

# The Body as a Trope: Ethnography and Symbolic Geographies in the Colonial Northeast

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Colonialism is not only a military or economic exercise. It is also a symbolic exercise. The predominant spatial forms of colonialism, namely – the military and the economic, thrive on the construction of symbolic geographies. Metaphorization of the body of the colonized is central to this exercise. However, body-spaces or ethno spaces – symbolic and yet instrumental in spatial politics of the Empire – is an important yet underexplored dimension in discussions of empire-building in the erstwhile northeast frontier of Bengal. It is with an understanding of ethnography as allegory and more specifically, of ethnography's participation in the transformation of space into symbolic geographies, that this paper investigates Edward Tuite Delton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), and L A Waddell's *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley* (1901), two pioneering ethnographic texts in the colonial northeast. It is argued here that these ethnographic texts transform the body of the colonized into an allegory of otherness.

The large body of ethnographic writings on the colonial northeast was instrumental in transforming the region into an ethnoscape wherein the body of the indigene functions as a metaphor of otherness and a symbolic topography of power. In the texts under investigation, the bodies indigenous to the northeast are often represented in ways that defy human description and yet help develop a symbolic geography of otherness so that the body emerges as a virtual topography. The space occupied by the ethnic body is not represented fully by relatively familiar spatial ideas such as landscape and territory. Instead, spaces seen as the homelands of particular tribes are best viewed as ethno-corporeal spaces. What is central to the construction of the northeast as ethnoscape is the attribution imagined specificities of the native body, which could be seen as anthropological or ethnographic troping. Once the

corporeality of a tribe – the body of a particular ethnic group either represented through an individual body or seen as a collective body of people – is seen as belonging to a specific landscape, neither the tribe nor the landscape can exist – either in the ethnographic imagination or in colonial records – as exclusive and independent of each other. Each becomes a combinatorial entity. This is part of colonial spatial politics, imprisoning the body alternately in colonial and corporeal space. This imprisonment of the body is informed by a symbolic geography, its attributes validated by colonial anthropology and sustained by the ethnographer's imagination. To the extent that ethnic groups are separated from one another in terms of their physical characteristics – and particular ethnic enclosures identified as the homelands of particular ethnic groups – ethnoscape is the beginning of a territorializing exercise, hence the suggestion of a colonial allegory.

Given the relationship between colonialism and ethnography, it would be useful at this point to look at the foundational principles of colonial governance. David Arnold, points to the role of ethnographic divisions in creating body spaces or corporeal specificities and explores how ethnography repeatedly imply and work on a divide between the body as a corporeal entity and as an ethnic type.<sup>1</sup> Arnold's most crucial observations on the issue can be cited here:

Colonial rule built up an enormous battery of texts and discursive practices that concerned themselves with the physical being of the colonized (and, no less critically, though the interconnection is too seldom recognized, of the colonizers implanted in their midst). Colonialism used or attempted to use the body as a site for the construction of its own authority, legitimacy, and control. In part, therefore, the history of colonial medicine ... serves to illustrate the more general nature of colonial power and knowledge and to illuminate its hegemonic as well as its coercive processes. Over the long period of British rule in India, the accumulation of medical knowledge about the body contributed to the political evolution and ideological articulation of the colonial system.<sup>2</sup>

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Arnold rightly argues that 'colonial medicine cannot be regarded as merely a matter of scientific interest. It cannot meaningfully be abstracted from the broader character of the colonial order... it remained integral to colonialism's political concerns, its economic intents, and its cultural preoccupations'.<sup>3</sup> It is partly to emphasize the importance of the body as a site of colonizing power and partly in order to stress the corporeality of colonialism in India that this study speaks of the 'colonization of the body'.

In a way, the corporeality of colonialism is constituted by a transformative body space that is both discursive and concrete. Arnold's thesis links up nineteenth century medicine and colonial politics with metaphorization of the body. He observes:

The broad and interrelated nature of [colonial] scientific concerns, exemplified by the 'medico-topographical' surveys produced from the 1820s onward ... also established a 'topographical' or 'environmentalist' tradition in India's colonial medicine which stubbornly persisted throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.<sup>4</sup>

The transformative nature of the discourse of medicine and disease is also evident in the world of landscape and spatial politics. Joanne Sharp's observations in *Geographies of Postcolonialism* on the transformation of landscapes and the transformative politics of colonial space are helpful here:

When it came to the landscape, colonialism was about transformation. Just as colonial knowledge sought to order the world in a taxonomy of the known, the engineers of the colonial landscape sought to order the colonies into a knowable pattern. Colonial landscapes were ordered, sanitised, made amenable to regulation, and structured to enhance the flow of economic activities. Thus, these landscapes did not simply reflect colonial aspirations but were also both consciously and unconsciously used as social technologies, as strategies of power to incorporate, categorise, discipline, control and reform the inhabitants of the city, town or plantation.<sup>5</sup>

What Sharp describes as 'taxonomy of the known' or 'social technologies' is represented in texts that look for—and repeatedly construct—specific enclosures based on ethnic habitats, the latter historicized and legitimated for a new spatial geography. This new spatial geography, once out or available in the discursive sphere, would order, sanitize, legitimize and replicate more such exercises. In this set-up, ethnic divides and ethnographic pockets will simultaneously be the condition and consequence of corporeal divides.

Given that colonial imagination views the mind of the colonized as an extension of his/her body<sup>6</sup> it is important to examine the overlapping of body and spatial politics. While the body is defined—feared or celebrated—by its socio-corporeal attributes such as habitat, costumes, food,

utensils, rituals, sexual practices, the colonized body is circumscribed by these. The colonial ethnographic imaginary creates and foregrounds the body as space, resulting in the creation and construction of body-spaces.

What problematizes colonial ethnography is to comment on the degree to which it bears visible marks of affinity and loyalty to imperial designs of domination and expansion. Colonial ethnography is often rooted in designs of surveying and partitioning space, and is a site of surveillance. It is always implicated in imperatives of governmentality and, it functions in ways which essentially have an element of obscurity that is produced by layers of sub-textual meanings. It is chiefly from its obscurity that colonial discourses derive their strength. In other words, what looks like the inherent mandate of colonial ethnography—that is, to map and divide, or alternately to divide and map, the physiological and cultural space occupied by the colonized body (presented and understood as demography or population)—derives from deep-rooted political designs to record, process, modify, sanitize,<sup>7</sup> and rule over colonized spaces.

It is in this sense that Talal Assad and others map out the colonial lineage of ethnography in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (1973).<sup>8</sup> Similar arguments are also made by Diane Lewis in 'Anthropology and Colonialism' (1973),<sup>9</sup> and Peter Pels in 'The Anthropology of Colonialism: Culture, History, and the Emergence of Western Governmentality' (1997).<sup>10</sup> These scholars argue that while seemingly documenting various aspects of colonized spaces, ethnography regularly bypasses indigenous spatialities. They also suggest that ethnographers often forcefully impose notions of European modernity while looking at social and corporeal spaces in areas outside Europe. This draws attention to another important dimension of the spatial politics of ethnography, that is, the construction of symbolic space. Symbolism is, undoubtedly an inherent component of the textual and material practices of colonialism. The material artifice of the Empire always rests on the pillars of ideological constructs. As suggested by critics like Abdul JanMohamed (1995)<sup>11</sup> and David Spurr (1993)<sup>12</sup> such ideological exercises make regular use of rhetoric and metaphorization as colonizing strategies which is central to ethnographic writings as they prepare favourable conditions for projects such as colonialism to operate.

The transformation of space into ethnoscapas or ethno-corporeal space involves acts of metaphorization of space. James Clifford explores the ways ethnographic texts transform spaces into cultural allegories and views ethnography as an instance of 'inscription' rather than of 'transcription'<sup>13</sup> given the fact that ethnographic texts bypass or even deliberately overlook immediate

dimensions of space in favour of other potential layers of meaning. Clifford writes:

To say that exotic behaviors and symbols make sense either in 'human' or 'cultural' terms is to supply the same sorts of *allegorical added meaning*...*Culturalist and humanist allegories* stand behind the *controlled fictions of difference and similitude* that we call ethnographic accounts. What is maintained in these texts is *double attention* to the descriptive surface and to more abstract, comparative, and explanatory levels of meaning.<sup>14</sup>

Clifford suggests that ethnographic writings could be viewed as "historical" and "humanist" allegories.<sup>15</sup> Ethnography, viewed as a historical allegory, frames people and places unfamiliar to the ethnographer, through tropes of primitivism. As humanist allegories, ethnography codes unfamiliar landscapes into familiar frames of reference thereby reducing these to supposedly elemental or transcendental levels of truth". It is precisely by allegorizing that ethnographic texts reduce lived social geographies into ideologically constructed narratives of otherness. This transformation involves strategies of "expansion, reduction, substitution and transference".<sup>16</sup> This is where ethnography converts itself from transcription to inscription. Therefore, the role of ethnography in creating and transforming space cannot be overstated.

Clifford's thesis of ethnography as allegory highlights the key role of ethnographic writings in projects of colonial space-production. Another thesis on the convergence of ethnography and the Empire comes from Nicholas Thomas. Thomas suggests that as an important genre of colonial culture, ethnography plays a crucial role in 'surveying, regulating, and sanitizing' colonized spaces.<sup>17</sup> Thomas argues that both colonialism and ethnography are constitutive of each other (7).<sup>18</sup> In so far as the transformation of space is concerned, the most important insight that emerges from Thomas's thesis is that ethnographic imaginaries convert polyphonic, or heteroglossic socio-cultural geographies to a series of physical and cultural attributes. Thomas views 'primitivism' as an ethnographic trope of othering.<sup>19</sup> What appears to be reification and fetishization of notionally simple ways of life of particular groups of people, in colonial ethnographic writing, are political attempts at denigrating the group. These writings often transform the body of the colonized into a metaphor of bestiality. Thomas rightly calls it 'bestialization'.<sup>20</sup> David Spurr, in a similar vein, identifies 'debasement' as a key trope in colonial writings including ethnography.<sup>21</sup> These observations corroborate the view of ethnography as an important site of symbolic geography and an ideological instrument of the Empire. As suggested above, ethnography functions through an inherent symbolism or the use of Eurocentric cultural ideas to frame cultural identities as naturalized.

This has important implications for the transformation of space into a dichotomy between the self and 'the Other,' which in colonial situations, corresponds to the dichotomy between culture and nature. As emerges from discussions of the texts in this paper, ethnographic writings often exploit rhetorical strategies such as denigration, transference, displacement, reification, fetishization to transform space to ethnoscape.

Bodies in the colonial northeast emerge as a key trope in *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), by Edward Tuite Dalton (1815-1880), one of the pioneering ethnographers in the northeast. His text marks a crucial moment in the transformation of the northeast into a certain kind of ethnoscape and illustrates the ethnographic imaginary that was in operation, in colonial northeast. The text reduces the northeast from a heteroglossic, polyphonic social space into an allegory of corporeal and cultural otherness as evident in attempts to trace out and thereby fix people to particular landscapes. For instance, Dalton observes:

The Phakis or Phakials [a tribe in Upper Assam] on the Dihing River, the Kamjangs [a tribe in Upper Assam] and the numerous settlements of Khamtis [a tribe in Upper Assam] are all colonies of this race, retaining the costume, customs, and religion they brought with them into the valley. It will be sufficient to describe the latter, who are the most numerous and important.<sup>22</sup>

The passage illustrates how colonial ethnography constructs ethnoscapas as a geography of exactitude and precision, that is— spaces of governmentality. The marking of a particular tribe as more important than others illustrate one of the key arguments in this paper, that is— the emergence of ethno-corporeality as a strategic spatial marker in the colonial northeast. Elsewhere, Dalton writes: 'The Khamtis are very far in advance of all the north-eastern frontier tribes in knowledge, arts, and civilization. They are Buddhists and have regular establishments of priests well-versed in the recondite mysteries of their religion; a large proportion of the laity can read and write in their own language.'<sup>23</sup> This illustrates another important contention offered in this paper, that is— the centrality of chosen Eurocentric notions for converting the northeast into an imagined geography of otherness. In this case, possessing a script is seen as obligatory for any people to be recognized as civilized. The focus of this study is participation of ethnography in formulating imagined geographies.

In this project of creating symbolic spaces the body emerges as the central trope and apparently non-corporeal attributes morph into metaphoric counterparts to the corporeal body. For instance, Dalton's description of the religion of the Singphos as 'rude paganism'<sup>24</sup> has strong socio-corporeal resonance. Mary Louise Pratt terms writings such as this as 'anti-aesthetic' or 'negative-

aesthetic,<sup>25</sup> key rhetorical tools of space production. In a similar instance, Dalton writes: 'The Singphos have a *confused notion of a Supreme Being*, but they propitiate only *malignant spirits*. They sacrifice fowls, pigs and dogs to them.'<sup>26</sup> Similarly, he writes: 'The religion of the Mishmis is *confined to the propitiation of demons...they appear to have no notion of a Supreme and benevolent deity*'.<sup>27</sup> To view their dance as 'wild and demoniacal'<sup>28</sup> is an attempt at insubstantialization, vilification, and negation. The negative aesthetic framings of other socio-corporeal dimensions of the ethnoscape such as housing, agricultural utensils, costumes, marriage, burial customs etc. Of the food of the Naga people, Dalton writes: 'In regard to food they are truly omnivorous — frogs, lizards, snakes, rats, dogs, monkeys, cats etc. are all delicacies, and an *animal that has died a natural death is as acceptable to them as the best butcher's meat*'.<sup>29</sup> It is their pejorative undertone that turns these narratives into ethnotropes. Even apparently benign descriptions have their disparaging sub-texts. For instance: 'The Khamtis are not a *handsome race*. They are of rather *darker complexion* than the other Shans, and of *coarser features*; the Mongolian peculiarities being more strongly developed in them than in their reputed brethren.'<sup>30</sup> Similarly: 'After setting in Assam, the Khamti chiefs frequently took to themselves Assamese wives, and in some families, the effect of this mingling is very marked in *softening* and improving the features of the generations that follow it.'<sup>31</sup> In these instances the body is used as a marker of ethnicity as well as an allegory of alterity.

Another key trope in the text is bestiality as an essential attribute of the body of the indigene. This is obvious in the way the Mishmis, a tribe in the northeast, are compared to monkeys. 'The Mishmis are...as *active as monkeys*'.<sup>32</sup> The choice of the monkey-metaphor to apparently admire the liveliness of the people is ironic in many ways, and is an attempt at devaluing. He mentions that the Mishmis are feared because of their 'prowling expeditions to kidnap women and children' and for their 'deceit'.<sup>33</sup>

The mutation of ethnography into allegory becomes more obvious in the way the text stereotypes the Hillman as a compulsive predator. Elsewhere, Dalton writes: 'It was very interesting to watch the barter that took place *between these suspicious, excitable savages* and the *cool, wily traders of the plains*'.<sup>34</sup> Here again, ethnography morphs into an allegory of imagined attributes. Dalton continues:

The former [the Mishmis] took salt chiefly in exchange for the commodities they brought down, and *they would not submit to its being measured or weighed them by any known process...they take from a well-guarded basket one of the articles they wish to exchange. Of this, they still retain a hold with their toe or their knee as they plunge two dirty paws into the bright white, salt. They make an attempt to transfer all they can grasp to their own*

basket, but the trader, with a sweep of his hand, knocks off half the quantity, and then there is a fiery altercation.'<sup>35</sup>

This passage illustrates the centrality of bestiality as a key metaphor to frame bodies, corporeal and otherwise, as evident in comments on aesthetic/cultural bodies:

The first scene represented a peaceful villager with his children hoeing in the ground, and singing and conversing with them as if utterly unconscious of danger. A *villainous looking crop-head glides in like a snake scarce seen in the long grass, takes note of the group, and glides away again. Presently armed savages are seen in the distance. They come gradually and stealthily on, till within a convenient distance they stop and watch their prey like so many cats, then there is a rush in, the man is supposed to be killed, and the children carried screeching away*.<sup>36</sup>

This is another instance of the body as ethnotrope. Sometimes, the text mutates into moral topography, evident in comments on Khamti women: 'The Khamti women have not *suffered in character* from the freedom allowed to them. The ladies of the Ahom families in Assam are equally unrestricted... *I believe, the ladies of the ex-royal family are in the habit of visiting the officials when they have an opportunity of doing so*'.<sup>37</sup> In an attempt to vilify or negativize, the Singphos, a tribe in the northeast, are painted as habitual night-raiders: 'In warfare, their attacks are confined to night-surprises, which are speedily abandoned if they meet with steady opposition.'<sup>38</sup> These ethnotropes reduce the northeast into a metaphor otherness.

The other text under investigation is Lawrence Augustine Waddell's *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley* (1901). Like Dalton's this text also participates in the transformation of the northeast into an allegory of ethno-corporeal otherness. Viewing the region as an ethnographic curio, Waddell begins: 'Few of the *wilder parts* of the world, still left, preserve such a vast variety of *savage tribes* of such great ethnological interest as the mountainous valley of the mighty Brahmaputra.'<sup>39</sup> Waddell views the hills as the 'last *refuge* of scattered detachments of *primitive hordes*'.<sup>40</sup> Subsequently, he writes:

Driven into these *wild glens* by the advance of civilization up the plains and lower valleys these people have become hemmed in among the mountains, where pressing on each other in their struggle for existence, they have developed into innumerable isolated tribes, differing widely in appearance, customs, and language; but all alike have been engaged in *blood-thirsty feuds, head-hunting* and *numerous raids* on their more defenseless neighbours. Many of them are of that *extremely barbarous type* which is popularly associated with *savage South Africa*.<sup>41</sup>

This passage only furthers the disparaging rhetoric, already in operation and transmutes the hill-man, into a stereotype of civilizational/cultural otherness. Words such as 'refuge', "driven" gives impetus to the metaphors,

already in operation. The 'negative aesthetic' in the text is reinforced by framing the northeastern tribe as a replica of African savagery. Waddell writes: 'The *wild hillmen*, bordering the Assamese plain, were little affected by the British occupation until recent years. *They proved to be so hostile, and their country so impenetrable...* subjects.'<sup>42</sup>Hills are seen as dystopia or 'dreaded hills.'<sup>43</sup> Here also, ethnography morphs into rhetoric. For example, regretting the loss of certain customs, Waddell writes:

These tribes which have hitherto been isolated from the outside world are *fast losing their primitive customs*. It is not an uncommon sight to see a *Naga* who only three years ago was a naked *head-hunting savage* of the most pronounced type, now clad in a tweed coat and carrying a Manchester umbrella, taking his ticket at a railway station.<sup>44</sup>

This is a campaign in favour of claims to preserve the 'rare vestiges of prehistoric society' that is 'rapidly swept away by advancing civilization.'<sup>45</sup>There are other instances as well where the native body is objectified as ethnographic curios or as 'a unique mine of unexplored civilization.'<sup>46</sup>This self-assumed custodianship or stewardship is both a condition and consequence of the supposed superiority of the white man over others. Waddell identifies the system of matrilineal descent, prevailing in the northeast as a proof of primitive otherness unlike 'as in civilized society.'<sup>47</sup>This is another instance of the strategic use of primitivism as an ethnotope in the text.

Exploring the reductionist and allegorical manner in which ethnography functions, Arjun Appadurai (1988), refers to how ethnography 'incarcerates' the natives in bounded localities, map essentialised cultures on to bounded territories and deploy strategies of 'metonymic freezing' through which select aspects of people's lives are presented in generic frames.<sup>48</sup> Nicholas Thomas views the same as a trick and trope of naturalized typification. The metonymic freezing of the hill-man is seen in the way the Abors, a hill tribe, are described. 'They seem to be the dreaded cannibal "Black *Lo* savages" of the Tibetans, in whose country the Indian Survey-explorer, K. P was turned back.'<sup>49</sup> Waddell offers the 'lawlessness and turbulence' of the Abors as a pretext to incarcerate them with blockades.<sup>50</sup> In the very beginning, imaginative homologies are created between the savage Abor and the African Savage, the prototype of 'the Other' in its most radical form, in colonial imagination. Narrating his encounter with an Abor, he writes:

I succeeded in measuring only seven men, six of whom had come to Dibrugarh market to barter gold-dust and rubber at my visit a few years ago when communication was still open. Their demand, as the price of their submitting to be photographed and measured *surprised* and *amused* me. They insisted that in

addition to a present in money I must give each of them a flat hat...*The savage nature* of the men was evident when the hats were brought. Although these latter were all alike, the men *sarled and shouted* and *quarreled* amongst themselves for some time, each thinking the other had got a better one than himself; and one of them drew his knife threatening on his fellow tribesman.<sup>51</sup>

The socio-corporeal tropes, employed here, has obvious pejorative/subhuman undertones, evident in subsequent descriptions such as—'The men are *thickest, uncouth, and clumsy*. They have remarkably deep *harsh* voices with slow deliberate utterance. Many of them are *disfigured* by goiter. They are *excessively rough mannered*, the hair in both sexes is cropped short, chopped off with a knife, probably *to get rid of the trouble of keeping it clean*.'<sup>52</sup>The tendency to regularly overstate certain supposedly unwanted attributes such as rudeness, noise, and ugliness underlie almost every description of the socio-cultural and corporeal body. For instance, commenting on dress habits, he writes: 'The dress of the men in their *primitive state*, consist of the fibrous bark of the Udal tree, tied round the loins in strips about fifteen inches long and hanging down behind like a *bushy tail*. It also serves as a *mat, to sit on and a pillow* at night.'<sup>53</sup>Thus, the text inscribes a cluster of metaphorical bestial/subhuman attributes to the indigenous body, most evident in the form of the image of tail. This has very strong symbolic resonance. Elsewhere, the Angami Nagas [a tribe in Naga Hills] are seen as the 'most warlike and bloodthirsty' of all the 'head-hunting 'Nagas and the finest in physique.'<sup>54</sup>Even ethnic costumes merges as a metaphor of bestiality: 'This gaudy attire of the males quite eclipses that of the females, as the rule *in the lower animal world*. For the dress of the women is much less showy than that of the men.'<sup>55</sup>These are some of the obvious illustrations of the way key dimensions of ethno-corporeal bodies emerge as instruments of space-production in the text.

Although the study so far focuses only on two key ethnographic documents on colonial northeast, this is in no way to suggest that the transformation of the northeast into a symbolic ethnoscape is exclusive to these texts. In fact, a cursory survey of the available colonial literature, which does not always correspond to what is officially recognized as ethnography, calls attention to the convergence between ethnography and space-production. Reading these texts, embedded in what Joan Pau terms as 'the ethnographic impulse,'<sup>56</sup>contributes to the understanding of how the ethnographic impulse morphs into other apparently non-ethnographic genres such as travel writing, gazetteers, survey reports etc. The rest of the paper brings in Major John Butler's *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam* (1855), T T Cooper's *The Mishmee Hills: An Account of the Journey made in an*

*Attempt to Penetrate Tibet from Assam to Open New Routes for Commerce* (1872), James Johnstone's *Manipur and Naga Hills* (1896) into this discussion.

The key trope in Butler is the idea of the wild. He presents his narrative as a document on the 'habits, customs and manners of the *wild* tribes of the hills' (Preface; emphasis added).<sup>57</sup> This metaphor already foregrounds a kind of deviance and exception evident in the way he overstates the 'many perils from the climate, wild beasts and demi-savages in the hills.'<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere he frames the Naga dance as 'hallooing, yelling, and jumping';<sup>59</sup> the Naga food as 'offensive';<sup>60</sup> dwellings as always 'filthy'<sup>61</sup> with 'pigs, fowls, wife and children all huddled together'<sup>62</sup> and the village streets as 'the receptacle for the filth of the whole village.'<sup>63</sup> Butler converts the ethnic body into a pathogenic site. He writes:

No regular government can be expected to exist among wild uncivilized tribes, who are ignorant of the use of letters or the art of writing and whose dialects differ and are scarcely intelligible to the tribes on the adjoining hills, and whose leisure time is spent in the diversion of surprising each other in hostile attack, rapine and murder.<sup>64</sup>

The plot to allegorize ethnic body is common to a range of other texts as well. T. T. Cooper, for instance, describes the Assamese as 'exceedingly indolent'<sup>65</sup>; their morality as of a very low scale;<sup>66</sup> the Abors as 'treacherous and half-naked savages';<sup>67</sup> the Mishmis as 'savage and warlike'.<sup>68</sup> The Abors emerges, in the text, as an allegory of subhuman corporeality: 'Every man greeted me, English fashion, by holding out a *dirty paw*... I invited them to come and drink. This proposition met with decided approval, expressed in *diabolical shouts of laughter*, and two of the *dirty savages* put their arms in mine, while others followed, still laughing like *fiends*'.<sup>69</sup> Elsewhere, Cooper writes:

They were decidedly above the middle height, with huge limbs, rendered hideously out of proportion by unnaturally large hands and feet. Their features were also very unprepossessing. High cheek-bones, thickish lips covering irregular and discolored teeth, small slightly oblique eyes set under small flat foreheads, have their face a *treacherous look*, while their dark copper-colored skins, begrimed by dirt accumulated from childhood, resembled the *hides of beasts*.<sup>70</sup>

Elsewhere he writes: 'I was marched off between two of them, who linked their arms in mine, and *strutted along like monkeys*'.<sup>71</sup> In a similar vein, Johnstone exploits ethnotropes such as 'oriental despotism',<sup>72</sup> 'barbarism',<sup>73</sup> and deception<sup>74</sup> to construct the ethnic body in his narrative as evident in his description of the food of the Angami Nagas.

All kinds of animals are readily eaten by the Angamis, and those dying a natural death are not rejected. Dog's flesh is

highly esteemed. When a man wants to have a delicate dish, he starves the dog for a day to make him voracious, and then cooks a huge dish of rice on which he feeds the hungry beast. As soon as the dog has eaten his fill, he is knocked on the head and roasted, cut up and divided.<sup>75</sup>

Colonial ethnographic writing, as evident in these texts, regularly participates in the transformation of the corporal bodies of indigenous groups in the northeast into a geography of otherness. In other words, these writings transform the northeast into a cluster of symbolic ethno-corporeal spaces. The traveler — ethnographer marks spaces as exclusive homelands or territories of particular tribes. This is done primarily by formulating particular set of corporeal, cognitive and cultural attributes for a particular group of people and subsequently tracing out these attributes in landscapes identified as exclusive homelands of exclusive groups. This practice could be viewed as a mode of demographic othering of space. Given the fact that such marking of space is almost always followed by more ambitious projects of mapping and distribution of space such as cartography, the transformation of space into ethnoscares is better seen as a prelude to colonial governance. The conversion of space to ethnoscares could be seen as an overture towards transforming the supposedly unmapped spaces in the northeast into more precisely mapped places.

## Notes

1. David Arnold. *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India* (U of California P, 1993), pp.8-9.
2. Ibid, p. 9.
3. Ibid, p. 8.
4. David Arnold. *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India*, (U of California P, 1993), p. 23.
5. Joanne P Sharp. *Geographies of Postcolonialism: Spaces of Power and Representation*. (Sage, 2009), P. 56.
6. See Arnold, *Colonizing*, 7-9; also see Sharpe, *Postcolonial*, 23-24.
7. Sharpe, *Postcolonial*, p. 24.
8. Talal Assad. Ed. *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, (Ithaca Press, 1973), pp. 23-95.
9. Diane Lewis. 'Anthropology and Colonialism,' *Current Anthropology*. Vol. 14, No. 5, (University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 581-602.
10. Peter Pels. "The Anthropology of Colonialism: Culture, History and the Emergence of Western Governmentality." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Vol. 26, 1997. Pp.163-183.
11. Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory,' *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, (Routledge, 1995), pp. 18-23.
12. David Spurr. *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in*

- Journalism, Travel Writing and Imperial Administration.* (Duke UP, 1993), pp. 18-47.
13. James Clifford. 'On Ethnographic Allegory,' *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Eds. James Clifford and George E Marcus. (U of California P, 1986), (98-120). p. 118
  14. Ibid, p. 101.
  15. Ibid, p. 102.
  16. Ibid, p. 106.
  17. Thomas, Nicholas. *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*. (Polity Press, 1994), p. 6.
  18. Ibid, p. 9.
  19. Ibid, p. 171.
  20. Ibid, p. 14.
  21. Spurr, *Rhetoric*, p. 22.
  22. Edward Tuite Dalton. *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. (London:1872. Rep. Calcutta: Studies Past and Present, 1960), p. 9.
  23. Ibid, p. 10.
  24. Ibid, p. 16.
  25. Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and Transculturation*. (Routledge,1992),pp. 149-150.
  26. Dalton, p. 16.
  27. Ibid, p. 20.
  28. Ibid, p. 21.
  29. Ibid, p. 49.
  30. Ibid, p. 11.
  31. Ibid.
  32. Ibid, p. 22.
  33. Ibid, p. 23.
  34. Ibid, p. 24.
  35. Ibid, p. 25.
  36. Ibid, p. 25.
  37. Ibid, p. 12.
  38. Ibid, p. 15.
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