector of what he called ‘ethnological objects’ – in other words, highland peoples’ belongings, many of which were spiritually potent and not intended for outsiders; Emil Riebeck, *The Chittagong Hill-Tribes: Results of a Journey Made in the Year 1882* (London: Asher & Co., 1885), n.p. For a German version, see *Die Hügelstämme von Chittagong: Ergebnisse einer Reise im Jahre 1882* (Berlin: A. Asher, 1885).

²⁵ Shakespear, ‘Diary’, 15–19 November 1904, MSA CB-8, G-538.

²⁶ Examples abound, but see, for instance, the offering of Thrangvunga in Shakespear, ‘Diary’, 6–14 January 1894, MSA, p. 1.

interested bystanders: 'it pleased them so much that one went away and returned with the skulls of a deer and a pig, and a live hen, all of which he requested me to draw, which I did; and the lookers on pointed out . . . even to some discolorations on the skulls, which I indicated by a little shading'.²⁷ These sorts of quotidian encounters clustered around the small colonial outposts and markets – the 'spaces of encounter' that began springing up throughout the hills.²⁸

For all the originality of their toys, games, artillery, songs, and drawings, the newcomers must have seemed naïve about the basics of life. When Captain John Shakespear's wife was ill during an 1895 tour, the chief Mompunga and his wife were 'much concerned' with the newcomers' complete lack of knowledge about how to heal her. '[S]everal times [they] have desired to perform sacrifices to ensure her recovery', records Shakespear in his tour diary.²⁹

The foreign chiefs knew equally little about public health. The colonial archives abound with highlanders baffled at being hauled before colonial officials for participating in the communal killing of dawithiam (in colonial parlance, 'wizards' or 'sorcerers').³⁰ In 1898, Frederick Charles Halliday ordered fifty male villagers into Lungleh to labour as punishment for the killing of a family of dangerous dawithiam. He records how the 'offenders' 'simply could not understand why we made any objection to their action'.³¹ The chief Kapleyha [Kaphleia] (who appears in Figure 1.5) 'was sorry that we should be annoyed by what he and all his tribe regarded as a rightful act, but evidently put our disapproval down to the utter madness of the strange white men'.³²

Highland populations assessing newcomers' attempts at establishing themselves in the hills often saw strangeness and vulnerability. The corrugated tin roofs that colonial officials insisted local men and Santal coolies carry for days up to colonial building projects acted as parasails, tearing off in the heavy monsoon winds. After one gusty night in November 1897, every colonial structure in the southern headquarters of Lungleh had to be reroofed.³³ The newcomers were perpetually repairing their telegraph lines, which were sometimes blown down for ninety kilometres at a stretch. Cows imported from the

²⁷ Robert G. Woodthorpe, 'The Lushai country', unpublished pamphlet, 1890, The Royal Geographical Society Manuscript Archive, London (hereafter RG SMA), mgX.291.1, p. 22.

²⁸ Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal to H. J. S. Cotton, 22 September 1896, National Archives of India, Delhi (hereafter NAI), Foreign Department, External A, K. W. No. 1, Part 1, p. 2; John Friedmann, 'Reflections on place and place-making in the cities of China', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 31.2 (2007), pp. 257–79, quoted in McDuire-Ra, *Northeast*, p. 149 ('spaces of encounter').

²⁹ Shakespear, 'Summary of events in the South Lushai Hills District, 26 November 1895', in 'Diary', MSA.

³⁰ See, for instance, the case of chief Darbilli in R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, '[Testimony of] Dokappa Fannai son of Paknuna Chief of Lungleng', 12 February 1898, MSA CB-4, G-39.

³¹ Halliday, 'Peregrinations', pp. 73–4. ³² *Ibid.*, p. 74.

³³ R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, 'Summary for week ending 6 November [1897]', MSA CB-5, G-52.



Figure 1.5 Kaphleia, Kapchunga, and their entourage visit Captain John Shakespear and interpreter Parjuham. SA.

plains became emaciated and produced no milk (while highlanders were gobsmacked that anyone would drink it in the first place).³⁴ Personal libraries carried up into the hills by oxcart and coolie had to be sunned during the rainy season, lest they rot away.³⁵

British troops were often equally helpless. Whole forces became lost in the dense bamboo forests and were only rescued by upland ‘bushcraft’, the intimacy with which locals knew, mentally mapped, and navigated an incredibly dense environment and complex landscape.³⁶ When Robert B. McCabe and John Shakespear’s forces could not locate each other one morning in 1892, McCabe set up his heliograph – a signal device that flashed out codes written in sunlight through its mirror and shutter (Figure 1.6). He also dispatched local uplanders as messengers into the forest at random. In the end, the most modern of remote, wireless communication technologies proved no match for the uplanders’ speed of travel or the bandwidth of village chatter: ‘I received an

³⁴ For ongoing dairy cow problems in Aijal, see, for instance, Beatrix Scott to Mother, 12 February 1919, Lady B. M. Scott Papers, box 2, CSASA, p. 6; Beatrix Scott to Mother, 15 June 1919, CSASA, p. 3.

³⁵ Lorrain, ‘Holiday trip’.

³⁶ Robert B. McCabe, ‘Diary’, 17–22 January 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 2.



Figure 1.6 Signalling by heliograph towards an outpost at Lalbura's defeated village, c. 1892. Kwantlen Polytechnic University Special Collections (hereafter KPUSC), G 155 A1 P46 1893.

answer the same evening, the messengers having done 30 miles across the hills in ten hours.³⁷ While colonial agents often disparaged Indigenous knowledge, expertise and ways of thinking about the world, the empire's presence in the hills was only made possible because of local know-how, labour, produce, and hospitality, whether given freely or otherwise.³⁸

At the same time, the perceived foreignness and loneliness of the hills compounded the newcomers' vulnerability.³⁹ Between 1891 and 1894, some seventy-one Gurkhas from the military police absconded from the district home to Nepal.⁴⁰ Others killed themselves.⁴¹

Despite, or perhaps as a result of, the difficulties faced by state agents, the first superintendents were keen to send local chiefs and their assistants (*upa*) to the metropolises of Chittagong and Calcutta to 'exercise a beneficial effect on

³⁷ R. B. McCabe, 'Diary', 23 January to 1 February 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 2.

³⁸ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 7.

³⁹ Shakespear, 'Note on the Lushai Hills', p. 10.

⁴⁰ Shakespear, 'Administration Report, South Lushai Hills, 1894-95', 8 May 1895, BL IOR/V/10/1541, p. 7.

⁴¹ Shakespear, 'Administration Report, South Lushai Hills, 1895-96', 11 March 1896, BL IOR/V/10/1541, p. 15.

the Lushai tribes' by demonstrating the sheer extent of colonial rule as well as its supposed civility and modernity.⁴² In the hills, Indigenous political power was dispersed in complex webs that linked individual chiefs (lal) and clans (hnam) via relationships of kinship, debt, reciprocity, marriage, and friendship.

In such a world, the newcomers' claims to abstract, overarching power made little sense. As he oversaw British stockades being drilled into mountaintops across the land, engineer G. H. Loch remarked that '[o]ne of the things most difficult to make a Lushai understand is that the Political Officers at Fort White, Falam, Haka, Lungleh, and Aijal all serve the same Government'.⁴³ To the south, uplanders perceived military assistance, extended from a column from Burma to one in the Lushai Hills, as merely a temporary chiefly alliance. The following year, people theorized, 'the Fort White chiefs might fall to fighting among themselves'.⁴⁴

In all of this, highland populations insisted on their own codes of interpersonal honour, seeking reciprocity with the newcomers in familiar political idioms of chiefly relationship and alliance. Elephant tusks were presented to British superintendents. Incoming British officers were expected to honour agreements made by their predecessors.⁴⁵

British superintendents did gradually learn to initiate oaths of peace by sharing in the symbolic killing of animal wealth or the eating of hill buffalo liver.⁴⁶ In the early 1890s, colonial festivals in Lungleh designed to ingratiate the newcomers to upland leaders were modelled after traditional forms that colonial officers simply termed 'big drink[s]'.⁴⁷ In 1892, an officer called Lalmantu (R. B. McCabe, known as the 'Chief Hunter' for his military attacks on village chieftains) invited six prominent chiefs from across the region to such a gathering to try to clear up the administrative confusion. Attempting to find some conceptual middle ground, he decided to portray the Europeans as 'brothers' that 'represented one authority only, that of the Queen Empress [Kumpinu, or the (East India) 'Company Mother']'.⁴⁸

Other colonial officers had different methods. Putara, the Old Man (G. H. Loch), attempted to transcend the political common senses in the region by removing people from it; he hoped that elders Sonthang and Thabaie, sent to Calcutta at government expense, might 'understand that it is the same

⁴² H. J. S. Cotton to the Secretary to the Government of India, 8 July 1895, MSA CB-4, G-44, p. 1.

⁴³ G. H. Loch, 'Diary', 19 September to 7 November 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ See, for example, Halliday, 'Tour Diary', MSA CB-6, G-69, p. 6, in which the chief of Konpui [Kawnpui] invokes an old agreement, one made with then retired superintendent Shakespear, in negotiations with the touring officer Halliday. For an example of elephant-tusk diplomacy, see the 1896 case of Lalluova and brothers Saipuia and Lalthangvunga, who presented a tusk to the incumbent superintendent; Shakespear to the Commissioner, Chittagong Division, 11 February 1896, MSA CB-4, G-41, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Shakespear, 'Diary' for the week ending 2 January 1892, MSA, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Shakespear, 'Diary', 25 December 1893, MSA, p. 1.

⁴⁸ McCabe, 'Diary', 23 January to 1 February 1892, p. 3.

Government at Calcutta and the other places they have seen' as it was in Aijal and Lungleh. Highlanders sent travelling to distant lands would understand the full territorial extent of British pre-eminence, or so they thought.⁴⁹

The travels rarely produced their desired results. Indeed, far from being overawed by the spectacle of foreign lands and the grandeur of colonial modernity, upland people confidently articulated critiques of each and acted in ways no one expected. When W. C. Plowden's upland travellers returned from Calcutta to Lungleh in 1895, Shakespear recorded disillusionment: 'I am sorry to say they seem rather dissatisfied, saying "there was lots to be seen, but we were not allowed to see it; there was lots to buy, but we were not allowed to buy it".'⁵⁰ One chief, Lalluova, is recorded as saying upon his return, '[S]uch thousands of people, and among them all not one that knew me: it is better here'.⁵¹ When one Liana was taken to visit Calcutta and Darjeeling with G. H. Loch, 'he was shown the grand panorama of the Eternal snows on the [Kanchenjunga] range. All he said was "Oh, I have seen that sort of thing before in my own country".'⁵²

In 1872, T. H. Lewin's group of eighteen chiefs and their companions likewise surprised their host by displaying 'impassivity' and 'stolidity', rather than the expected wonderment, at the steamboat journey from Chittagong to Calcutta.⁵³ The chiefs did give Lewin the pleasure ('[o]nce, and once only') of appearing 'roused to enthusiasm' and even 'fairly frightened' by the Raj's technological prowess; they were rocketed for 'a mile at full speed on a fiery, snorting locomotive engine' specially lent to Lewin 'for the purpose' by an officer of the East India Railway.⁵⁴ But to focus on Lewin's glee, which was based on the idea of two opposed worlds – one tribal, one civilized – misses the bigger picture. Throughout the late nineteenth century, 'civilized' Europeans the world over continued to struggle with the novelty and speed of railway journeys just like the Mizo travellers; lowlanders and uplanders alike feared derailment and disaster. Trains were dreadful for what they were – fire-powered monstrous juggernauts hurtling along a track – irrespective of who was riding inside.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ This was a recurring tactic. In 1872, Thomas H. Lewin persuaded a group of chiefs and their retainers to visit Calcutta 'to see the glories of the metropolis'. In 1894, William C. Plowden of the Bengal Police took another four chiefs (Lalluova, Rognolla, Dopura, and Jadoa) to Calcutta along with their twelve assistants. Still others that year were taken on day trips to appreciate 'the sights of civilization which Chittagong affords'; W. B. Oldham to the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal, 17 December 1894, MSA CB-3, Pol-25, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Shakespear, 'Diary', 24 December to 7 January 1895, MSA, p. 1. ⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Lorrain, *Logbook*, 28 October 1896, ALA.

⁵³ Thomas H. Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel; or, How I Helped to Govern India* (London: Allen, 1885; reprint, Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute, 2005), pp. 310–11. Lewin's entire expedition down from the hills included twenty-seven people.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁵⁵ For instance, an 1845 German text speaks of the fear of rapid travel and train derailment in noting 'a certain constriction of the spirit that never quite leaves no matter how comfortable the rail journeys have become'; see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 78. On social

Back on solid ground and continuing their tour, the chiefs refused to meet with the viceroy. Instead, they chose to meet the lieutenant governor of Bengal, presenting him with elephant tusks and homemade cloths ('as to an equal') and leveraging gifts in return – a reciprocity that they would have recognized as standard chiefly diplomacy. Lewin later recorded his sadness that 'the magnificence of the City of Palaces [Calcutta] did not apparently impress them . . . On the whole, the balance of their minds inclined in favour of their own hill-tops'.⁵⁶

Far from dumbfounded and passive spectators, the chiefs remained selective and perceptive. These 'savage headhunters' camped on the city's famed Maidan, surveyed the imperial capital, and articulated that which ailed it.⁵⁷ As Calcutta faced out-of-control urbanization and swarms of bugs that made malaria endemic, the chiefs expressed a longing for their homes, 'where the ceaseless jostling of strange men troubled them not' and 'where there were no mosquitoes'.⁵⁸

The thoughtful confidence and poise exhibited by the armed chiefs and their retainers is evident in photographs taken in Calcutta (see Figure 1.7).⁵⁹ Given the chiefs' selective leveraging of gifts and diplomacy to those they gauged as equals, their journey from upland Fort Lungleh to lowland Fort William, usually seen as the performance of British paternalism, can be reinterpreted to represent something else: the strategic extension of Mizo political and spiritual power into the very heart of the Indian empire.⁶⁰

1.2 Everyday Violence in the Hills⁶¹

When the colonial agents Old Eyes, the Chief Hunter, the Old Man, and others first climbed into the heart of the Lushai Hills, they styled themselves adventurers, explorers, and white princes in remote, exotic, and unmapped

change catalyzed by the rise of railways during the British Raj, see Ritika Prasad, *Tracks of Change: Railways and Everyday Life in Colonial India* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015). My point draws upon comparative perspectives in Coll Thrush, 'Iceberg', esp. pp. 71–2.

⁵⁶ Lewin, *Fly on the Wheel*, reprint, p. 311. ⁵⁷ This borrows from Thrush, 'Iceberg', pp. 70–1.

⁵⁸ Lewin, *Fly on the Wheel*, reprint, pp. 311–12. The population of Calcutta's riverside Hooghly District halved between the late 1850s and the late 1870s because of malaria epidemics, with death rates skyrocketing and birth rates plummeting, while the urbanizing city itself swelled to encompass some 428,000 individuals in 1872 – an increase of some 86 per cent over just a half-century; see Dharma Kumar, *The Cambridge Economic History of India, Volume 2: c. 1757–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 279, 480.

⁵⁹ Van Schendel and Pachau, *The Camera*, p. 33.

⁶⁰ For a similar inverting of received wisdom about Indigenous travellers in colonial metropolises, see Allen, *Pocahontas*; also see historian Steven J. Peach, 'Creek Indian globetrotter: Tomochichi's trans-Atlantic quest for traditional power in the colonial Southeast', *Ethnohistory*, 60.4 (2013), pp. 605–35.

⁶¹ Urban sociologist Duncan McDuie-Ra writes that 'in describing . . . acts as "everyday" the aim is not to downgrade their seriousness but instead to reflect their frequency and the ways in which [victims] have come to accept this kind of harassment as a part of their lives'; McDuie-Ra, *Northeast*, p. 104.



Figure 1.7 Chiefs at Calcutta, 1872. British Library, London, BL EAP454/13/22.

lands. ‘As explorers we were always penetrating the unknown – did I not myself lead my merry men to the summit of Blue Mountain [Phawngpui], the first white man ever to set foot there-on?’⁶² wrote Military Police Officer Frederick Charles Halliday in 1898. In fact, part of the draw of frontier posts like Halliday’s was the promise of reduced imperial oversight, or what one early administrator’s wife understated as the District’s ‘somewhat special form of administration’.⁶³ Decisions looked after by whole departments in other regions in India were, in the Lushai Hills, centralized in the person of the superintendent, who was ‘judge and magistrate’ as well as ‘head of education, forests, public works, [and] police, including the Military police’.⁶⁴ Government documents referred to

⁶² Halliday, ‘Peregrinations’, p. 71.

⁶³ Scott, ‘Indian panorama’, p. 103. In broader Assam, rule by British ‘military men . . . largely unfettered by the rule of law’ had a long history, dating to the 1822 Non-Regulation System that exempted local officials from general regulations. In 1898, the Lushai Hills District was incorporated into British India under the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874, which excluded it (along with tea-plantation-rich districts in northern Bengal, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts) from the jurisdiction of civil and judicial institutions in operation in the rest of India, including the Indian Penal Code. See Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire’s Garden: Assam and the Making of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 123.

⁶⁴ Scott, ‘Indian panorama’, p. 104; Lewin to ‘My darling’ [mother], 28 August 1864, BL Mss Eur C/79, p. 1.

superintendentships in the District as ‘almost independent position[s]’ and officials in Bengal worried (often with evidence in hand) that these ‘out-of-the-way’ posts encouraged incumbents towards rashness rather than discipline.⁶⁵

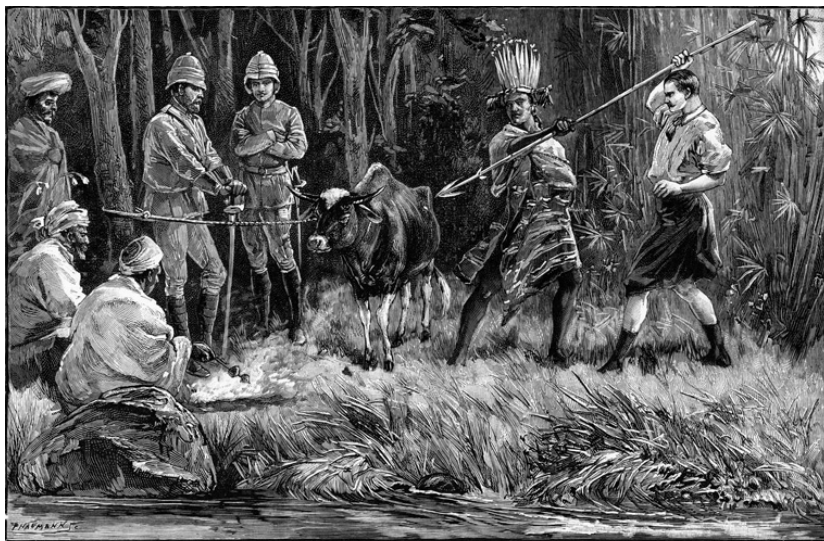
These self-styled pioneers arrived in the lands of a diverse range of people whom they lumped together as ‘artless savage tribes’ or worse.⁶⁶ Coupled with the looseness of administrative oversight, this rhetoric worked to underwrite a distinctively heavy-handed form of administration in the nascent Lushai Hills District, where superintendents quickly earned reputations as individuals of erratic violence. The case of Charles S. Murray, the first superintendent of the South Lushai Hills District, is an extreme one indicative of a general trend. Murray had built his reputation crushing tribal rebellions across eastern India, first in western Bengal and Bihar in 1880 and then, five years later, in Darjeeling. In 1890, he marched further eastwards, this time in aid of the Raj’s occupation of the lands of the Mizo people and the recovery of Lieutenant Stewart’s head. One of the few extant visual depictions of Murray – whom uplanders came to call Marliana – can be found in an 1890 issue of *The Illustrated London News* in which Murray is portrayed killing a hill buffalo in symbolic allegiance with the highland chief Mompunga (Figure 1.8). Within a year, however, the Government of India removed Superintendent Murray for building a new reputation for violence – this time as a serial rapist of women in villages like Khawhri.

In 1891, Panjiham Tipperah, son of Chandra Singh, one of Murray’s interpreters, made the following sworn statement about a riot in Khawhri under the Fanai village chief Zakapa (alternatively spelled Jacapa or Jakopa). On a cold day in January of 1890, not long after the annual harvest, Murray had stopped at Khawhri to demand kuli labourers for the government’s roadwork projects. He also demanded sex for himself and an assistant.

On the arrival of Mr. Murray to Jacopa’s village, Jacopa met the Saheb with welcome. Mr. Murray told me to get two girls for himself and the Chota Saheb (Mr. Taylor). I said, where shall I get them from[?] Mr Murray said, tell the Chief to get them. I did so. Then I and Vaitlaia and Jacopa searched for these girls, and could not get them any. Then we went to Mr. Murray and told him and he said ‘Why cannot you get them; go and make a “Banda bust” [an arrangement]’. Afterward we persuaded two girls to come but when I told them that they would sleep with the Saheb, they said ‘No, we won’t’ and run [sic]

⁶⁵ Letter X, 27 March 1891, Bengal Secretariat, A, April 1891, Nos. 1–38, File No. L/10, quoted in Robert Neil Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883–1941* (Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1942), p. 31; Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal to H. J. S. Cotton, 22 September 1896, K.W. No 1, Part 1, 1896, NAI Foreign Department, External A, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Halliday, ‘Peregrinations’, p. 71.



MOMPUNGA, A LUSHAI CHIEF, AND MR. MURRAY, POLITICAL AGENT, TAKING THE OATH OF FRIENDSHIP.
 SKETCH BY LIEUTENANT H. W. G. COLE, 2ND GOORKHAS, STAFF OFFICER.

Figure 1.8 Mompunga and Murray. © Illustrated London News Ltd./Mary Evans.

away. Then we three went to Saheb again. We said we will catch them if you like. Jacopa agreed to this. Then Murray Saheb said 'No do not catch them, the Sepoy [soldiers] will see, but if you cannot bring me two women, I will have the wives of Jacopa and Pajika'. Jacopa was present and Mr. Murray said it in Lushai [language], and at once Jacopa's family began to leave the village.⁶⁷

Despite being grossly outgunned, the remaining villagers of Khawhri attacked Murray's forces. Two sepoys and an assistant were killed during the fighting. Murray himself escaped into the forest as his forces burned most of Khawhri's houses and grain reserves.⁶⁸ Twenty days later, Shakespear's column of nearly 150 Gurkhas and Frontier Policemen returned to Khawhri to finish the job.⁶⁹ Twenty-four highlanders were killed as the settlement and its grain stores were all burned to ashes – an atrocity seen as depraved even by the British officer who felt compelled to commit it: 'I knew all along that Murray must have been much to blame and it hurt me badly having to deal so harshly with Jacopa', recalled Shakespear (who

⁶⁷ Diaries of Charles S. Murray, from 1 to 18 February 1891, quoted in J. Zorema, *Indirect Rule in Mizoram: 1890–1954* (Delhi: Mittal, 2007), p. 54; also see 'The Story of Dara, Chief of Pukpui', BL Mss Eur E361/4, p. 2.

⁶⁸ Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas*, p. 31.

⁶⁹ John Shakespear, 'Diary', 17 January to 10 February 1892 (entry for 24 January), BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 89/2, p. 4.

would replace Murray as superintendent). ‘But at that time one could not be lenient in cases of our parties being attacked.’⁷⁰

When colonial forces finally captured Zakapa five years later and tied him to a post (Figure 1.9), the chief was unrepentant.

Why should I [have] not [attacked Murray?] [H]e asked for two young women and when they fled he demanded my wife. I refused so he went to burn our rice. Seeing he was going to destroy that on which we depended for life, I could do no other than shoot him.

Officials whitewashed Murray’s misconduct. Only the testimonies of Panjiham Tipperah and Dara preserve the details of the case in the archival record. Colonial reports and writings instead refer obliquely to a ‘disaster’, an ‘affair’, or an ‘unfortunate incident’⁷¹ – a case of ‘those who commit the murders write the reports’.⁷² Contemporary military writings leave out Murray’s demands for sexual



Figure 1.9 ‘Jacopa on the evening of his capture’. John Shakespear, in ‘Lushai reminiscences’, *The Assam Review*, 2.5 (1929), p. 347.

⁷⁰ John Shakespear to Anthony G. McCall, 28 August 1938, BL Mss Eur E361/5, p. 6. Also see J. Shakespear, ‘Note on the Lushai Hills, its inhabitants, and its admin since 1888’, MSA CB-9, G-79, p. 5 or MSA CB-1, Pol-3.

⁷¹ Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas*, p. 31.

⁷² Ida B. Wells, ‘Lynch law in all its phases’, in Joseph Cook, ed., *Our Day: A Record and Review of Current Reform* (Chicago, IL: Woman’s Temperance Publishing Association, 1893), pp. 333–47(‘those who commit’, p. 341). On the tactical and strategic bases for covering up similar

corvée, blaming the twice-burning of Khawhri on Zakapa's withholding of kuli labourers.⁷³ Following a hushed investigation, Murray was quietly removed from the District and sent westwards to the Chittagong Hill Tracts to take up the more easily supervised post of assistant commissioner.⁷⁴ When Zakapa was finally captured in 1896, the chief was sent to Chittagong, in Murray's footsteps, to serve a three-month sentence.

Murray's terror outlived his deportation from the Lushai Hills. In 1903, rumours reached the ears of local Baptist Missionary Society missionaries James H. Lorrain and Frederick W. Savidge about an eleven-year-old boy with skin like theirs. The mother, Thangtei, was summoned to bring her child, Challiana, who was immediately seized. Thangtei had hidden her boy, conceived during Thangtei's assault by Murray, as long as she could. Under missionary Savidge's bungalow roof and tutelage, and with financial support from Murray in England, the stolen boy was groomed into a translator, church pastor, and medical assistant (Figure 1.10). Early mission registers recorded converts' 'clans' (Fanai, Chongthu, and so forth), and Challiana's clan was listed as 'Sâp'.⁷⁵

Murray was not the only colonial agent to earn a reputation for unleashing everyday physical, sexual, and psychological violence.⁷⁶ McCabe seized women and children and sent them under military guard to Aijal as hostages, refusing their husbands and fathers who came to beg for their return.⁷⁷ Other officers recorded their 'pleasure' at burning entire villages.⁷⁸

Colonial forces demanded firewood, vegetables, rice, goats, and chickens from villages, sometimes pressing a single settlement to yield upwards of 200,000 calories for a single force's meal.⁷⁹ Male forced labourers conscripted from village populations were sometimes 'severely assaulted' by their overseeing officers; one man forced to work on the Serchhip road had his 'head cut open' by a sepoy.⁸⁰

These sepoys were not only liabilities for a village's male population; in 1894, two Mizo men walked some 100 kilometres to Aijal to complain that a Kuki

sexual attacks by British Army men on subject women in India and Burma, see Douglas M. Peers, 'Privates off parade: Regimenting sexuality in the nineteenth-century Indian Empire', *The International History Review*, 20.4 (1998), pp. 823–54.

⁷³ E. B. Elly, *Military Report on the Chin-Lushai Country* (Simla: Government of India, 1893), p. 52.

⁷⁴ Elly, *Military Report*, p. 2; also see Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas*, p. 31. J. Shakespear also mentions the trial in his 'Administration Report, 1895–96', p. 6.

⁷⁵ 'Church Members Register – I', BCMCA, p. 6.

⁷⁶ On misconduct, sex crimes, and gendered colonial violence in neighbouring Burma, see Jonathan Saha, 'The male state: Colonialism, corruption and rape investigations in the Irawaddy Delta c. 1900', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 47.3 (2010), pp. 343–76.

⁷⁷ Robert B. McCabe, 'Diary', 2–13 May 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

⁷⁸ J. Shakespear, 'Note on the Lushai Hills, its inhabitants, and its administration since 1888', 1905, BL Mss Eur E361/3, p. 1.

⁷⁹ McCabe, 'Diary', 23 January to 1 February 1892, p. 1; J. Shakespear, 'Diary', 17 January to 10 February 1892 (entry for 24 January), BL Photo Eur 89/2, p. 4; J. Shakespear, 'Diary', 3–26 September 1901 (entry for 24 September), BL Mss Photo Eur 89/3, p. 2.

⁸⁰ A. Porteous, 'Diary', November 1896 (entry for 4–9 November), p. 1.



Figure 1.10 Challiana (on left) with F. W. Savidge in Serkawn, 1913. Used by kind permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford.

colonial soldier had – in a fashion reminiscent of C. S. Murray – attempted to rape one of their village women when delivering a government ‘notice for coolies’.⁸¹ Any village refusing a labour demand might find itself hosting sepoy with orders to ‘live free on the village’ until the workforce was supplied.⁸²

Though light on the ground in terms of actual manpower, colonial officials in this era clearly oversaw a ‘government by terror’.⁸³ In 1897, the Whipping Act was extended into the hills, granting the superintendent power to sentence people, including juveniles and female tea-plantation workers, to punishments of flogging.⁸⁴ Standing orders were later issued to curb the practice of government workers assaulting uplanders with ‘light canes etc.’⁸⁵

⁸¹ A. Porteous, ‘Diary’, November 1894 (entry for 30 November), BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 2.

⁸² A. W. Davis, ‘Diary’, 23 March to 15 April 1893, Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

⁸³ Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends*, p. 308.

⁸⁴ E. A. Gait to the Secretary to the Government of India, ‘Proposals for the Administration of the Lushai Hills’, 17 July 1897, MSA CB-5, G-57, p. 3.

⁸⁵ H. W. G. Cole, ‘Standing Order No. 10 of 1909–10’, 19 July 1909, MSA CB-14, G-169, p. 1.

It was in this context of quotidian terror that a young Mizo man (tlangval) approached touring officer John Shakespear for some tobacco. A nearby chief warned the youngster in the Mizo language: ‘Be quiet, these foreign chiefs when angry [are] like tigers.’ The chief’s choice of metaphor provides a glimpse into how uplanders at the time perceived the newcomers not only as chiefs but also as dangerous beasts. Shakespear overheard the remark and responded by punching the young man in the face – proving the chief’s point.⁸⁶

1.3 Kuli

Officials in Bengal began to see the highlanders as potential coolies because of costs and distance; government coolies had to be transported from far-flung camps to Calcutta, from Calcutta to Chittagong, and from Chittagong up into the Lushai Hills. There were real prospects for sickness and exhaustion on the journey.⁸⁷ With labour from neighbouring Khasi Hills also deemed too expensive, officials concluded that ‘if roads are ever to be made about this country, they will have to be made with local labour’.⁸⁸

Labour demands were immediate, significant, and varied (Figure 1.11). Men were forced to build houses for the families of soldiers and military police in distant colonial centres. Others were tasked with carrying hundreds of sheets of corrugated iron across mountain ranges, rebuilding shops when colonial agents ordered bazaars moved, and clearing the jungle around the colonial outposts of Lungleh, Fort Tregear, and Demagiri.⁸⁹

Roadwork was the most widespread and loathsome task of all. Tens of thousands of male villagers were put to work on coerced roadwork gangs supervised by soldiers. They cut footpaths alongside rivers, trails through forests, and roads across mountains, linking the colonial headquarters of Lungleh to local and other colonial settlements.⁹⁰ Kulis even had to carry

⁸⁶ Shakespear is quoted, though not by name, in Woodthorpe, ‘The Lushai country’, Royal Geographical Society Manuscript Archive MgX.291.1, p. 37.

⁸⁷ See the discussions on the ‘Pioneer Regiment’ in the note ‘Construction of a road between Aijal and Lungleh in the Lushai Hills’, NAI Foreign Department, External A, Pros. Nov 1892, Nos. 211–212, esp. p. 4.

⁸⁸ A. W. Davis, ‘Diary’, 23 December to 22 January 1893, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 4.

⁸⁹ On corrugated iron, see J. Shakespear to the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, 14 August 1895, MSA CB-4, G-47, p. 2; C. B. Drake-Brockman, ‘Administration Report for the Lungleh Subdivision, 1898–1899’, MSA CB-8, G-96, n. p.; on shops, see A. W. Davis, ‘Diary’ for December 1893, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1; also see Herbert Anderson, *Among the Lushais* (London: The Carey Press, 1914), p. 10; R. B. McCabe, ‘Diary’, 14–20 February 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1; and Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1895–96’, p. 14; on forest clearing, see R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, ‘Summary of events ... for the week ending 8 August 1896’, MSA CB-5, G-49, p. 1; R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, ‘Summary of events in the South Lushai Hills for the week ending 17 November 1896’, MSA CB-5, G-49, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1894–95’, p. 9; Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1895–96’, p. 13; R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, ‘17 November 1896’. For a discussion of forced

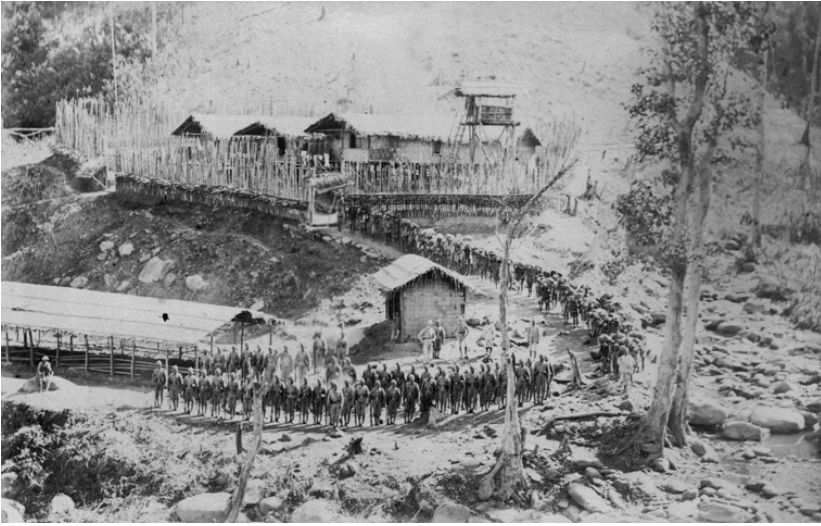


Figure 1.11 A line of kulis carry baggage for a contingent of military police on the road to Aijal, c. 1892. KPUSC G 155 A1 P46 1893.

their own food to work sites or found their meagre pay reduced.⁹¹ Though the state technically only demanded male labourers, women and even children also shouldered heavy loads. The wives and daughters of forced labourers from Lalthangvunga's village, for instance, had to help carrying touring officials' goods on a particularly difficult stretch of road that required clambering 'over boulders and tree trunks'.⁹²

Climate compounded the burden. In recent years, disaster-studies scholarship has emphasized the human-made character of so-called 'natural' cataclysms: cyclones, earthquakes, and monsoon floods are environmental processes, but their devastation is exacerbated when humans build in their regular paths.⁹³ In the Lushai Hills, monsoon seasons and attendant cyclones regularly dumped around 2.2 metres of rain per year in the north and a colossal

labour regimes in neighbouring Naga Hills, see Lipokmar Dzüvichü, 'Empire on their backs: Coolies in the eastern borderlands of the British Raj', supplement, *International Review of Social History*, 59.S22 (2014), pp. 1–24.

⁹¹ A. W. Davis, 'Diary', 9–17 February 1893, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

⁹² Shakespear, 'Diary', 1–2 January 1894, MSA, p. 1.

⁹³ See, for example, Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) or Coll Thrush and Ruth S. Ludwin, 'Finding fault: Indigenous seismology, colonial science, and the rediscovery of earthquakes and tsunamis in Cascadia', *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 31.4 (2007), pp. 1–24 (esp. p. 2).

3.7 metres in the south.⁹⁴ In a District distinguished by its landslide-prone gradients (over 70 per cent of the land area, well over 2 million hectares, slopes at angles steeper than 33 degrees),⁹⁵ the infrastructural decisions of colonial officials literally paved the way towards a vicious cycle of coerced road repair and landslide excavation (a government road is depicted under construction in Figure 1.12).

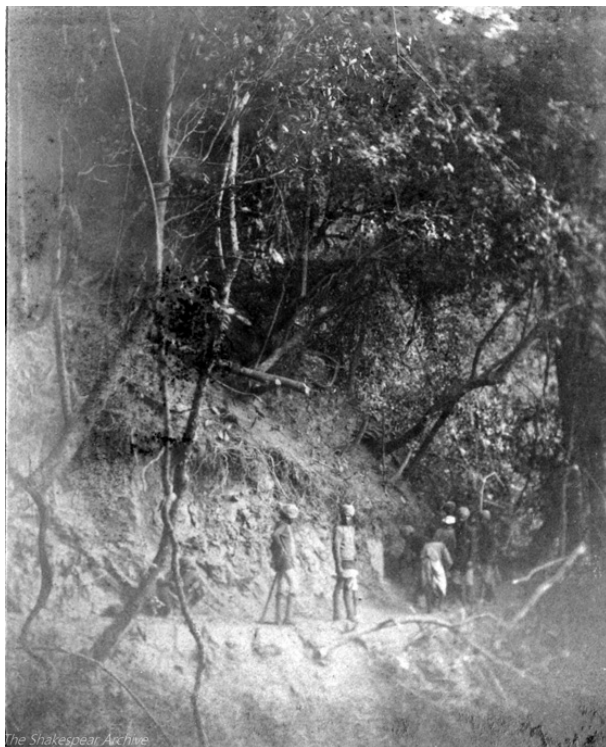


Figure 1.12 Roadbuilding near Theriat, 1890. SA.

⁹⁴ *Military Report on the Lushai Hills* (Simla: Government of India, 1906), BL L/MIL/17/18/11, p. 28. Also see 'Record of the Rainfall of Serkawn Station, 1912–1946', BL EAP 454/8/25; according to this private record, an annual average of 3.3 metres of rain fell between 1912 and 1918 in the southern village of Serkawn.

⁹⁵ Paul Grogan, F. Lalnunmawia, and S. K. Tripathi, 'Shifting cultivation in steeply sloped regions: A review of management options and research priorities for Mizoram state, Northeast India', *Agroforestry Systems*, 84.2 (2012), pp. 163–177 (pp. 163, 164). Also see the policy document *New Land Use Policy: Executive Summary* (Aizawl: Government of Mizoram, 2009).

People in the rainier south bore an even greater burden. Only one month into the rainy season of 1896, the brand-new trace road cut at Sailengret was deemed unfit for transport use: 'The trace goes along cliff sides a sheer drop of some two or three hundred feet and the loose soil is constantly giving.'⁹⁶ Overworked villagers remembered the unusually stormy year of 1895 as *minpui kum* – the year of landslides.⁹⁷ Larger disasters made things even worse. The Shillong earthquake in June 1897 rattled its way southwards across the Lushai Hills, pulling down tonnes of dirt 'along the Government roads and caus[ing] much inconvenience, necessitating constant road repair work'.⁹⁸

Government thoroughfares were not benign 'public works' or evidence of either technocratic 'progress' or transportation's 'improvement'. They were environmentally inappropriate in the hills, impossible to maintain without mass coerced labour regimes that victimized vulnerable populations. In contrast, Mizo footpaths, some following trails carved by elephants through the jungle, were narrow, less labour-intensive to both create and maintain. In other words, vernacular pathways were sensitive to the environmental processes that defined *zo ram*, the highlands, as a region.⁹⁹

Kuli demands seemed limitless.¹⁰⁰ Ten days' labour per man each year, not inclusive of travel time, was the labour requirement cited internally by government officers.¹⁰¹ In practice, actual demands were far more variable. No maximum was fixed 'as circumstances may arise in which a large quantity of labour is needed', and Mizo ignorance of any government temperance on the labour question was seen as favourable.¹⁰²

At the end of the workday, upland men employed on forced roadgangs scoffed at the four-anna coins that they were presented.¹⁰³ They gave the cash away to children in plain view of overseeing officers, 'implying that it was beneath their dignity to retain'.¹⁰⁴ The coinage was already an attempt to

⁹⁶ R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, 'Summary of events . . . for the week ending 9 June 1896', MSA CB-5, G-49, p. 2.

⁹⁷ S. L. Saihnuna, *Reflections on the Centennial Church and Mission Paradigm in Mizoram (1894–1994)* (Lunglei: H. Nikungi, 2001), p. vi.

⁹⁸ R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, 'Administration Report of the South Lushai Hills, 1896–1897', 5 April 1898, BL IOR/V/10/1541, p. 1; on road damage after cyclones, see Halliday, 'Tour Diary', MSA CB-6, G-69, p. 4.

⁹⁹ James Meirion Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram: Harvest in the Hills* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1991), p. 119.

¹⁰⁰ John Shakespear to the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, 8 February 1896, MSA CB-4, G-41, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ E. A. Gait (Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam) to the Secretary to the Government of India, 'Proposals for the Administration of the Lushai Hills', 17 July 1897, MSA CB-5, G-57, especially 'Guidelines for Administration', p. 7.

¹⁰² Shakespear to Commissioner, 8 February 1896, p. 3.

¹⁰³ Robert B. McCabe, 'Diary', 2–13 February 1892, Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1. ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

short-circuit highlanders' indifference; it had been introduced after forced labourers decided to use their paper-money earnings to roll cigarettes.¹⁰⁵

When a rumour circulated that the maximum load per coolie was 'twenty seers' (roughly 18.7 kilograms), Mizos began insisting on the weight cap, evidence that they were learning foreign units of measurement to defend themselves. Colonial officials determined to break this load-limit 'superstition' gave kulis from Lalhima's village each a *thirty-seer* load (roughly 28 kilograms).¹⁰⁶ Upland bodies bent and broke under the newcomers' rule.

1.4 Exceptional Violence in the Hills

Highland bodies had long borne colonialism's many traumas. Local perceptions of limitless forced labour need to be viewed against the backdrop of larger-scale hostilities and violence. British invasions into zo ram heartlands in the early 1890s had been timed to coincide with the end of the annual rice harvests, so that the troops could force resting harvesters into portage duties and eat freshly harvested rice rather than carry supplies.¹⁰⁷ As Shakespear gloated in 1892, 'It is pleasant to see the villagers really working hard at cleaning their own dhan [unhusked rice] for our consumption.'¹⁰⁸

That year, McCabe used famine conditions as a combat tool. The upcountry crops that year had been an 'utter failure' thanks to drought conditions and the purposeful interruption of planting cycles by state violence. McCabe saw people's hunger as a 'blessing' and imported rice that he offered only in return for hard labour.¹⁰⁹ He wrote:

I cannot reiterate too strongly how firmly I am convinced that burning a Lushai village and then withdrawing is no punishment. We must hunt the enemy down from camp to camp and jhum to jhum, destroy their crops and granaries, and force them by want and privation to accede to our terms. . . . Exposure and starvation are our strongest allies, and with their assistance I believe that the Lushais will be very shortly craving for peace.¹¹⁰

Villagers in the eastern regions under the banner of Lalbura resisted the newcomers with force, though they had little to eat other than jungle produce 'and what little rice they were able to beg or borrow from their more fortunate neighbours in the west or south'.¹¹¹ Inhabitants in the north, near Changsil,

¹⁰⁵ Scott, 'Indian panorama', p. 117.

¹⁰⁶ A. W. Davis, 'Diary', 11 November 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ 'Note regarding the proposed expedition against Kairuma', 11 May 1895, MSA CB-4, G-37, n.p.

¹⁰⁸ John Shakespear, 'Diary', 11–22 February 1892, BL Photo Eur 89/2, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Robert B. McCabe, 'Diary', 23 January to 1 February 1892, Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Robert B. McCabe, 'Diary', 10–30 April 1892, Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

¹¹¹ 'Annual Report of the North Lushai Hills for the Year 1892–1893', MSA CB-26, G-318, p. 1.



Figure 1.13 ‘Lushai woman and girl cleaning the husk from rice by pounding’, 1896. They pound wooden pestles (*suk*) into a wooden bowl (*sum*); both words are onomatopoeic. Used by kind permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent’s Park College, Oxford.

were reduced to collecting sticks from the jungle and exchanging these with local sepoy for something to eat.¹¹²

The appropriation and destruction of village grain reserves were highly gendered forms of state violence because they targeted ordinary women’s work. Women were primarily responsible for growing, transporting, and husking rice (see Figure 1.13). In the hills, women of status were also valued for their rice wealth, which was sometimes significant enough to be commemorated on memorial stones.¹¹³ State agents hypothesized that grain destruction, and thereby the disruption of agricultural cycles and food security, was the most effective way to ‘get rid of a troublesome community’ or to drive highlanders

¹¹² A. W. Davis, ‘Diary’, 18 February to 14 March 1893, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

¹¹³ See, for instance, the memorial stone for Zaziki Kھیangte (who died in 1920) that still stands at Zion Veng, Champhai. The stone indicates that Kھیangte possessed eight *puan tial* (an expensive design of cloth) and accomplished 1,500 *buh thlo*, a verb implying to successfully harvest rice, perhaps measured in repurposed kerosene oil tins, or through the action that Mizos call *phur* – to carry a load on one’s back (as in ‘*phur khat*’, to thus carry a single load).

towards settling under 'loyal Chiefs'.¹¹⁴ Assuming that all wealth was male wealth, colonial armies set about cutting off the food supplies of resistant men by destroying what they failed to recognize was women's work and wealth.¹¹⁵

In their pursuit of peace via military supremacy in the early 1890s, British forces in the already impoverished Chin and Mara villages south of South Vanlaiphai committed atrocities that were 'regret[ted]' in reports as 'harsh measures [that] had to be taken here as the people lied so terribly that it was impossible to either get information or guns'.¹¹⁶ Local officials, however, celebrated McCabe's reign of terror as having 'good effects' despite being 'very severe'.¹¹⁷ In 1894, when the village of Ramri fled instead of offering food and coolies to a touring colonial force, the village was completely burned. Shakespear preemptively excused his behaviour to officials in Shillong, who were beginning to take notice even in spite of the notorious administrative freedom-of-hand in the Lushai Hills: 'The punishment of this village may seem severe, but it is necessary to show these people that we wont [sic] be trifled with.'¹¹⁸ On one hand, severe violence was tolerated and even occasionally praised; on the other, it was frequently described as excessive and in need of justification.

Highlanders improvised. Colonial forces came across abandoned settlements pockmarked with excavated pits, evidence of a fleeing village carrying away stores of rice secreted away from the state.¹¹⁹ Underground chambers, encircled with split bamboo, consisted of carefully engineered sedimentary layers designed to preserve their precious contents. A top layer of soil roughly a foot deep capped a layer of bamboo and palm leaves that hid any assortment of wealth beneath: corn, millet, nets, looms, brass pots, embossed bronze bowls, alloy gongs, or rice paddy.¹²⁰

When colonial forces learned to dig up pits of concealed rice within villages or to look for grain salted away in distant jhum huts, some villages began locating their hidden bunkers even further afield.¹²¹ In 1892, sepoy dug up great pits of rice in an eastern Lushai Hills village, burning what officials estimated to be tens of thousands of kilograms of rice – a colossal destruction of agricultural exertion and rice wealth.¹²²

Fear loomed everywhere. Every colonial tour through the mountains brought with it the possibility of forced labour and bloodshed – of 'violence over the

¹¹⁴ Shakespear, 'Diary', 12 February to 19 February 1894, MSA, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ On this point, see Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends*, pp. 287–338 (esp. pp. 302–8).

¹¹⁶ Drake Brockman, 'Report on the disarmament of the Chin and Lakher villages south of South Vanlaiphai outpost, 1899–1900', MSA CB-7, G-76, 3, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Davis, 'Diary', 23 December to 22 January 1893 (entry for 25 December), p. 1.

¹¹⁸ Shakespear, 'Diary', 20–21 February 1894, MSA, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ Pits averaged around sixty cubic feet in volume: four or five feet deep, with similar diameters; McCabe, 'Diary', 2–13 May 1892, p. 2.

¹²⁰ McCabe, 'Diary', 10–30 April 1892, pp. 4, 6. ¹²¹ McCabe, 'Diary', 2–13 May 1892, p. 1.

¹²² McCabe, 'Diary', 10–30 April 1892, p. 4. Also see Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends*, p. 303.

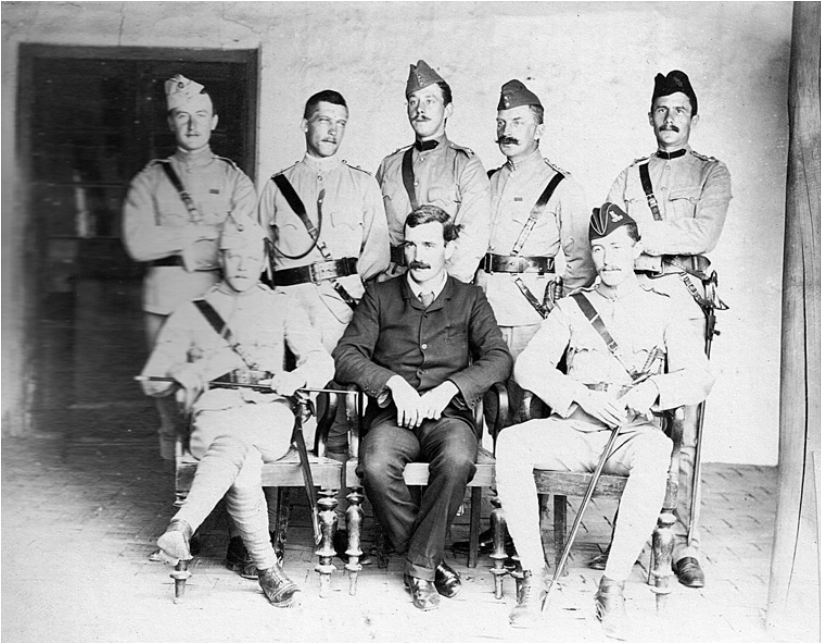


Figure 1.14 A political officer (possibly Robert B. McCabe) surrounded by field officers of the North Lushai Column at Fort Aijal, c. 1892. KPUSC G 155 A1 P46 1893.

land'.¹²³ In the mid-1890s, it was becoming more and more difficult for colonial agents to find anyone willing to work as an interpreter: 'They do not want us to interpret, they want to kill us.'¹²⁴ Upland postcarriers (*dakwalla*, after the Hindi) refused to carry the post without an escort through the mountain trails.¹²⁵

Childhood was transformed as broken parents ceased teaching traditional games during the upheaval.¹²⁶ Village children fled into the jungle at the first sight of white people arriving in their village, with cries of, 'Ka pu, khawngaih takin engmah min ti suh' ('Sir, please do not harm us'). Later, Christian missionaries found out that these children had thought they would be kidnapped; the white man was to be feared.¹²⁷

¹²³ Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 24.

¹²⁴ 'The Story of Dara', p. 1.

¹²⁵ Loose letter, 'My dear Mr. [illegible]', 8 April 1892, MSA CB-2, G-17, p. 2.

¹²⁶ Lewis, *The Lushai Hills*, p. 61.

¹²⁷ Frederick W. Savidge, 'Progress Among the Lushais', *The Missionary Herald of the Baptist Missionary Society for the Year 1907* (London: Baptist Missionary Society, 1907), p. [123?, illegible].

The newcomers were feared most of all for delivering 'violence in astonishing new ways'.¹²⁸ Many hill leaders were deported far over the horizon, some to distant lands unknown to Mizos. Many were never heard from again, like the chief Lianphunga, whose fellow villagers appear armed and defiant in Figure 1.15 prior

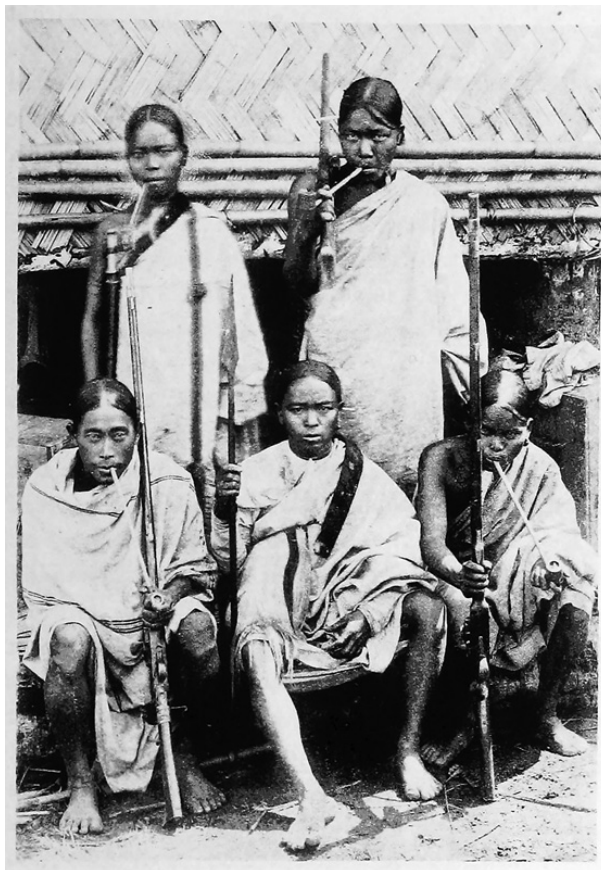


Figure 1.15 Armed men at Lianphunga's village in 1890, shortly before British forces burnt it down in their quest to capture the elusive chief. Adam Scott Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land, with Maps and Illustrations* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1893), p. 251. Public domain, British Library, London, BL General Reference Collection DRT Digital Store 010057.h.10.

¹²⁸ Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends*, p. 272.

to his capture.¹²⁹ Highland people who crossed the 'Inner Line', an invisible colonial boundary in the forest near Cachar, to climb and tap rubber trees were shot down 'like birds' by British forces.¹³⁰

Violence shattered families and childhoods; when a four-year-old Mizo child lost sight of his parents amid a gun battle near Kholel, he was immediately 'adopted' by a Cachari officer from Assam.¹³¹ In other cases, entire villages were forced to construct shelters for touring soldiers, at least once upon the charred remains of a village burned by the same soldiers two years prior.¹³² These experiences were not exceptional to the early Mizo experience of the Raj but constitutive of it. It is no coincidence that elders described the arrival of the newcomers from the Indian lowlands as a great 'boiling over', capturing the scalding of upland lives as violence flooded across the hills.¹³³

The concept of the 'information panic' has proven useful to understand the British Raj's difficulties, failures, and insecurities about acquiring and interpreting information about colonized societies, their intentions, and movements.¹³⁴ The concept is equally applicable in the reverse direction; colonized peoples panicked about a dearth of knowledge about the state and its motives, especially in times of extreme violence.¹³⁵

High in the Himalayan foothills, sightlines of violence were maximized. The mountaintops where people built their villages provided long sightlines and uniquely distant horizons. Outside of the smoky jhumming season, the topography itself compounded the terror that undergirded rumour and panic; the rising smoke of villages being burnt communicated panic across great distances.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ The brothers Lianphunga and Kalkhama killed themselves in Chotanagpur's Hazaribagh Jail in 1891 after their deportation, while the chief Nikaola, incarcerated in Calcutta, starved himself to death there. Other deported leaders included Ropuliani, Dokola, and the southern chiefs Kilkara, Hmunklinga, and Lingkung. See A. Porteous, 'Diary', March 1895 (entry for 10 March), BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 3; and P. Lalnithanga, *Emergence of Mizoram* (Aizawl: Mizoram Publication Board, 2005), p. 11; and the 24 October 1891 issue of *The Colonies and India from London*, p. 14; J. Shakespear to the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, 18 April 1894, MSA CB-2, Pol-17, p. 1; J. Shakespear to the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, 27 April 1896, MSA CB-2, Pol-17; and Brockman, 'Disarmament, 1899–1900', p. 3.

¹³⁰ On the rubber-tapping encounter, see NAI Foreign Department A, Political E, February 1884, Nos. 302–309, quoted in Zou, 'The interaction of print culture', p. 134.

¹³¹ McCabe, 'Diary', 10–30 April 1892, p. 7.

¹³² Shakespear, 'Diary', 6–14 January 1894, MSA, p. 1.

¹³³ J. H. Lorrain, 'Memories of Lushai', ALA BMS Acc. 250, p. 2.

¹³⁴ C. A. Bayly, 'Knowing the country: Empire and information in India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27.1 (1993), pp. 3–43; C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and D. K. Lahiri Choudhury, 'Sinews of panic and the nerves of empire: The imagined state's entanglement with information panic, India c. 1880–1912', *Modern Asian Studies*, 38.4 (2004), pp. 965–1002.

¹³⁵ Kim A. Wagner, *The Great Fear of 1857: Rumours, Conspiracies and the Making of the Indian Uprising* (Witney: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 24.

¹³⁶ In 1892, for instance, Robert B. McCabe could see from the eastern Lushai Hills (near Bungteya's village) the burning of the Chin village of Tlongbuta in the distant Chin Hills;

Ordinary individuals relied on information delivered orally across difficult terrain, on inter-village messengers and emissaries, as well as on rumour and community gossip (khual thuthang) in order to be bengvar ('quick-eared' or informed).¹³⁷ Amid the rising smoke, conflict, rumour, and panic, it was difficult for highland populations to be quick-eared. It was impossible to penetrate, let alone comprehend, the newcomers' information systems.¹³⁸ Early on, the newcomers' written words delivered via post (dak) and telegraph lines were technologies far more easily sabotaged than infiltrated and understood.

Excesses of state violence and uncertainty gave rise to fresh speculation about the foreigners' intentions and capabilities. Many chiefs refused an official's invitation to Lungleh's lavish New Year celebrations in 1892 for fear that the summons was a ploy to assemble and punish them – or worse.¹³⁹ Chief Lalbura offered a dreadful twin prophecy: the powerful foreigners would one day imprison the upland kulis and hold them for the ransom of all local guns.¹⁴⁰

Superintendents noticed how villagers 'appear[ed] extremely suspicious of [their] intentions . . .'.¹⁴¹ The chief Tholing, from near Serkawr (modern Saikao), refused to believe that colonial authorities in both the Lushai Hills and the Chittagong Hill Tracts meant him no harm despite repeated assurances. In 1897, he arrived with an entourage of seventy men to speak to R. H. Greenstreet, the superintendent of the Arakan Hill Tracts, and requested permission to move his village away from colonial authorities.¹⁴² Likewise, the 'morbidly nervous' chief Kairuma refused to meet with any sahibs or their agents.

[Kairuma] quoted the deaths of so many leading chiefs since our occupation of the hills, including chiefs such as Sailienpui and Lienkhunga, who died in their own houses, as proofs of our malevolence and powers of magic, and in justification of his refusal to see the interpreter [Sib Charan, sent from Aijal to speak the chief].¹⁴³

Kairuma's fears were soon confirmed. In retaliation for his refusal, two groups of sepoys arrived to kill off his village's animal wealth (fifty pigs and a mithun) and seize nearly 1,500 kilograms of grain.¹⁴⁴ The stakes were perceived to be so high

see McCabe, 'Diary', 2–13 May 1892, p. 2. On the burning of other villages and granaries, see, for instance, Elly, *Military Report*, reprint, p. 2, quoted in Zou, 'The interaction of print culture', p. 124; and Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, reprint, pp. 288, 293.

¹³⁷ Zou, 'The interaction of print culture', p. 75; E. L. Mendus, 'Editorial', *Kristian Tlangau*, September 1932, p. 188.

¹³⁸ Dowd, 'The Panic of 1751', esp. pp. 527–8.

¹³⁹ Shakespear, 'Diary' for the week ending 2 January 1892, MSA, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Loose letter, 'My dear Mr. [illegible]', 8 April 1892, p. 4.

¹⁴¹ A. Porteous, 'Diary', 1 February 1895, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

¹⁴² R. H. Greenstreet, note, 21 January 1897, MSA CB-5, G-58, p. 1; R. H. Greenstreet, note, 2 February 1897, MSA CB-5, G-58, p. 1.

¹⁴³ Porteous, 'Diary', December 1895, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Porteous, 'Diary', December 1895, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 4.

that highland people issued stern warnings across the land: anyone colluding with the oppressive vai would be killed when the occupiers were eventually forced out.¹⁴⁵

1.5 Disease

Far from being experts on treating disease, the newcomers seemed to cause it. In 1884, Alexander Mackenzie noted that locals closely associated white people with cholera in the hills.¹⁴⁶ According to a report in Calcutta's newspaper *The Pioneer*, Mizos called cholera 'vay-dam-lo' (vai damlohna, 'a foreign illness').¹⁴⁷ When, in 1861, a group of uplanders carried the lethal 'crowd disease' up into the hills after a raid (likely into what the Raj knew as the Chittagong Hill Tracts), it 'spread the greatest terror among them, many of them . . . blowing out their brains on the first appearance of the disease showing itself'.¹⁴⁸ In 1895, a cohort of Santal coolies working for the government carried cholera with them into Demagiri and Lungleh, resulting in ninety cases treated and twenty-nine deaths.¹⁴⁹

Highland populations visiting the newcomers' bazaars paid with their lives. In 1860, the Kassalong bazaar (in the Chittagong Hill Tracts) was said to be the source of a smallpox outbreak among upland villages.¹⁵⁰ After three highlanders contracted cholera in 1894 at the Demagiri bazaar, officials temporarily barred anyone else from visiting it.¹⁵¹ People visiting the colonial headquarters of Aijal to procure imported wares likewise carried cholera back to Mompunga's village, where fifteen people died.¹⁵² Chiefs and puithiams – the guardians of public wellbeing – were confronted with powerful foreign illnesses that they had little experience healing.

The historical reactions of highland individuals, like the true extent of the destruction caused by the diseases, are largely lost to us. Modern epidemiologists note that epidemics of cholera target adults and the most productive members of society: mothers, hunters, traders, and cultivators. The symptoms associated with cholera must have been alarming: muscles cramped, children fell into comas, heartbeats became irregular. Those infected released diarrheal fluids, projecting the cholera bacterium into water supplies and propagating the

¹⁴⁵ Lorrain, *Logbook*, 12 September 1894, ALA.

¹⁴⁶ Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (Calcutta: Home Department Press, 1884; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 327.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Woodthorpe, 'The Lushai country', p. 30. Cholera was also known as 'tuihri'.

¹⁴⁸ Shakespear, quoted in Woodthorpe, 'The Lushai country', p. 30.

¹⁴⁹ Shakespear, 'Administration Report, 1894–95', p. 11.

¹⁵⁰ Shakespear, quoted in Woodthorpe, 'The Lushai country', p. 30.

¹⁵¹ Shakespear, 'Administration Report, 1894–95', p. 13; Shakespear, 'Diary', 28 March to 20 April 1894, MSA, p. 1.

¹⁵² Shakespear, 'Administration Report, 1894–95', p. 13.

microbe.¹⁵³ In a world where someone hostile always caused sicknesses, upland populations were under attack by truly powerful external forces. Unknown to highlanders, the diseases took their toll against the wider backdrop of a British India in which civilian mortality was also soaring.¹⁵⁴

The earliest colonial jails in the hills – little more than single rooms, like the roughly 220-square-foot ‘lockup’ built in Demagiri in 1899 – were additional sites of death and panic, especially in the upland world where only animals, never humans, were caged.¹⁵⁵ In 1895, one Dokama died from sickness in the Lungleh jail, unable to access highland remedies.¹⁵⁶ His was a common plight. A year prior, the intermediary Lalaram requested that colonial officials allow him to return home following his mother’s death. He hoped to assist her spirits (of which humans had two) in leaving the world of the living. But officials refused the request because two high-profile prisoners at Chittagong Jail (the ill Ropuiliani and her son) required Lalaram as an interpreter. Events like these were all-round crises of healing. Lalaram could not release his dead mother to the spirit world; Ropuiliani, sick in lockup, could not heal herself in the usual ways.¹⁵⁷

Still other prisoners survived jail to find that their families had died in the interim. Thangula, a colonial resister from the northern Lushai Hills, was deported in 1891 to Hazaribagh Jail in Chotanagpur. His family often inquired anxiously after his health.¹⁵⁸ In 1893, a message dictated by Thangula in Mizo was dispatched to the Lushai Hills and read to his family, who were then told that they would not see Thangula for at least five more years.¹⁵⁹ When the chief finally returned to Aijal in 1895, he had no desire to return to any village: he ‘was destitute, and . . . his wife and three children had died in his absence’.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ See, for instance, Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), pp. 199–200. Also see Norman Longmate, *King Cholera* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1966).

¹⁵⁴ Between 1880 and 1920, epidemics of plague, influenza, cholera, and malaria saw skyrocketing mortality among the civilian population of India, with the death rate peaking in 1911; David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 75.

¹⁵⁵ I am grateful to the staff of the Tlabung Police Station for sharing their ‘Building Register’ (1899); see BL EAP454/21. That humans could be caged (both literally, in colonial jails, and more figuratively and specifically, in distant colonial jails built on the oceanic ‘cage’ of the Andaman Islands) was a part of several foundational shifts in how humans and animals together were treated and seen following the British invasion. On processes of ‘Encagement’, see Alan Mikhail, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. pp. 137–82. On islands as natural cages, see Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 160, cited in Mikhail, *The Animal*, p. 207.

¹⁵⁶ Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1894–95’, p. 3.

¹⁵⁷ Lalaram to Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, 10 May 1894, MSA CB-3, Pol-22.

¹⁵⁸ Davis, ‘Diary’, 18 February to 14 March 1893, p. 2.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; and A. W. Davis, ‘Diary’, 16–25 April 1893, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ A. Porteous, ‘Diary’, July 1895 (entry for July 29), BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, pp. 1–2.

Sometimes prisoners escaped. In 1897, a man of the Fanai clan escaped from a guardroom at Lungleh. In iron leg shackles, he hobbled into the forest for twenty-one kilometres before he was able to smash his shackles with river rock. When he was finally captured and handcuffed, the man was allowed to sleep in his mother's house one final time, but he fled during the night, breaking free from the handcuffs and enjoying freedom for 'some days'. Three Fanai chiefs harboured their fellow clansman, clandestinely ferrying him between their villages. The fugitive eventually gave himself up and was jailed again in Lungleh.¹⁶¹

In the words of one official, the story 'shows how determined these men can be and what hardships they can face'.¹⁶² It also shows the scale of colonial occupation. Across the hills, uplanders wished it would end. Farmers planted banana trees and wishfully prophesied that the occupiers would leave before the fruit was ready.¹⁶³ Local chiefs immediately took advantage of 'the difficulty that they thought [the foreigners] were in' and urged all villagers to abscond from kuli work when Fort Tregear accidentally burned in 1892. Three years later, smug stories buzzed from village to village heralding a group of chiefs who had successfully withheld kulis from the state and thereby revealed its failing strength.¹⁶⁴

When these rumours reached Aijal, they actually served to reinforce the severity of kuli demands. Superintendent Shakespear believed that softening demands for labour would only further encourage buoyant gossip about the government's waning powers.¹⁶⁵ Shakespear was periodically forced to confront the chatter head-on. He called a durbar (council) at the beginning of 1893, bringing together more than twenty chiefs and clan representatives, many of whom were in conflict with one another as well as with the new administration.¹⁶⁶ His speech was adamant.

I hear that you are always saying among yourselves – 'Soon the foreigners will leave our country and return to their own.' That is fools' talk and the word of a liar. We shall never leave these hills. . . . There is one more word to be said. We did not come here for pleasure: we did not want your land: but you have obliged us to leave our country, which is far better than yours, by your folly in continuing to raid our villages, and now you have got to pay us tribute of a basket of rice per house, and to give us coolies when we want them.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Earlier, in 1891, 1893, and 1894, members of the Lushai Hills Military Police had to be punished for failing to prevent still other jailbreaks; see Shakespear, 'Administration Report, 1894–95', p. 6. Also see H. J. S. Cotton to Commissioner of Chittagong, 31 January 1894, MSA CB-3, Pol-25, p. 1.

¹⁶² R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, 'Summary of . . . week ending 13 April [1897]', MSA CB-5, G-52.
¹⁶³ 'The Story of Dara', p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ 'Note regarding the proposed expedition against Kairuma', n. p.

¹⁶⁵ Shakespear to Commissioner, 8 February 1896, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Shakespear, 'Diary' for the week ending 2 January 1892, MSA, p. 1.

¹⁶⁷ John Shakespear, 'Extract from the Diary of the Superintendent of South Lushai Hills, 1892', January 1893, MSA CB-5, G-95, p. 1.

Upland hopes for the collapse of colonial rule were not only rebutted with speeches (and redoubled demands for labour and tribute) but also with architectural responses. Stone-and-brick buildings – the first of their kind in the region – began to dot the landscape around Aijal, partly intended to communicate ‘a look of [the sawrkar’s] permanence and solidity’¹⁶⁸ to the uplanders (Figures 1.16 and 1.17). To the south, highland visitors to Lungleh wandered through a strange and expanding landscape of colonial structures: a Civil Medical Office, telegraph and post offices, a guard room, prisoners’ cells, a treasury, two army barracks, a godown (or storage building), an office, and the grand houses of the superintendent and his assistant.¹⁶⁹



Figure 1.16 A bungalow section of Fort Aijal, c. 1892. KPUSC G 155 A1 P46 1893.

¹⁶⁸ A. Porteous, ‘Diary’, 27–31 July 1894, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1. Also see John Shakespear, ‘Note for the assistance of the officer engaged in compiling Gazetteer’, 24 December 1902, MSA CB-6, G-73, p. 1; John Shakespear, ‘The Making of Aijal’, 1939, unpublished manuscript, BL EAP454/20, pp. 2–3; Lorrain, *Logbook*, 12 September 1894, ALA; and Pachuau and van Schendel, *Camera*, p. 118.

¹⁶⁹ Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1894–95’, p. 9. By 1906, nearly forty government inspection houses were scattered even in distant rural locales around the district; see ‘List of Circuit-houses and Inspection-houses’, 12 February 1906, MSA CB-2, H-37, pp. 1–2.



Figure 1.17 The Quarter Guard under construction in Aijal, 1896. SA.

Characterizing colonial outposts as mere ‘administrative headquarters’ misses an important phenomenological point. The sight of the stockades of the fort at Champhai, great spikes made of teak and oak; the vista of Aijal’s buildings, some made of rock hewn from the earth; the sounds of army and artillery drills reverberating across the mountainous amphitheatre of Lungleh. Each of these communicated the dreaded permanence of the British to upland witnesses desperate for information.¹⁷⁰

1.6 Non-Violent Hill Resistance

As the colonial world of uncertainty looked increasingly permanent through the 1890s, upland populations actively engaged in everyday resistance, using the ‘weapons of the weak’.¹⁷¹ Hated officers were clandestinely mocked in the vernacular tongue and given nicknames like Bully, Crooked Nose, Old Disagreeable, or The Angry Old Man.¹⁷² Footdragging was rampant. Forced

¹⁷⁰ On the human ‘lived experience’ within historical structures, see Matthew H. Johnson, ‘What do medieval buildings mean?’, *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), pp. 380–99 (esp. p. 391).

¹⁷¹ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

¹⁷² For instance, Lorrain, *Logbook*, 7 November 1894, ALA.

labourers routinely arrived late and did shoddy work when left unsupervised.¹⁷³ By 1895, officials were exasperated: ‘They cause us much worry by their unpunctuality in obeying our summons, and laziness when they have obeyed it.’¹⁷⁴

People spurned the government’s demands for tribute rice. Since grain was used to nourish colonial forces, many uplanders inconvenienced the sawrkar by paying cash instead.¹⁷⁵ Ironically, the government’s meagre cash payments for kuli work supplied locals with a pool of petty cash to fund this minor act of resistance. Others, including twenty-nine villages in 1898, refused to send in any tribute at all.¹⁷⁶ The chief Kairuma declared, ‘I will give rice etc., When the sahibs come, and I will give coolies to carry their baggage, but I will not give up a single gunlock ever, nor will I send coolies to work on the road or at Aijal, nor will I see the sahibs.’¹⁷⁷ In 1895, a family of chiefs, together ruling over some 1,465 houses, even refused to supply coolies. The colonial government panicked that the challenge undermined its position in ‘the eyes of every chief in the district’.¹⁷⁸ Creative strategies of evasion were myriad. When a colonial agent came calling to a village in South Lushai Hills, the man the officer hoped to speak to about the illicit regional gun trade was simply ‘kept [too] drunk’ to talk.¹⁷⁹

Highland people twisted truth as well. Villages falsified their numbers of livestock, denying meat to hungry sepoy on tour or forcing officers to use their telescopes to spy distant, unreported goats.¹⁸⁰ Thanruma’s villagers lied to political officers, saying that no paths existed between their village and that of Tlongbuta – a chief who was to be fined twenty-three guns.¹⁸¹ Numbers of guns were chronically misreported.¹⁸² Prospering settlements excused themselves from tribute, reporting instead ‘that the rats have eaten up their crops or that the rain washed the seeds out of the ground’.¹⁸³ By 1900, officers in Aijal

¹⁷³ Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1895–96’, p. 14.

¹⁷⁴ Shakespear to the Commissioner, 14 August 1895, p. 4.

¹⁷⁵ Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1894–95’, p. 14.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Political Case No 3’, MSA CB-1, Pol-4, p. 1.

¹⁷⁷ Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1894–95’, p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ A. Porteous to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, 5 July 1895, MSA CB-4, G-37, p. 3.

¹⁷⁹ Ray? [illegible] to the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, 2 November 1902, MSA CB-6, G-73, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ Shakespear, ‘Diary’, 15–21 January 1894, MSA, p. 1.

¹⁸¹ A. Porteous, ‘Diary’, November 1894 (entry for 19–25 November), BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 2.

¹⁸² R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson, ‘Summary of events in the South Lushai Hills District for the week ending 14 January 1897’, separately bound volume, MSA office file, p. 1; also see ‘Order’, 6 June 1899, MSA CB-1, Pol-5, p. 1. Guns were also registered in one village and then promptly traded elsewhere. For instance, officials touring in Lalbuanga’s village at Neilo in 1897 found ten guns that, according to the official gun registry, were supposed to be in chief Monpunga’s village; see Halliday, ‘Tour Diary’, MSA CB-6, G-69, p. 3.

¹⁸³ Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1895–96’, p. 18.

dispatched their many orders (parwanas) to chiefs on physical pieces of paper rather than solely via the human tongue, lest chiefs continue to pretend they had never heard the orders.¹⁸⁴ Even so, chiefs learned to question the written word, claiming that tribute records were in error and that their village owed nothing further.¹⁸⁵ Others bypassed the government's nascent land ownership regulations by jhuming the land first and making excuses later.¹⁸⁶

Villagers insisted that village heads protect their wellbeing or threatened to move. Any chief not protecting his or her inhabitants from house tax and labour demands, the chief Lalbura explained to a colonial official in 1892, was swiftly abandoned.¹⁸⁷ Villagers also took matters into their own hands. Theft from the newcomers was not only a means of sabotage but also made people rich. Colonial *dak* runners carrying military police wages were robbed *en route*.¹⁸⁸ The army officer Subadar Bikaram even cited evidence that local coolies stole some of the sepoys' iron cooking pots they were forced to carry.¹⁸⁹

Colonial agents responded with a brand of 'divide and rule' policies. Gun licensing regimes, for example, tried to pit highlander against highlander. In 1896, villagers who reported unlicensed guns were to receive half the fine (usually Rs. 50/- or Rs. 25/- if the firearm was surrendered peacefully).¹⁹⁰ But these tactics failed. Despite the promise of huge monetary rewards, the scheme drew a mere ten guns that year. The only informer was a man called Bhuju – not a Mizo name.¹⁹¹ By contrast, 177 guns were confiscated by force (Figure 1.18).

Highlanders responded to 'divide and rule' tactics by further dividing themselves.¹⁹² Villages in the late 1890s began atomizing on an unprecedented scale. Chiefs splintered off into smaller settlements in an attempt to fly under the radar of the state's tribute or coolie demands.¹⁹³ These practices were unprecedented acts in a region where, historically, a populous village evidenced a chief's prestige. In other words, in the fires of colonial occupation, what constituted a good chief was being forged anew; village heads were esteemed not for the number of inhabitants they oversaw but for how well they preserved the communal wellbeing of inhabitants against state rule.

¹⁸⁴ 'Notes for the Administration Report of Lungleh Sub-Division for 1900–01', MSA CB-7, G-81, p. 2.

¹⁸⁵ Shakespear, 'Administration Report, 1894–95', p. 14.

¹⁸⁶ Shakespear, 'Administration Report, 1895–96', p. 7.

¹⁸⁷ McCabe, 'Diary', 2–13 February 1892, p. 3.

¹⁸⁸ 'Administration Report of 1902–03', MSA CB-7, G-88, p. 9. On early colonial *dak* runners in colonial India, see, for instance, Chitra Joshi, 'Dak roads, dak runners, and the reordering of communication networks', *International Review of Social History*, 57.2 (2012), pp. 169–89.

¹⁸⁹ Shakespear, 'Diary', 12–18 January 1895, MSA, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Shakespear, 'Administration Report, 1895–96', p. 6.

¹⁹¹ 'Political Case No. 2', 25 July 1899, MSA CB-1, Pol-4.

¹⁹² On this state avoidance strategy, see Scott, *The Art*, pp. 209–10.

¹⁹³ See, for example, the case of Hyhmunga's village near Funka, in Shakespear, 'Diary', 9–14 February 1895, MSA, p. 2.

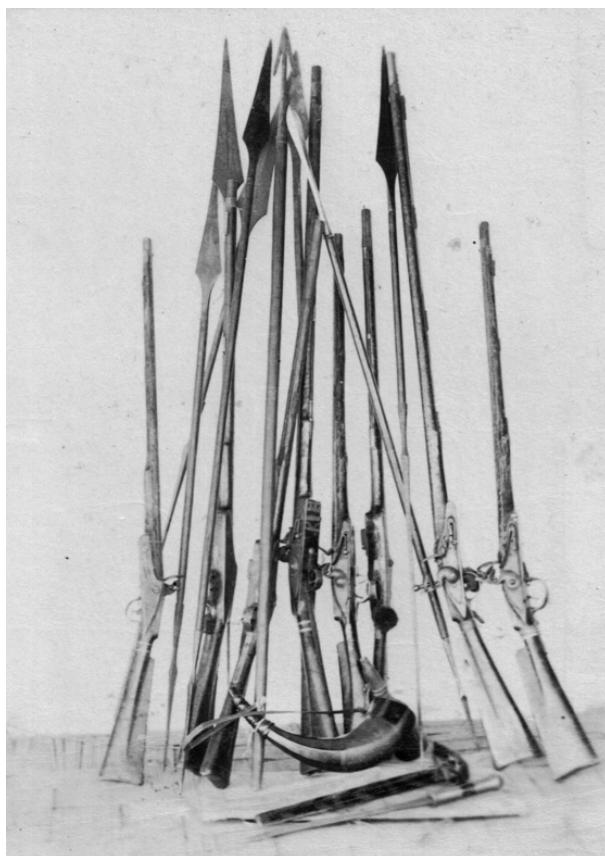


Figure 1.18 A collection of captured weapons, including spears, matchlock guns, and a gunpowder horn, c. 1892. KPUSC G 155 A1 P46 1893.

‘Successful’ chiefs were thus leaving colonial agents with an even more ‘amorphous, unstructured population’ that offered few ‘point[s] of entry or leverage’.¹⁹⁴

Superintendents took notice. With fewer and fewer strong, centralized chiefs from whom the state could demand tribute rice, it was almost impossible to enforce simple orders, let alone to collect and monitor tribute. Far from being lured in by the supposed benefits of colonial ‘civilization’ (land ownership, better access to trade goods, medicine, and so on), villagers were locating

¹⁹⁴ Scott, *The Art*, p. 210.

themselves away from the newcomers' outposts. Few chose to live even 'within a 10-mile radius of the stations', recorded R. H. Sneyd Hutchinson in 1897. Surveying the increasingly desolate mountaintops surrounding Lunghleh, Hutchinson was astonished to find that '[p]robably the whole population does not number 400 persons'.¹⁹⁵

1.7 Violent Hill Resistance

In 1892, John Shakespear called all the Mollienpui chiefs into the colonial headquarters to witness the hanging of the chief, colonial resister, and 'raider' Dokola.¹⁹⁶ For Shakespear, the unprecedented public execution was bound to have good effect; to 'hang a chief would startle the whole country into the belief that we really did mean what we said' about the cessation of all intervillage raiding.¹⁹⁷ But just as the hanging was about to get underway, a telegraph arrived from the commissioner of Assam ordering that Dokola be spared. He was to be deported to the Andaman Islands instead.

The Mollienpui chiefs arrived to good news; Dokola would live. One might read the cheerfulness of their last words to a departing Dokola – spoken clearly in earshot of the superintendent, whose macabre showcase of power had just been cancelled – as an act of passive resistance in itself. Dokola's assistant said 'quite cheerfully to Dokola as he was led away – "Go in health; you are going to see the Sahib's village"' to which Dokola replied quite cheerfully – "Yes, I shall see the Sahib's village."¹⁹⁸

Or perhaps these words were spoken with a wink. Walking through the forest towards the Chittagong Jail with a guard of ten men, Dokola suddenly leapt off the road and rolled down the hillside. A sergeant pursued the fugitive and tackled him, but was stabbed in the back with a knife hidden between the prisoner's legs. The weapon had apparently been slipped to Dokola, concealed in a meal of rice.¹⁹⁹

The line between passive resistance and active violence was often blurred in the Lushai Hills. Footdragging delayed the construction of colonial infrastructure; violence reversed it. In the eastern Lushai Hills, locals dismantled government bridges and ladders, piled felled trees on government roads, and

¹⁹⁵ Hutchinson, 'Administration Report, 1896–1897', p. 9.

¹⁹⁶ See John Shakespear, 'Diary', 23–27 February 1892, BL Photo Eur 89/2. In May 1890, Shakespear had promulgated to highland populations 'that any raiding would be . . . treated as common murder if any lives were taken'; entry for 25 February, p. 1.

¹⁹⁷ Shakespear, 'Diary', 23–27 February 1892 (entry for 25 February), p. 1.

¹⁹⁸ John Shakespear, 'Diary' for the week ending 5 March 1892 (entry for 3 March), BL Photo Eur 89/2, p. 1.

¹⁹⁹ See memorandum by W. B. Oldham (Commissioner of the Chittagong Division), 22 March 1892, and John Shakespear, 'Diary', 6–11 March 1892 (entry for 10 March), both BL Photo Eur 89/2, p. 1.

perched stones high above thoroughfares, ready to be dropped on British troops.²⁰⁰ In the west, an arsonist burnt down two sepoy barracks near the riverine colonial headquarters of Demagiri in 1893.²⁰¹ A year earlier, Mizos killed four cows kept at Aijal and mutilated ten more.²⁰² They had never seen these animals before, but they knew they were important to the newcomers. Relations of violence thus extended beyond conventional military operations into everyday acts of desperation and destruction.

British tactics were studied. Literate in the rituals of visits by colonial forces, Lalbura's village welcomed a battalion led by McCabe with feigned hospitality, leaving the village rice plainly in sight and offering a welcome delegation of rice beer and sugarcane. As usual, the colonial force occupied a portion of the village and settled in. Suddenly, 300 armed men attacked.

We had barely time to complete the message before the Lushais had set fire to the houses all round us, and the flames spread so rapidly that we succeeded with difficulty in removing our baggage and ammunition from the houses and stacking them in a heap in an open square in front of the jolbuk [zawlbuk, a shared training house for young Mizo men] . . . [T]he heat was so intense that the sepoys' brass plates, which were laying on the west face of the stack of baggage, were twisted into fantastic shapes.²⁰³

These moments of violent resistance catalyzed state information panics. Colonial agents frantic for news about the movement of highlanders discussed paying locals for intelligence on the movements of armed groups.²⁰⁴ In 1895, frontier guards and tea garden administrators in neighbouring Cachar and Tipperah went on high alert when a rumour swirled that the chief Kairuma was in a position to attack.²⁰⁵ Colonial alarm reached a peak in March of 1892 when resisters killed a bullock-herder only 300 yards from the Aijal Fort. As McCabe recorded: 'The jungle is so dense and the facilities of escape for men like Lushais so easy that it is impossible to outwit the enemy. We cannot distinguish between an Eastern Lushai foe and a Western Lushai ally, and it is quite possible that the men who killed this follower slept in the rest-house at Aijal last night.'²⁰⁶ Panics in Aijal translated into astonishing military heavy-handedness on the ground. The following month, squads of police and military

²⁰⁰ Robert B. McCabe, 'Diary', 14–23 May 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 2. Also see R. B. McCabe to Chief Commissioner of Assam, 1 April 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1: 'They have a belief that if they can only hamper our transport, we shall be forced sooner or later to evacuate these hills.'

²⁰¹ Shakespear, 'Diary', 29 November to 7 December 1894, MSA, p. 1.

²⁰² McCabe, 'Diary', 10–30 April 1892, p. 6.

²⁰³ Robert B. McCabe to Chief Commissioner of Assam, 2 March 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur, p. 1.

²⁰⁴ A. Porteous to the Secretary, 5 July 1895, p. 4. ²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Robert B. McCabe to Chief Commissioner of Assam, 11 March 1892, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 2.

men roamed the eastern Lushai Hills for two weeks, ‘destroying all the stores of paddy and other property that they could find’.²⁰⁷

In the displacement crises of the 1890s, many villagers decided to uproot their lives to seek sanctuary in lands unmapped by Europeans. Some liquidated their animal wealth, turning chickens and pigs into more transportable cash, and carried whatever else they could manage into the shadows of the jungle.²⁰⁸ Some arrived to hidden refuges in the forest – prefabricated emergency shelters built when the need for state evasion was imminent.²⁰⁹

Having learned that ‘good’ road access meant supplying tribute and kuli labour, others set off to unfamiliar territory, carrying their possessions on their backs in an effort to put distance between themselves and state infrastructure.²¹⁰ The infamous resister Kairuma located his village equidistant from the four colonial strongholds of Haka, Fort White, Aijal, and Lungleh – as far away from any colonial headquarters as was geographically possible.²¹¹ Tankama’s villagers, who had lived a two-day march northeast of Aijal, abandoned their homes, gardens, jhum fields, hunting grounds, and buried ancestors for the hope of unadministered lands hundreds of kilometres southeast.²¹²

Rumours held that the mountain chains to the northeast – in what the British Raj knew as Manipur – were also safer than the exceedingly violent region called the Lushai Hills District. The colonial archives so very rarely preserve the voice of the ‘invisible displaced’.²¹³ This makes a translated plea of an elderly woman Mizo refugee, spoken to a Manipur official in front of a large crowd of fellow migrants in 1900, all the more important.

Most honoured father, we have come into your territory to escape from the worry and annoyance we receive in the Lushai Hills district, the Sahibs and Police are for ever visiting our villages, seizing us as coolies, forcing us to work on the roads, issuing orders, the purport of which we cannot understand, and causing us to live in a state of uncertainty and fear. We know you are a kind father, and we are happy under Manipur Administration, and we pray that you will permit us to remain and pay revenue as the Kukis do.²¹⁴

The British Raj only officially annexed the Lushai Hills District in 1895. Split into two, a ‘North Lushai Hills District’ came under the British Indian province

²⁰⁷ ‘Annual Report of the North Lushai Hills for the year 1892–93’, p. 3.

²⁰⁸ Shakespear, ‘Diary’, 24 November 1895, MSA.

²⁰⁹ Shakespear, ‘Diary’ for the week ending 8 December 1895, MSA.

²¹⁰ John Shakespear, ‘Diary’, 7–21 January 1901 (entry for 14 January), BL Mss Photo Eur 89/3, p. 3.

²¹¹ McCabe, ‘Diary’, 23 January to 1 February 1892, p. 4.

²¹² A. Porteous, ‘Diary’ for 3 December 1894, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 108, p. 1.

²¹³ I borrow the term from Robert Muggah’s ‘The invisible displaced: A unified conceptualization of population displacement in Brazil’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 28.2 (2015), pp. 222–37.

²¹⁴ H. St. P. Maxwell (Political Agent in Manipur), ‘Diary’ for the week ending 3 February 1900, MSA CB-11, G-148, p. 2.

of Assam and a 'South Lushai Hills District' under the administration of Bengal. Amalgamated in 1898, the combined district would become geographically the largest in Assam Province, overseen locally by a superintendent in the headquarters of Aijal and regionally by the chief commissioner of Assam at Shillong (Map 1.1).

By the rains of 1894, most Mizos had learned the danger of not yielding to the newcomers. Even during this crucially busy season of jhum weeding, only two local villages refused to supply forced labourers to repair Fort Tregear. The holdout villages were fined precious guns and forced to supply coolies without pay.²¹⁵ By 1895, colonial officials could boast that '[t]his year all the coolies required for the baggage of our tour escorts were obtained from the villages we passed through'.²¹⁶ By 1896, Superintendent John Shakespear proclaimed that the government's 'hold over the Lushais is now so good that there is no fear of my orders being disobeyed'.²¹⁷

But resisters did not acquiesce simply because a 'hold' became too solid or because they suddenly appreciated the purported benefits of British rule,



Map 1.1 'The hill country divided between three provinces of British India: Bengal, Assam and Burma'. Joy L. K. Pachuau and Willem van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 7.

²¹⁵ Shakespear, 'Administration Report, 1894–95', p. 1. ²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²¹⁷ Shakespear, 'Administration Report, 1895–96', p. 5.

whether civilization, commerce, or peace. It is more likely that thoroughly ground-down highlanders finally came to resign themselves to conquest, maybe even coming to view the newcomers out of a sentiment that Mizos historically knew as *tīm*.²¹⁸ *Tīm* was a very specific kind of fear. A human-eating tiger prowling a nearby jungle conjured *tīm*. So did a dangerous illness teetering on the edge of mass outbreak. *Tīm* was what someone vulnerable felt in the face of the random, the predatory, and the powerful. It was a fear provoked by ‘people or things that have power over you and can be neither controlled nor predicted’²¹⁹ – a fear that makes you ‘abstain from doing what one otherwise would do’.²²⁰ Words like *tīm* drill down to the core of the colonial experience, where subjugated peoples ‘say yes when they want to say no’.²²¹

This specific fear was hard-won. When Shakespear left the hills later that year, he looked back on five miserable years of death, disease, and destruction: ‘I am now leaving this district for good after having held charge of it for five years, ever since it was formed into a district. I do so with regret, for I have had the rough and disagreeable work of subjugating and coercing the people, and I should have been glad if it had been possible for me to remain on to show the Lushais that burning their crops and villages is not the invariable accompaniment of British rule.’²²²

In the Lushai Hills, colonialism provided the infrastructure for the circulation of violence and disease that helped drive upland populations towards its own institutions, particularly the burgeoning schools, medical facilities, and salvation offered by Christian missionaries. It uprooted and scattered vulnerable populations and disrupted the work of healers. In large part, Mizo ‘primitivism’ was just an idea in colonial minds; colonial agents arriving in the hills saw what they expected to see. An overlooked age of warfare also underwrote the destitution, poverty, dislocation, and sickness that colonial agents misrecognized as primitivism but that was, in fact, the results of their own cataclysmic disturbances.²²³ Through claiming to be torchbearers of morality, order, and civilization to India’s ‘savage frontier’, the rapist Charles S. Murray, the

²¹⁸ J. H. Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1940), p. 502.

²¹⁹ The Mizo word finds an unlikely synonym in what is today Canada’s High Arctic, where Inuit elders once spoke of the Inuktitut word *ilira*, a fear evoked by unpredictable ‘[p]eople or things that make you feel vulnerable, and to which you *are* vulnerable’; Hugh Brody, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunter-Gatherers, Farmers and the Shaping of the World* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 43. Also see Thrush, ‘The iceberg’, pp. 65–6, which inspires this section.

²²⁰ Lorrain, *Dictionary*, p. 502. ²²¹ Brody, *Other Side of Eden*, p. 43.

²²² Shakespear, ‘Administration Report, 1895–96’, p. 20.

²²³ This idea is derived partly from Ned Blackhawk, ‘The displacement of violence: Ute diplomacy and the making of New Mexico’s eighteenth-century northern borderlands’, *Ethnohistory*, 54.4 (2007), pp. 723–55 (p. 741).

hostage-taker Robert B. McCabe, the village-burner John Shakespear, and others like them *were* the ‘savage frontier’ in many all-too-real ways.²²⁴

To see old stories anew and to put upland peoples back at the centre of these stories, we must realize that it is our habit of ‘vision, and not what we are viewing, that is limited’.²²⁵ From an upcountry perspective, it was Chittagong and Calcutta that were the ‘remote’, ‘exotic’, and ‘alien’ settlements (and, according to critical Mizo travellers, deficient ones at that). The Raj ‘came into view’ in an upland centre as much as stateless peoples ever did on an empire’s fringe.

Far from ‘primitives’ overawed by the grandeur of colonial trade goods or the wonders of modernity, Mizos developed creative responses to, and confidently articulated critiques of, their invaders – forces that often found themselves dependent on upland know-how, hospitality, and labour. Far from passive victims, Mizos resisted colonialism and sought out ways to moderate its most profound effects. They adopted new trade goods not only to make their lives easier but also (as with the adoption of colourful synthetic materials for headdresses and jewellery) to make everyday life more beautiful amid the bleakness of fear and conflict.

At the same time, a focus on profound violence and disruption – rather than the celebration of continuity, cross-cultural interaction, and cultural resilience that often characterizes Indigenous-centred studies of colonial encounter – demonstrates that highlanders had to adapt and reinvent themselves within a particular colonial situation and its imposed constraints: brutality, heartache, disease, hunger, and loss. It was into a scattered world-turned-upside-down that two Christian missionaries from the Arthington Aborigines Mission were permitted by the Government of India to visit briefly in 1894, and then again from 1897, to inaugurate the much-heralded process of missionization to which the rest of the book turns. But if there is any room for triumphalism in the history of Mizoram, it is best reserved for those who survived these forgotten years of trauma, dispossession, and oppression.

²²⁴ Coll Thrush and Robert H. Keller, “‘I see what I have done’: The life and murder of Xwelas, a S’kallam woman’, *Western Historical Quarterly*, 26.2 (1995), pp. 168–83 (p. 183).

²²⁵ James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games* (New York: Free Press, 1986), p. 75, quoted in Nick Sousanis, *Unflattening* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 42.