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*Not Isolated, Actively Isolationist: Towards a subaltern history of the Nilgiri hills before British imperialism**

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Abstract

The Nilgiri hill communities have for a long time been the focus of anthropological inquiry, though they have rarely been the focus of historical inquiry that delves more deeply into the past than the colonial period. And, while the fields of history and anthropology have moved beyond tropes of primitive and timeless, our studies of those formerly so-called 'timeless primitives' have remained stuck in time. I argue, therefore, for an interdisciplinary modified Subaltern Studies approach, integrating data from anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, and genetics, to develop a *longue durée* social history of the Nilgiri hills. For the Nilgiri communities, as with other tribal communities, narratives about their past have tended to emphasize their isolation until the modern period. In this article, drawing together data from several disciplines, I argue that the communities of the Nilgiris, especially the Toda, so frequently held up as examples of cultural isolation, were not truly isolated, neither from neighbouring tribal communities, nor from the states and empires of the plains below. I argue

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that the maintenance of distinctive religious, subsistence, and linguistic practices, despite contact with a wider world, is evidence of an active process of isolationist group formation/maintenance and resistance to other ways of being.

The Nilgiri district may almost be said to be one of those happy countries which have no history. Even had it been sufficiently rich or strategically important to tempt an invader, its inhospitable climate, the difficulties of the passes up to it and the feverish jungle which hedged it round would have deterred any but the boldest. But it never contained any towns worth sacking or forts worth capture; and the only inhabitants were poor graziers and cultivators. Consequently the rapacious rulers round about almost disregarded it; and the only parts of it which figure prominently in their chronicles are the passes (like Gajal-hatti on the north-east) which enabled them to circumvent it and get at their foes on the other side without actually crossing it.

— W. Francis, *The Nilgiris (Gazetteer)*,
Government of Madras, Madras, 1908, p. 90

Introduction

The history of the Nilgiri hills of South India does not begin in 1799 when the British took possession of the territory as a result of winning the third Anglo-Mysore war, though it seemed so to most of the early colonial scholars who wrote about the place. In many ways, the colonial scholarship, and even some of the scholarship that followed in anthropology and in other disciplines, has represented the Nilgiri hills as a *terra nullis*: remote, only sparsely populated by 'primitive', isolated tribes, and without agriculture.[1] Though the broader field of anthropology has, since the 1980s at least, shifted quite significantly away from this colonial frame, and rejected many of the assumptions inherent in this isolated *terra nullis* conception, there have been few investigations of the early history of this region to shed light on the *terra populata* and the interconnected histories of those who live(d) there. The exceptions to this trend are Kathleen Morrison, who has been working on the long-term histories of 'forager-traders' in the Western Ghats, and Alan Zagarell, whose research on the archaeology

[1] D. B. Kapp, 'The Kuṟumbas' relationship to the "megalithic" cult of the Nilgiri hills (South India)', *Anthropos*, vol. 80, 1985; M. Poyil, 'Megalithism and tribal ritualism: a passage through the Kurumbas of Attappadi', *Advances in Historical Studies*, vol. 2, 2013; K. Janardhanan, P. Sandhya, and S. Usha, 'Studies on the hepatoprotective property of folklore medicinal plants of Badagas in Nilgiri Biospehere Reserve, Western Ghats—phytochemistry and antioxidant activity', *International Journal of Ethnomedicine and Pharmacological Research*, vol. 1, 2013.

of the Nilgiris, and the adjacent Moyar Ditch anticipates many of the conclusions reached here.[2]

This article is a synthesis of many lines of evidence from the fields of history, anthropology, archaeology, genetics, and linguistics, and, though it is largely a review of the existing bodies of literature, I provide a novel lens through which to view Nilgiris social history, by bringing together concepts drawn from Gramsci, Ramchandra Guha and the Subaltern Studies group, James Scott's theories of state avoidance, and Rogers Brubaker's theories of groupness and groupism.[3] Through this lens, a refracted and moving picture emerges—a story of migration, isolationism, of cultural distinctiveness and social interconnectedness. Though not directly drawing on their work, this article falls within (and is inspired by) the trend of recent scholarship understanding both pre-colonial and colonial relations of ethnic and tribal groups by Ajay Skaria, Sumit Guha, Crispin Bates,

[2] Morrison argues that these communities have been gathering and exchanging non-timber forest products for lowland products like rice and have maintained interactions up and down the slopes of the hills for around 2000 years. She has also argued that, though they may appear 'primitive' in subsistence and social organization, their adaptations and economies are intimately tied to states and to complex economic systems. This work builds, in part, on her important contributions; see for example, K. D. Morrison, 'Environmental history, the spice trade, and the state in South India', in *Ecological Nationalisms: Nature, Livelihoods, and Identities in South Asia*, G. Cederlöf and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds), Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2005, pp. 49–50; K. D. Morrison, 'Historicizing adaptation, adapting to history: forager-traders in South and Southeast Asia', in *Forager Traders in South and Southeast Asia: Long Term Histories*, K. D. Morrison and L. Junker (eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002; K. D. Morrison, 'Pepper in the hills: upland-lowland exchange and the intensification of the spice trade', in Morrison and Junker, *Forager Traders in South and Southeast Asia*; K. D. Morrison, 'Foragers and forager-traders in South Asian worlds: some thoughts from the last 10,000 years', in *The Evolution and History of Human Populations in South Asia*, M. D. Petraglia and B. Allchin (eds), Springer, Dordecht, the Netherlands, 2007; A. Zagarell, 'State and community in the Niligiri mountains', *Michigan Academician*, vol. XXVI, 1994; A. Zagarell, 'Hierarchy and heterarchy: the unity of opposites', in *Heterarchy and the Analysis of Complex Societies*, C. L. Crumley and J. E. Levy (eds), American Anthropological Association, Arlington, 1995.

[3] I do not cite any archival material, not because I have not looked for it, but because I have yet to find any colonial archival material that is directly relevant to the questions addressed here. Colonial sources are rich for the colonial period but, aside from the published research by British authors on the history of the region or surrounding regions, there is not much light that colonial sources can shed on the pre-colonial periods; cf. Francis, *The Nilgiris (Gazetteer)*; D. Sutton, *Other Landscapes: Colonialism and the Predicament of Authority in Nineteenth-Century South India*, Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, Copenhagen, 2009.

and many others.[4] With this article, I attempt to shed light on the pre-colonial (and some might say pre-modern) history of the region, with the aim to also improve our understanding of the relations between colonizer and colonized in the colonial (or modern) period.

The Nilgiri region is one that has been understood for a long time to be a place with one society, and many cultures. For those unfamiliar with the region, it is occupied (and has been in documented history) by five (or more) cultural groups, distinguished by language, religion, and self-ascribed identity. These are the Toda, Badaga, Kota, Irula, and Kurumba (and/or Nayaka, with several sub-divisions). These communities, to briefly summarize many decades of ethnography, are culturally distinct, speak different (but related) languages, practise group endogamy, and form more or less a single society, in that they interact socially, economically, and ritually with each other (and to varying extents with the people of the plains to the east and west of them). This has been more or less true since the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, in as much as any generalization can be.

As I will argue in this article, the Toda, in particular, considered by scholars to have remained isolated until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were not isolated, but rather isolationist, which I argue was both a reaction to attempts by plains states to dominate them and a desire to maintain distinct group identity in the face of the in-migration of other communities (perhaps as refugees from state domination).

For reasons of historical and disciplinary bias, the Toda and Badaga communities have been the focus of significantly more research in

[4] Cf. D. Hardiman, 'Power in the forest: the Dangs, 1820–1940', in *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honor of Ranajit Guha*, D. Arnold and D. Hardiman (eds), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994; A. Skaria, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998; S. Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India: 1200–1991*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999; S. Guha, *Beyond Caste Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present*, Brill, Leiden, 2013; C. Bates and M. Carter, 'Tribal migration in India and beyond', in *The World of the Rural Labourer in Colonial India*, G. Prakash (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1992; C. Bates, 'Race, caste and tribe in central India: the early origins of Indian anthropometry', in *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, P. Robb (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995; N. Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns: An Anthropological History of Bastar 1854–2006*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2008; R. Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya, 20th Anniversary Edition*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2010; S. Das Gupta, *Adivasis and the Raj: Socio-Economic Transition of the Hos 1820–1932*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2011; S. Das Gupta and R. S. Basu (eds), *Narratives from the Margins: Aspects of Adivasi History in India*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2012; A. Prasad, *Against Ecological Romanticism: Verrier Elwin and the Making of An Anti-Modern Tribal Identity*, Three Essays Collective, Gurgaon, 2011.

anthropology, as well as genetics and linguistics, than others. The deep histories of other communities of the Nilgiris, including the Kota, Kurumba, and Irula, are not well understood—a situation that needs to be remedied, but unfortunately cannot be addressed here.[5]

Framing

In this article, drawing inspiration from James C. Scott's work on state avoidance, and from Brubaker's reconceptualization of groups, 'groupness', and 'groupism', I argue that the constitution of the communities in the Nilgiri hills needs to be examined as a process of developing groupism (otherwise known as ethnogenesis) over time, in relation to each other and to the plains states that surrounded them.[6] To briefly define Brubaker's concept of groupism (to which I return later), it is the tendency of ethnic groups to define themselves emically as fixed and bounded entities, and the tendency of scholars and outsiders to treat those boundaries and groups as ontologically real. He further argues that scholars should view the reification of groups as the result of historical processes and not as timeless, even though this timelessness is often part of the emic narrative.[7]

Scott's arguments about the nature of hill peoples and hill societies in Southeast Asia provide an important theorization of the relationships between hill peoples and lowland agrarian states. He argues that:

[5] Some ethnographic research has been done with the contemporary Kurumba, Kota, and Irula people but, like much ethnographic writing, such work does not deal much in history, but rather in their present-day circumstances and cultural practices. See N. Bird-David, 'Beyond "the hunting and gathering mode of subsistence": culture-sensitive observations on the Nayaka and other modern hunter-gatherers', *Man*, vol. 27, 1992; N. Bird-David, 'The Nilgiri tribal systems: a view from below', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 28, 1994; D. G. Mandelbaum, 'Polyandry in Kota society', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 40, 1938; D. G. Mandelbaum, 'The world and the world view of the Kota', *American Anthropologist, Comparative Studies of Cultures and Civilzations, No. 6, Village India: Studies in Little Community*, vol. 57, 1955. The Irulas rarely appear in studies devoted to them or their culture separate from the Nilgiri society as a whole; see W. A. Noble, 'Cultural contrasts and similarities among five ethnic groups in the Nilgiri district, Madras State, India, 1800–1963', Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, Baton Rouge, 1968.

[6] J. C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2009; R. Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without groups', *Archives of European Sociology*, vol. XLIII, 2002.

[7] Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without groups'.

Hill peoples are best understood as runaway, fugitive, maroon communities who have, over the course of two millennia, been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys—slavery, conscription, taxes, corvée labor, epidemics, and warfare. ... Virtually everything about these people's livelihoods, social organization, ideologies, and (more controversially) even their largely oral cultures, can be read as strategic positionings designed to keep the state at arm's length.[8]

Indeed, one of the largest communities of the Nilgiris, the Badaga, have an oral tradition that suggests that they arrived in the hills as refugees from central Karnataka around the time of the fall of the Vijayanagara empire in the sixteenth century.[9] And, though I introduce, by way of example, this oral history of Badaga self-avowed state avoidance, various lines of evidence discussed later in the article suggest that this is not the whole story of the creation of Badaga groupness (the process of the formation of Badaga as a self-defined group).

As I will discuss later, active state avoidance in no way necessitates the total isolation of hill communities. If and when the goal is to avoid state power, domination, exploitation, or taxation, hill communities nonetheless could and did continue to interact, trade, and communicate with the communities of the regions surrounding the hills. State avoidance does not at all imply total avoidance of all contact with surrounding regions. Even though I argue that Scott's theory of the state-averse has utility in the context of the Nilgiri hills, not all aspects of Scott's analysis are perfectly or directly applicable to the South Indian case.[10]

Notes on Subaltern Studies

As this article explicitly frames itself as subaltern, before continuing, I must define what I mean by the term. I use the term 'subaltern' to

[8] Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*.

[9] P. Hockings, *Ancient Hindu Refugees: Badaga Social History 1550–1975*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, 1980; P. Hockings, *So Long a Saga: Four Centuries of Badaga Social History*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2013.

[10] There are issues even with Scott's analysis of the history of state avoidance for 'zomia', the region of upland Southeast Asia on which his book is focused. These critiques have been best addressed by Lieberman in his review of the book, which I will not go into here. See V. Lieberman, 'A zone of refuge in Southeast Asia? Reconceptualizing interior spaces (review of The art of not being governed: an anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia)', *Journal of Global History*, vol. 5, 2010.

emphasize that the focus of this enquiry is on peoples who have no written history of their own, and whose history has been written thus far in a framework that was profoundly biased.[11] By focusing on the subaltern subject, especially in colonial history, the Subaltern Studies movement has paved the way for a great many new interpretations that were not possible before. However, I am not concerned only with the history of the Nilgiris peoples as subjects and subalterns in relation to European colonial rulers. They were in many ways subaltern to, if not always effectively subject to, many South Asian states and empires before Europeans arrived.

The subaltern is mutually constituted 'in a binary relationship of which the other [side] is dominance'.[12] Just as Ramchandra Guha and colleagues have argued that subalternity cannot be conceived without its counterpart—state domination, I argue as an extension of Scott that, in the study of hill peoples, the stateless, and state-averse, we must also remain aware of the mutual co-constitution of such refugee populations and the state.[13] As such, it becomes clear that the subjects of this investigation, the inhabitants of the Nilgiri hills, whether permanent or transient, were more than subaltern; they adopted a position of alterity, of otherness, outside the normative structures of hierarchy in state societies, though still in a social position for which the counter-position is state domination.

Subalterns, in the classic Gramscian sense, are the peasants and the lowest members the social hierarchy that constitutes an (agrarian) state as a both social and political entity.[14] Here I argue that there is a fruitful line of inquiry on the relationship between the subalterns (in the Gramscian sense) and the state-averse (*sensu* Scott). It may be said that one is more 'sub-' and the other is more '-altern', the latter perhaps having been willing to take up alterity in the form of small-scale social organization as an alternative to subordination. While I am broadly framing this work as a form of subaltern inquiry, it may

[11] See R. Guha, *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1982; R. Guha, *A Subaltern Studies Reader: 1986–1995*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1997; G. Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: deconstructing historiography', in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, R. Guha and G. C. Spivak (eds), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988.

[12] Guha, *Subaltern Studies I*, p. 1.

[13] Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*.

[14] A. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1971; E. H. Louai, 'Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: historical developments and new applications', *African Journal of History and Culture*, vol. 4, 2012.

be more fitting to come up with some other term for those people who, we might suspect, disliked the position of the subaltern peasant in the social hierarchy of the state enough to leave behind that social position for a life in the hills.

Much of the early literature on the Nilgiri hills demonstrates an assumption about the isolation of hill peoples (similar to the pattern observed by Scott), which was derived in part from the idea of their having been 'left behind' in the 'march of progress'. It is perhaps obvious, but nevertheless worth pointing out, that it is faulty logic to assume that because the hill peoples are so divergent from the valleys and plains in terms of language, cultural practices, subsistence, and social organization that they must have become so only as the result of prolonged, and more or less absolute, isolation.

Strongly divergent languages and cultural practices need not be the result of literal isolation, but rather can result from the strategic positioning of people who are well aware of the social structures and economic systems of the lower elevations, but who are or were actively resisting participation in those structures and systems.[15]

Landscapes

The Nilgiri hills are located at the intersection of the boundaries between the contemporary states of Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. These modern state boundaries have been drawn on the basis of linguistic lines, as well as on what was believed to be the historic boundaries of the various kingdoms that preceded British conquest.

The hills are distinctive in their topography, vegetation, temperature, and rainfall. They are marked by steep and forested slopes, on which grow some important non-timber forest products, especially pepper (*Piper nigrum*).[16] The distribution of forest, grassland, and cultivated land on the upper plateau has changed significantly over the last two millennia, and continues to change.[17]

[15] Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, p. x.

[16] Morrison, 'Pepper in the hills'.

[17] Morrison, 'Environmental history'; L. Caner, D. Lo Seen, Y. Gunnell, B. R. Ramesh, and G. Bourgeon, 'Spatial heterogeneity of land cover response to climatic change in the Nilgiri highlands (southern India) since the last glacial maximum', *The Holocene*, vol. 17, 2007; R. Nalina, T. Meenambal, and R. Sathyanarayan Sridhar, 'Land use land cover dynamics of Nilgiri District, India inferred from satellite imageries', *American Journal of Applied Sciences*, vol. 11, 2014.

The hills are themselves not internally environmentally homogeneous, though they are distinct from the very lush plains of Kerala to the west, the somewhat drier plains of the Erode and Coimbatore Districts of Tamil Nadu to the east, and the Chamrajnagar and Mysore Districts of Karnataka and Wayanad District of Kerala to the north. The slopes of the hills are steep and for the most part densely forested, except where there are sheer rock faces. These steep slopes rise to a plateau that is undulating, which was, as described by early British visitors and surveyors, mostly grassland, with pockets of forest, and some cultivated land.[18] The western part of the plateau is more forested and has less dense settlement, now and in the nineteenth century, than the eastern part of the plateau. The extent of cultivated land at the time of the first British visitors is debated, as they often described a significantly less cultivated landscape than they actually represented on maps. For example, there is an 1822 map, based on a survey by Benjamin Swain Ward, that appears to show extensive cultivated land, but there is a contrasting written account by Ward himself that downplays the extent and importance of agriculture on the Nilgiri plateau.[19]

The physiographic differences of South India have also been marked culturally and in the Sangam literature, in the form of the five '*tinais*', or landscapes, of Tamil Sangam literature. The hills are called '*kurinji*' after the flower that blooms once every 12 years, and are associated with hill tribes and forest products like honey; the '*pālai*', or wasteland, is dry and mostly uninhabited; '*mullai*' is both jungle or forest and pasture, associated with pastoralists; '*marutam*' is the lowland plains and agricultural fields, associated with rice and rural life; '*neytal*' is the seashore, associated with fisherfolk and salt production.[20] This cultural division of landscape is idealized, but also reflects the reality of numerous ecotones and ecozones, with distinct flora and fauna, and to some extent inhabited and/or utilized by different communities of people with different subsistence and economic practices. The landscape is not characterized by a simple dichotomy of hills and plains.

[18] H. B. Grigg, *A Manual of the Nílagiri District in the Madras Presidency*, Government Press, Madras, 1880.

[19] Ward's account is reprinted in Grigg, *A Manual of the Nílagiri District*, pp. lx–lxx; map reprinted in F. Price, *Ootacamund: A History*, Government Press, Madras, 1908.

[20] A. K. Ramanujan, *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology [Kue Interi]*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1967; K. V. Zvelebil, *Companion Studies to the History of Tamil Literature*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1992.

Even in the Sangam literature, it is clear that the hills were not part of the lowland kingdoms; the extent of territorial control of those early states is spotty across numerous types of landscapes. Even so, the Sangam literature as a corpus does seem to draw a political distinction between hills and everything else. As observed by S. Darsana, the Tamil title that translates as 'chieftain' was used to refer to political leaders of the hills and 'king' to their counterparts in the plains.[21] Such a semantic distinction suggests that the authors of the Sangam poems perceived a difference in the political organizations of the hills and various landscapes of lower elevation. The Sangam literature, and therefore these perceptions and representations of the hills and the hill peoples (by the Sangam bard-poets of the plains), could be as old as the third century BCE but most likely dates to around the first to third centuries CE.[22]

History

To explore the history of the hill peoples, both in contact with and resistance against the lowland states and empires, requires a subaltern methodology. Some information can be gleaned from limited texts and epigraphic sources, but the fugitive aspects of hill peoples' lives make such a project even more challenging than exploring the subaltern histories of peasants who lived in much more intimate contact with their rulers.[23]

The relationship of Nilgiris people to written history is not necessarily the same as the classic subaltern subject. They are not just another group of people with no written records. These are people, many of whom—I propose—purposefully evaded written records, and thereby any form of legibility to the state.[24]

[21] S. B. Darsana, 'Megaliths in the Upper Palar Basin, Tamil Nadu: a new perspective', *Man and Environment*, vol. XXIII, 1998.

[22] H. Tieken, *Kāvya in South India: Old Tamil Can So Poetry*, Egbert Forsten, Groningen, 2001; E. Wilden, 'Towards an internal chronology of old Tamil Caward literature or how to trace the laws of a poetic universe', *WZKS*, vol. 46, 2002, pp. 105–33; G. L. Hart, 'Review: *Kāvya in South India: Old Tamil Can So Poetry*, by Herman Tieken Egbert Forsten, Groningen, 2001. Pp. 270', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 124, 2004, pp. 180–4.

[23] As compared with the work done by Skaria and Guha in western India and the Deccan, there are even fewer pre-colonial written sources to draw from; cf. Skaria, *Hybrid Histories*; Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*.

[24] Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*, pp. ix–x.

The earliest and most comprehensive historical account of the Nilgiri hills, and their relations with the lowland states around them, is found in Francis's *The Nilgiris Gazetteer*. Ironically, he begins his historical account with the passage used as an epigraph to this article:

> The Nilgiri district may almost be said to be one of those happy countries which have no history. Even had it been sufficiently rich or strategically important to tempt an invader, its inhospitable climate, the difficulties of the passes up to it and the feverish jungle which hedged it round would have deterred any but the boldest. But it never contained any towns worth sacking or forts worth capture; and the only inhabitants were poor graziers and cultivators. Consequently the rapacious rulers round about almost disregarded it; and the only parts of it which figure prominently in their chronicles are the passes (like Gajal-hatti on the north-east) which enabled them to circumvent it and get at their foes on the other side without actually crossing it.[25]

In prefacing his history of the Nilgiris by saying that it may 'almost' be said to have no history, Francis reinforces the impression that, somehow, in spite of all the forts built, and attempts at conquest and rule, the Nilgiris remained isolated from outside influence. But, though the repetition of the trope of their isolation abounds, Francis's actual accounts of the historical and epigraphic data demonstrate the repeated attempts to conquer and incorporate the Nilgiris into state territories beginning in the tenth century.

The list of dynasties and would-be rulers of the Nilgiris is rather long over the period from 900 CE to 1799, when the British took possession of the territory. Those dynasties that at least laid claim to (parts of) the Nilgiris territory include: the Ganga, Chola, Hoysala, Dannayaka, Vijayanagara, Wodeyar/Udaiyar (Rajas of Ummatur), and the Sultans of Mysore, Hyder Ali, and Tipu Sultan. Forts in the hills, especially with clear views towards the plains and approaches, were constructed possibly as early as the Hoysala dynasty in the fourteenth century, though the largest and most solid evidence for fort construction in and on the hills comes fairly late with the Rajas of Ummatur in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[26] All together, there are the remnants of three dozen forts in and on the Nilgiris, especially at the main approaches to the hills from the plains.[27] Given that the

[25] Francis, *The Nilgiris (Gazetteer)*, p. 90.
[26] Ibid., p. 90; Zagarell, 'State and community'.
[27] It is interesting to note that this situation is completely different from the history of hill forts in Western India described by Guha, in that the various Nilgiris communities seem not to have ever occupied them or used them for any purpose.

region as a whole is a fairly small 500 square kilometres, that is a lot of forts, especially for a place so supposedly isolated and left out of the history of conquests by Francis's 'rapacious rulers'.[28]

Metz, an early German missionary and ethnographer, collected an oral text that recounts a memory of a Toda king and queen, and how what might be interpreted as a Toda state was conquered by one of the Rajas of Umattur. He says:

> According to a tradition which the Toda have preserved, they once had a King and Queen reigning over them, but all that they now know about them is that they were subdued and deprived of their authority by one of the Rajahs of the house of Oomatoor [Ummatur], who was driven to the Hills by his rival, an ancestor of the present Rajah of Mysore, and took possession of the tract lying between the Orange Valley and Ootacamund, called by the Badagas 'Todanaud.' The usurper built a fort named Malékoté, near Kalhatty, the ruins of which still exist and prove that it must have been a comparatively strong place.[29]

The mention of the incorporation of the Wayanad (formerly known as the Wainad), a somewhat lower-elevation plateau attached to the north-western part of the Nilgiris, into the territories of the Ganga kingdom of Mysore in 903 CE seems to be the earliest written evidence of attempts to control the Nilgiri territories, though the claim seems not to include the upper elevations.

Toda oral history, as collected by M. B. Emeneau (and W. H. R. Rivers, though Emeneau's accounts are clearer), recounts several occasions when armies invaded from the plains, though these lack any specific date. These accounts give the overall impression of ongoing antagonism and dislike of the plains people. One particular story recounts why men from particular septs cannot become priests in the ti· (sacred) dairy of the Noṣ clan, but incidentally recalls an army or raiding party from the plains who threatened to steal the sacred buffaloes, and simultaneously were extorting, or attempting to extort, cash money from the Todas:

Instead, these forts were only really appealing to various chieftains and kings from the north or the east, who competed with one another to occupy them. It seems that, if no particular king was actually occupying a fort, then these remained empty and unclaimed until another king came along to take them; cf. Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity*. P. Hockings, *Encyclopaedia of the Nilgiri Hills*, Manohar, Delhi, 2012, pp. 339–45.

[28] Francis, *The Nilgiris (Gazetteer)*, p. 90.

[29] J. F. Metz, *The Tribes Inhabiting the Neilgherry Hills: Their Social Customs and Religious Rites [From the Rough Notes of a German Missionary, Edited by a Friend]*, [s.n.], Madras, 1864, p. 44.

From the plains [kongu] in former times an army came. At that time they went driving off the buffaloes of the ti· dairy. The poḷ o·ł priest of the wïs̲ division remained behind at the ti· dairy. The poḷ o·ł priest of the ti· division went some distance on the way following behind the buffaloes. They did not let the buffaloes go. The Tamilians who went driving off the buffaloes said 'If you give us money filling a kwa·x measure, we will let the buffaloes go. Otherwise we will not let them go'. The poḷ o·ł's assistant (ko·lt mox), following behind, went on weeping. Then he remembered the one coin which he had tied in his priest's garment. At that time he untied the coin, and saying, 'If the buffaloes of Noṣ ti·, the O·ṛθi· dairy, the Paikara river, the poḷ o·ł priests [and the priests' garments] have power, may this coin fill up the kwa·x measure with coins!', he threw the coin in the kwa·x measure. The coin filling up the kwa·x measure with coins—the coin itself which he had thrown in slipped out on the ground. Then those who had gone driving off the buffaloes let the buffaloes go, and taking the coins in the kwa·x measure they went away. The poḷ o·ł's assistant took up the coin which had slipped out on the ground and tied in the corner of his garment, and driving the buffaloes he went away to the ti· dairy. Then thereafter, ... they made them [the men of Kï·wïṛ clan] not to be ordained for the ti· division and the wïs̲ division of the ti·of the Noṣ clan.[30]

The Toda and Kota oral texts collected by Emeneau also provide numerous examples of interaction with communities from outside the Nilgiris, though with little specific historical context or dating. Many of these were not positive interactions. There is one oral text that instructs the listener not to make friends with Tamilians, or form economic partnerships with Kurumbas.[31] There are instances of raids carried out by an army of men, attempts to steal buffaloes by just a few, betrayal of friendship, cheating, and so on. Several stories recall armies or raiding parties coming to steal buffaloes, which is not surprising. However, these stories have a parallel in which the Tamilians come to steal Badagas:

Tamilians from the plains, from a village called To·ṇykwa·ṭ on this side of Satimangalam, knowing 'These Badagas are here', took off these Badagas, saying, 'Pay land tax!'—so they say. The Todas who were at Wiṣo·ṛ mund heard, 'Tamilians are taking off the Badagas whom we ourselves brought up [like children]'—so they say.... [The] priest, in the middle of churning the milk, with the butter which he had taken in his hand went chasing the Tamilians who took off the Badagas—so they say. ... Then this priest, as soon as he saw them, prayed, 'If the mund, the sacred place is powerful, ... May the Tamilians become stone!', and threw on them the butter which he

[30] M. B. Emeneau, *Toda Grammar and Texts*, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 267.
[31] Ibid., pp. 364–5.

had taken in his hand—so they say. Then the Tamilians who had taken off the Badagas and the dogs which had come with them and the butter which the priest threw became stone—so they say. The Badagas whom the Tamilians had taken off turned and returned to their village—so they say. To this day near the mund which we call Pö·ṛxaṣ ('Tamilian Stones') figures which are like men and which are like dogs are made of stone. ... It is because these became stone there that the name Pö·ṛxaṣ came to this mund.[32]

While most stories involving people from the plains portray them as cheating or stealing from the Todas, there is at least one story in which a Toda woman cheated a Chetti out of two bells. She promised him 30 buffalo heifers, which he took and started to depart, but she asked a priest to pray for the return of the buffaloes, and the buffaloes returned, leaving the Chetti with neither his bells nor his buffaloes.[33] Overall, these stories suggest a history of antagonism, especially with the people of the plains who came up to the hills. The only mention of someone coming to collect a tax is the one in which the Tamilians were taking away the Badaga people, apparently because they owed taxes, perhaps to take them away and make them labour to pay off their taxes.

While tax collectors do not feature prominently in these stories, it seems stories of conquests are also mostly absent. The only example is the story recounted by Metz, suggesting that the Toda once had a king and queen whose throne was usurped by a chieftain or king from Ummattur, in present-day southern Karnataka. On the other hand, there are several stories and cases of Todas going down from the hills to interact with outsiders, and those stories are generally more positive. One example is of a Toda man who fled the hills after a family feud with his brother and his brother's wife. He went down to the Wayanad and asked for help. He was given a house, a wife, and buffaloes (on loan) and, with this assistance, he became rich and prosperous living in the Wayanad. The story essentially tells how it came to be that there was a Toda village in the Wayanad.[34]

It seems that the Toda perspective on relations with the world outside the hills was that those who came up to the hills usually meant trouble, but business could be conducted, help obtained, and so on, if a Toda person went down to the plains. The Toda, through these oral texts, tell of their aversion to unsolicited interference in their hill-top affairs. On the other hand, they were more than happy

[32] Ibid., p. 285.
[33] Ibid., p. 269.
[34] Ibid., p. 295.

to obtain goods and interact with the people of the Wayanad and Tamils, on their own terms.

Archaeology: study of prehistory and para-history[35]

Archaeological evidence, much of it also collected in the nineteenth century as a part of antiquarian interests and British colonial projects, presents an interesting and self-contradictory picture. On the one hand, the Nilgiris have long been considered as fully integrated into the regional South Indian 'culture area' from the Neolithic, or at least the Iron Age onwards.[36] This is because the region is (or was at least through the nineteenth century) full of megalithic stone monuments that appeared, in most respects, to belong to the widespread tradition of megalithic construction across South India that began around 1200 BCE. However, the only systematic excavation of a megalith on the Nilgiri hills produced a radiocarbon date of 910 ± 90 CE (uncalibrated), and the style of pottery and material culture found in the megaliths at Pykara excavated by Hockings is the same as that found in all of the many megaliths dug up by nineteenth-century antiquarians.[37] Cross-dating the unsystematically excavated

[35] By the coinage of 'para-history', I mean that, from 900 CE onwards, in other words what, in Europe has been termed the medieval period, the Nilgiris region was populated, and was referenced by outside political entities in various forms of documents. But, for the inhabitants of the Nilgiris themselves, mostly illiterate, they would still be considered 'pre-historic' and were thought of as such by early antiquarians. It also makes little sense even to use the more recent coinage 'proto-historic'. The Nilgiris are proximate to history, next to, and alongside, literate societies and therefore a 'para-historic' community.

[36] J. W. Breeks, 'The Todas', in *An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilagiris*, J. W. Breeks (ed.), India Museum, London, 1873; M. J. Walhouse, 'On non-sepulchral rude stone monuments', *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 7, 1878; L. S. Leshnik, *South Indian 'Megalithic' Burials: The Pandukal Complex*, Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, Wiesbaden, 1974; R. Brubaker, 'Aspects of mortuary variability in the south Indian iron age', *Bulletin of the Deccan College*, vol. 60–61 (2000–01), 2001; S. Abraham, 'Social complexity in early Tamilakam: sites and ceramics from the Palghat Gap, Kerala, India', *Social Complexity in Early Tamilakam: Sites and Ceramics from the Palghat Gap, Kerala, India*, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2002; Zagarell, 'State and community'; Zagarell, 'Hierarchy and heterarchy'; A. Zagarell, 'The megalithic graves of the Nilgiri hills and Moyar Ditch', in *Blue Mountains Revisited: Cultural Studies on the Nilgiri Hills*, P. Hockings (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997; A. Zagarell, 'Rock art', in *Encyclopaedia of the Nilgiri Hills*, P. Hockings (ed.), Manohar Press, New Delhi, 2012.

[37] P. Hockings, 'Paikara: an iron age burial in South India', *Asian Perspectives*, vol. XVIII, 1975.

material, in particular the ceramics and terracotta figurines, with this single dated megalith and archaeological material outside the Nilgiris suggests that the entire phenomenon of megalithic burial in the Nilgiris likely belongs entirely to the first millennium CE and later, and possibly the first few centuries BCE, but not the Iron Age (1200–400 BCE), as previously believed.

Occupation in the hills probably does go back at least as far as what is known in the rest of South India as the Neolithic (*circa* 3000 BCE), though very few data exist that can be shown to relate directly to this early settlement. Zagarell uses rock-art styles as a primary line of evidence.[38] Morrison has argued that the human use of the hills in this early period was more likely temporary and transient, rather than permanent.[39] Tamil Sangam literature provides another source, perhaps pertaining to the period from about 300 BCE to 300 CE.[40] This literature mentions the hills, or rather the slopes of the hills, as a source for spices, especially pepper that was brought down and loaded on to *yavana* (foreign) ships, bound ultimately for the Greco-Roman Mediterranean.[41]

What at first appeared to the British antiquarians, archaeologists, and anthropologists such as Harkness, Breeks, and Rivers as a deep continuity between the megalithic burials associated with extreme antiquity and the living communities is more likely a product of only the most recent 1000 or so years (the medieval period and later) of human activity in the region.[42] In other words, this seemingly 'primitive' archaeological culture does not belong to the hoary past, but instead appears to be contemporary with the rise of the Chola empire in the plains of Tamil Nadu to the south and east of the Nilgiri hills.

The archaeology of the region is known mostly through unsystematic excavation of megalithic constructions. Most of these excavations took

[38] Zagarell, 'The megalithic graves'; Zagarell, 'Rock art'.

[39] Morrison, 'Foragers and forager-traders'.

[40] The dating is still somewhat controversial. See Tieken, *Kāvya in South India*; H. Tieken, 'Old Tamil Caṅkam literature and the so-called Caṅkam period', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 40, 2003; Wilden, 'Towards an internal chronology'.

[41] See G. L. Hart and H. Heifetz, *The Four Hundred Songs of War and Wisdom: An Anthology of Poems From Classical Tamil [Puṟanāṉūṟu]*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1999.

[42] H. Harkness, *A Description of a Singular Aboriginal Race Inhabiting the Summit of the Neilgherry Hills, or Blue Mountains of Coimbatoor, in the Southern Peninsula of India*, Smith, Elder, and Co., London, 1832; J. W. Breeks, *An Account of the Primitive Tribes and Monuments of the Nilagiris*, India Museum, London, 1873; W. H. R. Rivers, *The Todas*, MacMillan and Co. Ltd, London, 1906.

place in the nineteenth century, often by men who were in the British military or Civil Service, who had an avocational interest in antiquities, who were in some cases also members of the Royal Asiatic Society or other scholarly organizations. Francis in 1908 wrote:

> As early as 1826, the Rev. James Hough said that some of [the megaliths] had been opened; Captain Harkness' book on the Todas, published in 1832, gave an account of his excavations into others with an illustration of his finds; and Lieutenant Burton, who wrote in 1847, put 'curiosity-hunting,' as he called it, first in his list of the amusements open to a visitor to Ootacamund. ... Even as early as that, he said, these antiquities had been 'so exposed to the pickaxes of indefatigable archeologists that their huge store of curiosities has been almost exhausted. Little remains but the fixtures.' Captain H. Congreve was the first to publish (in 1847) an illustrated account of the excavations he had made (he opened 46 cairns) and the relics he had found.[43]

Systematic archaeological enquiry did not get under way in South Asia until the early to mid-twentieth century.

Ethnography

There are, or at least there were as of the early nineteenth century, five communities in the Nilgiris identified as 'hill tribes': Toda, Kota, Badaga, Irula, and Kurumba (also known as Nayaka). Their classification as 'tribes' even in the classical anthropological sense is problematic, but this article is not the place in which to dwell on this issue.[44]

Here is the anthropological narrative (in a problematically ambiguous 'ethnographic present'[45]), as originated by early anthropologists and colonial observers, most prominently W. H. R. Rivers, and later expanded and systematized by William Noble and others.[46] David G. Mandelbaum sums it up well:

[43] Francis, *The Nilgiris (Gazetteer)*, p. 95.

[44] cf. M. H. Fried, *The Notion of Tribe*, Cummings, Menlo Park, CA, 1975; Morrison, 'Pepper in the hills'; Morrison, 'Environmental history'; Morrison, 'Foragers and forager-traders'; K. D. Morrison and M. T. Lycett, 'Forest products in a wider world: early historic connections across southern India', in *Connections and Complexity: New Approaches to the Archaeology of South Asia*, S. A. Abraham, P. Gullapalli, T. Raczek, and U. Rizvi (eds), Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, California, 2013; Hockings, *So Long a Saga*.

[45] A. Pandian, 'The time of anthropology: notes from a field of contemporary experience', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 27, 2012.

[46] Rivers, *The Todas*; E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, 'Kurumba or Kuruman', in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. 4*, E. Thurston and K. Rangachari (eds),

Four tribes, isolated together, mutually interdependent, yet culturally distinct .... For many centuries the tribes of the Nilgiri Hills in South India were isolated from the people of the plains below. The steepness of the hills and the climate of the plateau discouraged any extensive contacts with the Hindus of the lowlands. So the tribes formed a social enclave which was geographically close to Hindu life but culturally remote from it. The Nilgiri folk lived in economic and social symbiosis, the Todas being pastoral people, the Badagas agriculturalists, the Kotas artisans, the Kurumbas food gatherers and sorcerers.[47]

Mandelbaum's statements are representative of the view that anthropology held for a long time, namely that Nilgiris communities co-exist(ed) peacefully, and with a high degree of economic interdependence, while simultaneously maintaining ethnic and linguistic boundaries between them.

It is interesting that, while these ethnographies strongly emphasize the economic interdependence of the Nilgiris communities with each other, they rarely mention economic relations or interdependence with the plains or regions around the Nilgiris massif. This may well be a result of the bias regarding the more or less total isolation of the hills. Rivers, for example, recounts a Toda man walking down to a market in the Wayanad to buy rice, but suggests that such contacts are of much more recent origin, and that the 'true' or 'original' state of being was isolation.[48]

Government Press, Madras, 1909; E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, 'Badaga', in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. 1*, E. Thurston and K. Rangachari (eds), Government Press, Madras, 1909; E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, 'Irulas of the Nilgiris', in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. 2*, E. Thurston and K. Rangachari (eds), Government Press, Madras, 1909; E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, 'Kota', in Thurston and Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, *Vol. 4*; E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, 'Toda', in *Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. 7*, E. Thurston and K. Rangachari (eds), Government Press, Madras, 1909; D. G. Mandelbaum, 'Culture change among the Nilgiri tribes', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 43, 1941; M. B. Emeneau, 'Language and social forms: a study of Toda kinship and dual descent', in *Language, Culture and Personality: Essays in Memory of Edward Sapir*, L. Spier, A. E. Hallowell, and S. S. Newman (eds), Sapir Memorial Publication Fund, Menasha, Wisconsin, 1941, pp. 158–79; Noble, 'Cultural contrasts'; P. Hockings, 'On giving salt to buffaloes: ritual as communication', *Ethnology*, vol. 7, 1968; P. Hockings, 'Identity in complex societies: are the Badagas caste or tribe?', *Political Science Review*, vol. 7, 1968; Hockings, *Ancient Hindu Refugees*; P. Hockings, 'The cultural ecology of the Nilgiris district', in *Blue Mountains: The Ethnography and Biogeography of a South Indian Region*, P. Hockings (ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989; Hockings, *Encyclopaedia of the Nilgiri Hills*; Hockings, *So Long a Saga*.

[47] Mandelbaum, 'Culture change among the Nilgiri tribes', p. 19.

[48] Rivers, *The Todas*, pp. 18–19.

It does appear that goods were exchanged between regions, including the top of the Nilgiris plateau, the slopes, the Wayanad, and the plains, though the mechanisms probably varied in time and space. The slopes of the hills are known to have exchanged pepper, honey, and other non-timber forest products with the plains societies, while the Toda may have exchanged butter and ghee.[49] The Nilgiris communities (probably all of them) were consumers of rice, and perhaps also cotton (whether raw or spun or finished textile is not clear). However, there was not a pressing or urgent need for food grains like rice, since there were other grains and products that were grown in the hills—amaranth and millets. According to Hockings: 'Large groups of Badagas and Kotas used to go together to the market town of Gundlupet in southern Mysore, or to Karamadai, near Coimbatore. They carried hay, honey, opium, and clarified butter with them, and bartered these for salt, crude sugar, rice, coconut, tobacco, and trinkets.'[50] While there is clear evidence, therefore, for continuous and ongoing contact and exchange of goods between people of the hills and the plains, it does not suggest a real dependence on goods from the plains to survive—with salt perhaps being a necessity and therefore an exception.

The Toda, for anthropologists, are primary in many ways. They claim primacy in the hills as the region's first inhabitants. They were also the most fascinating and enthralling for early European writers. They seem(ed) the most strongly divergent in cultural practices, language, and identity. Second, at least in order of their supposed presence on the hills, were the Kota people—part-time agriculturalists and part-time craft producers, their language is the most closely related to Toda, though still significantly distinct. Third are the Badaga, meaning 'northerner'—a group whose oral history suggested to many authors that their origins did in fact lie to the north, and that they had migrated to the hills in the sixteenth century. Various forms of linguistic dating and historical convergences seem(ed) to suggest that this group migrated around the fall of the Vijayanagara polity, perhaps fleeing the city of Vijayanagara, which was sacked in 1565.[51] The other two groups, Irula and Kurumba, are occupants of the steep slopes of the hills and primarily engaged in hunting, gathering forest products

[49] cf. Morrison, 'Historicizing adaptation'; Morrison, 'Pepper in the hills'; Morrison, 'Foragers and forager-traders'.

[50] Hockings, 'On giving salt to buffaloes', p. 428, footnote 5.

[51] cf. Hockings, *Ancient Hindu Refugees*; Hockings, *So Long a Saga*.

such as honey, and perhaps some occasionally shifting horticulture. Other 'castes' are sometimes mentioned, identifiable as more recent and obvious transplants from the plains, though, as a result of their recent settlement in the hills, the British tended to treat them as not really 'counting' as part of hills society.[52]

One of the less agreed-upon features of Nilgiri society is whether or not, or to what extent, these communities are or were organized hierarchically in relation to one another. Some studies emphasize a hierarchy in which the Toda are the highest, based in part on concepts of purity and pollution, while others emphasize that the Badagas were given authority to arbitrate disputes between Todas and Badagas, and others. While this has been called a 'caste-like' system, I agree with Zagarell, who argued that the most reasonable interpretation is heterarchy. He suggests that the communities were ranked differently in relation to one another, depending on the social/economic/political context, and that additionally these hierarchies may have changed over time.[53] Even as we might suggest that Toda and Badaga were neither fully equal to one another, nor did one ever have complete power or domination over the other, it is clear that both viewed Kota, Kurumba, and Irula as lower, and potentially polluting. On the other hand, they were both afraid of Kurumba sorcery, and respected Kurumba magical and healing powers.

This narrative, and in many ways this article, is attempting to sidestep a debate on the construction of the categories of both caste and tribe, and the distinction between the two, hence my preference for the term 'communities' over both the terms 'caste' and 'tribe', and, for reasons stated above, also avoiding the term 'ethnic group'. There is not the space here for a full treatment of the myriad issues of classification and nomenclature. Dirks dealt with the historically

[52] See Metz, *The Tribes*; J. Ouchterlony and J. Shortt, *An Account of the Tribes of the Neilgherries, by J. Shortt, and a Geographical and Statistical Memoir of the Neilgherry Mountains by the Late Colonel Ouchterlony*, Higginbotham & Co., Madras, 1868; Rivers, *The Todas*; Mandelbaum, 'Culture change among the Nilgiri tribes'; R. G. Fox, '"Professional primitives": hunters and gatherers of nuclear South Asia', *Man in India*, vol. 49, 1969; Noble, 'Cultural contrasts'; Hockings, *Ancient Hindu Refugees*; A. R. Walker, *The Toda of South India: A New Look*, Hindustan Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1986.

[53] To argue that Nilgiri communities were averse to the domination of plains societies is not to say that they were averse to domination at all, or were living in a utopian egalitarian society. I suggest that they were averse to being dominated, which by no means suggests that people will not take the opportunity to create new hierarchies in which they are at the top; cf. Zagarell, 'Hierarchy and heterarchy'; Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*.

contingent and constructed nature of the concept of caste and of a caste 'system'. Béteille also deals with the problematic distinction between 'caste' and 'tribe', and the history of these terms in Indian sociology and anthropology.[54]

Ethnographic work in the last 50 years has done much to add depth and complexity to these questions, and to provide valuable data. Hockings has written extensively on the Badaga community, Walker on the contemporary Toda, and Bird-David and Noble on all five communities.[55] And, though I disagree with Hockings about some interpretations of his data, his publications have been invaluable to my discussions in this article. On the other hand, much of their work, and of most historians, has focused on recent changes and on confronting colonialism and 'modernity'. I argue that our historical understanding of the colonial period, and later, must be informed by an understanding of the histories of interaction, avoidance, domination, and attempted domination that preceded the arrival of Europeans. This article, while focusing on the 'pre-modern', is therefore addressed in large part to my colleagues of the 'modern'.

Reinterpreting social history: isolationism and groupism as process and event

Analytically in anthropology, these communities have been treated as real, observable entities. This is the problem identified by Brubaker as *groupism*:

[54] N. B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2001; A. Béteille, 'The concept of tribe with special reference to India', *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. 27, 1986; A. Béteille, 'The idea of indigenous people', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 39, 1998.

[55] Bird-David, 'The Nilgiri tribal systems'; Hockings, 'On giving salt to buffaloes'; Hockings, 'Identity in complex societies'; P. Hockings, *A Comprehensive Bibliography for the Nilgiri Hills of Southern India, 1603–1996*, Dynamiques des Milieuxet des Societes dansles EspacesTropicaux, Bordeaux, 1972; Hockings, 'Paikara'; Hockings, *Ancient Hindu Refugees*; P. Hockings, *Sex and Disease in a Mountain Community*, Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, 1980; P. Hockings, *Counsel from the Ancients: A Study of Badaga Proverbs, Prayers, Omens and Curses*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1988; Hockings, 'The cultural ecology of the Nilgiris district'; Hockings, *Encyclopaedia of the Nilgiri Hills*; Hockings, *So Long a Saga*; Noble, 'Cultural contrasts'; W. A. Noble, 'Nilgiri Dolmens (South India)', *Anthropos*, vol. Bd. 71, 1976; Walker, *The Toda of South India*; A. R. Walker, 'Sacred dairies, dairymen, and buffaloes of the Nilgiri mountains in South India', *Asian Highlands Perspectives*, vol. 21, 2012.

[Groupism is] the tendency to take discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis. In the domain of ethnicity, nationalism and race, I mean by 'groupism' the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed. I mean the tendency to reify such groups ... as if they were internally homogeneous, externally bounded groups, even unitary collective actors with common purposes.[56]

Groups appear, at many levels, to be very real things. Brubaker asks:

'What's wrong with this?' After all, it seems to be mere common sense to treat ethnic struggles as the struggles of ethnic groups, and ethnic conflict as conflict between such groups. I agree that this is the—or at least *a*—common-sense view of the matter. But we cannot rely on common sense here. Ethnic common sense—the tendency to partition the world into putatively deeply constituted, quasi-natural intrinsic kinds (Hirschfeld 1996)—is a key part of what we want to explain, not what we want to explain things *with*; it belongs to our empirical data, not to our analytical toolkit.[57]

Brubaker warns specifically that 'We should not uncritically *adopt categories of ethnopolitical practice* as our *categories of social analysis*'.[58]

The production of groups as defined entities is both a social and a political process. Brubaker emphasizes the process of self-identification, and the relations between outsiders such as anthropologists and sociologists and the 'group' as defined according to those emic definitions. The process of groupness can also be the result of definitions, criteria, and boundaries imposed and constructed by outsiders with goals less noble than academic study. Politics, and relations of power, within and between states (as in imperialism) are also key to the production of groupness through the sometimes asymmetrical, yet mutual, co-construction of group identity as produced in relations of domination, in which processes of defining a group come from both inside and outside. Though he did not conceive of it in these terms, Dirks described essentially this process with reference to the caste system, and castes as groups, as a product of relations between colonizer and colonized.[59]

[56] Brubaker, 'Ethnicity without groups', p. 164.
[57] Ibid., p. 165, emphasis in original.
[58] Ibid., p. 166, emphasis in original; also see F. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, Universitets Forlaget, Bergen, Oslo, 1969.
[59] Dirks, *Castes of Mind*.

Here, I present two histories of groupness as process and event. I examine the processes and events of groupness of the Toda and Badaga, since they are in many ways opposites. I begin with the Toda.

The groupness, that is to say the historical reality of an internally homogenous, externally bounded group, is much more manifest for the Toda than the Badaga and, though neither is entirely internally homogeneous, the Toda are more so. Toda groupness, and the ethnogenesis of the Toda as a community of shared practices, a linguistic community, and an endogamous community, seems, from all available evidence, to have occurred very early in history.

The linguistic evidence points to a long period of isolation, not necessarily from other members of the Nilgiris branch of the South Dravidian language family, but from speakers of the plains languages. To the extent that the Toda have been reified as a group and studied by anthropologists, sociologists, linguists, etc., this reification seems to correspond fairly well to the historical reality. That is to say that it appears that Toda identity and groupness coalesced more than 1000 years ago. Evidence is obviously scanty for such a claim, but there is mention of the ethnonym 'Toda' as one amongst a list of other groups in an account of an 1117 CE conquest of the region by the Hoysalas.[60] Later, in 1604 CE, the Portuguese Jesuit missionary Giacomo Finicio visited the 'Todamala' (Toda mountain) and describes his interactions with Toda and Badaga people. He records that he communicated with them through an interpreter who spoke Canara (Kannada), 'the language of the Badegas [*sic*], neighbours of the Todares [*sic*]'.[61] From his account, the traditional half-barrel-shaped house style and pastoral subsistence pattern seem also to have been features of a group called Toda.

Genetic evidence also supports a very early divergence of the Toda as an endogamous pastoralist community distinct from other non-pastoralist communities around them.[62] While many studies of the genetics of 'tribal' peoples in India have been done, this study includes Toda and other pastoralist communities within a larger sample of South Asians representative of the wider population. Romero and

[60] Francis, *The Nilgiris (Gazetteer)*, pp. 91–2.

[61] Finicio, cited in Rivers, *The Todas*, p. 721.

[62] I. G. Romero, C. B. Mallick, A. Liebert, F. Crivellaro, G. Chaubey, Y. Itan, M. Metspalu, M. Eaaswarkanth, R. Pitchappan, R. Villems, D. Reich, L. Singh, K. Thangaraj, M. G. Thomas, D. M. Swallow, M. M. Lahr, and T. Kivisild, 'Herders of Indian and European cattle share their predominant allele for lactase persistence', *Molecular Biology and Evolution*, vol. 29, 2012.

colleagues investigate the selection for, and distribution of, alleles that result in lactase persistence, or the ability to continue to consume milk and other dairy products into adulthood.[63] They conclude that Indian populations, north and south, Indo-European, and Dravidian speakers alike, share the same (-13910*T) allele that appears to have originated in Europe in the Neolithic, associated with the development of dairying as a primary subsistence strategy. However, the frequencies of this allele among different social/cultural divisions is variable and there are additional mutations that appear to have been derived since the arrival of this genetic input from Europe, several of which are concentrated in the Toda population.[64] The genetic differences of the Toda when compared with nearby populations and the fact that some of those differences specifically relate to a pastoralist subsistence economy tend towards the interpretation that the Toda were distinctive and maintained that distinctiveness without much gene flow over a long period.

In fact, the linguistic evidence, in particular the phonological divergence, suggests that Toda language was spoken only with in-group members and that there were rarely any non-native learners of the language.[65] Instead, Toda used Badaga language as a medium of communication with non-Toda people. According to Rivers, 'The Todas are a bilingual people speaking Badaga in their intercourse with other races and keeping Toda for themselves'.[66]

Many early observers made arguments about the distinctiveness of Toda phonology as evidence of the isolation of the community. I argue that we should consider the historical processes of Toda groupness, and to some extent intentional isolationism, as either directly or indirectly resulting in the distinctive features of the language that led scholars to initially interpret the Toda's language as evidence of their profound (and passive) isolation. One of the renowned linguists of Dravidian languages, Murray B. Emeneau, argued that:

> The existence of three mutually unintelligible Dravidian languages in the Nilgiris after many centuries of coexistence by three comparatively small communities in a small isolated area can only be explained in terms of preservation of difference (or possibly in the case of Toda and Kota,

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] A. Z. Foreman, personal communication.
[66] Rivers, *The Todas*, pp. 604–5.

establishment of difference) within a caste-like hierarchical structure of three communities.[67]

While I disagree that, specifically, hierarchical difference is the only way to explain this, and prefer the heterarchical argument made above, I think Emeneau is right about the social production of difference.[68]

Indeed, most early European accounts of interaction with the Toda are described as taking place through the medium of Badaga language. Most of the place names given for Toda places are actually Badaga names for those places. This may or may not have been a conscious strategy to keep the British (and others) at arm's length. It seems likely, however, that the choice to use Toda language for communication with group members resulted from a Toda perception of their own groupness. The use of Badaga as a *lingua franca* by multiple communities in the hills may also have facilitated an isolationist attitude in the use of Toda language, in that it provided Toda speakers with an alternate medium with which to communicate with outsiders. This may be comparable to (if perhaps a less extreme version of) the ways in which the Roma communities in Europe went to great lengths to maintain Romani as a language exclusive to those born into the community, even going so far as to intentionally mislead outsiders who enquired about the language.[69]

Based on these diverse pieces of information, it seems as though Toda groupness was certainly formed by the early twelfth century CE, perhaps significantly earlier, and that the cohesiveness and boundedness of this identity was something that was likely socially enforced through powerful prescriptions regarding language and endogamy, among other things.

In contrast to the restricted use of Toda language, it appears that Badaga language was used as a *lingua franca* during the early colonial period, and likely earlier. Christiane Pilot-Raichoor suggests that the origin of what is known now as Badaga language is a conglomeration of vocabulary and grammatical structures from many Dravidian languages, building on a base that is most similar to

[67] M. B. Emeneau, *Language and Linguistic Area: Essays*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1980.

[68] On the subject of the merits of heterarchical versus hierarchical orderings of Nilgiri communities, see Zagarell, 'Hierarchy and heterarchy'.

[69] Cf. Y. Matras, *Romani: A Linguistic Introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 238–9.

Alu Kurumba language (the language of one of the communities inhabiting the steeper slopes).[70] In other words, Badaga is at its core a Nilgiri language—a language of the hills—not a dialect of Kannada. Instead, we can say that it developed through koineization, a process of agglomeration of different linguistic features.[71]

Pilot-Raichoor argues that, while the Badaga language is heavily influenced by Kannada, it is not a direct descendent or dialect of it. This is an important point. The concept of koinization is based on an assumption that language is not biological, does not function as a biological species, and therefore should not be thought of only in terms of ancestry and descent. Instead, koinization is a process that must be understood as one of interaction between speakers of different languages, and the mutual co-constitution of a *koiné* as a shared medium of communication. As comparative and historical linguistics has waned in popularity, especially in American- and English-language research, there has been limited progress in our understanding of the relationships between Nilgiris languages. But, whether or not one agrees about the origins of Badaga as a Nilgiris language, or even whether such an endeavour as searching for linguistic origins is worthwhile, the evidence that Badaga was used as a *lingua franca* within the hills remains well documented, at least in the colonial period.[72]

The formation of Badaga identity as an ethnicity, as a *group*, likely did not take place until around the time of initial European colonial contact—around the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. This may be concluded in part based on the mention of the Badagas as the 'neighbours' of the Toda in a letter by Fr. Finicio in 1604, though it would appear that other communities were integrated into the Badaga community as late as the eighteenth century.[73]

Hockings's recent book, *So Long a Saga*, adds a great deal of data to this story, detailing the many and diverse origins of the different phratries within the Badaga community.[74] Hockings recounts: 'There

[70] C. Pilot-Raichoor, 'Badaga and its relations with neighbouring languages', in Hockings, *Blue Mountains Revisited*; C. Pilot-Raichoor, 'Badaga language', in Hockings, *Encyclopaedia of the Nilgiri Hills*, pp. 97–104.

[71] See P. Kerswill, 'Koineizetion and accommodation', in *The Handbook of Language Variation and Change*, J. K. Chambers, P. Trudgill, and N. Schilling-Estes (eds), Blackwell Handbooks in Linguistics, Oxford, 2002.

[72] Even the word 'mund' in reference to a Toda village used in all British documents and maps is a Badaga word; the Toda equivalent is Mād, spelled in the nineteenth and early twentieth century as Mâd; cf. Rivers, *The Todas*, pp. 24, 604–5.

[73] Finicio, cited in Rivers, *The Todas*, p. 721.

[74] Hockings, *So Long a Saga*, pp. 12–13, 30–47.

are two very small phratries living on the northern edge of the plateau near Si:gu:ru. These are the Kurumba:ras ("potters") and the Be:das ("hunters"), the latter from Nagatahalli, and both groups report that they originally came to this locality while in the service of the chieftain of Ummattūr.'[75] These two phratries or sub-groups of the Badaga community thus probably arrived in the seventeenth century—a tumultuous time, after the earlier migrants who came around the time of the fall of the Vijayanagar empire in 1565. Yet, despite different chronological and geographical origins, these communities were considered fully a part of the Badaga community by the early nineteenth century.[76]

To return to the point made by Scott for Southeast Asia, the hills were places of refuge for many people fleeing the state-making enterprises of the plains, fleeing conscription, corvée labour, slavery, taxation, and so on.[77] The actual inhabitants of the hills were not necessarily fixed populations or monolithic ethnic groups, but rather fragments, or what Scott called 'shards' of populations who had fled from the plains.

Taking into consideration the cultural, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity within the Badaga community, we can consider the historical origins of that heterogeneity as composed of various migrant communities from the plains; this explains the linguistic picture of diverse dialects, and koinezation, as well as the heterogeneous religious, marriage, and food-consumption practices described by

[75] Ibid., p. 12.

[76] The chieftains/rajas of Ummattūr figure often in Badaga oral history, as well in written chronicles of the Vijaynagar empire. Because of their mention in textual sources, they provide an interesting touchstone, and clues for dating certain events in Nilgiri history. For instance, Zagarell (1995) tells us there is legend that the Toda were once ruled by a king and queen, but they were displaced by the Raja of Ummattūr, who came up into the hills and conquered, after he was deposed by someone else. This finds corroboration with other documents that tell of the conquests of the Wodeyar (also sometimes Udaiyar) raja of Mysore, who incorporated Ummattūr into his territories between 1614 and 1617, Hayavadana Rao, quoted in Hockings, *Encyclopaedia of the Nilgiri Hills*, p. 420. The fort at Malē Kotē was also apparently built by the rajas/chieftains of Ummattūr, possibly in this time frame. According to Hayavadana Rao, that same fort may have been captured by the later Mysore Wodeyar, Chikkadēvarāja Wodeyar, in 1677. Thus, indirectly, we have an example of a small fort on the northern edge of the Nilgiri massif, playing a role in the competition and repeated conquests and re-conquests by various chieftains or rajas from the north—see C. Hayavadana Rao, *History of Mysore (1399–1799 A.D.)*, *Vol. 1*, Government Press, Bangalore, 1943, p. 280.

[77] Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed*.

Hockings for different Badaga sub-communities and phratries.[78] This revised picture does not preclude the possibility that there was a core or original refugee population in the sixteenth century, and that they probably had some influence over later arrivals. The migration from Karnataka in the sixteenth century cannot explain all aspects of what we know about the people who identified themselves as, or were identified as, Badaga by ethnographers, census-takers, and colonial observers.

It is, however, possible that we should not give sole credit to the colonial project for creating and/or reifying Badaga group identity. There may have been other reasons for ethnopolitical actors to want to crystallize Badaga groupness, and that process may have been going on for centuries before colonial contact. We should consider that, while there had been refugee populations of assorted linguistic backgrounds, potentially speaking a *koiné* that we call Badaga for a long time, the arrival of new refugees or migrants may have been a catalyst leading members of this heterogenous population and language community to try to establish a more formal groupness—a group identity that could be put on the same footing as Toda and perhaps Kota communities that had already established their groupness, and had established land rights/ownership and other privileges associated with their groupness.

Agglomeration of refugee populations into the heterogeneous mix of Badaga-speakers may have taken several forms, depending on the social position that those people had occupied in plains societies. If the refugee populations had belonged to low-status groups, they would have had powerful motivation to forget about their former membership in castes, jatis, or other groups/categories/labels. If one could migrate up into the hills and escape the strictures or stigma of low caste or untouchability, surely this would make many people more than willing to leave any sort of prior groupness behind.

If, on the other hand, the members of the group of refugees formerly enjoyed some benefits of groupness associated with a caste/jati or other marked group identity in their previous homeland, the sudden loss of these privileges would be problematic and difficult. The degree of influence of sixteenth-century Kannada on Badaga language is quite strong, which is, in part, what led to its misidentification as a dialect of Kannada.[79] This may suggest that the previously Kannada-speaking

[78] Hockings, *Ancient Hindu Refugees*; Hockings, *So Long a Saga*.

[79] Pilot-Raichoor, 'Badaga and its relations'; Pilot-Raichoor, 'Badaga language', pp. 97–104.

sixteenth-century refugee population was powerful both numerically and perhaps also socially. From this, we might infer that the sixteenth-century refugee Badagas had previously been of at least moderate social status before immigrating to the Nilgiris.

Above, I argued that the Toda's groupism was an early process compared with the Badagas, perhaps as early as the twelfth century CE. But the Toda community has its own internal heterogeneities, as well as internal hierarchies of purity, and status. The Toda may have become externally bounded early on in history, but they are not now, nor have they likely ever been, internally homogeneous. There are several divisions of Toda society, though these divisions do not produce major power differences; they are not status-neutral. In addition to the divisions between clans, the rules of purity and pollution severely limited the status and role of women in Toda society.

To return to the question of hierarchy between the Nilgiris communities, I wish to return to the relation between the Todas and Badagas, and which of these might be viewed as higher-status. For those who argue that the Todas are at the head of the Nilgiris hierarchy, the key fact is that of *gudu*, translated as 'rent in grain' or 'rent in kind', which was (at least just before the British period) paid by Badagas to Todas for the lands they cultivated. This has been viewed as a kind of peasant–landlord relationship, analogous to such relations between peasants and landlords in the plains. However, I would argue that these relationships are not at all analogous. In other parts of India in which the peasant–landlord relation has been historically discussed, landlords typically have a significant amount of power, in the form of both might and wealth, which can be used to extract rents. In such a feudal system, if there ever were a landlord who did not receive the share of grain he expected, he would simply go and seize it.[80] Nothing like this situation ever seems to have existed between the Todas and the Badagas. In fact, there were two means of recourse for resolving such conflicts. One was to call a meeting of the *naim*, or Toda council, which typically included the heads of the Toda clans, as well as the paramount head of the Badaga community.[81] The other alternative was to go to officials of the state, whichever one that might be. One Toda song recounts going to remedy grievances between Toda clans, to the Tamilians, the 'golden official', which was probably someone

[80] P. Chatterjee, *More on Modes of Power and the Peasantry*, Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1982, p. 7.

[81] Rivers, *The Todas*, p. 550; Hockings, *So Long a Saga*, p. 158.

(whether a British official, or representative of Tipu Sultan, or the Wodeyars, or any of the other prior occupying powers) residing at the Dannayakankote fort.[82] In addition, it seems that, whenever a plains-based state was effectively collecting taxes (as was occasionally the case), the Toda were expected to pay in grain, which they only received from the Badagas through *gudu*, or possibly through the barter of ghee. Thus, the Badagas paid (or gave) *gudu* to the Toda, and did so without much coercion from the Toda. Toda claim a sort of superiority by ritual purity over the Badaga but, though this is a form of hierarchy, it is not accompanied by great imbalances in power. Kotas and Kurumbas are tied to the Toda and Badaga communities through historic relationships of obligation and service. These might be viewed as producing greater power differential, and perhaps even marked by a level of coercion in extracting the obligations and services of the Kota or Kurumba parties. Yet, to say that the system is caste-like is too extreme. The Kota and Kurumba might have occupied positions that multiple communities viewed as lower, yet they were not oppressed or exploited in their labour to nearly the same extent as the lowest members of caste society.

But a social hierarchy is not a state. Zagarell argues for the more or less constant intervention of segmentary states (à la Burton Stein), saying that:

> Certainly, the hierarchical structures of the segmentary state in this region are predicated upon the control of relatively weakly ranked structures of the hill communities, which cannot contest the decentralized authority of segmentary states. The structure of the segmentary state limited the emergence of systems of hierarchical control in the highlands, as indeed it did in other regions, allowing the state to rule by balancing the various centers of power, thus limiting the high administrative costs of more centralized systems.[83]

On the other hand, considering the oral account presented by Metz, it does not mean that there were not attempts to create a Toda state, ruled by a king and queen.[84] Zagarell's argument suggests that the lack of a state (or states) can be taken as evidence of the interference of plains states, and therefore evidence of the profound non-isolation of the Nilgiris from the surrounding regions.

[82] M. B. Emeneau, *Toda Songs*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, p. 14.

[83] Zagarell, 'Hierarchy and heterarchy', p. 99; also cf. Zagarell, 'State and community'.

[84] See above, and Metz, *The Tribes*, p. 44.

His argument parallels mine in many ways in suggesting that the formation of the communities of the Nilgiris, as they came to be found at the beginning of the colonial period, owes much to the histories of entanglement between plains and hills, and the intrusions of plains states into the hills. However, I differ in my understanding of the processes by which these communities specifically arrived at the groupism that they displayed at the point of colonial arrival.

I argue that we should consider the ways in which these communities had greater agency in relation to the states they were avoiding, or attempting to avoid, and that they did not simply fail to evolve into a state society of their own. Such states (or statelets, as they have sometimes been called) did emerge in other contexts, like north-eastern India.[85] This returns us to the concept of isolationism, rather than passive isolation. What does isolationism mean in this context? You might be wondering 'how does a community or a society of multiple communities, come to the decision to adopt an isolationist stance?'. I would suggest that it is not a 'decision' per se, but rather the gradual development of an ethos. That ethos is one of avoidance, of outsiders of various kinds, but also avoidance of the kinds of trappings of state power, especially bureaucracy.

There is no evidence to suggest that the Todas, Badagas, or other hill communities ever raised a revolt, armed or otherwise, against any of their successive overlords from the earliest hints of conquests in the tenth century onwards. They do not appear to have been militarized in any way. Nor did they ever adopt or invent a writing system, which would have facilitated systematizing tribute (or *gudu*) collection. The Toda were not the feudal overlords of the Badagas, Kotas, Kurumbas, and Irulas; nor, despite the oral history collected by Metz, does it seem that they ever really tried to be. As compared with the tribal communities of western India discussed by Guha and Skaria (among others) and north-eastern India discussed by Guite (among many others), the Nilgiris communities seem to have been uninterested in the kinds of raiding and military resistance displayed in both those cases. But, again, this need not imply a passive 'failure' to resist.

Rather, the ethos was one of avoidance, perhaps at least partly encapsulated in the tale enjoining the listener 'don't make friends with a Tamilian'. Isolationism took the form of subsistence strategies illegible to states, avoiding taxation, or, at the very least, making it

[85] cf. J. Guite, 'Colonialism and its unruly? The colonial state and Kuki raids in nineteenth century northeast India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 48, 2014.

difficult to levy taxes. This is easily argued for the moveable herds of Toda buffalo pastoralism, as well as the Kurumba and Irula, living on the steep slopes, foraging (and trading forest products). This isolationism was evasive rather than aggressive. Toda spoke the Badaga language to outsiders and, according to some accounts, acquired many of their plains products through Badaga intermediaries in the form of long-term trade partners, who had obligations to provide some of those materials to the Toda, while the Toda had reciprocal obligations to them.[86] What they may have done, or how they might have conducted trade, before the arrival of Badagas in the sixteenth century is a difficult question to answer. If the oral histories provide any clue, it is that the Toda may have preferred to go down to the plains to trade and obtain salt, and maybe cloth, rice, and other items. They probably preferred to preserve the isolation of their homes in the hills and not to invite outsiders in. This is arguably a fairly effective strategy of avoidance, while simultaneously allowing them to benefit from the goods produced outside the hills.

Once Badagas of various stripes arrived in the sixteenth century, their status as outsiders of a sort may have been something of a boon, allowing Todas to isolate themselves further from direct contacts with outsiders. The Todas appear to have delegated the trade with lowlands merchants to the Badagas and, as a result, individual Toda families developed specific trade partnerships with individual Badaga families, who in turn developed relationships with Chettis who were perhaps both merchants and producers of goods like cloth.[87] Kotas also developed similar trade relationships with the Badagas, and depended on them and their trade connections for cloth as well.[88]

As a result of their isolationist attitudes, the Toda in particular developed a strong sense of the boundary of Toda and others. This ethos of isolationism, and the resulting groupism, may have driven them to find ways to consciously express their differences, through the characteristically distinctive styles of hair and dress, as such practices have been argued in many contexts for the marking of ethnic boundaries.[89] This may also have resulted in the active resistance against adopting outside gods or religious practices and the establishment of a religious orthodoxy. And so they appeared, with

[86] Hockings, *So Long a Saga*, pp. 147–58.
[87] Ibid., p. 182.
[88] Ibid., p. 137.
[89] cf. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*.

distinctive hairstyles, dress, language, and religion, as a community frozen in time, utterly isolated from the plains societies around them.

Conclusions

Thus, in 1799, when the British took over revenue collections based at the Dannayakankote fort, they were, so far as the inhabitants of the Nilgiris were concerned, simply another group claiming dominion, extracting (or attempting to extract) taxes—another empire whose reach they hoped to escape. What followed in the nineteenth century, then, in the establishment of European settlements at Ootacamund, Ketti, Coonoor, and Kotagiri, and one major military installation, the Wellington cantonment, had some precedent, but was in many ways unexpected and novel.

It became increasingly difficult for these communities to avoid intimate contact with the rulers and colonizers. What strategies the Nilgiris communities had developed for evasion of state legibility were mostly impotent in the face of this constant presence. At first, the Toda, as at least somewhat mobile pastoralists, and the Irula and Kurumba inhabitants of the steep and 'malarial' slopes managed to largely avoid enumeration in the early British censuses.

But, during the course of the nineteenth century, as the intensity of contact and settlement increased, and the persistence and insistence of such colonial projects as census enumeration also continued, the hill peoples' older evasive strategies became less and less feasible. Instead, it appears that the Toda took to strategic representations of their own timelessness as part of the basis for their claims to be compensated for land that had been taken by Europeans.[90] Their lack of written language and preference for using Badaga language to interact with outsiders appear as further strategies of evasion.

The idiom of timelessness may be viewed as a joint project of the colonizers and the colonized. Though I argue that this was a strategic

[90] Claims to land are still an issue for these communities in the contemporary world, who find themselves variably in conflict with other 'tribal' or caste communities, corporations or the state. See G. Cederlöf, 'Narratives of rights: codifying people and land in early nineteenth-century Nilgiris', *Environment and History*, vol. 8, 2002; G. Cederlöf, 'The Toda tiger: debates on custom, utility and rights in nature, South India 1820–1843', in Cederlöf and Sivaramakrishnan, *Ecological Nationalisms*; G. Cederlöf, 'The agency of the colonial subject: claims and rights in forestlands in early nineteenth-century Nilgiris', *Studies in History*, vol. 22, 2005; Sutton, *Other Landscapes*.

position of Toda people in response to the colonial government's attempts at enumerating people and land, it would not have been framed or understood as timelessness without British government officials' preconceived notions about social evolution: of savagery, barbarism, and civilization. In order to view the Toda and other hill inhabitants as potentially timeless and unchanging, they first had to understand them as existing in a state that could be placed in an evolutionary continuum, and could be seen therefore to have stood still while progress and civilization marched on around them. That the Toda would then take up the position advocating for their own timelessness reflects their astute understanding that this position would allow them to retain control over land. Negotiations over land, including ownership, but also '*gudu*' or rent, have been well chronicled by Cederlöf and Sutton.[91] However, these discussions have generally assumed a kind of naïveté on the part of the Toda and Badaga actors engaging with the colonial establishment. However, through this exploration of the pre-colonial history of the region, it becomes clear that the inhabitants of the Nilgiris were not isolated, or even new to negotiations with outsiders as rulers claiming dominion over their territory. Though the British and other Europeans did not settle in the hills until the 1820s, the Nilgiris people cannot have been ignorant of their presence in the surrounding plains. We can infer from the narratives above that these communities were not unconnected and that some of them probably went up and down the slopes fairly regularly, bringing news and goods from the outside world. Though the Europeans may only have become aware of the existence of Nilgiris communities in the 1820s, the Nilgiris communities were likely aware of the Europeans significantly before that. Our conception of history and of Nilgiris peoples' position vis-à-vis British colonizers must therefore take into account both the centuries of history of state–hill relations, with the Gangas, Cholas, Hoysalas, the Vijayanagara empire, the Mysore state of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, and perhaps others. The history of these relations, I argue, was to some extent isolationist or state-averse. This, combined with their awareness of the British and European presence in South India since possibly the early sixteenth century, suggests, contrary to Cederlöf,[92] that the Toda probably did view the British as a threat, though they may not have initially engaged in any obviously outright acts of resistance.

[91] Cederlöf, 'The agency of the colonial subject'; Sutton, *Other Landscapes*.
[92] Cederlöf, 'The agency of the colonial subject', pp. 249, 251.

In this article, by bringing together anthropological, archaeological, linguistic, genetic, and oral historical evidence, to re-examine the social and cultural history of the communities of the Nilgiri hills, I show that the communities of the hills were never truly isolated, and that the communities' histories of groupness are as varied as their cultural forms, languages, and practices described by the earliest British observers.

The history of the Nilgiri hills prior to British arrival is a complex one, which, upon closer inspection, bears little resemblance to the narrative as it was written by most British colonial authors. From at least the tenth century onwards, and probably before, the hills and their inhabitants have not been isolated, but rather in constant, if not always direct, contact with the states around them.[93] The apparent isolation of the Toda and their distinctive and bounded groupness seems now to be the product of an active and conscious cultural process, with deep historical roots. They were not simply left behind in the sweep of progress. On the other side of this coin, the groupness of the Badaga seems a much more recent development—a 'group' that is the product of the agglomerations of many of those state-averse people who sought refuge in the hills. The social histories of the other communities—the Irula, Kurumba, and Kota—are not yet sufficiently written, and much more work remains to be done to understand fully the history of the Nilgiri hill communities.

[93] See Morrison, 'Pepper in the hills'; Morrison, 'Historicizing adaptation'; Morrison, 'Environmental history'; Morrison, 'Foragers and forager-traders'; Morrison and Lycett, 'Forest products in a wider world'.

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CORRIGENDUM

Not Isolated, Actively Isolationist: Towards a subaltern history of the Nilgiri hills before British imperialism

GWENDOLYN I. O. KELLY

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In this article[1] the following errors appeared:

On page 1036, the 'third Anglo-Mysore War' should refer instead to the 'fourth Anglo-Mysore War'.

On page 1037, the statement 'by bringing together concepts drawn from Gramsci, Ramchandra Guha and the Subaltern Studies group' should read 'Ranajit Guha', not 'Ramchandra Guha'. Ranajit Guha was one of the founders of the Subaltern Studies group.

On page 1041, the statement 'Just as Ramchandra Guha and colleagues have argued' should again read 'Ranajit Guha' and not 'Ramchandra Guha'.

On page 1052, footnote 46 'P. Hockings, "Identity in complex societies: are the Badagas caste or tribe?", *Political Science Review*, vol. 7, 1968' is incorrect. The correct reference is: 'P. Hockings, "Identity in complex societies: are the Badagas caste or tribe?", *Journal of African and Asian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1968, pp. 29–35'.

The author would like to apologize to readers for these errors.

[1] G. Kelly, 'Not isolated, actively isolationist: towards a subaltern history of the Nilgiri hills before British imperialism', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1035–1069. doi:10.1017/S0026749X16000299