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Re-Imagined Communities: Global Climbing on Local Mountains

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Re-Imagined Communities: Global Climbing on Local Mountains

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Preface

A climb does not end at the summit of the mountain. For one, you have to descend back to the ground. Even at the car, when the climb is over, I find myself looking forward to the next, bigger, harder climb. Like research, there is no endpoint to climbing. Every climb is training for the next bigger, harder climb, and research opens up new avenues of inquiry. However, even though there is no endpoint, there are moments for reflection along the way where it makes sense to organize one's thoughts into writing or coil your ropes and drive home. While my insights may not be perfect, this is a moment of reflection for me and hopefully for my readers as well be they anthropologists, climbers, or both.

I could never have brought my research together into this thesis alone. Over the last four years the Anthropology Department at Colby College has consistently illuminated new perspectives, challenged my entrenched perceptions and helped me develop the tools to express my insights. The professors of the anthropology department at Colby have been influential advisors, mentors, and role models. While the generous help from every member of the department has been influential in this work, a few individuals stand out for the support and advice they have provided me. I wish to thanks Chandra Bhimull who has generously met with me many times to help clarify my thinking and push me to consider my research in new ways.

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to Professor Mary-Beth Mills without whom this research would not have been possible. I cannot thank Professors Mills enough for her support, encouragement, direction, and willingness to edit my endless drafts. Her ability as both a teacher and an anthropologist is inspiring. I am endlessly grateful for the opportunity to work so closely with such a talented individual.

There are many people, friends, climbing partners, fellow guides, employers, and others who, in one way or another, influenced my research and helped me consider the global climbing community in new ways. I particularly want to thank my Colby climbing partners Professor Russell Johnson and Patrick Bagley for their endless psych to go ‘get after it’.

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Chapter 1: Introductions

Successfully climbing a route that pushes you to your limits, whether it is a short top rope or a many thousand foot free climb requires, among other things a great deal of faith. A hard climb can challenge your faith in what you are trying to achieve and your ability to achieve it. Without this faith failure is all but guaranteed. On the climb, perhaps a great hold, a glimpse of the summit, or successfully climbing a hard pitch can renew your faith in your ability to finish the route.

Researching the international climbing community has, for me, been like climbing a big route. Standing at the base was intimidating; route finding through the literature has been tricky. At times the run on sentences feel like run-out pitches, shaky and seemingly endless. With the help and support of my partners (or rather advisors), I have managed to make it to the proverbial top of the research, though whether that is the actual summit or not is certainly up for debate.

Anthropology's most significant contributions to the world we study include our insights, suggestions, and activisms that engage the world's most pressing problems. Ethnographic writing on violence, poverty, and injustices of all sorts are fascinating, enlightening, and offer many practical, possible solutions. When I surface from my immersion in this anthropological literature, and have a moment to consider my research from a wide angle, it is easy to lose faith. What is the use of studying people who choose to put themselves at risk for the relatively contrived distinction of standing at a high point? Moreover, studying an open unbounded community, I constantly question, does this community really exist or have I conjured it to draw a pattern through social chaos? It is easy to find reasons to lose faith.

On a recent climbing trip I had a renewal of faith. I traveled with my two climbing partners Pat and Alaina to Red Rock Canyon in Nevada, a Bureau of Land Management[1] recreation area forty minutes from the Las Vegas Strip with a phenomenal quantity and variety of rock climbing. There is one campground about a mile from the entrance to the park, almost all the climbers stay there. Though the sites are cheap, climbers pack as many friends into each site as the two-cars-per-site limit allows. When the campground is full good networking gets you a place to sleep and friends to pass the time with.

One night, our neighbors walked into our campsites, handed us cans of beer from their pockets, and told us they decided they wanted to be social. The two introduced themselves as Evan and Winston. Evan and Winston explained that they figured most people like beer and that handing them out would be a good way to make friends, and they added, they had a cooler full of beer at their campsite. Their logic was flawless and we spent the evening chatting with new friends.

A few minutes later Alaina, stopped the conversation.

"Wait a minute," she said to Evan, "your voice sounds really familiar…" It is important to remember, that during the day, we climb, and in the campground, at night, its dark and impossible to see anyone's face. It is not uncommon to make friends whose silhouette is more recognizable than their face. Evan acknowledged that he was often told he had a distinctive voice. Alaina wondered aloud where she knew him from as the conversation continued. Eventually, Alaina exclaimed, she had figured out how she knew Evan. Alaina and Evan went to

[1] The BLM is one of the three major federal land management agencies. The other two are the National Park Service and the National Forest Service. All three are branches of the Department of the Interior.

high school together and saw each other at parties when they were home from college. Neither had known the other climbed; yet here they were in red rocks: a climbing connection made.

Later Peter, Jen, and Alexis shared our campsite. The connections were numerous and surprising. Pat knew Peter and Jen from Mexico's El Portrero Chico climbing area. I knew Peter and Alexis from guiding in Maine's Acadia National Park. Alaina had met Peter on top of a granite spire in Frey, an Argentinean climbing area. Pat and I knew Peter was coming to Red Rocks, though the fact that we were there at the same time was coincidental; I had no idea Alexis would be in town. Alaina was thoroughly surprised the arrival of Peter's whom she assumed she would never see again. That night Alexis introduced us to his friends from Tucson, Arizona who arrived the same day and widened the circle of future connections.

It is easy for climbers to meet one another. For those of us who work in the climbing industry, climbing becomes your life. Making small talk is easy. Climbers talk about routes they have done, places they have climbed or hope to climb, and other climbers they have met. To me it seems that it is more unusual if these kinds of conversations do *not* revolve around mutual friends and experiences on the same route. Camping and climbing in Red Rocks renewed my faith in the existence of the climbing community as something much more than a figment of my imagination.

In Red Rocks, as I conversed with the climbers I met, conversation sometimes turned towards my research. Most climbers seem genuinely interested in the project, many people going so far as to begin to describe some of the ways they see the connections that shape the climbing community. Conversations in Red Rocks renewed my faith in the utility of this research. Between many climbers' genuine interest in my research and the vague and prolific references to the 'climbing community' in the outdoor oriented media, it is clear to me that this research can

make a meaningful contribution to the way that climbers envision and experience the social world of climbing.

For me this research has been an engaging and frustrating process. Sitting inside on a beautiful day writing about climbing instead of *going* climbing can be a bit depressing. This is one of the many tensions involved in writing about something I am so invested in. I need to simultaneously immerse myself in climbing to gain insight while distancing myself enough to gain perspective. This research has forced me to be reflexive not only, about my participation in the climbing community; it has forced me to question some of the ideological dispositions (against global capitalism for example) I have developed as a student. Capitalism in particular has proven to be a foundation for networks through which the global climbing community is constructed.

As mentioned above route-finding through the available literature is often tricky. The amount of climbing literature available has led some observers to call climbing the most literary sport. As a researcher it is easy to get caught up in endless climbing publications. While I am certain that all of this literature offers important contributions to the climbing community, it would be impossible to read them all. Furthermore, the part of the community I know is, admittedly, limited. As appealing as a global climbing/research trip sounds, neither time nor funding allow for it. Perhaps someday research on the global climbing community will make it possible to construct a more accurate and in depth exploration of the climbing community.

What follows, my particular perspective on the climbing community informed by research and experience. Mine is a vision of the climbing community considered through an ethnographic prism. This prism refracts the climbing community into the various elements of its construction. Through a consideration of previous ethnographic research into high altitude

climbing (Frohlick 2003, 2004, 2006, Ortner 1999 and Fisher 1990), community construction (Anderson 2006), tourism (Urry 1990, 2007), internet networking (Juris 2008), gender (Frohlick 2006), and social and political economies (Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005) I construct a fresh vision of the global climbing community. My argument offers a vision that expands anthropological understandings of how community is constructed and experienced. At the same time, I hope to transform how climbers imagine our community and our connections to one another.

In the work that follows I begin by establishing transnational networks and global communities as an important site for ethnographic inquiry. I address the ways in which the climbing community both represents and challenges current understandings and analyses of transnational communities. I draw attention to the way that the global climbing community and my position in relation to it allows me to illuminate the climbing community on individual, institutional, national, and international levels. I argue that this multi-scalar perspective is essential in order to grasp how people experience and act within global networks.

I continue by exploring my own positioning both intellectually and socially with regard to the climbing community. I try to reconcile the ways in which my perspective obscures some aspects of the climbing community while illuminating others. I contrast my approach with the generally hostile attitudes of the few anthropologists who have researched climbers. I contextualize and deconstruct this hostility to reveal some of the assumptions and misconceptions that have led to problematic portrayals of the climbing community.

As a part of this contextualization I raise the question of who is a ‘climber’. While I offer some suggestions to this end, the question is purposely left open-ended. Rather the question

of ‘who is a climber?’ points toward the ways in which the embodied experience of climbing is essential to fully appreciating, understanding, and participating in the climbing community.

In Chapter 2 I consider perspectives on transnational networks and global communities and perspectives on the climbing community specifically. I lay out the particular challenges of studying an unbounded community. I continue by exploring how as a climber and a researcher some aspects of the climbing community are more accessible to me while because of my involvement in a particular part of the climbing community others are obscured. I analyze the ways that previous research on climbing has been limited by preconceived notions of climbing and lack of personal climbing experience.

In Chapter 3 I examine the climbing community as an unbounded community. In this section I explore some of the ways community is constructed, negotiated (or not), and performed by members of the climbing community. I focus particularly on the importance of the internet in creating sites for climbers to construct, through their multimedia performances, a sense of shared experience and climbing identity. I continue to examine the ways that capitalism provides the impetus for companies to construct and support notions of a climbing lifestyle or community. Finally, I raise questions about differential access to the internet and explore the ways in which, as a site for the construction of community, the internet caters mostly to an Anglophonic population and limits the participation of climbers who do not have access to it.

In Chapter 4 I explore more deeply the ways in which capitalist networks and capitalism are essential for the construction and sustenance of a transnational climbing community. I look at international capitalism and how it brings capital and climbing equipment to mountainous

regions distant from metropolitan centers. I look at the ways that tourism and retail have created transnational opportunities for small climbing businesses. I explore how tourism facilitates personal relationships that have become the foundations of a global capitalism constructed from the ground up by grassroots actors.

I continue this discussion to explore the case of Nepal specifically. Nepal's recent economic history is at once distinct and emblematic of many resource poor, but beautiful and mountainous countries. IMF and World Bank neoliberalization policies redefined the Nepali landscape as a form of capital for the sake of the country's potential for development. I identify the ways in which this has formed the foundations of Nepal's focus on developing the tourist industry and the inequity intrinsic to this development. Neoliberal IMF and Word Bank policies also allowed climbers to re-imagine the climbing experience as a private commodity giving rise to the commercial Himalayan climbing industry, a sector of the guiding industry that quickly became quite lucrative.

In Chapter 5 I explore how climbers are mobile subjects. I investigate the ways in which climbers experience or are limited by the mobility necessary to engage in the networks of international capitalism. I examine the ways in which climbers construct identities around both their mobility and a sense of homeland. Notions of homeland are powerful rhetorical devices that can at once anchor a mobile climber in a particular place or incarcerate a climber and their achievements in a particular range. Through connections to their homelands, climbers gain access to networks of capitalism. On the other hand, some climbers can *only* access networks that flow through their homeland. In this discussion I explore theoretically how space is far from irrelevant in the study of communities that are not spatially bound.

In Chapter 6 I explore how the ways in which climbing is a gendered performance. I begin by exploring how Victorian men used the mountains as a site for the construction of masculine, and middle-class identities in conjunction with an expanding British Empire. The importance of masculinity for early climbers left a legacy of male dominance in climbing that female climbers challenge in increasingly direct ways. I continue with the discussion by challenging the popular notion that climbing is an inherently masculine activity. I describe some of the important contributions women have made to the climbing community and discuss various projects to spread climbing knowledge among women in order to facilitate their equal participation in the climbing community. Finally, I look at women's climbing equipment and discuss the ways that feminine identities are expressed (or not) through climbing equipment and what that says about women's climbing.

Chapter 7 proceeds with my discussion of climbing identities. I highlight the experience of Suraj, a Gurung (non-Sherpa) Indian climber. I examine how the hegemonic assumptions of Sherpas ability in the mountains as natural and unique are problematic for non-Sherpa climbers like Suraj. This section is based on my 2008 fieldwork in Darjeeling, India. I show how the Indian climbing community challenges popular notions of the global climbing community. I use the example of India to explore the military's use of climbing knowledge and how the climbing community develops as a part of a large state bureaucracy. I explore how the ethno politics of Indian political life percolate into the Indian climbing community. Ethnic identities become the foundation for privileging or marginalizing actors within the Indian climbing community. Ultimately, Indian climbing is connected to the transnational climbing community and at the same time challenges hegemonic constructions of the climbing community.

I conclude with an exploration of how my analysis of the climbing community speaks to contemporary anthropological discussions of community and identity construction. I position my research in contrast to recent work on unbounded communities that focus on political activism as a catalyst for community building. I argue that the climbing community shows that the kind of community construction ascribed to activists is, in fact, not unique to subaltern political engagements. Furthermore, I point out the ways in which capitalism, often viewed negatively by activists, provides the framework for the construction of the global climbing community. The climbing community offers an example of how mobility and communication technologies offer the opportunity for individuals to construct and participate in small-scale grassroots-based community construction and globalization.

Chapter 2: Perspectives

What follows is an inquiry into the transnational climbing community. That is, a group of individuals who are connected or imagine themselves as connected through space by a common interest, investment, commitment, and participation in rock, ice, or snow climbing. My first challenge is to show that there is such thing as a global climbing community. Second, I must, to the extent possible, define who constitutes this community. Finally, when exploring a global community such as the climbing community, it is essential to consider how the diverse individuals involved may imagine that community differently. I discuss the climbing community as a series of engagements, a process of negotiations and performances. I examine how these processes, performances, and negotiations challenge, re-imagine, or entrench constructions of a global climbing community.

Within the social sciences globalization is a popular theme. It should be. Faster, farther reaching forms of globalization are some of the most powerful forces affecting people's lives all over the world. Stories and analyses of globalization are numerous. The majority of this literature is a part of what Anna Tsing calls the, "retelling of global connections in imagined world centers" (Tsing 2005:271). These imagined world centers, cities like New York, Chicago, Beijing, Delhi, Paris, or Moscow, are understood to be the nexuses of global social and financial networks. In these locations, through state of the art communication technologies, individuals, corporations, and states engage one another in a variety of relationships. With developments in communication and travel, these engagements are occurring at an increasingly rapid pace.

The global climbing community engages the social and financial networks that run through these cities. Despite this engagement, centers of the climbing community are locations

that are often distant from nexuses of world power. In this sense, the global climbing community challenges conventional constructions of globalization by de-centering major world cities.

Here, I depict the climbing community as a series of engagements. It is a process through which climbers connect distant sites, far from imagined world centers. Locations as distant as Boulder and Addis Abba, North Conway and Namche, Skagit county and Patagonia, are socially and financially connected to one another. As such, the story of the transnational climbing community highlights experiences and agents of globalization who, since the nineteenth century and continuing today, have engaged one another in vertical landscapes as well as in commercial and private contexts. The transnational climbing community exemplifies the accidental, awkward, difficult, and rough ways in which climbers experience and make sense of the opportunities and constraints of social and economic globalization.

Any research into global connection needs to address the question of scale. How deep must an anthropologist delve into a particular locale when the focus is on the global whole of a series of networks? Many studies do not go beyond the institutional level. Studies that focus on corporations, NGOs, and advocacy organizations, tend to gloss over the human concerns that define those organizations (Tsing 2005, Gupta and Ferguson 1992, Stoller 1997, Smethurst 2003). Furthermore, studies about global connection often obscure the ways that landscape and the difficulty of moving through it can be as important as the ease with which people and goods move. In mountainous regions, for example, the rugged landscape is part of why people often do not have the direct unfettered access to global capital, networks, and communication that are more easily tapped into from centers of power and finance.

In exploring the climbing community I hope to rise to the challenge presented by Tsing in her seminal work, *Friction*. Tsing writes, “Can one gain an ethnographic purchase on global

connections? …Even those who are determined to conduct this kind of research still struggle to figure out how it is done" (Tsing 2005:3). Listening to climbers talk about their favorite climbs and climbing areas suggests a way to think about Tsing's challenge.

Ask climbers in North Conway, New Hampshire and they can tell you about their big climbs in distant mountain ranges in the Himalaya or Patagonia or they can tell you about their favorite New Hampshire crag. Or, if you ask these individuals to talk about their favorite climb on a certain cliff, they will be able to describe to you that one pink, granite crystal on the third pitch that breaks up the patch of smooth rock and provides enough friction to allow you to step up and reach the next handhold. This is the crux, if you miss that crystal there is no way you will complete the route. Their perspective is simultaneously wide enough to encompass the globe and narrow enough to see that small crystal when it matters.

The goal here is to use a similar kind of multi-scalar perspective on global connections in order to understand simultaneously the universal and the particular, the distant ranges and the local crags, and to look for the essential crystals, the tiny bits of texture that provide enough friction to gain intellectual purchase on the transnational climbing community. To trace the skeleton of the climbing community is to trace the essential networks of media and communication through which climbers engage one another and construct, perform, and negotiate a sense of community. The goal is to be able to see the universals and the particulars as mutually constitutive.

The borders of the climbing community are fluid and undefined. Actors such as mountain guides, gear manufacturers, or high altitude porters are obviously members; however, deciding whether weekend warriors, clients, and others are members or not is a socially, historically, and politically charged question. The climbing community's boundaries are often

awkward, vague, and permeable. Ultimately, the community and its borders are ever changing. Here I suggest a particular vision of the international climbing community, a way to understand its features without necessarily defining its exact limits. Which is to say that from my vantage point I may have left out some who feel they are part of the climbing community and included others who do not recognize the connection.

Because perspective is important in imagining the climbing community I must take a moment to consider my own position with regard to the international climbing community. I am a climber and a guide and I am an anthropologist. Based in New England I do not climb the tallest mountains, but certainly have access to world-class rock, ice, and mixed climbing. I have never climbed in the Himalaya though I have trekked and traveled in the Indian and Nepali Himalaya during a semester of study abroad where I chatted in Nepali with many local climbers, trekking guides, climbing guides and other people involved in climbing in India and Nepal. As an educated white male located in North America and employed in the climbing industry, I must, as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson suggest recognize my own, "location in multiple fields of power" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:20).

While I hope to "problematize the unity of the 'us' and the otherness of the 'other', and question the radical separation between the two…" in the climbing community; the sense of 'us' and 'other' depend on perspective and mine is a perspective, for better or worse, based in ethnographic research as well as in lived experience (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:14). American climbing media have a habit of portraying climbing internationally as one big brotherhood (often gendered as such despite the participation of many women). As a climber myself, it is easy to accept a vision of the climbing community that connects me to climbers around the world. On the other hand, my training as an anthropologist highlights the disparities in access to mountains,

equipment, training, and communications technology within the climbing community. These disparities mean that the vision of a climbing community that I consume as a climber is one that is constructed, maintained, and disseminated by the most empowered members of the climbing community.

While a global climbing community certainly can be said to exist, its constitution, operation, and proliferation function differently in practice than its representations in magazines and films. I draw on my own experience, on anthropological research, as well as on representations generated by the climbing community itself. I explore the ways in which an international climbing community is constructed, maintained, performed and negotiated by the actions of many independent agents all over the world. In order to make this study manageable I focus on those parts of the climbing community with which I have experience. I draw on my experience in New Hampshire's Mount Washington Valley in the United States and the Darjeeling Hills region of India, and the Khumbu region of Nepal. These foci represent how the specific contemporary connections between distant locales that constitute the global climbing community are formed and operate.

Initially, I embarked on this project simply because climbing and anthropology are my life. When I am not engaged in one, I am at work on the other. As I began this project to unite my interests, I realized the ways in which my lived experiences and allegiances within the climbing world alter my perspective on my research. At the same time, however, my technical knowledge and experience in climbing may be unique among researchers of climbing. As such, details only accessible through lived climbing experience illuminate aspects of the climbing community in ways that, in my opinion, are obscured in previous research on climbing and the climbing community.

When I began my research, I was surprised and perhaps even a little disappointed to find that the anthropological literature seemed generally hostile to climbers. Sherry Ortner, an ethnographer of the Sherpas in Nepal's Khumbu region at the foot of Mount Everest, admits that in her research, "I became extremely hostile to mountaineering" (Ortner 1999:8). Though her hostility is ultimately tempered by academic sensibilities, I sense that the hostility still lingers beneath the surface of her analysis. Some researchers show less restraint. Elizabeth Rosen writes that climbing "seems to border on the epic, if not the foolish" (Rosen 2007:147). Similar characterizations, whether overt or implied, are echoed throughout the ethnographic literature on climbing (see Adams 1996, Elmes and Barry 1999, Frohlick 2004, 2006).

This hostility stems from three sources. First, some observers object to climbing's historical association with Europe's imperial project. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, many early Himalayan expeditions beginning in the nineteenth century were extensions of colonial cartographic projects[2]. Though by the 1950s--when people first summated 8,000-meter peaks--the land grabbing of the nineteenth century was over, these high-altitude expeditions for national glory evoked the imperial rhetoric of conquering and subduing the mountain in honor of the colonizing nation. Many ethnographic observers limit their gaze to this high profile, high-altitude climbing with particular attention to guided climbing on big mountains. This depiction ignores the ways in which a variety of forms of climbing, rock climbing, high-altitude mountaineering, big wall etc. developed and continue in conversation with one another, rather than as isolated disciplines. This is true of both technical skills and social ideologies. To characterize Himalayan climbing as essentially imperialist is to oversimplify climbing and its history. Many researchers

[2] These cartographic projects were specifically aimed at constructing knowledge to facilitate more effective control of colonial territories.

refuse to recognize the ways in which climbing, much like anthropology, has changed significantly since its inception when it was very clearly part of the colonial project.

The second source of hostility towards climbing is rooted in the popular response to the disaster of the spring of 1996 on Mount Everest where eight climbers, including several senior guides were killed in an unanticipated storm[3]. The disaster rocketed Everest and guided climbing into American popular culture. Following the success of John Krakauer's book about the Everest disaster, *Into Thin Air* and the popularity of David Breashears Imax "Everest", many scholars and climbers published books and articles directly and tangentially connected to the disaster. Some sought to understand the deaths on the mountain; others sought to tell the untold stories and histories that brought climbers to the peak in the first place. Krakauer is often called the poet laureate of the climbing world. A very experienced and talented climber himself, *Into Thin Air* is one of a number of his books and essays that deals with climbing and climbing culture (Krakauer 1990). When viewed in the context of his larger body of climbing-related work, the tragedy of death and destruction that characterizes Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* is countered by many other more positive and many humorous anecdotes. Other writing that followed Krakauer's success, whether serious or an attempt to latch onto his coat tails, seems to give disproportionate attention to, or even sensationalize, the tragedies on Mount Everest (Boukreev and DeWalt 1999, Weathers 2000, Breashears 1999 Norgay and Coburn 2001).

The final reason for anthropology's hostility towards climbing, and in my opinion, the foundation for the misrepresentations already discussed, is a fundamental misunderstanding of climbing. Almost all the research on climbing focuses on Himalayan mountaineering and a great deal of that literature focuses exclusively on Mount Everest. For many of today's climbers,

[3] Fifteen climbers died total that spring making it the deadliest season on Everest ever.

Everest is a location to guide clients, rather than a pinnacle of success. Going climbing once or twice or talking to climbers about climbing is to climbing what tourism is to anthropological fieldwork. Fundamental misconceptions about climbing and the perceived goals of climbers have led to an inordinate amount of research on Everest and a virtual silence about climbing outside the Himalaya.

Indeed the terms 'climbing' or 'climber' are themselves misleading, conflating a wide spectrum of activities. No doubt the definition of 'climbing' in the Himalaya, in the American southwest, in Antarctica, in Cuba, in Norway, or the many other locations around the world where people climb is as variable as today's average local temperatures in those locations. Climbing journalist Andrew Bisharatt points out, "climbing is not a very descriptive term. The sport ranges from mountaineering, to big-wall, to gym, to ice, to something called 'urban climbing'" (2009: 34). The details of what those variations are is tangential to the discussion at hand. Suffice it to say that to do ethnographic research on the climbing community, a bit of climbing experience is necessary. Ultimately, Bisharatt concludes that he, "calls himself a climber because he likes to go up rocks and ice with good friends, yell, curse, laugh a lot, party hard, and not make a big deal out of it" (2009:35). That is, not to allow the question of what it means to be a climber evolve into an existential crisis. To me, an anthropologist constantly preoccupied with climbing, the simplicity, clarity, and light heartedness of Bisharatt's characterization of 'the climber' makes it one of the most insightful I have come across.

Anthropology's hostility to climbing is perhaps even more surprising when one considers the discipline's perhaps counter intuitive similarities to climbing. Both climbing and anthropology were important parts of colonial projects and grew exponentially in that era. Both have sought to reconstruct themselves to remain relevant in the postcolonial era. In this

reconstruction climbing, like anthropology has had to reconcile with its uncomfortable past of cultural exploitation and in the case of climbing environmental degradation. In climbing as well as in anthropology one finds a great deal of reflexivity questioning current trends, ideas, or engagements.

Climbers, like anthropologists are increasingly engaging with the communities with which they work. Climbers formed organizations such as the dZi foundation, The Khumbu Climbing School, the Central Asia Institute and others to aid populations that are associated with the climbing and trekking industries. Climbers' texts, like anthropologists' historically were often paternalistic and racist. Like anthropology, contemporary climbing literature considers much more sensitively the perspectives of the local peoples climbers work with.

Perspective and insight in climbing and anthropology rely on an open-minded holism. The authority of climbers, like that of anthropologists, is dependent on their intimate personal experience in a particular location. Anthropologists research and engage social landscapes in a way remarkably similar to how climbers research and engage the physical landscape. For climbers, like anthropologists, this engagement is corporeal as well as cerebral. In a sense, as we watch snow pack, ice conditions, climbing sequences, or clients' belay techniques, climbers, like anthropologists, are at once participants and observers.

There are many ways in which a climber's perspective can illuminate an anthropology of the climbing community. While many studies see climbers on the mountains as uniformly as climbers, there are important differentials of power and experience in place between the various individuals who gather in the mountains to climb. Guides, clients, high altitude porters and others fulfill distinct roles that can be difficult to discern by individuals with little or no experience in the mountains. Furthermore, many studies of the climbing community,

particularly as evidenced in the literature that deals with the 1996 disaster on Everest, are preoccupied with the dangers of climbing at high altitudes. High-altitude mountaineering, as well as other forms of climbing is often risky and individuals for a variety of reasons choose to take or avoid those risks. Having chosen to take risks at certain times and avoid risk at others makes it possible for me to understand the decisions climbers make that are socially as well as technically motivated.

After the Spring 1996 disaster many observers focused primarily on death on Everest. Experienced climbers, on the other hand, were able to deconstruct the dynamics that led to that tragedy and others like it. Experience is fundamental to climbing. Climbing is about doing, being there, touching the rock, or feeling the ice tool vibrate when swung properly into the ice. To understand climbing there is simply no substitute for doing it. There is no replacement for looking between your feet to watch a cliff drop away for a thousand feet or of looking above your head at an impossibly balanced serac and hoping it waits to fall until you have passed beneath it.

Participant observation is one of the most fundamental research methods used by anthropologists. There are, however, many ways to be a participant-observer in climbing culture. One can go to trade shows, slide shows, climbing competitions, or other cultural events to spend time with climbers and participate and observe their interactions with one another. An anthropologist could read the extensive climbing literature, watch climbing films and keep an eye on climbing blogs and community sites to see how climbers form and participate in the climbing community. There is however, a shared subtext of experience, the quickening of a climber's pulse beneath a hard pitch, the disappointment of bailing off a route, or the intensity of

climbing high above the last piece of protection that climbers share that a non-climbing anthropologist would likely miss.

For most anthropologists access to an alpine field site is too physically dangerous. However, to talk about climbing without that experience is like writing about agriculture without ever setting foot on a farm. Even in the mountains there are multiple perspectives. If a researcher were to experience climbing as a client, the dynamics of that relationship would likely obscure the climbing community. The dynamic between two friends climbing as partners together and a guide climbing with a client is quite different. Climbing partners share responsibility and decision-making; they tap into each other's strengths while helping one another overcome their weaknesses. These partnerships are an essential part of how many climbers' networks are formed.

My view from the 'sharp end of the rope'[4] offers both possibilities and limitations. I know that when I climb, I often slip into tunnel vision and miss pitons[5] I could have clipped or less obvious holds. Likewise, studying the climbing community from the sharp end means that the immediate community I know and love illuminates some of the international climbing community and obscures other parts of it. As an American, white, male climber, it can be difficult to see how far the climbing community extends beyond its depictions in climbing media. Indeed there are many micro communities that position themselves as the center of their

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[4] The sharp end is the leader's end of the rope. As the leader heads up the climb he or she clips the rope through protection either placed while climbing (and removed by the second climber) or that is previously (and permanently) drilled into the rock. If the leader should fall, he or she risks falling more than twice the distance to the last piece of protection because of the stretch in the rope.

[5] Pitons were an early style of protection for rock climbing. They are metal wedges that are hammered into the rock. Though less cumbersome and destructive forms of rock protection have since been invented, in some locations old pitons stuck in the rock are common.

own climbing universe. Below I will discuss the international connections and adventures of climbers from North Conway, New Hampshire because this is the community I know. In other words, I have very little to say about how the climbing community in the American southeast has left its mark on international climbing. Nor can I tell you how climbers in Malaysia, Thailand, Iran, or Cuba have carved a place for themselves in the climbing community though I know that they have.

As such, this study is by no means an authoritative portrait of how the whole climbing community works. It is however, a beginning. It is a perspective from which anthropologists can enhance their understanding of the ways in which a range of disparate individuals and local communities intertwine, participate, and negotiate to construct a global climbing community. At the same time I hope to illuminate for climbers who it is we are talking about in our prolific references to the "climbing community" and to explore the experiences of climbers from around the world with whom we climb and work and yet whom we have often failed to include. The climbing community is a cohesive, yet unbounded and global community. That cohesion is maintained through a variety of commercial and personal networks. I will continue by exploring the ways in which the internet constitutes an especially productive site for the performances and negotiations that characterize the climbing community.

Chapter 3: 'Communications Internationalism'

The climbing community is a process. It is a series of engagements, sometimes negotiations, and it is often a performance. Like many communities, the climbing community is imagined. Its "members…will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 2006:6). Despite the fact that it exists in the imaginations of its members the climbing community has very real significance in the lives of its members.

The internet is a site for some of the engagements of an international community of climbers. Capitalism, consumerism, and community are intertwined in climbing media and equipment outlets. The internet is a powerful tool for the creation and maintenance of a sense of community that facilitates communications across oceans and political boundaries with the click of a mouse. The internet however, is just one of many networks through which a global community can be constructed and maintained.

It is important to remember, that building the climbing community is a process that involves negotiation. For a community as geographically disparate and transnational as the climbing community, the internet is an important site for the creation, negotiation, and performance of a climbing lifestyle and of climbing identities. Professional climber's blogs, magazine websites, manufacturers websites all offer extensive photos, writing and video through which they construct a sense of a shared climbing experience.

In his ethnography, *Networking Futures* Jeffery Juris explores how the performance of community happens in the contemporary world. Juris focuses on Eastern European grassroots globalization-activist communities and the ways that they use the internet as a site for the

formation, performance, and negotiation of community. Though Juris locates his observations about the connections between internet networking and the construction of global communities in urban centers and political arenas, they are applicable in a much broader context. Though they may not be located in these urban centers, The global climbing community is based in a sense of a “communications internationalism” (Juris 2008:5).

Computer networks, Juris argues, are increasingly foundational to the construction, maintenance, and negotiation of community.

> “By enhancing the speed, flexibility, and global reach of communication flows, computer networks provide the technological infrastructure for the operation of contemporary transnational social movements. Barry Wellman has argued that ‘computer-supported social networks’ are profoundly transforming communities’ sociality and interpersonal relations” (Juris 2008:12).

That is to say, internet communities are not bound to the internet. They are an engagement that is altering the processes and performances that constitute communities *especially* global communities that must rely on the internet for communication.

`In the climbing community, some agents have been very successful in mobilizing the internet as a resource to promote a particular vision of the climbing community. Climbing is a very gear intensive sport and the manufacturers of this equipment have been successful in using the internet to construct the notion of a climbing lifestyle and related visions of the climbing community which foreground their products.

In a variety of ways, gear manufacturers websites connect capitalism and consumption to community. Manufacturers such as Black Diamond and Petzl already have sections on their websites devoted to the climbing “scene”. Since September 2008, when I began this research,

Mountain Hardwear, Patagonia, and La Sportiva have all retooled their websites in an effort to make them better conduits for climbing media and for the creation of a sense of shared experience. Mountain Hardwear welcomes viewers to join the Expedition Republic, "our community where climbers, explorers, adventurers, and other dharma bum nomadic souls can merge, mingle, and discuss what we all love" (http://expedition.mountainhardwear.com/). Part of Patagonia's website called, the "Tin Shed" constructs a sense of shared history and love of the outdoors as intertwined with the consumption of Patagonia's products. Next to a photo of the tin shed where Patagonia was started as Pacific Iron Works is written,

> "The Tin Shed…once was home to the whole company. Yvon Chouinard Patagonia's founder forged his pitons in here. The rest of us drilled hexes, assembled ice axes, or inspected ropes (or slacked off when the surf was up). The Tin Shed still stands- and stands for all we hold close and dear, though there are more of us: for great clothes and gear, guaranteed, and a love of wild places" (http://www.patagonia.com/web/us/tinshed/index.jsp?ln=263).

The Tin Shed, like the Expedition Republic is a virtual space for Patagonia to construct a climbing community that conspicuously highlights their brand in order to link lifestyle, community, and consumption.

The internet is only one way in which the climbing community is constructed and experienced. Internet communities facilitate, reinforce, and continue relationships that are formed in base camps, at tradeshows, and in coincidental meetings on cliff faces. "The internet complements and reinforces, rather than replaces face-to-face interaction" (Juris 2008:13). As such, the relationships built between climbing partners, campground neighbors, and colleagues

make it possible for climbers to imagine themselves as apart of the communities performed on the internet (Juris 2008:6).

Contemporary rhetoric on globalization emphasizes the proliferation and availability of communications technologies. While these technologies have undoubtedly spread and are available in some of the least expected locations, this rhetoric applies most fittingly to the urban landscapes that constitute imagined centers of globalization. The reality however, is that "discourses of open networking often conceal other forms of exclusion based on unequal access to information technology" (Juris 2008:15). For an unbounded, global community, this means that despite the democratic pretensions of internet communities, there are wide disparities in individuals' abilities to participate in the engagements, processes and performances of the international climbing community. Access to the internet, and English literacy[6] are essential for an individual's effective participation in these technological modes of constructing a global climbing community.

The disparities caused by the digital divide are hard to pin down in this study because they are defined by silence and absence. Those who do not have access to the internet are not posting on on-line forums. Those without English literacy will be quiet in an online discussion of mountaineering ethics. Nevertheless, it is essential *not* to assume the marginalization of all climbers outside of Europe and North America. Discussing the research for his article about a disastrous season on K2, adventure journalist Freddie Wilkinson writes, "'8,000-meter climbers do more text messaging, blogging and online gossiping than my little sister'…the internet age has changed the sport of high-altitude climbing, but also adventure journalism. 'The

[6] It is important to emphasize the difference between literacy and fluency. Many international climbers in non-English speaking countries are engaged in international mountaineering tourism and most speak some degree of English. This however, is very different from an ability to read easily and write eloquently on the available Internet forums.

Sherpas…were far and away the most reliable e-mailers of everyone I contacted for the story'" (2008:12).

Competing visions of what a climbing lifestyle should be or what kind of experiences climbers share amount to a negotiation of the character of the climbing community. Where there is negotiation there are power dynamics. I already discussed how disparities in internet access and English fluency limit the extent to which various members can participate in or contest the climbing community. I also pointed out how corporate sites are important sites for the dissemination of climbing media and the construction of a sense of shared experience or participation in 'climbing life'. Like a great deal of media, the kinds of videos and articles found on manufacturers' websites, occupy the strange position of both passively reflecting and actively affecting the lives and lifestyles portrayed. Manufacturers' websites are at once locations for the performance of existing, organic climbing identities and the construction or synthesis of some aspects of those identities.

Despite its limitations the internet does signal some of the very important ways in which capitalism provides the impetus for or the foundations of the networks that define the climbing community. Websites can be understood as virtual sites for climbers to engage with one another and construct a sense of shared experience. The importance of these kinds of connections should not be underestimated. Non-climbers often have a difficult time understanding why climbers would want to pursue experiences in the vertical. As elite climbers push their climbing on higher and harder mountains they increasingly use the transnational networks facilitated by the internet as forums to share their performances of identities that constitute the climbing community. Climber's blogs, local conditions websites, social networking tools like facebook, email, and

other kinds of communications technologies allow climbers share their exploits, advice, and excitement about climbing around the world

The internet is, in a way, emblematic of the ways in which capitalism and the climbing community are intertwined. Capitalism is at once present in logos and advertisements on websites and obscured in the rhetoric of corporations. Buying a particular jacket is presented as an identity statement rather than consumption. Elite climbers relate their adventures on blogs often with tasteful thanks to the corporate sponsors that make the kinds of elite climbing they do possible (e.g. Burhadrt 2009, Haley 2008, Mahoney 2008). Not only does capitalism provide the impetus for climbing networks, it provides the conduits, and the structure, through which, the climbing community is constructed and negotiated. Below I will explore some of these capitalist engagements and the community building processes they support.

Chapter 4: 'The Largest Industry in the World'- Tourism

Himalayan climbing, and the traveling and consumption implicit in it, demonstrates the ways in which international capitalism and the international climbing community are bound up with one another. Himalayan climbing is a particularly significant site for analysis because it is the most famous and most internationalized arena for climbing. Between the expense and popularity of Himalayan climbing, more is at stake in the construction of a global climbing community in the Himalaya than, perhaps, anywhere else. Like its topography, the extremes of the Himalaya throw the financial and social stakes of global climbing into the greatest relief. In fact, the networks of capital found in the Himalaya have many analogues in climbing destinations all over the world from Argentina, to Colorado, to New Hampshire, and to Tanzania. Each of these locations has its unique dynamics and environments.

A few doors down from the North Face store in Katmandu, Mountain Hardwear recently opened its own shop offering genuine Mountain Hardwear equipment. It is one of the only Mountain Hardwear shops in the world. Its owner Jamling Norgay, son of Everest first ascentionist Tenzing Norgay, proudly told me that the store carries the entire Mountain Hardwear catalogue in its inventory. Jamling actually lives in Darjeeling, India. He is, however, Mountain Hardwear's representative for its Asian operations.

It was some months after our conversation that I was in Katmandu and had the chance to go into both Mountain Hardwear and North Face in Katmandu. In both shops friendly, well-manicured employees who spoke impeccable English greeted me. They seemed surprised when I responded to them in Nepali. Both stores seemed like miniaturized versions of their American counterparts. They were shrunk down to fit the congested bustle of Katmandu's Thamel tourist

district. As I passed through the giant, crystalline glass doors of the Mountain Hardwear store, the bells of rickshaws, and horns of taxis faded away and I entered a brightly lit, sterile show room.

I looked around at the assortment of fleeces, parkas, and shells that seemed out of place in the Katmandu heat. The store was tastefully packed with apparel. An entire expedition could show up naked and be on their way to Everest the next day, and this was the real stuff. It stood in contrast not only to the busy streets outside but also to the many gear shops in the tourist district selling parkas, shells, and technical gear. The shelves of these other stores held a difficult to discern mixture of bootleg gear, spin off brands I had never heard of like "Everest Hardwear", alongside genuine North Face, Mountain Hardwear, and Mammut apparel. Every year thousands of trekkers and climbers would walk past these stores waiting for their permits to be approved in Katmandu or after haggling over logistics with sirdars[7] and realize they could use an extra shell or that they had forgotten a pair of gloves. These shops were owned by entrepreneurial Sherpas and other Nepalis some of whom had made names for themselves (and earned their start up capital) carrying loads in the big mountains.

These small shops are sometimes linked by business relationships and personal friendships to networks of guides and tour agencies that bring their clients through a particular shop. Often these friendships are based on past coincidental meetings or previous expeditions. As such, retailers across the world are linked in informal networks of trade that have brought incredible wealth into isolated parts of Nepal, a country otherwise wanting for foreign investment. While international capitalism is usually thought about in terms of large corporations. The kinds of networks discussed here connect small-scale businesses over vast

[7] Sirdars are the local individuals who organize and oversee the usually numerous porters hired for expeditions.

distances. Were it not for modern communications technologies and systems of mobility these small businesses would be excluded from global capitalism. To illustrate these connections I turn to International Mountain Equipment, an independent gear shop in North Conway, New Hampshire and its relationship with International Mountain Equipment in Namche Bazaar Nepal.

In North Conway International Mountain Equipment is something of an institution. The store's owner, Rick Wilcox was central to the organization and leadership of the 1991 New England Everest Expedition. The expedition helped establish the relevance of New England climbing to the American climbing community. It proved that New England could be a training ground for the world's biggest mountains despite the fact that the highest point is Mount Washington at 6,288 feet. On the trip, Rick established business relationships with his Sherpa staff. In the years since the climb Rick has led numerous treks to Everest base camp and Kala Pattar, the popular viewpoint nearby. Rick works closely with a Sherpa by the name of TseDam. TseDam owns a beautiful hotel and a gear store in Namche Bazaar, the economic center of the Khumbu Region. For mutual benefit, Rick allows TseDam to use his business's name, International Mountain Equipment for his gear store.

Working the cash register at IME, I overheard Rick on the phone with a potential client. "Look," he explained, "you could show up in your underwear, we'll take you to International Mountain Equipment in Namche and outfit you with everything you need for the trek." The business arrangement was ideal. Rick would get the clients business, so would TseDam, and the client had the incentive to sign up with Rick's trip because of Rick's ability to ensure the client could get the quality equipment he needed. Whether the client intended to buy all his equipment in Namche or not, the connections and knowledge that Rick was able to demonstrate sent a more important message about his familiarity with the people and landscape of an area very distant

from the client's realm of experience. Rick and TseDam were engaged in the kind of mutually beneficial relationship that is responsible for the prosperity that characterizes the Khumbu and other trekking destinations.

These kinds of relationships are personal as well as financial. More than simply connected through business, Rick and TseDam know each other's families and children. Other individuals I met trekking in Nepal and Sikkim, like TseDam, told me of their connections to the owners of some of the US's biggest guide services. Tenzig, whom I met trekking in Sikkim and then ran into several times in Darjeeling, had trekked, climbed, and guided all over South Asia. In doing so, he established a relationship with an American guide service owner that allowed him the opportunity to guide in the United States on Mount Rainier and Denali where he could earn American wages[8].

Trekking and climbing in the Nepali Himalaya is part of a global increase in popularity in adventure travel including climbing tourism (Pomfret 113:2004, Beedie and Hudson 2003). The increased popularity of trekking and climbing has brought wealth to areas otherwise disconnected from metropolitan centers of capital. The Khumbu region of Nepal has become something of a classic case study in the transformations wrought by intensive tourism on a subsistence economy (Ortner 1999, Adams 1996, Fisher 1990). Today, the Khumbu is one of the wealthiest parts of Nepal.

Other parts of the world that have become famous for their natural beauty more recently are experiencing some of the same kinds of changes as the Khumbu. In a blog post about his trip

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[8] While wages for guides vary widely some trekking guides I spoke with in India said they made around 300 Rupees a day, about $6.50 a day while in the US guides earn anywhere from $90 to over $300 a day depending on experience and certifications. In Europe and Canada guiding is more professionalized (requires higher levels of certification among other things) and guides can make even more money. Many American guides work to become certified so they can guide in Europe or Canada.

to Patagonia, Washington-based climber Colin Haley observes, "El Chalten has been growing and changing very dramatically in just the five years since my first trip here…roads are now paved, [there is] almost no free camping, and prices continue to rise" (Haley 2008)[9]. Climbing alone is not a strong enough force to affect this kind of change. However, the tourism that often follows climbers to landscapes that were once absent from the pages of travel guidebooks like the *Lonely Planet* can have significant cultural and economic effects. Tourism development can be an incredible boon to regions otherwise lacking in resources. Tourism can also be socially, economically, and environmentally problematic. Below I will explore the intersections of adventure tourism, a broad category that includes climbing tourism, and global capitalism.

International climbing is a form of tourism. Climbers employ tourist services as they travel to their mountainous destinations. As tourists, climbers engage with what Urry identifies as, "the largest industry in the world," (Urry 2007:4). Urry goes on to point out that traveling and tourism are, "worth 6.5 trillion and directly and indirectly accounting for 8.7 percent of world employment and 10.3 percent of world GDP" (Urry 2007:4). As one of many forms of tourism, climbing tourism uses the same networks, and systems of mobility as tourism more generally.

While the cultural effects of the increase of tourism on the Khumbu have been well documented, the economic and geopolitical context that led to the focus on tourism as a means to development is rarely examined. The authors Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha contextualize and problematize Nepal's focus on tourism development.

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[9] Haley also points out that this tourism opened access to climbing to local Argentineans. He writes, "the most exciting change I have noticed this year is the frequency with which local Argentine climbers are attacking the big routes…argentine climbers are equally confident in attempting big routes as the European and North American visitors" (Haley "Skagit Alpinism" December 15, 2008).

> "Given its land-locked situation, poor resource base, and state of under-development, Nepal's prospect of urban-industrial development is limited. One of the principal paths Nepal has pursued in its attempt to develop rural/remote areas basically amounts to tourism commoditization of the commercial potential embedded in its enchanting natural sceneries…it is tantamount to privatization of public resources and bucolic life, leading to the formation of what may be called 'geocapital', or the cumulative economic value derived from the commoditization of geographical attributes/ features" (Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005:670).

Thus, a location like Everest can be assigned a dollar value corresponding to the dollar value of the number of permits issued. Permits for the major peaks like Everest usually start around $60,000 for the permit and with fees up to $10,000 per climber. Bhattarai Conway and Shrestha write that, "in 2003, Mt. Everest alone attracted 23 international expeditions…This generated $1.38 million in royalties, not an insignificant amount for a country where the current annual per capita income barely exceeds $250" (Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005:676).

Not only do climbing expeditions generate revenue through the hiring of porters and other local staff[10], they often spend more per capita than other tourist groups. Despite the fact that mountaineering accounts for only a fraction of tourism in Nepal, it has been essential to the development of the commercial potential of Nepal's landscape (Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005:674). As such, the engagement of international climbing with Nepal has facilitated the transformation of the natural landscape into geocapital.

[10] In 2000 132 expeditions employed almost 12,000 people (Bhattarai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005:676)

Before Nepal opened its borders to foreigners in 1951[11] climbers endeavored to ascend many of Nepal's border peaks via routes that started on the Tibetan and Indian sides of the mountains. Early mountaineers climbed throughout Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet as well as making attempts on Kangchenjunga the most accessible 8,000-meter peak. Attempts were made on Everest from the Tibetan side where, most famously George Mallory and Andrew Irvine nearly summated in 1924, whether they died on the ascent or descent is still hotly debated among mountaineering historians. Once Nepal opened its borders in 1951, climbers scrambled for first ascents on lesser peaks. However, by then the real focus of most climbers willing to make the journey to the Himalaya was on summiting the earth's highest point. Climbers traveled to mountain destinations like the Khumbu in Nepal, Argentina's El Chalten, Pakistan's Boltoro Valley, and other locations, long before these landscapes were re-imagined as geocapital for economic exploitation by the tourist industry.

In Nepal, the change in perspective that re-imagined the landscape as geocapital began in the 1970s due to a sharp increasing in tourism to Nepal. However, it was not until the 1980s when faced with financial and political instability, Nepal negotiated a structural adjustment agreement with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. New neoliberal policies focused on the privatization of public resources and export oriented economic growth. Lacking valuable natural resources such as oil or precious minerals, tourism was identified as Nepal's most viable source of foreign income. "Commoditizing the Kingdom's natural beauty, traditional ways of life, and artistic heritage," it seemed would, "generate employment, earn foreign currency, and bring some balance to existing uneven regional development" (Bhattarrai, Conway, and Shrestha 2005:679).

[11] Around the same time China invaded Tibet and closed the region to climbers and thereby concentrated climbing activity in Asia in India and Nepal.

Unfortunately, like many structural adjustment plans, the IMF and World Bank vision for Nepal failed. The country became increasingly stratified as particular ethnic groups came to control the majority of the hotel industry and Sherpas cornered the trekking market. People living along certain popular trekking routes had the opportunity to become wealthy, while others saw none of the benefits of this so-called-development. Furthermore, the focus on attracting international capital left Nepal dependant on the capital brought by foreign tourists. Geopolitical maneuvering easily endangers this vital stream of capital. For example, after September 11, 2001, the United State's war on terror classified the Maoist insurgency in Nepal as a terrorist group and the US State Department issued a travel warning against tourism to Nepal thus threatening the stability of the tourist industry.[12]

In 1985, a year after the World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs were enacted, David Breashears guided amateur Dick Bass, a wealthy Texan to the summit of Everest in what was one of the first guided climbs of the world's highest mountain. A year after the Nepali landscape was commoditized as geocapital, mountaineering too became a commodity. It was not that Bass had never climbed before. The summit was a part of his larger, highly publicized project to be the first to climb to the top of the highest peaks on each of the world's seven continents. Bass had already climbed to the top of six of the seven summits. Guided climbing was not new either. Almost since the inception of climbing, clients (who fancied themselves climbers) hired guides to show them the way to the summits of challenging peaks. What challenged the climbing community was that if the world's highest point could be commoditized then it seemed any summit could be used to turn a profit.

[12] The Maoists have since won a huge majority in the new democratic government elected in the spring of 2008. Their victory forced the King of Nepal to abdicate thus ending Nepal's long tradition of authoritarian monarchical rule.

I do not intend to vilify Breashears as the agent of neoliberalism. Breashears was simply a really good climber and guide who took advantage of the opportunity to earn a living climbing the world's highest mountain. Breashears is no more to blame than a Sherpa farmer who decides to open a few rooms to trekkers. Guiding was not and still is not a particularly lucrative career for Americans. Guides work as independent contractors; work is seasonal and is often dependant on whether conditions. Guides pay is often low and it is rare that guides, who often take significant physical risks leading their clients, receive medical benefits from their employers. Guides work in this role often because they love to climb and the chance to climb for a living is worth the difficulties. Despite the criticisms of some elite mountaineers, one cannot blame commercialization or related tragedies in the mountains on Breashears or the hundreds of guides who have followed in his footsteps for agreeing to lead relative neophytes up Everest. Working on Everest is comparatively lucrative not only financially, but also because of the marketability of the achievement.

Today guide services lead climbers up hundreds of peaks and on treks throughout the Nepali, Indian, and Pakistani Himalaya. The result is a unique form of adventure tourism: climbing tourism. This lucrative form of tourism has developed into an international flow of people and money. The mobility of people and money around the world for climbing tourism is facilitated by the communications technologies discussed in Chapter 3. These mobilities form an essential part of the material and financial underpinnings of the global climbing community. It is not that the climbing community is exclusively about business. Often business deals lead to shared experiences and genuine friendships high in the mountains. These experiences form the foundations for very genuine friendships. The genuine friendship between Everest first

ascentionists Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay resulted in the founding of the Hillary schools and clinics that have educated and cared for countless Sherpa children.

The international flows of people and money are neither even nor smooth. The number of Nepalis who travel to the United States is miniscule compared to the number of Americans who travel to Nepal to gaze upon the Hindu kingdom[13]. The flows of people and money have not only brought Nepal into global markets but also into global discourses on human rights, democracy, and personal liberty. That is, that the global flows that travel through Nepal have caused frictions that are reshaping Nepali society.

Recently in Nepal the movement for democracy forced the abdication of the king and transformed the country from a Hindu kingdom to a republic, dramatically changing the political landscape[14]. Grassroots and global NGO projects are the results of the frictions of global flows and networks, such as those developed through tourism, that are reshaping Nepali society. These kinds of projects are working to subvert the caste system, empower women, and spread access to micro credit, health services and education. These flows and networks, and the frictions they produce are facilitated by communications technologies.

Communications technologies and systems of mobility have enabled the climbing community to envision itself as an unbounded global community. While the climbing community is highly mobile, land, landscape, and a sense of origin or homeland remain

[13] The tourist gaze is concept developed by John Urry to describe how tourists see the world around them. Tourists gaze upon the world and see, "'everything as a sign of itself'" (Urry 2002:3). While the notion of gaze is borrowed from Foucault's medical gaze that reduces the world to that which it is trained to see, in this case the sign. The concept of a sign is borrowed from Saussure, it is an arbitrary signifier the meaning of which is culturally constructed.

[14] Which is not to say that these flows were the only force that caused major changes in Nepal but part of the reason why the Maoist party's campaign for democracy was able to be so wildly successful as evidenced by the huge majority of the vote they won in the spring 2008 election.

meaningful concepts for many climbers. I explore and attempt to reconcile this tension in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Movement and Homeland

"Maybe having a life of movement means a life of greater connections. Or maybe it does so long as we pay attention to it and allow our transient lives to allow a chronicling of emotion via an unfixed notion of place, and of home"

- Majka Burhardt, Professional climber, guide and climbing journalist in her "Liminal Line Blog" (2009).

There are two theoretical poles in anthropological thought on community. The first is based on the influential thinking about community in the post-colonial world that Benedict Anderson presents in his work *Imagined Communities.* The communities Anderson discusses are formed in discrete spaces by well-defined groups of people. On the other end of the spectrum are thinkers like Paul Stoller who complicates bounded notions of community. Stoller points out how, "…the flow of money, goods, and people across increasingly transnational spaces is transforming social landscapes, rendering them less bounded and more confusingly complex" (Stoller 1997:81). In the climbing community discrete mountain spaces and a sense of flow and mobility both shape climber's identities and lifestyles. As such, understanding the climbing community lies in reconciling these two seemingly oppositional approaches to community.

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson present important concepts that help reconcile Anderson and Stoller's thoughts about community. Gupta and Ferguson provide conceptual tools to rethink naturalized conceptions of culture, community and space and to encompass the complexity that characterizes transnational networks and communities.

To understand an unbounded community one must, "move beyond naturalized conceptions of spatialized 'cultures'" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:16). This is not to say that space is not important, but rather, it is not the only plane on which community and culture coalesce. If culture or community is not spatialized, then an individual can inhabit multiple cultures or multiple communities simultaneously. In discussing networks of power Carolyn Nordstrom points out that, "common wisdom holds that two things can't exist in one place," (Nordstrom 2004:233). This common wisdom, she contends, obscures the true processes through which networks, communities, and power are forged. That is, people simultaneously participate in multiple communities locally and transnationally. Now more than ever, due to communications technologies and faster and cheaper systems of mobility (for those with access to these developments), membership in multiple communities and participation in extensive networks is increasingly common.

For British sociologist John Urry some forms of movement are expressions of sociality. "Movement," Urry writes, "often involves embodied experience of the material and sociable modes of dwelling-in-motion, places of and for activities in their own right," for example, "to climb a mountain…the sensation…of movement through and exposure to the environment, the beauty of a route and so on" (Urry 2007:11). Climbers express the sociality of climbing, this sense of dwelling-in-motion, when they share stories about the exciting exposure of knife-edge ridges or the tension of a long descent at night. The shared experiences of moving over similar kinds of terrain on mountains and cliffs across the world allow climbers to relate to one another's experiences even if they have never climbed the same routes.

The sociality of movement for the climbing community involves not only the act of climbing but also the mobile lifestyles that many climbers lead. Whether living out of their

trucks in Yosemite's Camp 4 or seasonally flying to Nepal, a mobile lifestyle is important for many members of the climbing community. I was recently presented with an example of the centrality of mobility to climbing community lifestyles by my friend Jon, a guide and recruiter for Rainier Mountaineering Inc. Jon showed me a short recruiting video he made. With the help of a catchy hip-hop beat, Jon's video links climbing and travel. Shots of spectacular mountains and ranges are interspersed in the video with 'exotic' mountain ranges. Footage of a base camp *puja* on Ama Dablam, a clip of landing at Kahiltna Airport[15], and photos of stately Mexican buildings are summed up at the end with the words, "you too can get paid to play" (Shea 2009). The video constructs mobility and adventure as fundamental to the climbing lifestyle in order to entice aspiring guides.

Climbing cultural expressions are complex and sometimes contradictory due to the way that space both is and is not significant. The experience of a climbing community happens in discrete, albeit temporary spaces. Climbers come together in campgrounds, base camps, and even glacial airports like the one on the Kahiltna glacier. Rick Wilcox, owner of North Conway's International Mountain Equipment explained to me that because climbing is seasonal climbers often meet at the same mountains around the world in the same seasons.

Paradoxically, because of the choice to be mobile to pursue climbing, "'homeland' …remains one of the most powerful unifying symbols for mobile and displaced people" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). There are many ways that climbers hearken back to their 'homelands'. New Hampshire climber Kevin Mahoney expresses his sense of homeland as he describes a recent

[15] Access to the peaks of Alaska's Alaska Range where Denali, north America's highest peak is located, is generally by small aircraft. Planes are equipped to land on glaciers. The Kahiltna glacier is the most popular landing for the numerous parties that attempt Denali every year.

ascent of the North Face of Kangtega Nepal's Khumbu region with Freddie Wilkinson and Ben Gilmore.

> "Our line, the New Hampshire route AI5+ R/X 1000M with a little mixed[16], climbed the north face to the upper East face to the summit of Kangtega 6,779M (22,241ft). The name came from the sustained cold nature of the face and 'interesting conditions' that we experienced, both of which seem common on New Hampshire winter adventures" (Mahoney 2008).

Similarly, in October 2007 Colorado based climbers Micah Dash and Johnny Copp named their new route on Pakistan's Shafat Fortress "The Colorado Route" harkening back to their own homeland and training ground.

While these names may echo climbing's historical role in the imperial project as national expeditions sought to plant their flags on the highest summits, they function differently. The imperial project was about enclosing space in the name of empire. Today, international climbing is about moving through space for a variety of personal, individual, and commercial (in the form of guiding and sponsored climbing) goals rather than to accomplish overtly imperial or political purposes. Unlike the nationalist expeditions of the early twentieth century, contemporary climbers leave little behind except for a few rappel anchors and the financial capital exchanged for porters' labor. The names given to the routes described above celebrate the mobility of climbing subjects by signaling their homelands as the essential training grounds for their global achievements.

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[16] AI 5+ signifies that the medium is alpine ice and the difficulty of the climbing while the R/X describes the quality of the protection available. Suffice to say that the route is quite hard and that the protection was poor such that falling was not an option.

In many ethnographies of global connection, the land is no more than the physical space that networks must overcome. In global climbing, land is an anchor, a starting point from which transnational networks and global communities can be imagined. Individuals are proud of their "homelands" and the local style of climbing developed around the rock and ice formations found there. Most ethnographies of international connection deal in finance and power (see Nordstrom 2007, Tsing 2005, Coronil 1997). They deal with networks defined largely by their ability to overcome space and distance rather than move through it. In these ethnographies place is relevant to the extent that valuable natural resources are in the soil. Otherwise the flows of global capital, power and people supersede the effects of space, topography, and distance. "Homelands" are a part of the "'immobile' material worlds" that facilitate experiences predicated on the international mobility of bodies and flows of global goods and capital (Urry 2007:54).

While some individuals choose to highlight their association with a particular homeland, when those associations are imposed and naturalized, they can become problematic. For example, widespread presumptions linking Sherpas with Himalayan climbing amounts to what Gupta and Ferguson call the, "spatial incarceration of the native" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:17). In her study of Everest as a 'global playscape' Susan Frohlick demonstrates how Sherpa climbers are incarcerated in the Himalaya and often identified specifically with Everest. Frohlick describes a panel at the Banff Center for Mountain Culture organized to discuss current issues in Himalayan climbing. The panelists included a Canadian climber and a Polish climber as well as Sherpa climber Babu Chirri who was asked to speak about his multiple ascents of Mount Everest and his records for fastest ascent and longest duration in the summit. Frohlick writes,

> "I had learned from my conversations with Babu in Nepal that he had climbed numerous mountains, yet for a variety of reasons including the structure of the session as well as the

> broader historical denigration of Nepali climbers by western mountaineers. He was regarded within this predominantly western mountaineering community as an 'Everest' climber…someone from the audience asked Babu whether he was at all interested in climbing mountains *other than* Everest. Underpinning this question…is the naturalized association of Sherpas with Sagarmartha and ignorance of the history of non-western climbing more generally. Moreover, and perhaps more problematic was the erasure of his desire and participation in 'peak bagging'" (Frohlick 2003:537-8).

The naturalized association of Sherpa climbers with Everest serves to limit their participation in the climbing community and obscure their achievements in locations other than Mount Everest. Unlike Kevin Mahoney, for whom his identification with the mountains of New Hampshire led him to name the New Hampshire Route, Babu did not choose to exclusively associate his expertise with Everest beyond the fact that it was a site for some of his many impressive achievements. Too often Everest is understood not as a site for Sherpa achievements but as the *only* site for Sherpas to participate in climbing in a meaningful way.

In Himalayan climbing, Sherpas have a virtual monopoly on high altitude portering. While this kind of work occurs on many 8,000-meter peaks every year as well as on smaller peaks, Everest has a great deal more visibility within the media than most mountains. Over the years the communication technologies available at Everest base camp have become increasingly sophisticated. Radios, satellite phones, internet connections and even faxes keep climbers in touch with loved ones, clients who are wealthy executives in touch with business, and make their expeditions accessible to the media. For many people outside Nepal, the country is identified specifically with Everest. Sherpas are portrayed in a variety of ways in climbing and non-climbing media but ultimately the association of their supposed natural ability in the mountains

is usually connected to their perceived ethnic homeland, in the high Himalaya, an abstract construction that for many people translates simply as Everest.

Furthermore, the kinds of climbing Sherpas do, whether for work or personal recreation rarely makes it into the popular (climbing) press. Magazines and other media outlets have constructed the notion of a "cutting edge", climbing that pushes a perceived evolution of the sport. This climbing is characterized by light and fast ascents of large mountains by small teams via technically challenging routes. It requires training at small crags or smaller alpine settings where skills and techniques can be honed.

The geology and topography of the Himalaya makes it difficult for Sherpas to train in the way climbers in Colorado, New Hampshire, or Switzerland might. The poor quality of the rock means that there few rock climbing crags for Sherpas to hone their climbing skills. Ice climbing in the Khumbu is similarly limited. Furthermore, because motorized transportation is nearly impossible in the Himalaya, Sherpa climbers cannot simply drive to a crag for the afternoon. Most Sherpas do not have as easy access to the wide variety of equipment available in an average North American climbing shop. The kinds of training and climbing that are accessible to Sherpas is perfect for the kind of expedition style climbing that characterizes mountaineering tourism and climbing on Everest. Ultimately, Sherpas skills are honed for their jobs in a way that can limit their ability to be a part of the 'cutting edge' of climbing. Furthermore, because it is the highest and appeals to the kind of climbing Sherpas most often do, Everest is an important site for Sherpas to produce social capital in the climbing world.

While for Gupta and Ferguson claims "homeland" are powerful means through which mobile subjects can construct a sense of unity and, perhaps empowerment. However, the importance of a 'homeland' association, as in the case of Babu Chirri Sherpa, can limit an

individual or group's participation in an imagined international community. Rather their symbolic incarceration works to obscure the variety of ways that Sherpas are involved in the climbing community both within and outside of the Himalaya. From the first treks and climbs in the Himalaya by Europeans in the late nineteenth century until the nineteen sixties and seventies, a great deal of Sherpa participation was at best a footnote to European and American climbing.[17] Sherpas were mentioned off hand as good "coolies" or applauded for their strength however; the white, western climbers were ultimately the focus of climbing discourses. People wrote and talked about climbing to the summit, not who carried the tent and food.

Though Sherpas may not garner the kinds of media attention that American and European climbers do, their full participation in the climbing community is increasing. As Sherpas' full participation in the climbing community increases, "space is being *re*territorialized in the contemporary world" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992:20). Sherpas are climbing and guiding all over the Himalaya and the world. Recently, Lakpa Rita Sherpa was the first Sherpa to climb the seven summits, an achievement he made through his extensive international guiding career. Furthermore, through organizations like the Khumbu Climbing School, Sherpas are learning modern climbing techniques and may one day participate in shaping the idea of "cutting edge" climbing. While the crags of New Hampshire may be Kevin Mahoney's stomping grounds, and the alpine cliffs of Colorado inspired The Colorado Route, the Himalaya are less and less the sites for exclusively white achievements but are increasingly recognized as the Sherpas' home turf. As Lakpa Rita Sherpa points out, "Nepalese people are happy to climb…a lot of people

[17] Though there were some notable exceptions. Often, especially in the forties and fifties, the climbers themselves were less racist than the media outlets that heralded the climbers achievements.

think we climb just to make a living. But we climb for fun, too" (GreatOutdoors.com 2009 http://www.greatoutdoors.com/published/sherpa-poised-to-be-first-atop-seven-summits)

The complexity and contradictions of how sociality occurs in and across space emphasizes Urry's claim that "social science needs to reflect, capture, simulate, and interrogate movements across variable distances that are how social relations are performed organized and mobilized." (Urry 2007:44). Furthermore, the centrality of mobility to global climbing, creates substantial inequality within the climbing community, despite efforts to the contrary. Urry writes, "the richer the society, the greater the range of mobility-systems that will be present, and the more complex the intersections between such systems. These mobility-systems have the effect of producing substantial inequalities between places and between people in terms of their location and access to these mobility systems" (Urry 2007:51).

There are a number of ways in which these mobility-system inequalities manifest themselves in relation to the climbing community. The most obvious example is to compare standards of living on the trekking routes (which are easily accessible and wildly popular for tourism) through the Khumbu to the rest of Nepal. Rick Wilcox who has led over twenty-five treks through the region calls the route, the "money road of Nepal" (personal communication). In my experience trekking there in 2008 I witnessed how the Sherpa community in Namche, that is deeply involved in trekking tourist businesses, celebrated a Dumje festival: I was most struck by the number of families videotaping and photographing one another on new, expensive digital cameras. Many Sherpas in Namche families have children who travel to Katmandu or the United States for education. Both the cameras and the education are prohibitively expensive for the majority of Nepalis.

At its core, climbing is about mobility. The foundation of the climbing community is movement through vertical terrain; climbers are terrestrially as well as internationally mobile subjects. For climbers, a sense of homeland can be a tool for constructing unique identities or can be used to incarcerate the achievements of climbers in particular locations. The Khumbu of Nepal demonstrates the ways in which climber's mobility and mobility systems both facilitate and limit climber's options. It is in access to mobility that some of the greatest disparities within the climbing community are created. Despite these disparities a range of international climbers, including many Sherpas, are continually challenging and negotiating constructions of the climbing community that limit their ability to participate fully as talented climbers themselves, rather than as employees who climb.

Sherpas are not the only people for whom mountains and identity are intertwined. In the next chapter I explore how historically masculine constructions of climbing are challenged as women claim a space within the climbing community. In Chapter 7 I investigate the ways that ethnic identity can enhance or limit climber's opportunities in a militaristic Indian climbing tradition. These two examples are representative of the kinds of struggles and negotiations that contest dominant constructions of the climbing community. They are by no means the only arenas of contest. They do however, illustrate what is at stake for some participants in the climbing community and the ways in which the climbing community is neither as coherent nor as egalitarian as it is often represented.

Chapter 6: Gendered Identities

Today, climbing remains an overwhelmingly male dominated activity. Despite this, many women have made and continue to make important contributions to the climbing community. The ways that women negotiate their ability to climb as equals with their male partners signal some of the ways that gender is still an important part of performing climbing identities. Women's climbing also indicates the ways in which the climbing community is negotiated through and constituted by a variety of individual experiences both on and off the mountains rather than by a singular 'climbing experience'.

Before embarking on a discussion of gender identity in the climbing community I would like to highlight a few observations. First, and perhaps most importantly is that as already mentioned men overwhelmingly dominate the climbing community. As such, climbing spaces are often masculine spaces, both physically and socially. However, climbing is not *inherently* a masculine activity. Female climbers are not necessarily enacting masculine gender roles. To assume that climbing is intrinsically gendered legitimizes and excuses the unfortunate chauvinism within the climbing community. This attitude also ignores the ways in which women are active participants in the construction of a transnational climbing community.

Most anthropological research on climbing focuses almost exclusively on high altitude mountaineering and of that mostly around Mount Everest. Within this narrow purview, the dominant discourse on gender overwhelmingly ascribes to and builds on Sherry Ortner's characterization of mountaineering as, "always in part about masculinity and manhood" (Ortner 1999:217). Mountaineers are accused of enacting, "brave, crazy, strong, 'macho'" identities (Rosen 2007:151). Authors identify, "a long masculinist history associated with masculine ideals

of physical strength, risk-taking, conquest, militarism, and adventure" (Frohlick 2006:479). Despite these claims however, the expression and meanings of gender identities and performances in climbing are much more complex than such characterizations allow.

At its inception, mountaineering was an activity through which a new British middle-class, emerging as a result of industrial capitalism, could assert masculinity, and prosperity without emulating traditional, aristocratic leisure patterns. Mountaineering emerged, "at the intersection of contemporary definitions of middle-class gentility and status, gender, and national identity" (Hansen 1995:301). Mountaineers intertwined climbing and militarism by imagining themselves as apart of the expansion and exploration of the British Empire.

Historian Peter Hansen explains how the connections between climbing, militarism and masculinity were solidified as a result of contemporary geopolitics. Hansen explains:

> "A series of military crises from the mid 1850s to mid 1860s undermined a complacent confidence in British manliness and power… [These crises] each provoked anxiety and debate about the decline of British power…Middle-class men elevated the exploits of athletes and the adventures of mountaineers into cultural symbol of British masculinity, patriotism, national character, and imperial power" (Hansen 1995:313-4)

Mountaineers' exploits were identified with the glory of the homeland. As such the already male dominated sport was associated with masculine imperial notions of conquest, possession, and subjugation. British mountaineering was a way for British men to assert "the masculinity of the English as opposed to the effeminacy of the French" through mountaineering exploits (Hansen 1995:312). In both the masculine and imperial discourses, mountaineering, for most of its (male) participants was about the performance of gender roles and the performance of, the "drama of empire" (Hansen 1995:323).

Climbing mountains came to symbolize middle class masculinity as well as the glory of empire. Climbing performances in this tradition had their grandest and ultimate expression in the expeditions to summit the world's 8,000-meter peaks. Located in the Himalaya from Pakistan through India and Nepal, European powers dedicated immense amounts of resources to summit these peaks at a great cost of life. Despite the fact that the actual people to summit Everest in the name of the Queen of Britain were Edmund Hillary, a New Zealander and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, the expedition was a British expedition commissioned by the British and mostly staffed by British climbers. As such the expedition asserted the primacy of British organization, masculinity and climbing ability.

Though few in numbers, women did climb during the early days of climbing. As the popularity of climbing has grown opportunities for women to participate in the climbing community have expanded. Still, the rhetoric around climbing highlighted links between the tropes of masculinity, subjugation of nature, and militarism and climbing until the late seventies. In 1978 when Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler summited Everest as a small team without supplemental oxygen and then Messner summated again in 1980 solo via another route, it was a watershed event that fundamentally changed mountaineering.

These achievements were a turning point because they debunked the importance of large militaristic (i.e. masculine) teams to mount expeditions to big mountains. Messner proved that the modernist reliance on large militaristic teams hauling large amounts of equipment was unnecessary. Such heavy handed climbing brought the summit down to the climbers rather than the climbers up to the summit. No longer would cutting edge climbing be about militarism, masculinity, and empire. Messner's achievements were, to some, the pinnacle of a larger trend in

the climbing discourse towards themes of individuality, independence, or the conception that, as Neil Lewis puts it, "freedom lies in *doing*" (Lewis 2000:74).

The individualist notions represented by Messner are paradoxical in that they are both liberating and harbingers of the neoliberalization of mountain landscapes. Climbing the world's highest mountain became a private act in multiple senses of the word. Climbing was privatized in the sense that it could be marketed to individuals as with Breashears and Bass's expedition mentioned in Chapter 4. Climbing was also privatized in the sense that it became a more personal act. Climbers, had reached the highest point on earth *solo* they no longer needed the support of governments to achieve in the mountains. This also opened high-altitude climbing to new populations. Sherry Ortner discusses the trend of women's expeditions, Sherpa expeditions, and other expeditions that highlighted the abilities of groups and individuals who previously did not have access to the high Himalayas (Ortner 1999). The neoliberalization of high altitude mountaineering experiences means high-altitude mountaineering is available to anyone who can pay the exorbitant expenses required to climb regardless of gender and ethnicity[18].

Forms of climbing that are less resource intensive than high-altitude climbing have been open to women for much longer. However, men continue to dominate the community. Because climbing is a very social sport and because men are in the majority, climbing often becomes something of a joking-around-with-the-guys sort of activity. The acceptance of these kinds of masculine gender performances as a part of social climbing is unfortunate and has served to discourage better representation of female climbers within the climbing community. Though this kind of masculine gender performance discourages many female climbers, women like Lynn Hill, Kitty Calhoun, Beth Rodden, and others continue to raise the standards for all climbers.

[18] Though gender and ethnicity are important to the socio-economic structures that limit individual's ability to be able to afford to pay the fees necessary for high-altitude climbing.

Women's equal participation in climbing, however, is a continued site for contest. Climbers debate a range of concerns from women's upper body strength to questions of equity in the climbing community. These debates take place in private conversations, at the crags, in bars, in online forums and in the magazines.

Common themes in the discourse of women's climbing are as varied as the media through which they are expressed. Climbers discuss how female beginners tend to have more success then their male counterparts because they are less prone to trying to muscle their way through hard moves. For some, women's climbing is an expression of a new kind of femininity. For others, women's equal participation means blending in with male climbers. A commonly recurring debate is over whether it is responsible for mothers to climb, and whether the standards are or should be different for fathers (Frohlick 2004, 2006 Schwartz 2009 *Climbing Magazine*, January "Confessions of a Climbing Mom"). Climbers debate whether climbing with other women helps women get into climbing or if it denies them access to the climbing world more generally. Opinions range as widely as questions (personal communications). While I do not endeavor to answer any of these questions, below I will shed some light on what is at stake as women try to carve out a place for themselves in a historically masculine space.

Beyond using high peaks as proving grounds in "all-female ascents" women have claimed climbing as their own. Organizations like Chicks with Picks or Mountaingirl serve the climbing community by promoting women's climbing. These organizations employ some of the most qualified female guides in the (male dominated) guiding business to lead all-female climbing clinics and trips. As an organization, Chicks With Picks makes simultaneous and uncompromising claims to climbing as compatible with their version of femininity. Unlike most guide services Chicks, as they call themselves for short, is a nonprofit. Also unlike most guide

services, Chicks has a driving philosophy of empowerment and community involvement. Their mission statement reads, "Chicks with Picks promotes self reliance through learning technical skills that help women become more equal partners with their counterparts…We promote women's empowerment, the spirit of service, and giving back to the community through supporting local women's shelters…" (http://www.chickswithpicks.net/brains.htm accessed 03/04/09).

Chicks organizes their own clinics, events, and works with established ice and rock climbing festivals to run women's clinics. In an article about Chicks' involvement with an upcoming ice festival in New Hampshire's Mount Washington Valley Chicks founder, Kim Reynolds points out that, "For many years, you rarely saw women ice climbing. In the past five or so years that's gained momentum and I've noticed more and more women coming out but they weren't taking control of the situation and they weren't leading" (http://www.chickswithpicks.net/press/pressear.htm accessed 03/04/09). By leading, Reynolds means leading climbs, placing protection as women work up the rock or ice. However, leading in the climbing sense and leading in the institutional sense are linked. Climbing on lead involves taking bigger risks than following on top-rope. This is not to say that top-rope climbing is meaningless; for many it is an important way to train. However, gaining social capital in the climbing community involves lead climbing. So when Reynolds talks about teaching women to lead, she is talking about teaching a specific skill set, one that is important to gain access to the institutional centers of power within the climbing community.

Lead climbing, especially for beginners can be extremely scary. Lead climbers have to place protection as they climb and clip the rope through carabiners attached to that protection. If the leader falls, she or he will fall twice the distance traveled since the last piece of protection. In

other words even a relatively modest 5-foot run out from the last clip or piece of protection means a fall greater then ten feet. Learning to be comfortable doing this on rock or ice (where the protection is less trustworthy, placed less frequently and a falling climber has many sharp points attached to their body) takes not only practice, it takes equipment like boots, shoes, and high-tech apparel that fits near perfectly. Here the gendered constraints of climbing become more evident as most climbing equipment on the market today is designed for a presumed male body.

In an equipment intensive activity, where the climber must trust their life to their gear, the fit of the gear matters[19]. The availability of women's equipment is a recent phenomenon. Differences in women's anatomy show that some "ergonomic" equipment is in fact only ergonomic for men. When I worked at Camp Muir, a shelter at 10,000 feet on Mount Rainier, I noticed that of all the novices that passed through camp, more women complained of shin-bang[20]. Most novice climbers, men and women, wore the same Koflach plastic boots. These boots are known to be clunky but over the climbing season I noticed that they seemed to cause women more difficulties than men. So while the boots were theoretically unisex, they were clearly designed around a man's foot and lower leg.

Another good example of how unisex equipment is actually designed for men involves ice tools. New ice tools are advertised as precisely engineered to be ergonomic to an individual's body. This engineering focuses on accommodating the geometry of the arm and the arc of an individual's swing. I have had a number of female clients who have had a much more difficult

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[19] With few exceptions all the equipment available in gear shops works. So, for example, any carabiner rated to sustain a 22 kilonewton force (a kilonewton or KN is a measure of force the created by a falling object, 22 KN is about 4,945.8 pounds) will work though some designs are more user friendly than others. A certain kind of carabiner may be are easier to handle, lighter, or serve particular purposes.

[20] Shin-bang occurs when, in a poorly fitted boot, the climber's shin hits the top of the boot as he or she hikes. Over the course of the day this causes painful bruising.

time ice climbing then their male counterparts. On a number of occasions, when they were available, I gave the women a different style of tool with a radically different design. Suddenly, if they had not already tired themselves out, they climbed as successfully as their male counterparts. I often wondered how many women who had tired themselves out with the first tools and were thus equally unsuccessful with the second tools erroneously concluded they were not strong enough for ice climbing.

The point is that there are historical, social and material reasons why the climbing world continues to be dominated by men. Despite the difficulties discussed above, many women are strong lead climbers who have made significant contributions to the climbing world. Still, there is negotiation over how women's climbing should be understood in the context of the larger climbing community. This negotiation is played out most interestingly in climbing apparel. Now most major clothing manufacturers have women's models of most of their products if not women's exclusive lines. The colors and styles of women's apparel represents particular companies' visions of women's role in climbing.

Some companies choose to flaunt femininity with the cuts and colors of their products. The cut of these jackets are more form fitting while the colors are often bright pinks, purples, or pastels, colors picked to be more 'feminine'. Some women's parkas are lined with floral pattern nylon. These decisions are design decisions as well as social decisions. Like Chicks with Picks who identify their guides as "girly guides", some companies envision climbing as a realm for women to assert themselves as strong members of the climbing community without having to adopt masculine styles (http://www.chickswithpicks.net/brains.htm accessed 03/04/09). On the other hand, some companies choose colors and styles that, though the jacket may be cut for a woman's frame, do not deviate from the color palette of their other offerings. This kind of design

decision downplays the gendered performances that happen in climbing. This is a sort of equality through similarity. In this sense when a woman completes an ascent, it is not a “female ascent” as one might find in the climbing media; it is simply an ascent, equality through gender neutrality.

The two attitudes represented by designer’s choice of colors are two important ways show how women negotiate access to the climbing community. However, this negotiation is a difficult one. Gender remains a problematic dynamic in the climbing community. Though climbing magazines and advertisements do a comparatively good job of avoiding images and discourse that overtly sexualize and objectify women, meaningful discussions of gender are mostly absent from magazines and websites about climbing. Climbing institutions like guide services are regulated by state and federal mandates for fair practices that regulate all businesses. However, despite the rules regulating gender equity sexism remains rampant in many guide services. For example some guide services present women with obstacles to gaining seniority and backcountry medicine courses and texts (required for guides) do not include feminine hygiene in the backcountry as part of their curricula. Outside these institutions most climbers are in the mountains and at the crags to climb and have fun not to ponder gendered attitudes in climbing. As such reconciling questions of gender in climbing is largely left up to individuals. Climbers need to consider what kind of community we want to inhabit and contribute to for future generations.

It is impossible to prescribe a blanket formula to encourage women’s participation in climbing because the global climbing community extends across such a vast diversity of cultures. Climbing centers outside North America often have distinct approaches to climbing. In the next chapter I explore how ethnicity shapes the opportunities available to climbers in India.

Chapter 7: Indian Climbing

Thus far, though I have attempted to incorporate non-American and non-European perspectives and experiences of the climbing community, my arguments, anecdotes and analysis focus heavily on the experiences of American and European climbers and people engaged with American and European climbing networks. The nodes of the climbing community outside of Europe and North America are structured and function quite differently from the parts of the climbing community I have focused on up to this point. In this chapter I focus more explicitly on South Asian climbing. In this context the structure of the climbing community and the climbing that people do reflects different interpretations of the reason to climb and of climbing experiences.

Below I draw on some of the experiences and conversations I had with Indian and Nepali climbers while I was living in India in 2008. I will also draw on my observations of a Himalayan Mountaineering Institute[21] (HMI) course that I shadowed in Sikkim, India to explore how geopolitics and ethno-politics collide in the construction of the Indian climbing community. Climber's practices, lifestyles, and aspirations facilitated by HMI highlight the social and political forces that are often obscured but are fundamental to the constitution of Indian climbing.

I stood in the courtyard at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute and watched about one hundred students make final adjustments to their packs that were bulging with heavy equipment. The students were waiting for their bus assignments for the ride to Yuksom where

[21] The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute was the first climbing institute in India. It is now part of the Indian Mountaineering Federation which has several institutes throughout the country.

they would start the trek to HMI base camp in the Sikkim Himalaya at a site called Chauringkang. The students were laughing and chatting, among them several Americans, a Brit, and an Australian talked apart from the otherwise predominantly Indian group. A whistle blasted over the hum of conversation and an instructor barked at the crowd. Groups of students strained and groaned as they hoisted their packs and trudged towards one of the buses. One student walked over toward the instructor and addressed him as sir before asking his question. While the discipline was far from strict, I was struck by the seemingly military style of interaction. I also noticed a range of militaristic references during the course, including a prominent sign in the HMI library that read, "sweat shed in peace saves blood shed in war". I began to understand why the names of so many Indian mountaineers are preceded by military titles.

Climbing in India is organized under the auspices of the Indian Mountaineering Federation (IMF). The IMF oversees both permitting and permit enforcement for foreign and domestic expeditions, the proliferation of climbing training, and a variety of venues for climbers to compete against one another. The IMF is funded through the military. The IMF runs several climbing training centers throughout the mountainous regions of India to train soldiers and civilians in mountaineering techniques. One of the more famous of these training centers is the Himalayan Mountain Institute (HMI) in Darjeeling. Jawaharlal Nehru helped found the institute and Everest first ascentionist Tenzing Norgay[22] ran it beginning in 1954. Later as the Indian government opened other mountaineering schools the IMF was established to oversee mountaineering training.

[22] After he made the first ascent of Everest Tibetans, Sherpas and Indians all tried to claim Norgay as one of them. Norgay who had very little formal education was rocketed into the public spot light after his ascent. Nehru's mentorship, facilitated by his establishment of HMI allowed India to claim Norgay as one of theirs and as such some of the glory of the ascent of Everest.

In Europe and the United States today the state and military have very little to do with climbing, especially climbing training. However, in India, the government, and the military agendas for the proliferation of climbing knowledge shape the character of climbing in India and much of South Asia. The differences in the structures that support and proliferate American or European and Indian climbing and the resulting differences in the climbing communities show how the social and political climates of a particular location shape the climbing community that forms there.

All of India's most volatile borders are mountainous. India has fought wars with Pakistan to the northwest and with China to the north. As the two major powers in Asian geopolitics, tensions between China and India ebb and flow regularly. Accordingly the Indian Army, through the IMF, trains soldiers in basic mountaineering skills to facilitate their ability to fight wars in mountainous border regions. While the training is not specifically military it has a militarist quality to it. This soldierly style draws heavily from the Euro-American tradition of imperialist expeditions that were organized militaristically to climb 8,000-meter peaks after World War II. These were the expeditions that brought climbing to South Asia.

Because climbing equipment is expensive, and almost impossibly expensive for most Indians, the IMF not only facilitates training but also provides equipment for the students. The labyrinthine bureaucracy of the IMF is typical of Indian governmental institutions. To replace antiquated or worn out equipment (on which student's lives depend) schools like HMI have to go though an incredibly bureaucratic process run by administrators who themselves may have little interest in mountaineering.

During my fieldwork in the Darjeeling area, I traveled to the Indian state of Sikkim to shadow an HMI course over the space of about a week as they made their way up to their base

camp at Chauringkang. Once there one of the instructors took me on a tour of the camp. There were many stone huts. The lead instructor's huts were adorned with wood stoves and solar panels, while the students were assigned to dank stone structures with plywood bunks.

On the edge of a flat dirt field where some students with extra time and energy played a game of high altitude cricket (at around 14,000 feet) I noticed gear sorted for the afternoon's training. The piles of gear included antiquated equipment such as warthogs and lash-on crampons[23]. The ice screws were dull, figure eights and carabiners had huge notches in them from where ropes had rubbed into the soft aluminum. In general the equipment was in bad shape and much of it was obsolete. I had seen this kind of equipment in museum displays but never in the field intended for use. Some of it, I thought, should be retired. The standard techniques of climbing have evolved with the equipment. As such, if the equipment is obsolete there is a good chance the techniques taught might be antiquated as well.

Climbing education in India focuses on teaching students how to climb as a part of large hierarchical teams called expedition or siege style climbing. As members of expeditions, climbers make several trips up and down to move equipment in order to establish camps progressively higher on the mountain. This contrasts with climbing alpine style climbing that is characterized by teams of two or three people who try and make an ascent in a single push up the mountain. Expedition style climbing is the dominant method of recreation and professional climbing in South Asia this is both the cause and the result of the prevalence of expedition climbing techniques on courses like the ones taught by HMI. By teaching this kind of climbing

[23] Warthogs are an antiquated mixture between a screw and a piton. They are meant to be pounded into the ice and suffice to say the likelihood that they could hold the force exerted by a significant fall is slim. Lash on crampons are an old style of crampon with long straps that must be laced back and forth around the boot. Modern crampons are simpler and fit more snugly and thus allow for better control and sensitivity to the ice or snow.

the IMF prepares students to take part in lucrative work on commercial expeditions. Furthermore this kind of climbing is a more useful skill for the soldiers who take IMF courses as it teaches them how to establish supply lines in mountainous regions. These skills may have strategic importance in the event of an armed conflict.

As a part of a larger military bureaucracy, it is difficult for HMI to secure the funds to update its equipment or its curriculum. The difficulty of getting funding was reinforced both by the instructors I spoke with but also, when I noticed that many of the instructors and some of the students wore Rainier Mountaineering Inc. and Sun Valley[24] fleeces and jackets. Both RMI and Sun Valley are companies in the United States and employed former HMI instructors. The companies had become a source for donated climbing apparel of a quality that was unavailable locally.

Because the IMF is a government institution, its employees, including many (but not all) instructors are government employees who, after completing roughly twenty years of service, get to look forward to a government pension among other benefits. Instructors employed by the government, particularly the senior ones, comprise the Indian mountaineering elite. Their financial security depends not on pursuing ever-bolder ascents of new routes, but rather on retaining a privileged position within the IMF bureaucracy. As such there is no incentive to update climbing techniques or to attempt risky alpine-style climbs. Social capital in the Indian climbing community depends on expedition experience and experience at altitude, which means that summiting Everest is a key benchmark of achievement.[25] When I asked climbers about their aspirations the most common responses involved retiring with a pension and starting a private

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[24] A ski resort in Idaho

[25] Often, when I spoke with HMI instructors they would ask what was the highest altitude I had ever climbed to while American climbers are more likely to ask what was the hardest climb I have done.

trekking company. This was precisely what several instructors had done and they lived very comfortably by Indian standards.

One instructor who was kind enough to allow me to meet his family was a guest instructor for HMI Suraj Gurung. Though he was a guest instructor, Suraj worked full time for HMI and part-time for only a few private expeditions. Suraj's experience illustrates they way that climbing, ethnicity and working-class life collide in Darjeeling.

Suraj and I got in a taxi at the taxi stand, rode a couple of miles out of town and stopped in front of what appeared to be a row of shops. I followed him past the shops and we turned into a steep, dark, and narrow alley typical of Darjeeling built as a staircase on one of the city's many precipitous hillsides. As we walked down the stairs the smell of urine hung in the air because, I would learn later when I had to relieve myself, the tenants of the roughly eight apartments had no bathrooms and at night they urinated down the alley staircase.

We took a turn away from the stairs into a narrow hallway that looked as if it was assembled out of scrap planks and boards. We ascended two flights of these haphazard wooden stairs. Eventually Suraj led me through one of the doorways out of the darkness and into his brightly lit apartment. On the walls were colored portraits of Hindu gods including a particularly big one of Lakshmi[26]. The apartment consisted of two small rooms. In the front room where I stood was a bed on one side piled with blankets and a gas stove and a few pots pans and food items on the other side. In the second room was a case full of what looked like bronze and copper plates and bowls for doing *puja*, two chairs, a couch, and a black and white television blaring Hindi soap operas.

[26] One of Lakshmi's roles is as goddess of wealth

Suraj introduced me to his wife, Prensila and his wife's two younger sisters who lived with them in order to attend school in Darjeeling, and his two small children, a boy of about seven and a girl of about three. Everyone except for Prensila was very shy. The girls giggled when I asked them their names and their ages and the children hid behind their mother when I tried to ask the same. Prensila offered me tea and Suraj and I chatted while she made it. As I was drinking my tea Suraj's friend and co-instructor on the HMI course I was observing, a tall dark Bengali man named Sanjay stepped into the apartment. "Even though he is Bengali he is a pretty good guy and good mountaineer anyway." Suraj explained joking about the negative Darjeeling stereotypes of Bengalis fueled by the political situation in the Hills at the time and the Bengali tourists that crowded Darjeeling streets in the summer.

Suraj, Sanjay and I sat around the television talking about climbing. We talked about where each of them had climbed. They each talked up the achievements of the other a great deal. Suraj, Sanjay explained, was an amazing instructor and dedicated employee. Suraj pointed out that Sanjay had climbed Nanda Devi and several other very tall and famous peaks. The lists of mountains they had summated impressed me. Our tea was long finished and Sanjay produced a bottle of Honey Bee Brandy, which he poured into glasses that Prensila had placed in front of us. As the brandy flowed the conversation become more frank.

Suraj explained to me that he was a guest instructor at HMI for around eleven years and still, he complained, he could not become permanent.

"Look" he said. "Look at my house it is so small. There is not even a bathroom, eleven years I have given them, *naam kamaeko chhu* [I have earned a name] as an instructor, everyone around here knows it, yet this is how I live."

I nodded not sure where he was going. Sanjay lit a cigarette and handed it to Suraj then offered me one and lit one for himself. Suraj continued:

"I'm embarrassed of my home; I don't invite most people here. I am your older brother; you are my younger brother. You can call my wife *Bauju*[27]."

A few years ago, Suraj explained, a position for a permanent instructor opened up at HMI. Suraj had been quite senior as a guest instructor at the time and was well qualified for the post. But when he applied for the position, a friend who was involved in the process confided in him that, really, they were looking for someone who was a Sherpa. Despite the fact that all the applicants were Indian citizens, as a Gurung, a Nepali ethnicity with its roots in the foothills not associated with high-altitude climbing, Suraj had no chance at the position.

"And that is the way it is" Suraj went on, "Sherpas have earned a name and that is all anyone has heard of in mountaineering and that's who they wanted for the job"

Both Suraj and his friend began to get quite worked up at this point and the brandy seemed to have loosened their tongues quite a bit.

Sanjay waved his hand through the air smoky from our cigarettes, "bring them," he said. "Bring any Sherpa and we will be just as good as him, just as strong."

"We are just as good as them," Suraj agreed. "People just have only heard the name Sherpa."

Suraj's frustration was as historical as it was contemporary. The British divided India along linguistic lines, lines later deployed to establish distinct ethnic identities with the writing of the Indian constitution. As such politics in India are fueled by leaders' attempts to mobilize constituencies along ethnic lines. Nepalis, which includes Sherpas as well as Gurungs, occupy an

[27] This is a kinship term meaning sister in law. It is a term of endearment when used referring to someone who is not blood kin.

awkward position in the Indian discourse on ethnicity. While in Nepal Sherpas and Gurungs might be two separate ethnicities Nepalis whose ancestors migrated to India in the nineteenth century had since developed a sense of a Nepali (often referred to as Gorkahli[28]) people.

Nepalis migrated in the nineteenth century to Darjeeling to work at the hill station recently established by the British as a sanatorium, free from the oppressive heat of the plains and as a center of tea production. Many Nepalis, including Sherpa immigrated to the Darjeeling hills to work on tea plantations. At the same time some of the first British Himalayan expeditions left from Darjeeling. From among many Nepalis who emigrated to Darjeeling, the British quickly identified Sherpas as superior porters.

Among Nepalis Suraj is a Gurung, Gurungs are one of a number of Nepali hill peoples. These Nepalis had good reasons to leave Nepal for the opportunities under the British Raj. The land inheritance systems of many Nepali hill peoples[29] in the nineteenth century pushed many Nepalis to migrate to India to look for work. When men's parents died land was traditionally divided evenly between the sons of the family. Divided between many sons, land parcels were often too small to support a family. As a result many Nepalis, particularly the eldest who sought independence before their parents died, recognized that they would not have enough land to provide for themselves. Many Nepalis left Nepal for India to work in the tea gardens, in construction or as porters (Ortner 1999, 1979). Nepalis like Suraj see themselves as Gorkahli, an Indian ethnicity however the Indian state sees them as Nepali, a nationality.

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[28] The Gorkahs unified the many peoples of Nepal into a nation state. Gorkah was also the name for the Nepali soldiers who were famous for their victories on behalf of the British.

[29] This category includes Sherpas among many other Hill peoples. Most other hill peoples live at much lower altitudes in the foothills of the Himalayas. Over thousands of years people moving north from the Nepali plains and south from the Tibetan plateau (such as the Sherpas) populated the Nepali hills.

Once in Darjeeling, Sherpas established a reputation among their British employers as superior porters for geographical and later mountaineering expeditions in the mountains. Life in the high Himalaya prepared Sherpas better than others to work for expeditions in the mountains. Then, and to some extent now, Sherpas, spent long days working on farms growing buckwheat, potatoes, and raising Yaks and Zao[30]. Because of the precipitous landscape in the Himalaya and its foothills, animals cannot graze for much of the year. As a result the majority of farm work involves cutting fodder for animals. This is difficult work that involves hiking into the forest, collecting large amounts of fodder and carrying heavy loads home (Stevens 1993). This kind of labor is characteristic of many Nepali hill peoples. Sherpas, however, grow up doing it at much higher altitudes so they are better prepared to do high altitude expedition work. The legacy of Sherpa preeminence in mountaineering lives on today.

Sanjay came from a wealthy Bengali background and could afford to live a climbing life. Suraj could make a living but it was a meager one. Suraj's non-Sherpa Nepali identity systematically limited his opportunities for upward mobility. Though Suraj worked for some private commercial expeditions (that paid much better than HMI) his identity as a Gurung made it more difficult for him to establish long-term business relationships with wealthy foreigners who wanted to be able to sell the fact that they work with authentic Sherpas to their perspective clients.

Climbing, particularly commercial climbing and climbing training in India and South Asia more generally exist within this larger context of the ethno politics that shape the opportunities available to different people. Within the Indian state Gorkahlis like Suraj have little representation, relatively less access to power, and are often denied the material benefits that

[30] Cow-yak cross breeds

Bengalis[31], the ethnic majority, enjoy. One of the ways in which this manifests is that there are fewer government posts open to Gorkahlis in Darjeeling hills. So while some Bengalis like Sherpas are able to achieve permanent positions at HMI, Suraj had neither the ethno political advantages that a Bengali like Sanjay enjoyed, nor the social capital of being a Sherpa.

In Chapter 4 I discussed the ways that establishing a longstanding relationship with Europeans and Americans has been central to Sherpas success in the mountaineering industry. The high standard of living in the Khumbu is evidence of Khumbu Sherpas virtual monopoly on the climbing and trekking tourism market in South Asia. 'Sherpa' has in a sense become a brand both in India and the United States. I have never heard or seen any Nepali climber working closely with a foreigner or guiding in the United States or Europe who was not a Sherpa. Some Nepalis have even pretended to be Sherpas so they could have a better chance at working as a high altitude porter and earn more money.

Non-Sherpa climbers from Himalayan regions are almost entirely absent from the dominant discourse on Himalayan climbing. Tamangs, Gurungs, Langtapa, Tibetans, Rai and many other Himalayan peoples are rarely if ever mentioned in chronicles of South Asian climbing. Non-Sherpa climbers in South Asia were historically denied positions as porters for expeditions. Sherpas became renowned climbers due to their close associations with early Himalayan expeditions. Today, Sherpas continue to dominate the climbing and trekking tourism industry. However, not all Sherpas are mountaineers and Sherpas are not the only mountaineers in South Asia. Globalized images of Sherpas as naturally even genetically predisposed to high

[31] Darjeeling is a part of the sate of West Bengal. Though the area is predominantly ethnically Tibetan and Nepali, The vast Bengali majority in the rest of the state advantages Bengalis and limits Nepali's opportunities. Though these Nepalis have lived in India for over two hundred years, the Bengali majority still has a tendency to view them as Nepali citizens, which they are not.

altitude climbing contribute to the myth that all Sherpas are climbers. These globalized images, along with local ethno-politics, have also served to limit the opportunities available to South Asians who are not Sherpas in the climbing industry.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

I once did a route on North Conway's Cathedral ledge called *Intimidation*. The name was due to the fact that several key holds on the climb are out of sight around a corner. When you cannot see what to grab it is intimidating. As the climber I had to have faith as I pawed the rock hoping my hand would grasp something that I could hold onto. I had to be willing to commit to the moves when I was not entirely sure what I might find. Ultimately however, the holds were there. It all came together, and I managed the climb without too much difficulty.

In a sense, this climb is a great metaphor for the research process involved in this study. As an unbounded community the global climbing community was obscure and I did not always know where to look for it. I often groped through articles, books, and memories of conversations to try and figure out who constitutes the climbing community, and how it operates and how it is contested. I opened with a discussion of scale. I aimed to try and encompass the whole and the particulars of the global climbing community in a way that did justice to both. I wanted to look for the key crystals of understanding without forgetting the context of the cliff, region, and mountain range. I attempted to understand the transnational connections of climbers through various networks established through commercial engagements. I tried to position these networks in the context of the economic constraints and geopolitics that shape the regions where climbing happens. I examined how climbing experiences are at once historically constructed and gendered. Finally, I tried to encompass the individual experiences of climbers like Kevin Mahoney, Babu Chirri, Suraj Gurung, along with my own experiences to draw out the humanity of transnational capitalism and the global climbing community.

The result is this portrait of the climbing community, including some of its diverse climbing identities, and examination of the various ways in which those identities are constructed and experienced. Ultimately, this study challenges the popular media depictions of a homogenous climbing community. Americans, Europeans, Sherpas, Nepalis, women, and others bring different experiences, worldviews and concepts of sociality to the climbing community both on and off the mountains.

In addition to its descriptive contributions, this study also sheds light on the importance of global networks for ethnographic inquiry. Climbers are not unique in their use of the internet to construct and share global communities and identities. Lately, perhaps as a result of the post-modern turn in anthropology, researchers have turned their attention to communities not bounded by space. Individuals connect with one another via systems of mobility and the internet to constitute these communities. Research on these communities focuses heavily on social and political activists. Activism is a site for the organization of individuals who imagine an alternative construction of society. Activist communities have the prerogative to live the change they hope to see and actually construct their communities based on the ideologies they espouse.

While political activism is a particularly fertile ground for this sort of inquiry, the creation and experience of unbounded communities can also be non-political. That is, the experience of non-political (i.e. non-activist, though every community has politics) grassroots community construction is increasingly important in the ways that people create their identities and situate themselves socially. Individuals in the climbing community use the networks of global capitalism to construct social networks. These social networks form the foundations for meaningful relationships, and the foundations of an open, though not always equitable, community.

While I am often inclined to criticize horrific abuses that seem intrinsic to global capitalism, this study has forced me to temper my arguments. Globalization as negotiated by major world powers marginalizes small-scale actors in favor of large corporations. Foe example, trade agreements are negotiated behind a thin rhetorical façade of development by global elites to facilitate transnational corporations ability to exploit resources and cheap labor. However, there is a quieter and parallel story of globalization. Actually, it is not so much one story as millions of individual stories of grassroots globalization. Grassroots globalization facilitates the networks that bring TseDam to North Conway, Lakpa Rita to Kilimanjaro, and moves many other people and goods outside of climbing all over the world.

Following these networks (and in some cases preceding them) are the personal relationships that are the foundations of a community that can empower local actors in their home contexts and within transnational networks. The climbing community is only one example. Indeed in *The Magical State* Fernando Coronil explores the ways that international elites have been creating global communities of power brokers to shape the global order in one another's interests. To use a simple example, a few years ago only the exceptionally wealthy and privileged owned cell phones. Today they are widely accessible around the world. As communication technology and travel becomes less expensive, the kinds of global community construction that they facilitate is no longer the exclusive realm of political and economic elites.

Rather than a discrete group of people, the global climbing community is a process; it is a series of engagements that revolve around performances. The act of climbing is itself a kind of performance as are the ways that climbers share their climbing experiences. Some of this sharing

involves the genuine exchange of stories between climbers and some of it is mediated by carefully crafted narratives deployed commercially by climbing media, equipment manufacturers, and other entities that have a financial stake in linking notions of a climbing lifestyle and community to particular products and images.

While climbers, as well as their stories and the sense of community these facilitate, are internationally mobile, they cannot match the speed and ease with which climbing media and equipment manufacturers can disseminate their construction of what it means to be a part of the climbing community to an Anglophonic audience. The internet and the communication it facilitates is central to sharing performances of climbing identities across the globe in the form of articles, pictures, and films. This proliferation happens through commercial networks and represents one of the ways that the global climbing community is intertwined with capitalism. Most major gear manufacturers have sections of their websites dedicated to the climbing community. Other climbers and their forums such as websites, films, and magazines depend on the revenue from advertisers and corporate sponsors.

Like climbing media, climbing tourism, especially international climbing tourism is a commercial engagement that constructs the climbing community. As a form of tourism international climbing must be considered in context with the global economy that shapes the flow of international tourism. Many climbing destinations rely on geocapital as a foundation of the local economy. While, on the one hand, this puts a premium on environmental protection to protect that capital, on the other hand land and landscape become subject to the troubling neoliberal gaze and forms of exotification

In a place like the Khumbu in Nepal, Sherpa ‘traditions’, mountain vistas, and the mountaineering experience are all for sale to tourists. While this has been wildly successful in

some regions, most notable the Khumbu, it is a model for development that operates unevenly. The systems of transportation in Nepal facilitate tourists' access to some destinations (the Khumbu, Pokhara, Chitwan, etc.) at the expense of others. Communities of people located off the 'beaten trekking path', remain marginalized from the most lucrative development and environmental protection projects of the state.

Still, the areas that have been identified as tourist destinations have become incorporated into transnational networks of exchange that bring much needed foreign currency to Nepal. Similarly, personal relationships established through tourism, like TseDam and Rick's exchanges have the potential to challenge some aspects of global inequity through their direct participation in transnational capitalism on a smaller scale.

Climbers are mobile subjects. Climbers are not only mobile on vertical terrain, their mobility across national and global landscapes challenges the idea that individuals live and imagine themselves as residents of discrete locations. Yet, despite this is mobility climbers rarely see themselves as nomads. For many climbers, the concept of a homeland, usually a home mountain range or crag often remains a significant foundation of an individual's identity. Climbers are at once mobile and unbounded and anchored in particular local communities. Ethnographic consideration of climbing mobilities has to account for both subjects' physical mobility and their ability to imagine deep connections to landscapes and homelands.

This research has shown the ways in which climber's constructions of homelands and landscapes can be deployed both nostalgically and restrictively. So while the nostalgic notion of homeland is positive one for many American and European climbers, for Sherpas the idea of homeland has served to incarcerate their achievements and opportunities within the Himalaya in general and to Mount Everest specifically. Constructions of homeland, and the statements of

identity implicit in them force us to consider observationally and reflexively who the agents of social constructions like ‘homeland’ are and whose interests are served by these kinds of constructions.

For different individuals the mountains become sites for the construction and experience of various identities. Historically mountains were seen as places for British men to assert their middle-class, masculine identities. They were a way that British men could imagine their participation in an expanding British empire. Though these kinds of imperialist attitudes have largely died out, the mountains remain an interesting site for the construction of various identities. Women’s climbing has inspired many to explore the possibilities for constructing active, athletic, and feminine identities in the mountains. As female climbers challenge male dominance in the climbing scene, the gendered histories and material productions (such as through the production of women’s equipment) of the global climbing community become more unstable and can, as a result, be questioned and refined in new ways.

Outside the North American context it is also important to recognize how identities, particularly ethnicities shape climbers’ experiences. Here the politics of Indian climbing are instructive. Climbing in India is a government institution. The bureaucracy of Indian climbing places a premium on an individual’s identity over their ability. As such Non-Sherpa climbers have a difficult time gaining access to the more prestigious climbing related posts. The discussion of Indian climbing not only relates some of the difficulties faced by non-Sherpa Indian climbers it offers a drastically different vision of how a climbing community can be constructed (as a government institution) and experienced (as a military discipline). The differences in the Indian climbing community, as well as the disparity in Indians’ access to quality equipment raises questions about hegemonic construction of climbing as evolving and

celebrates (mostly) American and European climbers as the vanguard of that evolution. Furthermore, Non-Sherpa South Asians have been marginalized from dominant conceptions of the global climbing community while the Sherpas have become entrenched within that community as a token transnational other.

The first time I climbed *Intimidation*, a friend of mine who had climbed it previously stood on the ground shouting up clues to where I could find the good holds. Some of the route was easily discerned; there was the obvious crack and a few big holds covered in chalk. At other times the route seemed to dead end. “Reach up and left around the corner” my partner yelled. I pinched the first crystal that felt good and pulled as hard as I could. Sometimes I rounded the corner to find I had missed a better hold, on other occasions I nailed it. Perhaps if I tried the climb again I could find all the good holds.

Climbers often joke that every climb is training. We are always honing our skills for a bigger or harder climb in the future. Each climb teaches me a lesson I bring to future climbs. Similarly a research project is never done. Additional investigation into the climbing world might involve deciding on a narrower segment of the climbing community on which to focus and performing indepth fieldwork among these climbers. This might involve traveling to popular base camps on major guided peaks and conducting interviews with guides, clients, and local staff. Another deeper study might involve spending a few seasons in Yosemite’s Camp 4 and interviewing the numerous characters who travel the US climbing and gather every year in Yosemite to climb the valley’s spectacular big walls. Perhaps future research could focus on Nepal and the transmission of newer climbing techniques and equipment to Nepali climbers.

There are many remaining avenues for research in the climbing world. The perspective from high on a mountain face, or hanging from high on a sheer cliff is essential to grasp the big picture of the climbing community while simultaneously appreciating the highly personal set of experiences that inform climbers' construction of their community. To climb is to experience an unmediated interaction with the natural world and one's self. Climbers touch the rock, feel the wind, hear rock-fall, and overcome their fears.

From high up on a climb in Red Rock Canyon I could see Las Vegas, I could see the city with its throngs of tourists and traffic, I could see the campground where all the climbers stayed. It was a small city of temporary shelters, of nomadic climbers who came for the spring climbing weather. If the mobility of people, objects, and communication technologies are some of the most powerful forces shaping contemporary social life, then the climbing community offers a window into how individuals are empowered and constrained as agents of global, unbounded communities.

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