

March 2014

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Recommended Citation

Das, Suchismita (2014) "Sikkim the Place and Sikkim the Documentary: Reading Political History through the Life and After-Life of a Visual Representation," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 33: No. 1, Article 9.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol33/iss1/9>



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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Mark Turin for all the encouragement and for the wonderfully insightful course on the visual representation of the Himalayas, from which the idea of this article germinated. I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and to Hope Cooke for their comments, which have helped me improve my arguments. Lastly, I am indebted to Dr. Anna Balikci Denjongpa for being my one-stop resource on all things Sikkim.

Sikkim the Place and *Sikkim* the Documentary: Reading Political History through the Life and After-Life of a Visual Representation

Suchismita Das

In the year 1971, the renowned India filmmaker Satyajit Ray made a documentary on Sikkim, commissioned by the royal family, to showcase the small Himalayan Kingdom which was then a protectorate of India. The content of the film however failed to impress its royal patrons and hence it was not publicly released. A few years later the kingdom was merged into India as the twenty-second state of the union and the film was banned by the Indian government for its sensitive topic. After more than thirty years of unavailability and hence a resultant unique legendary status, the film finally became available for unrestricted public viewing in 2011.

This paper traces the eventful trajectory of this film, treating its journey as metaphoric of the political history of Sikkim as it negotiated its status within the larger nation-state

during various configurations of political power-structures. Reading back through the controversies engendered in each phase, the article sheds light on the underlying ideological contestations over the material and symbolic dimensions of Sikkim's political identity which came to bear on the course of events. The unbounded, unpredictable life and after-life of the film attest to the unbounded, unpredictable ways in which hegemonic assertions operate – such that the meaning and significance of the film, and by extension the meaning and significance of the historic moment in which it was made, and the present vantage-point remain ever-dynamic, open to emergent re-articulations and re-significations.

Keywords: Sikkim, contested meanings, hegemony, nationhood, sovereignty, visual representation.

Introduction

In 1971, the eminent film-maker Satyajit Ray was commissioned to make a documentary on Sikkim – titled *Sikkim*¹ – by its monarchy, which till then enjoyed a semi-sovereign status as India's protectorate. The *Chos rgyal* (King) and *Rgyal mo* (Queen) did not give it a public release – a fact many newspaper articles attribute to the purported displeasure of the royalty with the film's depiction of Sikkim and its then rulers (Bhaumik 2010; *Telegraph* 2010). Upon Sikkim's merger with India in 1975 the film was banned, ostensibly owing to its volatile topic (Banerjee 2010; Bhowmik 2003). This ban was finally lifted by the Government of India in 2010, only for the film to earn an injunction from the Court of Sikkim in the same year after one public screening (Banerjee 2010; Chettri 2011; Paul 2010).

In tracing in some detail the life and after-life of this film – until its formal public release in Sikkim in 2011 – this paper simultaneously traces the political trajectory of the state as it transitioned from one mode of legitimate governance to another. The conditions of this transition remain controversial to date. The role of the Bhutia monarchy in denying equal political representation to its Nepali population, of the Sikkimese political parties in destabilizing the legitimacy and popularity of the monarchy, and of India in instigating and aggravating local unrest to depict the inevitability of the merger – have all been discussed as causal factors (Cooke 1980; Das 1983; Datta-Ray 1984; Rustomji 1987). Different writers emphasize different sets of conditions. Thus the fate of *Sikkim* is inextricably tied to Sikkim's changing political fortunes – from a peaceful Himalayan kingdom, to a monarchy plagued by internal unrest running along ethnic lines, to being the twenty-second state of the Indian union with certain grievances with the center and with certain special protections offered by the Indian central government in its turn (Balikci 2008).

Inasmuch as these changing political conditions and the perception of these conditions (especially among the officialdom) determined the life of *Sikkim*, the film offers a metaphoric and symptomatic reading of Sikkim's contemporary history. This mode of enquiry attests to the methodological insight that the cultural, social and political history of a place can be understood not only through the examination of contents of particular cultural productions about it, but also through the social life of these cultural representations as they are produced and circulate in the public sphere and in public imaginaries (Appadurai 1986; Marcus 1998).

Background

Sikkim is located towards the north-eastern region of India, sandwiched between Tibet on its north and north-east, Nepal on its west and Bhutan on its east. It is a small mountainous state with an area of 7,096 square kilometers and a population of 611,000 according to the 2011 census. The twenty-two ethnic communities (Balikci-Denjongpa 2011: 5) who inhabit the hills are in popular parlance often grouped as Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali. Kangchengdzonga, the third highest peak in the world is located here. Sikkim's location thus contributes to its continued strategic importance for India, quite disproportionate to its small size.

To contextualize India's dynamics with Sikkim, which shape the fate of *Sikkim*, we need to understand the position of Sikkim in British imperial history. Sikkim, a monarchy under a Bhutia king since 1642 (Balikci 2008: 108), first came to have substantive diplomatic ties with the British during the Anglo-Gorkha war of 1814-1816. The British helped Sikkim regain some its territory which it had previously lost to Nepal, in lieu of Sikkim providing the British an alley for communications with Tibet and China (Lamb 1986: 34 cited in Mullard 2011: 179; Risley 1989 [1894]).² By the middle of the nineteenth century however Anglo-Sikkimese relations had soured considerably. A central cause was the cultural-political misunderstanding over the status of Darjeeling as land granted by the *Chos rgyal* (pronounced Chögyal) to the British in 1935, with both parties considering the other as infringing on their sovereign claims to it.³ Thus allegations and counter-allegations led to more than a decade-long conflict resulting in the attachment to portions of Sikkimese territory by the British,⁴ until a new treaty was signed in 1861 (History of Sikkim 1908, cited in Rock 1953: 932). Finally, Sikkim was made a protectorate of the empire in 1887 when the empire thought that in its contestations with Tibet and China over the opening up of British-Tibet trade, the Sikkimese monarch was siding with the opposition.⁵ Hence a Political Officer from the Indian Civil Services was henceforth deputed to assist the *Chos rgyal*, even as over much of the nineteenth century Sikkim had already operated under a limited sovereign status.

Thus at the moment of de-colonization of the sub-continent, Sikkim found itself in a unique position in the geo-political scenario of the region. At this moment Sir Tashi Namgyal transitioned from being the *Chos rgyal* of a scenic Himalayan kingdom under British protectorate status to being a *Chos rgyal* under the protectorate control of independent India. His son Palden Thondup Namgyal served as his Internal Affairs advisor, heading negotiations

with India during this transition. On his father's death in 1965, he inherited the throne. As per the 1950 Indo-Sikkim treaty, being the *Chos rgyal* of Sikkim circa 1965 entailed that matters of communication, foreign affairs and defense remained under the jurisdiction of India, which also retained the right to intervene in internal administration should law and order be threatened (Datta-Ray 1984; Hiltz 2003: 70; Rustomji 1987).

Nonetheless this was an interesting time for Sikkim. Hiltz (2003) depicts this period as one where the *Chos rgyal* was riding the "last-wave of nationalism,"⁶ working on political and cultural-symbolic registers to represent and thus create a national identity for Sikkim. In political terms this included the public rhetoric of renegotiation of the treaty with India – towards greater sovereignty, a call for Sikkim's inclusion in the UN and its recognition as an independent nation, demand for reduced presence of India in Sikkim's administrative structure and the transfer of exercise duties on goods imported into Sikkim that were being retained by India. Culturally and symbolically this effort rested on greater visibility of distinct Sikkimese insignia like the flag, national anthem, handicraft products and an effort to engender, especially through education, a national consciousness (Cooke 1980; Das 1983; Hiltz 2003; Rose 1969).

After the death of his first wife,⁷ the *Chos rgyal* married Hope Cooke, an American whom he met on the latter's visit to Darjeeling (Cooke 1980; Rustomji 1987). She played a big part in the cultural-symbolic efforts to increase Sikkim's visibility on the world map. Hiltz (2003: 81) highlights an iconic moment capturing this phase when Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India visited Sikkim in 1968, and "nine hundred alternately spaced flags of India and Sikkim lined the route of her motorcade" with the King publicly speaking of Sikkim's aspirations for UN recognition. Hiltz argues that this assertion was rooted in a distinct Tibeto-Burman identity which, through a narrative of common non-Aryan descent, sought to over-ride the cultural differences between the Bhutia-Lepcha population who were considered the original inhabitants of the state and the more recently migrated Nepali population. However, such a narrative of a distinctive Sikkimese identity in contrast with India, rooted in an ostensibly ethnic commonality, was still exclusionary in its ability to encompass only those Nepali origin immigrants who were of the non-Aryan stock.⁸

The *Chos rgyal's* second marriage substantially contributed to Sikkim's visibility in the international media. As Hope Cooke became "the first American-born queen in history"⁹

by her "clear choice of a destiny linked to a remote Himalayan Kingdom" (*Vogue* 1963: 143), the kingdom was served up to the American imagination via news and lifestyle magazines. On one hand, Sikkim was represented as the exotic other where "frolicking pandas and prowling snow leopards" roamed an "an enclave of rain forests and staggering mountains", and the "Maharajah personally own[ed] Kanchenjunga" (*Time* 1963b; *Vogue* 1963: 143). At the same time, Sikkim was also suddenly accessible through the mediating presence of one of the West's own, which allowed for the realization that Sikkim's palace looked "surprisingly like a summer house in Maine" (*Vogue* 1963: 143). Thus international magazines covered the "\$60,000 Buddhist rite" of the royal wedding in the "doll-house capital of Gangtok" where "snow lions and billions of other Sikkimese deities" were invoked to bless the union, in the presence of a "top-hatted" west which encountered a "yak-skin booted" east (*Time* 1963a).

On the eve of Palden Thondup's ascendancy to the throne, magazines reported on this reincarnated king who was "more interested in agriculture and atomic energy... than in the miraculous". His statement that "steadfastly we shall reach our goal of freedom from want, disease and illiteracy, and usher in a welfare state so that Sikkim can enjoy her rightful place under the sun" was deemed worthy of socialist Scandinavia (*Time* 1963b). The Queen in these narrations emerged as an industrious figure – striving to popularize Sikkim's handicraft, writing a book on its history, learning the local language and customs and touring the farthest reaches of the kingdom with her husband (*Time* 1969). Coverage of the coronation ceremony celebrated the effervescence of "lissome American girls, friends of the Queen", dancing with Sikkimese aristocrats to the tunes of a turbaned local band (*Time* 1965). It presented Sikkim as "wistfully pin[ing] for more autonomy under India", while adding the cautious note that "it is India's army that has thus far kept Peking from making another Tibet out of Sikkim" (*Time* 1965).

Differing ideological affiliations lead to differing interpretations of this period of Sikkim's history. Some see it as the over-ambitious, ill-advised, ill-timed venture of a less-astute statesman. This is accompanied by troubling misogynistic undertones, with culpability attributed to the 'foreign woman' for leading the King astray (Das 1983).¹⁰ Others cast this juncture as the legitimate counter-hegemonic nationalistic ambitions of a cultural minority (Cooke 1980; Datta-Ray 1984; Hiltz 2003). Datta-Ray (1984), offering a counter-point to Das (1983), painstakingly depicts the autonomy enjoyed by Sikkim in its dealings with the British, therefore arguing for the legitimacy of

the *Chos rgyal's* post-colonial ambitions. He also stresses that the internal unrest since the early 1970s – in terms of popular protests against the monarchy, especially by Nepali constituents who felt they were treated as inferior to the Bhutia-Lepcha subjects, and demands by the political parties for more power vis-à-vis the palace – which disrupts the characterization of the actions and aspirations of the palace as arising out of a unified nationalistic sentiment, were products of external instigation. *Sikkim* the film, as I will show, captures and thus offers a window into the deep ambivalence that marks this period.

The Commissioning

It was in the period of heightened ethno-nationalism following Palden Thondup Namgyal's ascendency to the throne that *Sikkim* the documentary was commissioned. Satyajit Ray was then a renowned film-maker in post-colonial India. Born of the cine-club movement in Calcutta which was influenced by various European and Soviet traditions of realist cinema, Ray's films sought on one hand to cultivate a national public with discerning taste in the aesthetics of visual representation; and on the other to present Indian cinema to the world as being on par with the intellectual and technical prowess of this medium elsewhere (Majumdar 2012; Ray 1976).

Ray's focus on the aesthetics of cinema made him an ideal choice for the production of a travel documentary on Sikkim, at a time when it was trying to overturn the clamp-down against tourism imposed by India. Tourism had a special ideological position for Sikkim (Cooke 1980), which saw it as a way to bolster its security and integrity and avoid any misunderstanding of its "basic affiliations" (i.e. suspicions of being close to China) caused by this forced isolation (Rose 1969: 38). Ray's international reputation was complimentary to the project of increasing Sikkim's visibility to the outside world.¹¹ Thus, before the product had come into being, it had been invested with a set of ideological meanings with which its physical manifestation would have to tarry. The tall order was for it to be a consolidation and carrying forward of the cultural-political nationalistic effervescence of that period, which had so far only sporadically translated onto pages of international magazines.

According to Ray's son, the queen was an admirer of Ray's work and thus recommended him to the king¹² (Bhaumik 2010). By this time, Ray had made a significant portion of his oeuvre including the internationally renowned Apu trilogy, *Nayak*, *Charulata* etc. Closer home to Sikkim, his

film *Kanchenjunga*¹³ had been shot in Darjeeling. This film involved Ray's cousin, who lived in the region and, acquainted with the royal family, probably served as a liaison between the two parties (Robinson 2004). His son documents the difficulties of filming in "places like Lachen, where it was very difficult to travel at that time, there was no electricity and [they] would work at night in candlelight" (*Telegraph* 2010); the project purportedly started with his cousin selling it to him as a well-paid holiday, where he would be making a film with royal patronage, staying at the palace and travelling throughout the state (Robinson 2004).

The Film

In keeping with his vision for documentary film-making, Ray's intention through *Sikkim* was to capture the essence of the place and its people. Robinson (2004) characterizes this as a self-effacing, subject-oriented gaze. Even as the production was hampered by the censorship of its content by the patrons (which will be discussed in greater detail below),¹⁴ the part he was able to retain was described by him as "a paean of praise for the place" (275). Thus the film opens with the encompassing soundscape of ceremonial trumpets with the visual of white prayerflags. This gives way to a natural soundscape of chirping birds and gushing rivers and waterfalls, accompanied by zoomed in and zoomed out shots of the snow-capped Kangchendzonga, the cascading rivers and orchids and other flora. Ray was particularly proud of the poetic effect of "a shot of a parallel ropeway with two carriages advancing towards each other...[where] they're reaching this point [and he] cuts to a shot of a piece of telegraph wire. It's raining and there are two drops of rain approaching on a downward curve" (Robinson 2004).

On one hand the film, through Ray's Attenboroughish modernist narration of natural history, takes us visually through Sikkim's wild flora and fauna and then through its agricultural practices – transitioning from nature to culture in not so subtle ways. Thus, farmers cultivating terraced fields in Lachung and Lachen are depicted as living idyllic lives ensconced within the mountains and monasteries. Montages of their daily activities are perhaps meant to invoke a sense of frolicking communion between humans, animals and nature. The other theme is "the fascinating mélange of hill-folk that is the Sikkimese population", instantiated through a consciously intrusive gaze¹⁵ into the different ethnic groups. The visual markers of difference are focused on and woven into a narrative of merger without loss of diverse identities – of dress, dialect, religions. The locus of this crucible of diversity is the

Namchi Bazaar and Gangtok's Lal Bazaar – the latter also a place for the Indians who have come to live and work in Sikkim. Depiction of the practice of Mahayana Buddhism which is the “official religion of Sikkim”, at the *Padma yang rtse* (Pemayangtse) monastery, at Rumtek and at the *Gtsug lag Khang* (Royal Chapel) are countered with a scene of a public proselytization drive in Lal bazaar, with Nepali-speaking men bespeaking the virtue of ‘yesu.’

The sound-track of the film, composed by Ray himself, has received special attention after the film's rediscovery. Much of it interestingly uses folk-music which implicitly invokes the narrated diversity. The opening song invokes “Denjong” (*Bras mo ljongs*), which is a Bhutia way of describing Sikkim, implying “the fruitful valley” or the “valley of rice” (Balicki 2008: 6); and “mayel lyang” a Lepcha phrase meaning ‘an earthly paradise’ (Arora 2009: 63). In taking us through Gangtok, we hear a Nepali song invoking Kangchendzonga, asking one to dance a *maruni* (traditional dance of the Tamang community) and play the *madal* (drum).

Ray complained of having to make more than forty percent of the film into something bureaucratic (Robinson 2004). These bureaucratic themes include the new roads, which “bring civilization to... border-tribes” that “came from Tibet” and free education to which “twenty-five percent of the state budget” is allocated. Advertently or inadvertently, the film shows the contrast between the aristocratic Tashi Namgyal Academy, where teachers in western short skirts conduct morning assemblies and the rustic schools where children carry a desk each to start class and girls play basketball on dirt grounds.¹⁶ A picture of the king and queen are also seen hanging on the walls of one of the schools, reminding the viewer of the differing logic of nationhood, in case it is forgotten. The *Chos rgyal* is introduced as the “righteous king,” in the twentieth minute of the documentary – sitting in the veranda of his palace, receiving offerings from his subjects who prostrate on the ground as a mode of greeting him.¹⁷ At this stage, while his father, the late Tashi Namgyal is named, Palden Thondup remains unnamed. We are shown pictures of his wedding to Hope Cooke, who is named and the international attention the event received is mentioned. The royal couple are depicted making appearances at ‘fun-fares’ and distributing prizes at local school events. Another “bureaucratic” agenda presented is that of handicrafts – with shots of the weaving process, mainly dominated by girls and the carving process, which is presented as the forte of boys.

The crescendo of the documentary is the celebration of “Kagyed” (*bKa' brgyad*) – the closing of the Tibetan year – with its prayers, ceremonial dances and grand feast.¹⁸ The festival is depicted more as a social or cultural fact and less as a religious fact. Whether this is the effect of lesser information from his interlocutors about the ritual significance of the dance and other symbolic acts, or whether it is Ray's own modernist sensibilities which leads to this surface-based depiction, we can only speculate. He narrates about the ritual significance of the dance “being lost upon the outsider” but compliments the evocative quality of the rhythm, of the stately gestures and music, and, of the majesty of the silk and brocade costumes. The acharyas, or masked jesters who “provide impromptu playfulness to the solemnness of the ritual dances” provide for perhaps one of the most controversial scenes in the film, wherein they comically prostrate on the ground multiple times as the king passes by.

The Police Band and Royal Guards make an appearance as the other embodied articulations of nationhood. The *Chos rgyal*, the *Rgyal mo* (pronounced Gyalmo) and the royal entourage are depicted as arriving at the palace grounds to be saluted by the modern state apparatus i.e. the guards, followed by the more feudal form of tribute from the two aforementioned acharyas. The scene of the masked dance is interspersed with men in khaki polishing silverware and setting the table with drinks for the imminent feast on one hand and with the arrival of the lay population on the grounds beyond on the other. The latter evokes the quality of a village fair. Besides some food and cattle trading, the camera pans on the many huddles of gambling men indulging in a “popular pass-time of the hill-folk.” While the king and queen attend to their royal guests at the buffet, the commoners are shown sitting on the ground, being served plain rice, pork and chang. The final ritual of the burning of the shrine of straws (as a symbol of the evils to be eliminated) then cuts to a montage of groups of children bashfully laughing (and some of them smoking) in front of the camera. The then camera zooms into the Kangchendzonga and a ‘the end’ sign appears.

The First Rupture

Ernesto Laclau (1989: 90) argues that any structural system though limited, is always surrounded by an “excess of meaning” which it is unable to master and which consequently renders “society as a unitary and intelligible object which grounds its own partial processes” an impossibility. Attention to this “precarious character of any structuration” (92) had led Raymond Williams

(1977: 106-107) to theorize history as always in the making, instead of treating it as epochs with already known structures and products. Bakhtin (1981: 419-420) uses the term heteroglossia to depict this dialogic character of discourse as the mover of history. Thus represented narratives might be ironically reappropriated such that in retaining a pseudo-objective character of facts, the subsequent authors can add opposing meaning and value. However, such reaccentuations elide a complete solidarity between the author and her discourse, and exist somewhere between complete reification and transparent intentionality (Bakhtin 1981). In locating the source of excess, Williams (1977: 122-123) distinguishes between “residual meanings,” which serve as potential sources of future threats, subject to “reinterpretation, dilution, projection” and separates them from the “emergent,” which are new meanings and values which may be incomplete, uneven or non-articulated, but are oppositional and alternative to the dominant culture.

Thus in tracing the signification of *Sikkim*, we need to see each subsequent claim over it not as an addendum to a positive reality but in each instance as a making of meaning and value. Discourse in being dialogic enters the terrain of the other, anticipates and incorporates it and in the process changes its subsequent utterance (Bakhtin 1981). Ray’s claim about the interference in production in terms of a preponderance of statistical information and a disproportionate emphasis on sections of the population the royalty wanted to focus on (Robinson 2004) attests to this dynamic. Dialogicality characterized *Sikkim* even before it claimed its place as a fully articulated cultural product in the public domain. At stake were the competing representations of Sikkim tied to differing visions of its past, present and future and the role of cinema in mediating this trajectory. Insofar as ideology operates through the insistence on “closure, fixation of meaning and non-recognition of the infinite play of differences” (Laclau 1989: 92), the disagreements between Ray and the royal patrons over the content of the film were rooted in their ideological stakes in telling and through telling, shaping the history of Sikkim.

The rupture in the creation of *Sikkim* has to be understood in the context of other media representations of the royal feasts and celebrations as had appeared in the international print media. These provided the residual meanings which were sought to be projected onto the current production by its patrons. One only needs to contrast the ingratiating prose in the international journals depicting the marriage ceremony where “the country people were streaming along...the gaily decorated

capital...with their bundles and babies, their prayer wheels and rosaries...to witness the most popular of all fairy-tale plots” (Ross 1963), to Ray’s matter-of-fact depiction of the arrival of the country-folk to the royal grounds to gamble and eat plain rice and pork, served on the ground while the royalty entertained their aristocratic guests separately, to understand why the latter representation would be contested by its patrons. Hope Cooke’s exclamation of “It’s wicked!” at some unflattering shot of a bureaucrat “eating noodles” (Robinson 2004: 275) is similarly dealing with the residual representation of eastern bureaucrats asking the fair ladies to dance, with its connotation of a self-assured east meeting a ready-to-be-charmed west. It is the signification of the cultural-political fact of a feudal monarchy forming the non-bounded register which is sought to be tamed, in the contestations between the Sikkimese monarchy which wanted the film to depict its legitimacy and the modernist Indian filmmaker who chose to highlight the quaintness of this cultural-political scenario.

The basis of the rupture here is that for Sikkim any ideological expression of nation-statehood cannot be divorced from a depiction of its royalty, whose legitimacy is rooted not only in tradition but also in the notion of a divine will which the ruler embodies. Mullard (2011: 26) highlights the concept of “*cakravātin*, who on account of his enlightened status is the ideal ruler, as he will govern according to higher principles than that of a worldly political figure” to explain the notion of divine kingship in Tibetan political theology. However, such kingship he states “was contractual (between the king and ministers) and was not a prize sought but a burden shouldered at the request of others in order to benefit benighted, rudderless subjects” (Mullard 2011). Cooke (1980: 124) also stresses the ego annihilating character of the king’s complete identification with the state which, she argues, in keeping with Buddhist cosmology differs from the western sense of the term “*L’etat c’est moi*.” Thus it seems a bit inadequate that to summarize the *Chos rgyal*’s political ambitions Hiltz (2003) invokes Benedict Anderson’s (1983) characterization of the last-wave of nationalism. The friction here is that Anderson’s thesis about nationalism is one where the public sphere becomes coterminous with a national consciousness seeped in notions of secularism and enlightenment rationality that replaces religious modes of relating to authority. The latter modes of relating to political authority can in Anderson’s story only find refracted symbolic depictions in national public spheres.¹⁹

Sikkim then can be read in this first moment as an internally conflicted representation, where even as the

royal family is intrinsically tied to the unfolding of Sikkim as a place, appearing in the bazaars, schools and fairs, there is a refusal to name or personalize the protagonists. This ambiguity of the film indexes the ambiguity of Sikkim's position in the last-wave of nationalism. Thus inasmuch as the stress is often on the secularization of cultural symbolic articulations of national belonging during this period, Sikkim's inalienable sacral articulation of nationhood is the excess, the out-of-joints, which then leads to successive ruptures in the political trajectory of this place. It is this out-of-joints which India focused on, to thwart Sikkim's national ambitions and legitimize Sikkim's ultimate merger into the secular Indian federal union in 1975²⁰ (Cooke 1980; Das 1983; Datta-Ray 1984). One political precursor to this disjuncture is India's refusal, post 1947, to officially refer to the King as *Chos rgyal*, as its meaning as the "defender of the faith" was not agreeable to it (Rose 1969: 36). Thus the two particular scenes in the film which depict elaborate gestures of prostration to the king – one by a group of men bringing the *Chos rgyal* offerings of their first harvest and the other of the acharyas or jesters during Kagyed – become the site of this protracted historical tension.

Society is a total fact and parceling it off as cultural or political has limited analytic or practical benefits in anthropological reckoning. Robinson (2004) writes of Ray's aversion to pushing political propaganda through his films. This apolitical posture was criticized by his colleagues and interlocutors of the alternative cinema movement in India (Majumdar 2012). Especially in the context of *Sikkim*, a film commissioned by an overt political entity, this seemed to be a rather untenable position. On one hand he is compelled to propagandize on behalf of the state – narrating its education outlay and eulogizing its road connectivity. On the other hand, his depiction of certain characteristics of the state – probably arising out of his motto of showing things as they were, without projecting the film-maker's thoughts onto the material (Robinson 2004: 274) – does leave moments of excess where a political stance of either being anti-monarchy or a more generic leftist critic of social inequality may be ascribed to him. These include the above mentioned scenes of feasting and gambling by commoners while the aristocracy is waited upon by men in khaki polishing their silver-ware, or even subtle shots of the dark village classrooms where children carry desks on their heads while the elite school enjoys impeccable infrastructure.

Aesthetic theory argues that the politics of a work of art works best if separated from the intentionality of the artist. Whether Ray subscribed to this theory or not

would require further investigation. What is to be noted here is that *Sikkim* did become political. In a collective viewing of this film during a class on the visual and textual representations of the Himalayas, one found the audience perplexed as to what about this very mundane, dated "National Geographic type" film led it to be banned for more than thirty years. But perhaps it is this very fact of its lack of politics that made it so politically volatile. For example, in depicting the rich-poor inequality without contextualizing or comparing this scenario to any other, it becomes open to being conflated with a royalty-commoner schism. One doubts if a chronicling of any state event in democratic India circa 1970 would not find a similar segregation of publics, with similar modes of inclusion and exclusion. If we take Williams' and Laclau's insights seriously, the meaning of any cultural assertion cannot be bounded off even as ideological efforts are made to render meanings static. But since Ray made special efforts to keep the meaning of the film unbounded, through the move towards an ostensibly neutral chronicling, it only added to the intensity of the contest over subsequent ideological appropriations.

Thus in this first moment of production, the mode of seeking to bound the meaning of *Sikkim* took a form wherein till the state's merger it was never screened for anyone besides the royal family. Hence its expected destiny of "putting Sikkim on the tourism map" (Paul 2010) had to make way for more contingent manifestations of history.

The Second Rupture

Articles written in the recent past give a very breezy account of the years immediately after the film's making (Bhaumik 2010; Joshi 2010). It failed to meet its patron's expectations, but received an 'U' i.e. universal certification from the Central Board of Film Certification, India in 1973. However as Sikkim was merged into India in 1975, it was banned by the Indian government, condemning it to almost thirty years of obscurity (Bhaumik 2010; Joshi 2010). Trying to understand the second rupture in the after-life of the film by bringing forth all the conditions which potentially led to its banning exposes the multiple ideological pulls that were operating on and through this cultural product. *Sikkim* is iconic of a very volatile period of Sikkim's history, as it transitioned from a monarchy to being part of a democracy under very complex conditions. The effort to exercise absolute control over any interpretation of *Sikkim*'s signification – by withdrawing it from circulation – is indicative of the nervousness of the political apparatus at this moment. Thus at this crucial

juncture of an unboundedness in the unfolding of Sikkim's history which was susceptible to various interpretations – in posterity, as well as in that moment itself – the ban was an effort to reel in the excess.

As per the Indian official discourse, Sikkim was merged into the Indian union after a referendum to that effect was held in April 1975. This followed a few years of popular uprising. In spite of comprising more than seventy-five percent of the population, the Nepalis had equal number of seats in the Sikkim Council as the Bhutia-Lepcha minority.²¹ This sense of exclusion from the nationalistic discourse that centered around the autochthonous population led them to believe that throwing their lot in with India and its representative electoral politics would be more beneficial. The palace and the political parties had also become increasingly opposed in their stands (Das 1983; Gupta 1975). Thus B S Das (1983: 13), the Indian Chief Executive Officer during this period, argues that the Indian government's role was mainly to overturn the administrative breakdown which had followed the uprising. The agentive actors in his discourse were the democratically oriented local political parties representing the Nepali middle-class whom the *Chos rgyal* had alienated, with India playing the paternal peace-keeper in their internal power-struggles.

The specter of communism loomed in the background (Levi 1959), with India fearing that political unrest along its frontiers might be exploited by China, with whom its disputes had already resulted in a war in the last decade (Rustomji 1987). But a counter point to this was Sikkim's monarchy falling short of India's socialist agendas in the 70s. Indira Gandhi's defiant stance towards the United States of America following the liberation of Bangladesh through the war with Pakistan made it a rather inopportune time for its protectorate to be leaning towards USA and implicitly liberal capitalism²² (Gupta 1975: 797). Even if Sikkim's ties were largely cultural and personal,²³ in a moment of extraordinary nationalistic triumphalism from India's center, these cultural exchanges became ripe for far-fetched suspicions of espionage and conspiracy to unsettle India's strategic interests (Cooke 1980; Das 1983). Further, in terms of strategic alliances, Sikkim's proximity to the Calcutta elite was not endearing to the Delhi government (Gupta 1975: 797). While this proximity was a result of historical and geographic conditions (Pradhan 2008; Rustomji 1971), it did little to allay mutual suspicion with the center or to forge newer relations more suited to the post-colonial conditions and the circulation of elites and power-brokers that it entailed.

Of course what the Indian official version does not state are the legitimate objections Sikkim had about India's policy towards it (Cooke 1980), which remained purposefully vague on the degree of autonomy its treaty status entailed (Rose 1969: 36). The non-transfer of funds from excise duties, dominance of Indian bureaucrats in local administration, and the forced seclusion through strict control of tourism have been highlighted above. Further, the role of India in being more than a mere supporter of calls for democracy, and being instead an active inciter of communal rifts, has also been chronicled (Cooke 1980; Datta-Ray 1984; *EPW* 1979). These writers argue that agitations against the palace had protestors being brought in from the neighboring hills outside the state.

A few years later, *EPW* (1979: 1737) documents how the legislative assembly in 1979 "was dissolved on the speciously 'democratic' plea of having outlived its legal term... [to] pre-empt a reported move by a large group of MLAs to table a motion in the House to countermand the merger". This was the same assembly which had earlier introduced the merger bill in the legislature that received a ninety-seven percent support from the Sikkimese people in the referendum.²⁴ Datta-Ray (1984: 291-294) documents how a similar memorandum, signed by twenty-nine legislators of the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, dated March 12, 1975, in the form of a letter to Mrs. Gandhi, demanded the reverting of home, finance and establishment portfolios from the Indian Chief Executive to the Sikkimese Chief Minister, curtailing of the powers of the Chief Executive and Indian officers on deputation and called for a dialogue with the *Chos rgyal*. The memorandum was later declared illegal and repudiated by the signatories themselves, under duress from the Indian administrative representatives.

It is in these moments of acute political volatility and the resultant need for the national government to achieve ideological control over cultural dissemination affecting how these events would be read that *Sikkim's* after-life can be understood. This is the context for the objection that the Indian government took to a screening of the film in New York at a festival of Indian films organized by the Asia Society and the Museum of Modern Art in 1981. This led to the film being removed from the official list, even as it was screened (Joshi 2010). At stake was not the content of the film, but what the idea of a quasi-travel-documentary commissioned by the royalty stood for or could be interpreted to stand for.

Back home, the elements that had been supportive of Sikkim's nationalistic leanings, i.e. the intelligentsia (Hiltz 2003) were still part of Sikkim's public sphere after the King's deposition. As the question of greater representation of the Sikkimese Nepali population gave way to new concerns about the central government aiding greater visibility of the plainsmen who dominated the business sector in Sikkim (Datta-Ray 1984; EPW 1979), the residual meaning of nationalism attached to the royalty became potentially detrimental to the central governmental interest. The group of MLAs who were to table the motion to reconsider the merger had come to power in the elections following the end of the President's rule and in the interim the popularity of the party which had successfully opposed the *Chos rgyal* during the uprising had dwindled. Hence India's interest in deterring Sikkim's easy availability is explicable as an unsure political power being extra-careful about its claims to legitimacy.

However, the clamp-down on Sikkim was linked not only to a fear of it being a positive representation of Sikkim, but also to controlling its negative depictions. Ray saw the ban as a result of fears that a territory of India was depicted as feudal, indexed by the prostrating subjects. Since "it show[ed] Sikkim at a certain point in history [and did not] claim to show Sikkim of today" (Robinson 2004: 276), he considered the ban illogical. Sikkim did hamper the modernist teleology which India aspired to and which characterized its self-representation to the outside world. Hence even as Ray and the royal family could hardly be said to be ideologically aligned, the nation-state had stakes in controlling the autonomous production of art which circulated subversive imageries of place beyond its control. Here the residual meaning of Sikkim's suspicious alliances with the Calcutta elites and of the reception of Ray's famed Pather Panchali, which sections of the Indian government had wanted barred from the Cannes Film Festival in 1956 for its depiction of poverty in India, added more connotation to Sikkim's subversive potential than its immediate content warranted.²⁵

McGranahan (2005: 576) argues that "by arresting potentially disruptive histories so that they are structurally unavailable as history, spaces are secured for both past and present official truths." The banning of Sikkim was thus one such moment of attempted arrest, or as Laclau (1989: 91-92) writes, an attempt to hegemonize by seeking to limit the infinite play of social discourse.

The 'Release' of Arrested Histories

After the initial period of active censorship, through the 1980s and 1990s the film largely disappeared. It came to

be said that its prints had gone missing, till stories of its recovery began to circulate. Thus it is claimed that in 1994 a print deposited by Hope Cooke was found in the Heffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Rhode Island. Meanwhile the print with the royal family in Sikkim was recovered in 2000 or 2002,²⁶ but believed to be damaged beyond repair²⁷ (Joshi 2010). Reports claim that finally it was a print recovered from London which was restored by the Academy of Motion Pictures (*Telegraph* 2010), and further that this print was associated with Sir Richard Attenborough, to whom the film was a personal favorite (Banerjee 2010; Bhaumik 2010). This recovery has been attributed to the efforts of Dilip K. Basu, the founding director of the Satyajit Ray Film and Study Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz (Joshi 2010). Joshi goes on to write that the ban on the film was lifted in 2002 based on the unrestored print from Gangtok, with the Art and Culture Trust of Sikkim holding the rights to it. It was the restoration work which took time and the Trust received a copy of the film on September 11, 2010.

Meanwhile in 2008 the film was screened at the Nantes Three Continents Film Festival in France, as part of a Satyajit Ray retrospective. The first Indian public screening was on November 11, 2010, at a film festival in Kolkata. This screening became mired in a new set of controversies and court battles. Finally it was on April 6, 2011 that the documentary was released for continuous public viewing in a theater in Gangtok (*Sikkim NOW!* 2011b).

McGranahan (2005: 571), writing about the narratives of violent Tibetan resistance which were silenced within the hegemonic production of Tibet's non-violent national history, sees the former as "arrested histories... not so much erased or forgotten as they are postponed and archived for future use." History, her interlocutor informs her, is "truth and fear and some lies" (McGranahan 2005: 570). The period of Sikkim's history symbolically congealed in Sikkim can also be read as coming out of a phase of arrest – a phase where due to the detrimental admixture of the three above mentioned structures of feelings, "the time was not right" (McGranahan 2005: 575) for Sikkim's collective commemoration (or even denouncement if such were to be the public verdict). Sikkim's "arrest" is also causally related to the materiality of the film itself which was in this period "lost." The conditions of this loss however are linked to the conditions of the arrest and implications of foul-play form the sub-text of various write-ups. In McGranahan's story, the arrest of histories is emic, whereas for Sikkim the originary external conditions were complemented and reinforced by local perceptions and silences.

But what is interesting about the moment of resurfacing of the arrested history of this particular visual representation is the multiple narratives of recovery, which index the continued contestations over sovereignty and the negotiation of marginality of this erstwhile monarchy vis-à-vis the larger nation-state. These are historically rooted contestations which have continued into the new millennium in an altered form. In the national media, Sikkim the place falls in the background, and the protagonist of the story is the maverick film-maker (*Indian Express* 2010; Paul 2010; *Telegraph* 2010). The reference to the place is mostly in terms of the controversy of offending the royalty and the cuts in the film Ray had to make. His son is quoted in each instance, talking about the difficulties of shooting the film and his father's aesthetic vision for representing the beauty of the place (Banerjee 2010; Bhoumik 2010; Chatterji 2012).

A review of the film from its 2010 Kolkata screening gives it a 4 out of 5 for being a "lesson in film-making," with its "balanced colour-palates" (Paul 2010). As far as the reviewer is concerned, the purpose of the film is achieved inasmuch as the beauty of the place is captured in the depiction of "chirping birds, weavers at work or the unclear chitchat between denizens." There is little perturbation about the fact that in this ostensible documentary about a place, the place does not talk back to the film-maker, but is rendered solely by the authorial narrative of Ray.

A perplexing dichotomy is invoked to characterize these stylistic choices – that unlike his other documentaries this film is not about people,²⁸ but a place (Robinson 2004). Yet this is not a nature documentary, which depicts some pristine nature untouched by civilization – as troublesomely false the nature-culture divide itself is. Robinson (2004) stresses Ray's subject-centric approach to documentary film-making wherein the directors own thoughts are not projected onto the film. By this token then, the subject emergent in *Sikkim* is not the average Sikkimese, who surely does not think of everyday conversation as "unclear chatter," nor evaluates the experience of a Cham dance in terms of the elegance of silk-brocade costumes of the performers alone. The subject appears to be the outsider as the viewer of this representation, to whom "the ritual significance is lost," as is the content and significance of everyday conversation and who comes to see the people as the exotic other – the otherness adding to the aesthetic enjoyment of the place.

Further, some national newspapers characterized the injunction from the District Court of Gangtok against the

unauthorized public screening of the film in 2010 as a ban (Banerjee 2010). The article then goes on to describe how the Government of India is looking for legal and diplomatic avenues so that the *public* gets to see the work of the *master* (Banerjee 2010, emphasis added). Only some of these articles clearly state that the injunction was a case of copyright infringement (*Indian Express* 2010). Also the narrative of the recovery of the print implicitly casts the royal family as careless for possessing a copy of the film which was "shockingly" damaged beyond repair (Joshi 2010; *Telegraph* 2010).

The narrative in the local media however is a study in contrast. Here the release of the film is seen as its "world premier" (Chhetri 2011), hence asserting sovereign claims over the film whereby all other screenings so far are rendered unofficial, lacking legitimacy. While the glory of the film-maker is acknowledged, the patrons are symbolically reinstated to an authorial position by the decision to "release" the film on April 4, the birth anniversary of the late *Chos rgyal*, Palden Thondup Namgyal.²⁹ This is a moment of ironic re-signification which breaks from the residual ideological meanings that had congealed around the film previously and rides on the wave of an emergent space for Sikkim's self-articulation as a culturally distinct entity within the nation-state. If the *Chos rgyal*'s actions in the 70s operated via the global moment of decolonization, the actions now can be understood in the context of global articulations of indigeneity, which while claiming spaces for autochthonous assertions, do not threaten the concept of the nation-state in an immediate way.³⁰

Agentiveness is also recovered for the copyright holder of the film - the Art and Culture Trust [ACT] of Sikkim "has worked for many years now to restore the original prints of this thus far lost work" (Chhetri 2011). Thus the uniqueness of the Gangtok screening was that it was to be accompanied by "an audiovisual presentation on the restoration process prepared by Josef Lidner from the Academy Motion Picture Arts and Science." Here the royal family is not cast as marginal actors in possession of damaged copies, but rather the story begins with *Chos rgyal* Wangchuk Namgyal, the current titular royal descendent, donating a repository of materials amongst which *Sikkim* was discovered. Here it is the "Trust that got in touch with the Ray Society, through which [it] was able to contact the archives at the Academy Motion Pictures Arts and Science, California" (ibid). Dilip Basu in this narrative becomes the liaison. The event in Calcutta is pitched as "shocking" for its infringement.

Thus the screening was an occasion for public commemoration of “the entire royal family along with the senior citizens who lived in the period captured in the documentary” (Chhetri 2011) who were invited as special guests. It was an opportunity for the re-inscription or re-statement of ethnic identity, with dignitaries dressed in traditional Khos and Choktes, making speeches on stage, to witness which citizens had weathered hail and rain (Tashi 2011).

Locally it was a safe moment for the release of arrested royal histories by introducing students to the “dignity and grace of the *Chos rgyal*” (Chhetri 2011). Cooke writes in her personal correspondence (March 5, 2013) how her daughter witnessed the audience cheering at the purportedly feudal signifiers, such as the Palace band, which she thinks Ray depicted with the intention to mock. The cheering thus turns authorial intentionality on its head, highlighting the unbounded nature of any cultural production. Chhetri ends his article with the aspirations that “the late *Chos rgyal*’s purpose to showcase Sikkim to the rest of the world will finally become possible after forty years and the release of the film will help in creating more awareness and generate interest and curiosity on Sikkim.”

The film is reviewed in the regional press along the register of a harking-back to simpler times, which depicts the “hard-work,” “dignity” and “innocence” of the Sikkimese people. If the film failed to contextualize the obeisance of a group of men to the king on the royal grounds, the reviewer explains it as “jheshu...offered to the Gods in Gtsug lag Khang (the royal chapel) by the Chos rgyal on behalf of the people” (Tashi 2011). Signification of an ethnically divided populace has been erased in this reading of the film, which is seen now as capturing a Sikkimese essence. A different residual aspect slips in though, in the reviewer’s special mention of the marching band of the Sikkim Guards and their salute to the king – read now as a “poignant” but “probably ineffective” expression of sovereignty³¹ (Tashi 2011).

Conclusion

Raymond Williams (1977: 129) writes that “perhaps the dead can be reduced to fixed forms (though their surviving records are against it). But the living will not be reduced.... all the known complexities, the experienced tensions, shifts, and uncertainties, the intricate forms of unevenness and confusion, are against the terms of the reduction”. *Sikkim*’s trajectory attests to the unpredictable, unbounded ways in which hegemonic assertions work, such that issues

and contestations are never irretrievably settled. This insight is perhaps echoed in Tashi’s (2011) locally situated summary of the *Sikkim* saga – that it is a “still-surviving graphic archive of what Sikkim was. I think that is what we should all celebrate, that it was made, that it survived, that it saw the light of day.”

In seeing the light of day, *Sikkim* made way for other materializations of its arrested history to seek release. Thus the “restoration and preservation work on some other films on Sikkim like ‘The Yankee Queen,’ a royal wedding film, silent films, and footage shot by Chogyal Palden Thondup Namgyal [were] also in the pipeline” (Eden 2011). As these historic moments seek re-entrenchment in public consciousness, the contemporary meaning of Sikkim as a place and a socio-cultural collective and its relation to the larger nation-state are re-articulated and re-signified, as in the past drawn on for this re-articulation. The exercise of understanding Sikkim through *Sikkim* helps us explore this dynamic process of the making of history and identity, while attending to the material/cultural objects which mediate such movements.

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The author would like to thank Dr. Mark Turin for his encouragement and for the wonderfully insightful course on the visual representation of the Himalayas, from which the idea for this article germinated. She is grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and to Hope Cooke for their comments, which have helped her improve her arguments. Lastly, she is indebted to Dr. Anna Balikci Denjongpa for being her one-stop resource on all things about Sikkim.

Endnotes

1. Hereon, for brevity, Sikkim refers to the state and *Sikkim* refers to the documentary.
2. *The Gazetteer* claims that on account of the Treaty of Titalia, signed in 1817 after the British defeated Nepal, territory which has been previously annexed from Sikkim by Nepal was returned to Sikkim (Risley 1989 [1894]). Recent studies have sought to question this imperial bias. Consulting Sikkim's Palace documents, scholars assert that during the Sino-Nepalese War of 1788-1792, siding with the Chinese forces, Sikkim had itself won back some of its territory which the Gorkha expansionist powers had laid claims to (Dorjee 2011: 67; Mullard 2011: 175-179). However the subsequent treaty between China and Nepal failed to take cognizance of these military feats, causing Sikkim to actively aid the British in their operations against the Gorkha army and thus rightfully benefit from the Titalia treaty (Dorjee 2011: 67; Mullard 2011: 175-179).
3. Darjeeling was sought by the British (for a royalty of 6000 Rupees per annum) on account of its temperate climate which made it an ideal sanatorium (Rock 1953). Again imperial sources present this as a peaceful process of just compensation for quelling "certain Lepcha malcontents" (Risley (1894) 1989: iix). However, Mullard (2011: 180-184) highlights the spurious help provided by the British during the Ko Ta Pa rebellion and the displeasure of Sikkim at the British for treating Darjeeling as its sovereign territory. In Sikkim's political understanding, a gift of land given by the *Chos rgyal* was retained under his sovereignty, with development of such land being taxable by the monarchy (Mullard 2011: 180-184).
4. Matters spiraled with the arrest of the noted botanist Sir J. D. Hooker along with Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling, for trespassing on Sikkim and Tibet's sovereign territories during a scientific expedition of the Himalayas in 1849. The British also accused Sikkim of the "kidnapping of British subjects" from Darjeeling for "slave-trade between Sikkim and Bhutan" (Risley 1989 [1894]: 245).
5. In 1887, the empire launched a military offensive against Tibet for encroaching on Sikkimese territory at Lingtu. This alleged encroachment was Tibet's way of expressing strong opposition to aggressive overtures of trade being made by the British. The incumbent Sikkimese monarch, in refusing to respond to British summons to explain his position, was seen as submitting to the authority of Tibet and China in this matter (Datta-Ray 1984: 27-31; Risley 1989 [1894]: vi-xiv).
6. That occurred during the mid-twentieth century, in a phase of global decolonization (Anderson 1983, cited by Hiltz 2003: 71).
7. Sangey Deki, who was of Tibetan descent as per the marriage customs of the monarchy.
8. I am grateful to the reviewer for pointing this out.
9. Time Magazine (1963a) was more circumspect, reminding the reader of the precedence of the Hollywood actress Grace Kelly, who married the Prince of Monaco.
10. B. S. Das was the Chief Executive Officer (Dewan) deputed by India in 1973, preceding the merger when political unrest had heightened. His views in the book, though personal, may be closer to the general Indian perceptions, especially among Indian officials. However, in a personal letter J. S. Lall wrote to Nari Rustomji (both had served as Dewans of Sikkim before Das) – "poor Thondup is painted as the villain of the piece, as if our own people had nothing to do with turning his head" (N. K. Rustomji Papers n.d).
11. Hope Cooke writes in her memoirs (1980, quoted in Hiltz 2003: 81) "We wanted people to have Sikkim in their [i.e. international] consciousness. If...something happened, we wouldn't be quite so alone. We knew that they wouldn't be able or willing to help, but somehow the mere fact of people knowing of us seemed to diffuse the awfulness of a potential take-over [by India] and possibly ... keep it in abeyance."
12. Hope Cooke, in her personal correspondence with the author (March 5, 2013), offers a different account. She

states that it was Ray who was interested in making a film on Sikkim and that his wife had contacted the palace.

13. Interestingly or ironically, when like his other films Kanchenjunga was criticized by Ashok Rudra for its lack of interest in directly addressing social problems as was being done by his leftist contemporaries, Ray invoked the fairy-tale like quality of the mountains to defend his restrained modernist tenor (Majumdar 2012: 762). Hope Cooke in her personal correspondence (March 5, 2013) makes a similar criticism of the film for failing to incorporate the local population into the story, referred to it as “retro-Ray.”

14. Hope Cooke (personal correspondence, March 5, 2013) denies this charge. She claims her only input in the film was to suggest that the crew shoot beyond Gangtok – something they had not done initially, ostensibly owing to Ray having a bad knee and a heart condition.

15. Ray was skeptical of the cinema verité movement, believing that no one could be natural in front of a camera (Robinson 2004).

16. Cooke (1980: 183) in her autobiography (written much after the film and Sikkim’s merger) herself derides the “coat and tie education” of the Academy, preferring the village school which stands for a Sikkimese ethos, where she sends her son too. Whether the film was echoing her sentiment requires further investigation.

17. Datta-Ray (1984: xiv) notes that the traditional mode of showing submission to the king’s sovereignty involves the subjects measuring the ground three times with their bodies, with knees, palms and forehead flat on the ground. The abbreviated form of this homage is one of bowing from the waist, with fingertips touching the ground three times.

18. Balikci (2008: 314-315) explains, “during the time of the kingdom, the Kagyed cham (*bKa’ brgyad ’cham*) used to be held at the Palace chapel during the last days of the year by the lamas of Pemayangtse monastery. [V]illagers... would send an offering of newly harvested grain to the Palace which helped to feed the participating lamas.” This was part of the “the end of year ritual, the loshi gurim (*lo gcig sku rim*—“ninth ritual of the end of the year”)...[where] lamas read the ritual text offering to Mahākāla (*mGon po’i bskang gso*) ten times over the ten-day period...and perform[ed] its cham on the last two days” (ibid).

19. For example, for him the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is one such monument, which confers on martyrdom for the nation a greater affective intensity on a metaphysical register than a utilitarian view of state-subject relations would allow for.

20. The stress here is on the deployment of a narrative of secularization in liberal politics. The veracity and extent

of this secularization has long been questioned. See Asad (1993, 1999) for example.

21. By 1974 Sikkim had a bicameral dyarchy with eighteen elected members, seven each from the Nepalese and Bhutiya-Lepcha communities, one each for the Tsongs and Nepalese Hindu scheduled castes, a representative of the kingdom’s 54 Buddhist monasteries, and one from a general seat who was elected by the entire populace on a simple majority [with] the durbar nominat[ing] six councilors” (Datta-Ray 1984: 101).

22. India’s involvement in the Bangladesh crisis of 1971 had been narrativized as India’s inevitable moral and pragmatic response to the crises of millions of refugees spilling over into its borders. Perhaps this preexistent narrative structure, fresh in public memory, made it easier to cast Sikkim as a similar story. Cooke (1980: 245-247) documents such a report in Newsweek, damning the monarchy for creating “refugees from paradise.”

23. Hope Cooke worked to organize fashion events showcasing Sikkimese ethnic clothing in “upscale department stores, exclusive clubs, and museums in New York City and Washington, D.C” (Hiltz 2003: 81). Also Cooke (1980: 166) writes how her success in getting the Asia House in New York to establish a Sikkim Council drew the ire of the Indian Foreign Office.

24. The veracity of this referendum and its inflated figure have been questioned by Datta-Ray (1984) and Cooke (1980) among others. Datta-Ray (1984: 259) especially relies on an unpublished document by Nar Bahadur Khatiawara (who had been at the forefront of the anti-palace agitations) and nine others, titled “Sikkim’s Merger-A Brief Resume” to make his point.

25. This ideological contest over the depiction of poverty in India for foreign publics is a question far from settled. It is reopened with every other film of the realist genre made in India and shown globally. For Ray this issue resulted in his historic quibbles with the Hindi film actress Nargis, who went on to be a Member of Parliament and one of his staunchest opponents (<http://satyajitray.ucsc.edu/critics.html>).

26. The same article seems to offer two dates.

27. Hope Cooke (personal correspondence March 5, 2013) states that since the film was owned by Sikkim (paid for partly by the then Government and partly by the *Chos rgyal* himself), the dissemination of the film was not within her rights. She had possession of a copy for a brief period after *Chos rgyal’s* death, when legalities were being figured out. She writes thus that “my stepson Wangchuk was *Chos rgyal’s* heir and it was he - appropriately - who allowed the film to be copied and shown via his Cultural Trust.”

28. Ray's other documentaries were largely biographical, like *Inner Eye* about the blinded painter Binode Bihari Mukherjee and the 1961 documentary on Tagore.

29. The screening though was ultimately postponed, due to a two-day bandh in the state (*Sikkim NOW* 2011a).

30. For an excellent discussion on the new modes in which a distinct Sikkimese identity is articulated by ritualizing a consolidated ethnicity of Sikkim, as a nation within the Indian nation, see Vandenhelsken (2011). She also invokes A C Sinha's (2006) discussion of the 'politics of tribalization' to highlight how Sikkim as a state positions itself as distinct but not opposed to the Indian state to claim certain development benefits.

31. Even after agreements had been signed in 1973 with India and the Sikkimese political parties, which substantially curbed the authority of the monarchy, the Sikkim Guards had remained under the direct control of the *Chos rgyal* (Datta-Ray 1984: 7). Hence it almost stood as the last vestige of the legitimacy of Sikkim's royal polity. Expectedly then, the attack on and overpowering of the palace guards by the Indian military on April 9, 1975 is chosen by Datta-Ray as the moment to depict the end of the monarchy, as opposed to other moments such as the legislative measures passed in the Indian parliament to that effect.

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