

Festivals as the Practice of Politics by the Tamangs of Rural Nepal

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ABSTRACT

The literature on indigenous movements tends to limit indigenous festivals and associated cultural practices to performances or strategies of peoples to profess an indigenous culture distinct from mainstream society. This it is claimed, is in a bid to secure membership to the global indigenous community and attain associated material gains. While this is a prominent aspect, the literature fails to recognize that festivals provoke the practice of politics in an everyday setting that, while seemingly proclaiming consent to indigenous movements, actually engender practices that shape, challenge, and resist such movements. This article is based on participatory observation and interviews with a Tamang community in Nepal and employs the concept of the practice of politics to argue that cultural performances such as festivals are an assertion of indigenous power in a shifting context that continuously contest the meanings of culture disseminated by indigenous movements; here, the Adivasi Janajati movement. Through exploring the paradoxical celebrations of the Lohsar and Dashain festivals by the Tamang, this article shows how participation in these festivals does legitimize the indigenous movement, but also challenges and modifies it, as festival meanings collide with the many intersecting interests of the community.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, Adivasi Janajati, Tamang, Nepal, Practice of politics, Dashain, Lohsar.

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous people have been represented as long-term inhabitants of a particular territory that are marginalized or displaced by invaders or settlers, have unique cultural practices distinct from those settlers, and who have been exploited/oppressed by settlers and are thus entitled to redress, largely in the form of distinct rights and recognition (Martínez-Cobo, 1982). These representations largely stem from the working definition of indigenous people found in the United Nations

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which has become a checklist gatekeeping who qualifies as indigenous people (Lindroth, 2014; Merlan, 2009). Likewise, the exhibitions of unique culture often relayed through festivals, costumes, rituals etc., are widely publicized and accepted ways to fulfil expectations of indigeneity (Dahl, 2012). A growing literature argues that festivals and cultural practices are performances or strategies used by peoples to secure entry into the global indigenous community and to receive distinct rights and recognition (for example, Baglo, 2014; Dahl, 2012; Hodgson, 2014; Lindroth, 2014). Because indigenous peoples are required to maintain and replicate their unique cultures to be eligible for these rights, some argue they are trapped in cultural stagnation (Dahl, 2012; Lindroth, 2014), and thus, a stagnation of identity. However, despite their strengths, such arguments fossilize festivals and render them static, overlooking festivals as sites of dynamic practice conducted by subjects who perpetually contest their meanings. This article applies Li's (2007) concept of the practice of politics to argue that the meanings of so-called indigenous festivals described by the global indigenous movement differ from the meanings the festival participants themselves have acquired throughout their lived experiences. It does so by focusing on the festivals of the Tamang people of rural Nepal.

Nepal is a signatory to the UNDRIP and is one of only 22 member states of the United Nations, and the first South Asian nation, to have signed the International Labor Organization Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, 1989 (also known as ILO Convention 169, signed by Nepal in 2007). This was made possible through the indigenous movement (Adivasi Janajati movement) in Nepal that has continued to grow in strength since the 1990s, and which became a defining force during the constitution-making era of the 2000s. The successful exhibition of the unique culture of Adivasi Janajati peoples has been a cornerstone in achieving indigenous status, providing them unprecedented rights and recognition nationally. Those identifying as Adivasi Janajati have actively presented their culture as distinct from "high" caste Hindus, especially Bahuns and Chhetris from the hill region, mainly through festivals, customs, rituals, and ways of life (NFDIN Act, 2002). This has also allowed them to continue demand for reparations and self-determination, leading to ethnic-based autonomous federal states.

Demands for an autonomous state and distinct rights are justified by claims of historical-cultural, political, and economic marginalization and oppression of minorities by the state for centuries. In terms of culture, the movement has drawn attention to the Shah regime's systematic formal or informal endorsement of Hindu religion and culture and the discouragement of other cultural practices like festivals, rituals, customs etc. The movement claims that the unification of Nepal in 1768 A.D. marked a black era for indigenous people and their culture as they were coerced into renouncing their culture through a process of Hinduization.¹ While this process of Hinduization was slow and long, it intensified during the Panchayat era (1961-1990 A.D.) when the reigning king used the slogan of 'One King, One Costume, One Language, One Nation' to try and impose a homogenous Nepali identity. According to activists, the imposition of Hindu culture is inseparable from the humiliation,

¹ Hinduization is a process of assimilating non-Hindus into the Hindu religion and its practices.

deception, and oppression long suffered by non-Hindu people in Nepal, and the revival of ethnic culture is pivotal to restoring their past glory, dignity, and to honor their ancestors. Accordingly, after the fall of the monarchy in 2008 and the subsequent new constitution-making era, many ethnic groups launched massive campaigns with protests, awareness raising, media work, etc., to try and rediscover and embrace their culture. These campaigns ran in parallel to a refusal and boycott of mainstream “high” caste religion and culture.

However, some believed the influx of different ethnic festivals into mainstream society was motivated to satisfy the criteria of ‘unique culture’ in the global indigenous discourse, to gain the official status of indigeneity, and therefore to receive reparations and self-rule.² These people claimed that the cultural performances of some Adivasi Janajati people had little or no link with their everyday realities. Indigenous movements are often led by ethnic elites and activists driven by their own agenda, with little or no support from below (Dahal, 1994). In this way, festivals are ‘constructed’ and not part of peoples’ lives – who are, for the most part, forced to accept campaign narratives and discourses. This article argues that the assertion of indigenous culture and status is both implicitly concerned with questions of rights as well as other interests and intentions. In doing so, the article asks how a particular people, the Tamang, relate to and make meaning from their festivals, which are forms of cultural narrative disseminated by the national Adivasi Janajati movement.

The article continues in four parts. First, the literature review is presented, which justifies the use of and explains the concept of the practice of politics. Second, the methods used to generate data for the article are discussed. The third section describes how two festivals are celebrated by the Tamang and what this means for the overall Adivasi Janajati movement. In the final section, the findings of the paper are discussed and the article concludes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to pursue this question, the concept of the practice of politics (Li, 2007) is useful. According to Li, the practice of politics “is the expression, in word or deed, of a critical challenge to the way things are.” It emerges in the practice of government in the form of programs that seek to secure control over people and territory. But the practice of politics equally means these technical programs can be challenged by subjects, rejecting government diagnoses and prescriptions. This clash of power and subjectivities opens up opportunities for creative and careful deliberation and interpretation. On the surface, this understanding of power, the subject, and the negotiated relation between the two, seems to imply that the practice of politics is similar to or within a cultural politics approach focusing on the inherently political nature of everyday life. Recent studies in cultural politics think through the tensions, stresses, and strains of the global cultural field (Armitage et al., 2017). However, a

² One of the most controversial forms of reparation for indigenous peoples according to the global discourse on indigenous peoples is self-determination, often understood as self-rule. In the case of Nepal, Adivasi Janajati peoples demanded autonomous federal ethnic-based states. This would allow some groups to exercise exceptional rights to natural resources in their new autonomous states.

closer look into the practice of politics shows how it is different to cultural politics.

While cultural approaches deal with theorizing oppositional, critical, and reconstructive approaches to the political through a vast array of cultural forms and formulations, the practice of politics moves beyond the rigid terrain of culture into the realm of power, which exists everywhere. This is especially relevant to this research as the cultural practices in its research area are linked to the global indigenous movement and other developmental practices, indigenous institutions and activism – not just being limited to local culture and agents.

The practice of politics suggests an infinite possibility of meaning-making that renders cultural practices an ever-dynamic process. It recognizes how different people daily interact with discourses (cultural or not). Thus, while the Adivasi movement might want people to identify with ethnic cultures and festivals as specified by activists, leaders, institutions and even the country's legal bodies; individual subjects will assign their own meaning and perform their own practices. These multiple meanings and practices are possible because processes have messy actualities brought about by, but which are not limited to, peoples' relations to things and other processes (Li, 2007). As such, the Adivasi Janajati movement's goals are challenged by groups' relations to other intersecting and complex interests, links, and aspects of their lives, their history, their experiences, and their existing subjectivities. The practice of politics by the Tamang people of Nepal in their cultural festivals thus limits the possibilities of the Adivasi Janajati movement's calculated attempt to dictate what Tamang culture is or should be; often resulting in a 'witches brew' that unexpectedly changes the movement itself.

METHODS

This article is based on field research conducted in the second half of 2018 for my PhD. I undertook interviews and participant observation with the Tamang community of Rainbow Village, focusing on the Lohsar and Dashain festivals. Rainbow Village is an ideal field site for gaining a close view of identity politics in Nepal and is situated in a majority-Tamang district long inhabited by the Tamang people. The Tamang are one of the largest Adivasi Janajati groups in Nepal, comprising 5.6 percent of the total population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011), and are highly active. Initially neglected by the state, Rainbow Village became one of the most active sites for political activism and development initiatives, assisted by its proximity to the capital, in the late 1960s. This legacy of political activism and encounters with development led to a vibrant ethnic awareness in the research site by the 1990s, which also has a significant presence of Bahun Chettri and Dalit populations.

The Tamangs are a Tibeto-Burman people, believed to have migrated from the central Asian plateaus (Zemach-Bersin, 2005), especially Tibet (Kukuczka, 2011). Tamangs have experienced discrimination from the "high" caste Bahun Chettri. State-sponsored discrimination of Tamang people is believed to have worsened due to the community's support for Tibet during the Nepal-Tibet war of 1855–1856. For over two hundred years, Tamangs have been exploited for rents, taxes, and labor, and were

excluded from opportunities in education and the civil and military services (Holmberg, 1989; Zemach-Bersin, 2005). Additionally, their cultural practices, rituals and festivals were either discouraged or looked down upon by the state and the “high” castes. This marginalization continues and is reflected in the lower living standards of the Tamang compared to other groups in Nepal. Such discrimination has prompted many episodes of Tamang resistance throughout history, including in recent years through participation in the Adivasi Janajati movement and exhibited through Tamang performances of culture such as festivals.

Despite substantial numbers of Tamangs involving in the Adivasi Janajati movement, some choose not to. Because of this split, I focus on the Dashain (for its association with the Hindu nation) and Lohsar (a ‘rediscovered’ Tamang festival) festivals. These two festivals have become almost synonymous with support or opposition to the Adivasi Janajati movement. Celebrating Lohsar and boycotting Dashain can be viewed as supporting the movement – and vice versa.

Interviews with research participants were initially semi-structured with questions pertaining directly to the identity movement: people’s views on the movement, ethnic organizations, festivals, artefacts, various other communities, political parties, etc. Participant observation included daily interactions among people at festivals, life events, political activities, ethnic activities, etc. Most interviews were recorded, but not informal conversations, and photographs were taken. The name of the field site and participants have been changed to protect the identities of participants.

RESULTS

This section is divided into four parts. The first parts deal with how Tamangs, during the Adivasi Janajati movement and in its aftermath (following the 2015 Constitution promulgation), celebrate the Lohsar festival. On the surface, this festival’s continuation suggests that its narratives have been accepted and even internalized, especially as participation has continued to grow. However, under the surface, people assign multiple meanings to Lohsar and what it stands for, which at times contradict the meanings assigned by the Adivasi movement. The second two parts deal with peoples’ engagement with the movement’s call to boycott the Dashain festival. Many inhabitants ignore this and continue celebrating the Dashain festival as their own experience of Dashain does not resonate with the festival’s meaning as propagated by the movement. The Adivasi Janajati movement’s discourse surrounding both festivals conflicts with the many interests and identities of the Tamang community’s varied members.

LOHSAR AND THE PRACTICE OF POLITICS IN CELEBRATION

The Adivasi Janajati movement recognizes the Sonam Lohsar festival as the central festival of the Tamang people, celebrated around the time of Chinese New Year (January-February) each year according to the lunar calendar. Lohsar was relatively unheard of in Rainbow Village before the 1990s but is being recently rekindled and

follows a similar celebration format as those in big cities: musical performances, feasts, political activism, cultural shows, etc. Interestingly, while most people in the field site are vocal about their discontent and opposition to the Adivasi identity movement itself, they are open to celebrating Lohsar. People are still confused about when and how to celebrate it. The local government, Tamang-based organizations such as Tamang Ghedung, the Tamang diaspora and local Tamang communities sponsor and organize celebration programs in public spaces.

LOHSAR AS A SPACE FOR INTERSECTIONS OF MULTIPLE INTERESTS

The public spaces for celebration are filled with food stalls and Tamang artists performing Tamang *selo* (songs and dances). Some stalls sell and educate people on Tamang cultural artefacts like *Damphu*, *Vazra*, and *khada* and their cultural and religious importance. *Damphu* a musical drum claimed by activists to be central to Tamang identity. It features in Tamangs festivities and *selo*, which are not only popular among Tamangs, but are garnering a unique place in mainstream national culture. *Vazra* is a religious artefact held by many Buddhist deities like Manjushree and Padmasambhava (greatly respected in Nepalese society) and is a symbol of Tamang Buddhist heritage. Similarly, Tamangs have their costume completed with a particular hat, distinct from the Nepali *Topi* (a hat mostly associated with the ruling class and Bahun Chettri). Many competitions take place at the festival including a *khapse* making competition (a fried biscuit believed to be a historic Tamang staple foodstuff). The festivals serve as spaces for Tamangs to mingle, construct and share a collective identity and create a strong sense of belonging to a wider social group. These kinds of interactions with artefacts and other people are result in the extension and distribution of collective memories (Heersmink, 2021).

During my visit, a monk in the village gave a small speech on the use of *khada* and its importance to Tamang identity. *Khada* is a piece of cloth traditionally used in Tibetan Buddhism that is offered to gods and deities. It is also offered to people on special occasions like birthdays, weddings, religious rituals etc., and especially given to guests as a sign of respect. There are traditionally different colors meant for gods and people. It can be used again and again, and when it cannot be used anymore, it is supposed to be tied to sacred trees or left in holy places. In recent times, *khada* is used widely by most communities around the country in place of garlands at various religious and official ceremonies. For the monk speaking and those listening to him, the *khada* showcases the intelligence of Tamang culture and its increasing acceptance. This is important as it gives prestige to Tamang culture and heals some of the trauma of the past when Tamangs were discriminated against by mainstream Hindu culture. As Hunani-Kay Trask states, restoration and practice of such festival activities serve to reclaim past and lost ways of life and decolonize the mind (as cited in Phipp, 2010). As such, the sense of inferiority that Tamangs endured during unification and especially during the Panchayat and Rana rule are soothed.

Planning and participation in such festivals contributes to emotional wellbeing and may lead to positive identification (Hokowhitu, 2014; Lee & Chang, 2017). The

Lohsar festival is also a prominent site for the *Tamsaling* (proposed Tamang autonomous state) campaign. Activists and politicians take advantage of the festival's large attendance to argue for a *Tamsaling* to correct the injustices of the past and honor Tamang culture, history and their ancestors. Lohsar thus serves as an opportunity for political strategy keeping Tamang issues on the national agenda. The public celebration as a platform to build new resources for the community as it often hosts influential political figures, media people, administrators, health care workers, etc. Many felicitations, services, scholarships, medical facilities, gifts and resources are handed out or promised during the public celebrations. The Lohsar festival in Rainbow Village is fast becoming a part of indigenous wellbeing as it fosters community belonging and in so doing defines and makes a connection between people and place (Slater, 2010). These celebrations allow Tamangs to present themselves to the world and challenge a history that has rendered them absent (Slater, 2010). Hence Lohsar serves as a space for positive reinforcement for Tamangs.

However, the celebration of Lohsar does not necessarily resonate with the meaning of Lohsar as stipulated by the Adivasi discourse. While many feel Lohsar must be celebrated, they have a diverse take on just how it should be celebrated. For many, Lohsar is a new year celebration and not a festival. One well-respected village elder stated:

Lohsar is not a festival, it is just new year. In Tamang language, Loh means year and Sar means new, so Lohsar literally means new year. New years are not really festivals, they just mark new beginnings. There is no need to term Lohsar a festival. Festivals are mostly an intimate practice. Families are involved, emotions are involved, but the new year is just that. If Lohsar was a festival, why would the government have to give money to celebrate it (referring to the budget that the local government allocates for celebration) and why would people celebrate it outside but not in their home? (I. Tamang, personal communication, October 9, 2018).

Statements like this are common. While the Adivasi movement connects Lohsar to history, memory, oppression and pride, its meaning for people depends on their own experiences. The narratives of the movement only loosely resonate with the people. Tamangs, while acknowledging history, remain skeptical about the festival's authenticity and practicality. Further, as Rainbow Village is in a Tamang majority district, people have less experience of oppression and domination than the movement takes for granted. Their experience with the Bahun Chettri, although not without conflict, has not been as polarizing as the movement claims. Many people align their disapproval of the movement with the celebration of Lohsar by calling it "just a new year" or "just an opportunity to eat, dance and sing" and do not acknowledge it as a festival. In doing so they are carefully constructing their meaning of the festival to balance aspects of their identity that the Adivasi movement does not acknowledge; such as the identity that most Tamangs in Rainbow Village identify themselves as – Buddhist, but also Hindu.

Many residents reconcile their Tamang identity as part of the amalgamation of Buddhist-Hindu culture so evident in Nepal. The interlinking of practices related to two or more religions is quite common in Nepal. Buddhism and Hinduism, in general,

are seen as having many similarities, but the case becomes even more complicated in the context of Nepal. As the birthplace of Buddha, all the Nepalese Buddhists, Hindus or otherwise, have a deep sense of ownership and almost possessiveness toward the Buddha and Buddhism. Many of the deities and practices are common to both religions. Many Nepalis would prefer to have a dual religious identity of Hindu and Buddhist (Gellner, 2018; Gellner & Hausner, 2018). While the Adivasi Jatanasi movement attributes a strict Buddhist identity to the Lohsar festival, people introduce part of their Hindu identity to the celebration.

As noted above, Lohsar is also an opportunity to showcase Tamang culture as Buddhist and distinct from the Hindu cultural practices, including the use of Tamang costumes. During the Adivasi movement, costume is politicized and ethnic communities proudly exhibit their ethnic costumes in mainstream spaces. Many members of parliament from ethnic communities began wearing their specific costumes, foregoing *Daura suruwal* or *saree* (formerly called national dress and mostly associated with “high” caste Bahun Chettri). Similarly, there is a call to boycott *sindur* (red vermillion powder worn on partings of hair), *potey* (glass bead necklaces) and *tika* (a sticker or vermillion powder worn on the forehead) for its association with Hindu culture. However, many participants of the Lohsar festival ignore this and wear *sindor*, *potey*, and *tika* with Tamang costumes during the festival. Further, even though most celebrate Lohsar, a few feel say they feel pressured to do so as they believe if they do not participate, they will be a target of ridicule or accusations from activists. By constructing new meanings, some Tamangs alleviate these pressures.

DASHAIN AND THE PRACTICE OF POLITICS IN RESISTING BOYCOTTS

The very foundation of the Adivasi movement is dependent on the existence of an oppositional identity, as such, the call for the revitalization of ethnic festivals is inseparable from calls to boycott Dashain. Throughout Nepal, this call has led many people to make dramatic changes in their cultural practices. The boycott initially gained momentum in the country’s east in the early 1990s and was followed by many ethnic groups throughout the rest of the country. Indigenous activists represent Dashain as a severe form of cultural oppression by the majority that is extremely detrimental to the lives and culture of Adivasi Janajati peoples (Hangen, 2013). Dashain takes place in late September-October and has a long history and was until recently called the ‘national festival,’ and for many (including Janajati), it continues to be seen as such. The 15-day festival in honor of the goddess Durga’s victory over evil starts by sowing barley and corn (*Jamara*) in a mixture of soil and cow dung, which is worshipped for ten days, when elders put *tika* (mixture of rice yoghurt and red vermillion) on the forehead of younger ones as a form of blessing. The festival is a big part of Nepalese life, Hindu or not. Many people visit Nepal from abroad and there is substantial rural-urban movement within the country at the time of the festival. It is a time to gather family and friends, feast and rejoice. But it has also been a tool used by the state during the Rana and Panchayat eras in a bid to assimilate Nepalese irrespective of their religion (see Hangen, 2013; Holmberg, 2016). The state forced

citizens to participate in the holiday (Yakharai, 1996).

During Panchayat, every local headman was expected to stand in for the king and take a leading role in the festival. Ritual roles were distributed on a caste basis with the more demeaning roles being ascribed to 'tribals' or low castes (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1993). Additionally, animal sacrifice (usually a goat) was made mandatory for those who could afford it and fingerprints stained with animal blood had to be put on the door of houses so soldiers could confirm the sacrifice. However, Dashain has never been a uniform festival, and each community has modified the celebration to incorporate rituals that highlight the distinct identities of their community. Campbell (1997) discusses how the Tamang celebrate the holiday, including a funeral for a sacrificed buffalo to redeem the sin of violence, and the role of the Tamang lamas and other ritual practitioners in the performance of the rites. Some ethnic communities like Magar, Tamang and Gurung use white *tika* instead of red to oppose the ritual of animal sacrifice. This shows that while the state controls the proliferation of Dashain celebration, it cannot control the meanings and modifications made by the local population. The ethnic Kirat outright rejected the festival and interestingly, owing to their understanding with the king's representative and considerable economic resources, they were permitted to forego Dashain. On the other hand, ethnic Rai people started celebrating it. The decrease in celebrations, notably in the east, started only in the 1990s with the rise of the Mongolian National Organization and its ethnic awareness campaign. Activists disseminated the idea celebrating Dashain meant identifying as Hindus and accepting a low place in the Hindu caste system (Rai 2003; Yakharai, 1996) which ignores the injustices suffered by their ancestors.

DASHAIN AS SPACE FOR THE INTERSECTION OF MULTIPLE INTERESTS

A call to boycott Dashain was widely circulated in Rainbow Village. Despite such activism many residents still consider Dashain their main festival. Even the families of activists advocating against the festival themselves only subdue their celebrations rather than foregoing it entirely. Before the boycott call, the Tamangs already used white *tika* on the forehead instead of the red used by Bahun Chettri, and *Jamara* is not usually kept in each household (continuing the previous practices where *Jamara* would be given by the Bahun priest). The basic principle of receiving blessings from elders and visiting Devi temples are widely practiced. Parents especially like this as it means their children and grandchildren, and other family, will come home. As one Rainbow Village elder said, "the village comes alive during Dashain."

For most villagers, Dashain means saving up and spending vast sums of money and feasting, meeting up with family friends and escaping the miseries of everyday life (including ethnic conflict). However, some have concerns. Dhan Bahadur Tamang, a wealthy research participant, noted that until 2017, the media and government offices referred to Dashain as "Hindu's great festival." He was slightly relieved in 2018 when they started referring to Dashain as "Nepal's great festival." He explained that small things like this are actually important and contribute to the divisive nature of the festival.

As Li (2007) states, subjects formed in these matrices encounter inconsistencies that provide grist for critical insights: the discrepancies between the Adivasi movement narratives and Tamang experiences of Dashain provokes Tamang subjectivities for critical evaluation of Dashain which influences their celebration practice. For most research participants, Dashain has been about happiness and community, and worries are put on hold. The idea that Dashain is forced upon the Tamang does not resonate with residents who look forward to the occasion all year round. The continuation of the practice of celebrating Dashain also stands in opposition to the movement's narrative of Tamangs as non-Hindu. Accordingly, most research participants confirmed that they were Buddhist but also Hindu. There are many Hindu-Buddhist intermixing gods and goddesses in the village which have been long worshipped and Dashain is a central event for such worship. The call for boycotting Dashain disturbs these century-long practices integral to peoples' belief systems. Most elders believe boycotting Dashain would anger the gods and cause misfortune to the community. The Adivasi movement's boycott implies Buddhism is a static, homogenous religion that cannot be adjusted by peoples, practices and places. Similarly, the Tamangs are not static, homogenized entities. Their culture has adjusted with migration and acculturation, etc., over time. The Adivasi movement's description of Dashain conflicts with this reality. Processes and ideas are never linear, they are subject to unexpected time-spaces and experiences. The very ideas that the Adivasi movement bases itself on, develop into the elements that challenge and contradict it.

In Rainbow Village and elsewhere in Nepal the Dashain celebration is also highly influenced by political party affiliations. Loyal followers of the Maoist party abstain from or perform subdued festival celebrations, while supporters of the Nepali Congress (NC) or Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) publicly support and celebrate the festival. Celebration of Dashain is a sign of party loyalty (Hangen, 2013). During the constitution-making process, the two older political parties, the NC and CPN-UML, although pledging to redress many ethnic grievances, were never in favor of ethnic movements and their demands, as they conflicted with the ideologies and interests of their voter base. The NC is the oldest party and has a diverse, mass following, with socialist democracy widely accepted to be its guiding principle. It has contributed to institutionalizing democracy in Nepal and views it as the best solution for governance and solving issues of ethnicity. Similarly, the CPN-UML, regard themselves as agents of social transformation, aiming to subsume ethnic identities into a more homogenous national identity (Shneiderman, 2009). The Maoists on the other hand base focus on caste and class discrimination. For them and their base, ethnic movements are struggles for equality and power-sharing. The Maoist party capitalized on caste and ethnic-based issues to fuel its violent struggle against the state from 1996-2006 and emerged as the leading party in the 2008 Constituent Assembly. The Maoist party's emergence as the leading party resulted in a massive power struggle with the two older parties in which support or opposition to the ethnic movements was central (Gharti, 2022).

In Rainbow Village, like in the rest of the country, political parties are integral to peoples' lives. With the absence of employment opportunities, a welfare system and a reliable administrative system, people depend on parties to fill the void. Apart from

instrumental needs, parties also provide emotional support, as there is often a lack of formality and distance practiced by party leaders. Supporters of a particular party have ideological similarities or have had similar life experiences and often rely on this community for emotional and instrumental support. Party supporters influence party ideology and are also influenced by it. To sustain membership in their respective parties, supporters often display attitudes of prototypical ingroup members, traits and established norms of the group, that are formed through agreement (Hogg, 2016). These displays reflect a deeper process of internalization and enactment of the group's prototype norm (Huddy et al., 2018). Given this, the NC and CPN-UML's disagreement with the Janajati movement and the Maoists' support for it have been significant in representing and directing voter base perception and corresponding actions. During the constitution-making era and even today many of the three parties' supporters took cues from their respective parties regarding ethnic issues (Gharti, 2022), which is observable in the cultural practices of Tamangs. Due to this wider national context, many Maoists in Rainbow Village subdued their Dashain celebrations, while NC and UML supporters continue celebrating it.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Adivasi Janajati movement continues to disseminate narratives of ethnic identity in which issues surrounding cultural practices such as festivals are pivotal. However, despite these narratives and sustained pressure on communities, there is a lack of uniformity in practice—such as the Tamang celebrating Lohsar and rejecting the boycott of Dashain. Through these celebrations, people attend to a sense of healing and wellbeing, a sense of collective identity, and construct a positive view of themselves. Tamangs apply multiple meanings to Lohsar, often contradicting the narratives of Adivasi Janajati movement that affixes a strict Buddhist identity to it, distinct from Hinduism. This is illustrated by research participants claiming Lohsar is just “new year” and not meant for public spaces and introducing ‘Hindu’ artefacts and rituals into the festivals. Thus, rather than being a project in constructing identity as stipulated by the movement, peoples are more focused on having a good time and growing as a community. This is the practice of politics by subjects against the narratives of the Adivasi Janajati movement that seeks to define their cultural conduct.

Similarly, the vibrant celebration of Dashain and its enormous campaign builds the argument that communities and individuals have practiced politics to ‘make sense’ of inconsistencies between the Adivasi movement's discourse and peoples' experiences, interests, and ideologies. While the movement associates Dashain with Hindu domination, Tamangs associate Dashain with family, syncretic Buddhist-Hindu identity, being part of wider society, tradition, religion and in many cases professing party loyalty and exhibiting political identity. Thus, rather than fitting themselves into the identity circumscribed by the movement, Tamang peoples exercise multiple identities and interests by modifying the meaning of the festival in relation to their own needs, experience, and ideology. The celebrations reconcile the fluid and multiple natures of Tamang identity (Butler, 1990). Thus, the practice of Dashain showcases how the Adivasi movement breeds subjectivities through creative

contestation and evaluation of the movement itself.

The practice of politics permeates everyday life, from ordinary conversations and interactions to a sense of being part of a common identity, to making sense of who one is, resulting from self-conscious critical analysis of the surrounding world. In so doing, it challenges the Adivasi movement's imagery of a linear Tamang identity distinct from mainstream society assesses the movement based on this imagery. This suggests that the indigenous subjectivities are not given; there is no single ideology, be it an indigenous movement, political party or even religion, that fully determines indigenous subjectivity. Accordingly, Tamangs are neither victims of the making of indigenous peoples, nor have they surrendered to the discourse of the Adivasi Janajati movement or overlooked it—they retain the power to act otherwise. When the movement's interests and narratives collide with Tamang interests, ideologies and lived experiences, they deliberate and analyze what it means to their lives. The practice of politics here is a collective and strategic practice that articulates a political antagonism embedded in lived experience, memories and everyday links and relations. In so doing, the Tamang have simultaneously enabled the movement and threatened the very foundation of the movement.

The assumption that festivals are mere attempts to 'become indigenous' or have outlasted their purpose beyond the Adivasi movement is refuted by this article. Festivals and their meanings are neither given nor predictable. They lie in the conjunctures of politics and those who try to govern the conduct of subjects, and the subjectivities that emerge when multiple powers collide, provoking the practice of politics in line with peoples' experience, interests, and ideologies. Hence, festivals are neither mere performances aimed at creating indigeneity nor are they forced on peoples; they are a dynamic practice of politics by peoples which limit the possibilities of the Adivasi movement, something widely overlooked.

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