

## Until Gorkhaland

### *Agitation in the Remains*

“CRPF aayo! CRPF aayo!” The call would ring out through the plantation darkness, warning of a possible raid by the government’s paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Again the call would pierce the night—“CRPF aayo! CRPF aayo!”—moving through the cinchona and villages, sending young Gorkhas scrambling from their homes and into the jungle to wait out the danger. To be a Gorkha man caught in a raid during the agitations could mean anything: violence, arrest, false charges, disappearance. And so would sound the sentinels of Gorkhaland, “CRPF aayo! CRPF aayo!”—a warning of the enemy’s approach, a signal to escape to the forested hillsides they knew so well.

Tonight would be different. Tonight the people of Mungpoo would hold their ground. Gebu was just sixteen in 1986 when the first Gorkhaland agitation began. The son of a plantation officer, Gebu grew up privileged compared to his cinchona laborer friends. He had things they did not: a colonial-era bungalow to call home, a better education, a horse, a gun. But Gebu was also a Gorkha, and, as he told me in 2020, he soon found himself swept up in the movement.

My first brush happened just below our bungalow in the field, what we call the *bari*, down by the cowshed. There were some sweet potatoes there that were being ravaged by wild boar at night. I was there, along with a *chowkidar* [guard], waiting with the gun for the wild boar to show up so that I could shoot them. And as I was waiting, I heard quite a commotion in the village. Then over loudspeakers an announcement came to turn off all lights. Of course, we didn’t have electricity, but people used to use batteries. They announced to turn off all lights and for all the young people, young men, to come out on the streets. So we went to the main square, and everyone was saying that we need more people because this guy

R. K. Handa, a much-feared police officer, was coming. He was probably the superintendent of police, the SP, then, so he was well known for conducting raids and instilling a lot of fear. If he was coming through Mungpoo, that definitely meant that he would be conducting raids. As I went down to the main road, I could easily recognize the voice on the loudspeaker: it happened to be one of my buddies, much senior to me. So immediately they singled me out since I had a gun. They said, "You need to come with us."

They led me through the bazaar. All the lights were off. Complete blackout! I could see some of the local boys sprawled across the tin roofs. I don't know what they were doing. They probably had some crude homemade bombs or explosives. As we approached Nali Dara [the main junction in Mungpoo], there was quite a bit of cinchona, quinine, growing there along the road. And when I looked, I saw a lot of people in there. You know, among the cinchona. A lot of people had gathered with *khukuris*, bows and arrows, knives, whatever they could get their hands on. People actually had already showed up there, anticipating the raid. But the leaders led me onward to the junction at Nali Dara and put me behind a stone chorten [a small Buddhist stupa]. They sat me there and said, "If the SP comes from the road below toward Darjeeling, then . . ."

I was on edge point, up there behind the chorten. I probably had three rounds with me, which I had repacked myself. I wasn't even sure whether they'd actually go off. My heart was racing. It was racing! But then the only thought, the foremost thought in my mind, is just simply: I will just give it a shot. I will give it a shot. At least when the time comes, when he shows up, I'm actually going to just try my best to shoot. I wasn't thinking of any consequences. Nothing. Nothing! Imagine the consequences: that was a government gun belonging to my father, a plantation officer! But I thought nothing of that. Just what I've been told. I've been asked to do this. This guy, Handa, is the enemy, right? So he was just that concept of the enemy. Yeah, well, I have to fight!

. . .

What possibilities of resistance, revolution, and justice lay in the remains? This chapter explores a violent reanimation of quinine's remains: the Gorkhaland agitations. Since the 1980s, the region's demographic majority, the Gorkhas, has waged three subnationalist agitations for a separate state of Gorkhaland. The movement's goal is to create a homeland for the Gorkhas within India, where they can govern themselves free from the exploitation, discrimination, and marginalization that have dogged their existence in India since the colonial period. Attaining Gorkhaland, however, requires prying the region from West Bengal, which the Gorkhas see as their archenemy and a colonial force in its own right.

The cinchona plantations sit squarely within the demanded territory of Gorkhaland. And their local population is almost entirely Gorkha. The fact that the plantations remain the property of the West Bengal government has made them a particularly violent arena of the Gorkhaland agitations. Cinchona workers have

been centrally involved with the Gorkhaland movement from the start. Gebu's story of the ambush at Mungpoo is just one example of how the cinchona community has taken up the fight for Gorkhaland. Workers shared with me harrowing tales from the 1980s of decapitated heads appearing at their morning musters, homes ransacked, go-downs set ablaze, plantation offices looted, robberies, raids, disappearances, kidnappings, and murders. The 1980s Gorkhaland uprisings remain the movement's archetype, but the agitations have returned, reappearing in 2007–8, when a new "liberation front" resurrected the cause, and again in 2017, when a devastating third agitation crippled the region with 104 days of blockades, violence, internet blackout, and food shortages. And still the demand for Gorkhaland is unrequited.

Attend a political rally in the hills, and you will hear impassioned chants of "Jai Gorkha! Jai Gorkha!" (Victory to the Gorkha!). Listen longer, and you will hear scathing critiques of West Bengal: "Bengal hamro chyan ho!" (Bengal is our grave!). And you will hear the Gorkhas' solution: "Gorkhaland hamro mangh ho!" (Gorkhaland is our demand!). The enmity echoes across the generations and takes particular form on the cinchona plantations. A local Gorkha plantation leader didn't mince words when explaining the Gorkhas' relationship to West Bengal. "The word I am about to use does not sound democratic," he told me from his home in Mungpoo, just months after the 2017 agitations, "but the people in Kolkata are colonial-minded people. They are of colonial design! When we speak of a democratic right of separating from West Bengal, they put us in jail on sedition charges. Is that democracy?" Now in his sixties, he grew up a son of cinchona soil and had served in multiple agitations. He was alone in neither his experience nor his judgment of West Bengal's "colonial" rule. Accusations of internal colonialization are rampant.<sup>1</sup> For those who toil on the exhausted plantations of this erstwhile colonial hill station, West Bengal's rule marks but the latest colonial claim to life and land. When the Gorkhas speak, they accordingly do so from the subaltern vantage point of generations of living and working under these conditions of compounded coloniality—first British, now Bengali.<sup>2</sup> Particularly for Gorkhas of the cinchona plantations, coloniality is therefore not a thing of the past. It is a condition that structures and haunts the present.

The Gorkhaland agitations are a response to these conditions of undying coloniality.<sup>3</sup> To understand their shape and feel on the cinchona plantations, one first must contend with plantations as a distinct kind of territorial formation. By design, plantations lay territorial claim to land and life. They uproot plants and peoples from often very disparate parts of the world, bring them to a place, and make them work together. Hard. Haraway and Tsing call this "multispecies forced labor."<sup>4</sup> Through these processes of transfer and extraction, plantations radically transform ecologies—often sucking land and life into a vicious cycle of exhaustion and dependence on the imperial economy that they serve.

As territorial configurations, plantations have their ways of eviscerating all that came before.<sup>5</sup> Their monocropped, monopolistic technologies of control countenance no other claims on space—no other notions of territory. What held true in the tea and cinchona plantations of colonial Darjeeling and Kalimpong has largely held true in the postcolonial era. That is, until Gorkhaland.

Put an ear to the ground, and one can hear other tellings of history, other murmurs of territory echoing through the remains. In claiming the cinchona plantations and greater Darjeeling-Kalimpong Hills as a distinctively ethnic or “Gorkha” space, the Gorkhaland movement poses a radically different notion of territory—one predicated on the presence, belonging, and work of the people who made these places what they were then and what they are now. The movement puts to the West Bengal-controlled plantation a vernacular theory of territory,<sup>6</sup> written in the impassioned, often-violent scripts of agitation.

Gorkhas typically refer to their struggle as either an *andolan* (an anodyne term in South Asian languages meaning “movement”) or by the English word *agitation*, the double entendre of which is useful. In the fight for Gorkhaland, *agitation* is equally a political project and an embodied state—that is, a politics of agitating and an experience of being agitated. Politically, agitation involves tactics like protests, region-wide strikes (*bandhs*), destruction of government properties, and guerrilla warfare. Experientially, agitation involves being on edge, anxious, and collectively uncertain about what tomorrow will bring. Importantly, one form of agitation begets the other. And they leave their traces. The traumas of three unsuccessful Gorkhaland agitations have accumulated in the body and body politic. On the cinchona plantations, they have left a people and their land scarred and wanting. Agitation, in these regards, is written into quinine’s remains. There it lives as both history and imminent possibility. Indeed, even when the hills are not burning, the potential for agitation is always present—a project and condition prone to return.

For Gorkha cinchona workers, the plantation’s imperious control did not end with the British Empire; it merely changed hands. Even as West Bengal has steadily abandoned the quinine project of its British predecessors, the state government’s grip on the plantations is unrelenting. This is especially clear in the context of the agitations, wherein the cinchona plantations have morphed into a theater of insurgent and counterinsurgent operations. Part of this owes to the territorial configurations of these spaces. For Gorkhas, the cinchona plantations are an ethnic territory to be pried from the neocolonial grips of West Bengal. The government of West Bengal, conversely, has made the plantations a stage of state power and persistent domination. Part owes to the terrain of the cinchona plantations themselves. Steep, densely forested, and remote, these tracts have proven ideal terrain for the guerrilla warfare on which the movement has depended. As territory and terrain,<sup>7</sup> the cinchona plantations have thus proven a unique battleground in the Gorkhaland struggle.

Here I explore the Gorkhaland agitations from the distinct vantage point of the cinchona plantations and the cinchona community itself—a people who have fought and “agitated” for these places that are their home.<sup>8</sup> Seen through the prism of agitation, the cinchona plantations appear to be many things: a territory to be reclaimed; property to be owned and developed; the terrain on which subnationalist struggle is fought; the grounds on which life is lived.<sup>9</sup> Above all, they are places of *belonging*: belonging in the sense of being in and of one’s place and community and belonging in the sense of something that is rightfully one’s own.<sup>10</sup> Belonging—and the rights, dignity, and justice that go with it—is what history has denied the Gorkhas. It is what is at stake.

And so it was that sixteen-year-old Gebu found himself crouched behind that chorten, gun in hand, waiting for the headlights and his moment to do what his people needed. Scared but ready, Gebu lay in wait through the night, his community hiding behind him in the cinchona. Ultimately, the SP’s headlights never appeared. The next day Mungpoo learned that the SP, fearing Gorkha informants in his force, had “changed his mind” at the last minute (a common counterinsurgent tactic of the time) and raided the nearby town of Jorbungalow instead. The ambush therefore never happened. Gebu never had the opportunity to pull the trigger. But he believes he would have, likely at the cost of his own life.

Listening to Gebu tell his story, I tried to imagine being in that position, a would-be assassin at age sixteen. “I’m just trying to put myself in your shoes,” I said to my friend. “I mean, you’re a Gorkha. I’m sure there was just this immense feeling of solidarity with everybody in that moment. And this is the enemy.”

“It’s simply just that,” Gebu responded. “We’re all in this together, whatever the consequence.”

#### UNSETTLING TERRITORY

The rumor is legendary. Deep in the throes of the first Gorkhaland agitation, CRPF commandos descended on the cinchona plantation offices at Munsong. It was just after dark when the paramilitary unit appeared, seemingly out of nowhere. They told the *chowkidar* to run, which he did. As commandos surrounded the dilapidated bungalow, the manager and staff likewise fled. With the premises vacated, the commandos stormed the offices. What happened inside remains a mystery. Three hours later, though, the commandos climbed back into their jeeps and disappeared as quickly as they appeared. The next morning the staff returned to find the office ransacked. Tables were upturned. The office’s safe was broken open. Yet nothing, at first, seemed to be missing. Only later did the staff realize that a single file had gone missing. It was called “File 6,” and it dealt with the historical boundaries of the Munsong plantation. Across the top of this file was allegedly written “Property of the Kingdom of Bhutan.” Now it was gone.

I chased this rumor for years, never quite getting a definitive version of what happened that day in Munsong. Eyewitnesses are hard to come by. The traumas of agitation have muddled memory and made it mercurial. Not everyone on the cinchona plantations has heard the story. But for those who have, it has assumed mythical properties—not only for the fantastic qualities of a state swooping down to confiscate a mysterious file, but also for what it says about the order of the world in quinine's wake.<sup>11</sup> I heard many tellings during fieldwork, each with its own gaps and flourishes: the file is only thirty pages long; it's written entirely in calligraphy; it's in New Delhi; no, it's sealed and locked away at the Department of Forestry. Nobody's quite sure where the file is or what it says, much less whether it still exists. Yet the story continues to be told. The rumor moves.

It moves for two reasons. The first concerns how Munsong became British territory—what we might think of as colonial territory formation *then*. The second concerns how territory is made and maintained *now*. Before the British colonial period, the borders and demographics of the region were not what they are today. In the early nineteenth century, Nepal reached as far east as the Teesta River, encompassing today's Darjeeling district. Kalimpong was part of Bhutan, until the British annexed it in 1865 at the close of the Anglo-Bhutan war. Before the colonial period, sovereignty seems to have been relatively fluid, as indigenous Lepcha, Bhutia, and a smattering of Nepali-speaking (Gorkha) communities paid tribute to different sovereigns at different times depending on the circumstance. But as the historian Catherine Warner has ably shown, the British effectively territorialized the region, formalizing borders and instituting new systems of taxation, and through these political technologies, establishing new forms of rule.<sup>12</sup> These were the colonial histories through which the hills—and, ultimately, places like Mungpoo and Munsong—became the official territory of the British Empire.

The rumor poses an alternate version of this history. The details are opaque, yet every telling I heard came back to the same detail: that file. Across the top of this British colonial document was reportedly written "Property of the Kingdom of Bhutan." Others have it as "Rent of Bhutan"—seemingly in reference to Munsong originally being part of Bhutan but also raising questions about how that territory came into British hands. Recall from chapter 1 how the British expanded the cinchona frontier into the Kalimpong Hills, driven by the moral imperative of protecting human life from the malaria killing multitudes in the plains below.

The rumor posits a glitch—or crack—in Munsong's colonial foundings and any triumphant narratives thereof. That mysterious file bearing the name of another sovereign casts doubts on the legitimacy of British claims to this territory by insinuating that the empire was perhaps leasing the land from Bhutan all along. From there the crack quickly spreads. For if the British lacked legitimacy, then so too do the inheritors of that colonial mantle, West Bengal. What might that mean for the Gorkha workers who've lived and worked on this land for generations?<sup>13</sup> What might it mean for Gorkhaland? Fast-forward to the 1980s agitations when the hills

were erupting in a very different project of territory making. Someone somewhere knew about the file, ordered the raid, and made it disappear.

Only it didn't. Instead, the file took new life precisely because of its spectacular disappearance. The reasons for the rumor's salience are both historical and contemporary. Historically, it suggests something faulty and untoward in the founding of this land. It reminds listeners on the cinchona plantations that these were lands taken and bent to the will of empire. In doing so, it lays bare the obvious state secret that imperial territory always rests on shaky claims backed by violence, force, and particular versions of history,<sup>14</sup> that it is always open to question and contestation. For a people seeking their rightful place in India, this is a burning issue. It is an opening.

The rumor's provocation is to unsettle territory *then* in order to unsettle territory *now*. It reopens the question at the heart of the Gorkhaland movement: To whom does this land belong? The rumor moves not only for what it suggests about Munsong's colonial past but also for what it says about life, power, and territory in the present—*after* quinine. It corroborates what Gorkhas today know all too well to be true: this holding of state territory *still* requires its disappearances, violence, and military operations. For the Gorkha cinchona workers who tell this tale, the raid at Munsong was not just a historical coverup. It was yet another instance of territory's violent constitution in this corner of India.

If the rumor unsettled territory through insinuation, the Gorkhaland movement has elsewhere been more direct. Subash Ghisingh, leader of the Gorkhaland National Liberation Front (GNLF), which launched the first agitations in the 1980s, was a master in this art. The "militant-poet" repeatedly dismantled the foundations of British rule in order to justify Gorkhaland. Ghisingh made it a point to morally deconstruct the treaties that brought Darjeeling and then Kalimpong under British control.<sup>15</sup> "The aboriginally inhabiting Gorkhas," Ghisingh wrote in 1983, "became in serious false position when their historic land and territories were mercilessly ceded to the land of the British empire by the Treaty of Sugaulee on 2nd December, 1815." Ghisingh elaborated that one treaty after another had subsequently built on those shoddy foundations to lead to the Gorkhas' contemporary crisis. Ghisingh's ultimate target, however, was not the British's Empire's claim to territory; it was West Bengal's. To deny Gorkhaland on the logic that contemporary "Bengal would not be divided," as was the government's common refrain, was to miss the fundamental point. "Gorkhaland has never been a part of Bengal," Ghisingh insisted. "The British forcibly added this land to Bengal. So by granting our demand, the Centre would just right an historical wrong."<sup>16</sup>

As headlines of "the hills burning" began splashing across national newspapers, the charismatic Ghisingh pleaded for India to recognize the continuities between British and Bengali rule. "The same British policy was, and is being, followed and adopted by the West Bengal Government," he pleaded in a 1987 letter to Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi. "[This] makes it crystal clear that the Gorkhas of the hills areas are simply the political slaves of West Bengal."<sup>17</sup>

Ghisingh didn't just unsettle territory. He also unsettled his own people by stoking the Gorkhas' anxieties of belonging in India—what I've elsewhere termed "anxious belongings."<sup>18</sup> These anxieties date to the colonial migration patterns that brought many (though not all) Gorkhas to colonial Darjeeling to work for the British. These anxieties have been continually reaggravated as India's Gorkhas have been excluded as "foreigners," "outsiders," and "chinkies." The ethnic cleansings of Gorkhas in India's Northeast and in neighboring Bhutan in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s only underscored Gorkhas' insecurities regarding their place in India.<sup>19</sup> Ghisingh fomented these anxieties and offered their cure. In his diagnosis, "The growing fears of the Gorkhas had spread like a cancer. There was just one capsule which could clean the system of this affliction—Gorkhaland."<sup>20</sup>

In 1986, the GNLF's agitation spread like wildfire. Bands of GNLF fighters took to the forests and began attacking government property and personnel. The government countered by deploying police and paramilitary forces like the CRPF in an ill-fated attempt to tamp down the insurgency. As the violence escalated, political graffiti painted the logics and landscape of the Gorkhas' agitation.

"Bengal must stop looting us . . .  
We are not slaves of Bengal . . .  
Bengal is not our master."

"Gorkhaland Is Dearer Than Life."

"Deceitful leaders trying to dislodge the movement for our land, beware!"<sup>21</sup>

The tea estates were one arena of the struggle. The densely populated cities of Darjeeling Town and Kalimpong Town were another. Many of the agitation's most notorious events unfolded in these urban centers. On July 17, 1986, for example, Gorkha demonstrators gathered in Kalimpong to burn copies of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty, which Ghisingh claimed allowed Indian Gorkhas to be misconstrued as outsiders in India. Police fired on the demonstrators, arresting twenty-seven. When thousands of Gorkhas reassembled at the *mela* (fair) grounds at the center of town to protest the arrests, the CRPF took to the rooftops and opened fire. The massacre at Kalimpong left thirteen dead.<sup>22</sup>

#### THE CINCHONA BATTLEFIELDS

Fifteen miles down the road, the agitations were taking shape in very different terrain. On the otherwise sleepy Munsong cinchona plantation, the agitation set in "little by little," the plantation's head clerk of the time recalled, before erupting in "full force in 1987 and 1988." Enjoying a sunny day at Munsong in 2017, the now-retired Gorkha clerk explained to Vikash and me how, slow start aside, the violence quickly escalated. "People were murdered," he explained. "Guards



were set on fire, and many more burnings.” Vikash’s father was Munsong’s manager during the agitations, so Vikash had his own experiences to share. As the two of them swapped stories, the clerk told harrowing tales of his own implication. One of his duties as head clerk was to distribute wages—a suddenly dangerous job. Despite being a Gorkha, the clerk soon found himself on the wrong end of the GNLF’s guerrilla warfare. It happened at Munsong’s administrative offices—the same site where the CRPF disappeared the file featured earlier. “I was tidying up my table,” the clerk recounted, “when suddenly I was in the aim of a rifle, at gunpoint.”

“Pointed at you?” I asked.

“At me!” he responded, holding up his hands as guns. “They entered swiftly with rifles. Two were standing outside. Six entered, disconnected our telephone lines, discharged blank fire, and asked me where the money was . . . I was thinking fast. I said, ‘Brother, I don’t have any money. On this table, you will find all the papers that show that all of the wages have already been disbursed. If you wish to check the money vault [a wooden box at that time], you will find it inside the chamber.’ One went inside and gave one kick to the vault. At that very moment, an officer happened to be coming out after receiving his salary. They hit him hard on his hand, strewing his money all over the floor. They quickly picked it up and stuffed it inside their jacket pocket. Then there was no more money for them. It was finished. They yelled ‘Jai Gorkha!’ and left.”

Isolated on a steep hillside, surrounded by dense cinchona stands, and flush with cash on payday, the office was a sitting duck. So it is logical that GNLF guerrillas targeted it. The brazen attack on the plantation’s wages was nevertheless a problem: these, after all, were government funds going *to* Gorkha workers. Management scrambled for a solution. Vikash’s father happened to be overseeing the disbursement of Munsong’s wages at the time. When I interviewed him many years later, he explained the dangers as follows: “About 20 to 25 lakh rupees would have to be brought every month to Munsong. The police were not able to do this work. The CRPF was deployed to do this. The money was brought in a sealed box in a truck that was heavily secured.” Vikash’s father was well connected, so he worked his personal contacts and eventually got through to Ghisingh. Noting how the robbery of wages was robbing Gorkhas of vital resources in these dire times, he pleaded with the GNLF leader to keep his cadres at bay. Ghisingh agreed. But with the agitation intensifying, every payday remained a peril.

Plantation coffers were hardly the only assets targeted. GNLF cadres on the plantations seized jeeps and building materials. Bark disappeared from drying sheds. Timber vanished from the hillsides. Assets that weren’t taken were destroyed. “You cannot imagine how merciless the politics of destruction started to become,” the director of the plantations at the time, S. K. Chatterjee, told me from his Kolkata home decades later. “Ghisingh’s approach was to destroy the

government institutions and the laboratories and fields, which are owned by the government.”

As territory and target, the cinchona plantations were distinct. Where *off* the plantations GNLf cadres selectively attacked government outposts, *on* the plantations everything was government property and thus a potential target. Many of the plantations’ Bengali botanists, chemists, and other officers fled. Those who stayed had little choice but to do the GNLf’s bidding or face the *khukuri*. The tables had turned. The Gorkhas now held the handle and the Bengalis the blade.

Gorkha plantation officers found themselves in a difficult position. By dint of their posts, they worked for West Bengal. But they were also Gorkhas, beholden to their fellow Gorkhas. Vikash remembered his father “trying to strike a balance as best as he could between these two forces. . . . If somebody wanted to burn down the government property, [he would] try to talk people out of it, you know, drive some sense into them and tell them, ‘This is your own. This is *our* own. We should not destroy this.’”

But, of course, everyone knew that the plantations were not Gorkha workers’ “own.” “Eventually the scales starting tipping,” Vikash recounted. “Things were really getting out of hand. I mean, a bunch of people rock up and decide to burn up the government property, a public property. Nobody could stop it, right? You just couldn’t stop it. So you just sit back and watch. It’s all you could do.”

Then there was the labor. Plantation work continued through the agitation, but laborers were arriving to their morning *muster* with sharpened antiestablishment sensibilities—some having spent the night before agitating under the cover of darkness and/or waiting out raids in the nearby jungle. Laborers by day. Guerrillas by night. Whether a worker was taking up arms or not, no one wanted to be a “slave of Bengal,” as the graffiti had it. Beyond getting one’s name in the books to ensure wages and facilities like their homes and fields, there was little incentive to do the hard labor that the West Bengal–owned plantation required. Foot dragging, defiance, and indifference eroded the work culture and discipline (*amushasan*) that had earlier made the plantations’ ecology go. With workers checking in and checking out, the effects spread into the fields and factory, where deteriorating botanical and chemical productivity further weakened an industry already on the brink of collapse.

In 1988, Ghisingh backed off his “nothing short of a separate state” stance and began negotiating with New Delhi and West Bengal for a compromise. After three years of violence, many Gorkhas were relieved to have the agitation’s end in sight. Hard-liners were not having it. The Gorkhas had come too far to turn back now. Soon the GNLf’s most radical elements splintered off into the Gorkha Voluntary Cell (GVC), a guerrilla outfit led by the grizzled Chattrey Subba. As the GVC took to the jungles to carry on the fight, the cinchona plantation became a battleground between not only Gorkhas and West Bengal but also rival Gorkha factions.

The internecine violence was horrific. “There were two groups in those days—one of Chattrey Subba (GVC) and the other of [local GNLf leader] N. T. Moktan. They were at loggerheads with each other,” Vikash’s father explained to me. “If one met the other, they would behead each other, and the head would be hung. The ears would be chopped off and stuffed in the mouth.” One evening, he recalled of his days as plantation manager, “armed men carrying guns came into the office and sat down. Many! About twenty to twenty-five. And there was another circle of men outside the office standing guard to protect the group inside from the rival group. They had come to ask for petrol. Their last demand was that I buy a weapon. It was some sort of light machine gun. The leader came and showed me a bill and told me to buy this machine gun.” The guerrillas’ demand put Vikash’s dad, himself a Gorkha, in an impossible situation. “If I bought that weapon during the agitation,” he explained, “I would be blacklisted [by the cinchona plantation administration and thus fired]. They were using the manager’s jeep for themselves too. These agitators had already taken the vehicle! I said I could not buy the weapon, no matter what they did to me.”

Fortunately, these were GNLf (not GVC) guerrillas, and Vikash’s father always carried a letter from Ghisingh explaining that he belonged to the GNLf and thus nobody was to harm him. The guerrillas backed off this time. Nevertheless, with multiple factions taking aim at the plantations and each other, the situation was becoming unmanageable.

As the agitation spiraled out of control, many used it as a foil to loot the plantations for their own gain. More troubling, some used it as cover to take out grievances on their neighbors. Being a member of a rival faction, or worse yet, a communist-leaning *macpa* could be pretense enough for harassment, even murder.<sup>23</sup> (I heard stories of both.) Gorkha-on-Gorkha violence sullied the agitation. Attacks on the plantation were one thing; attacks on fellow Gorkhas were quite another. In their remembrances, people frequently lamented to me how “out of hand” things got. Many blamed Ghisingh. “I speak the truth,” one elder worker told me, looking back on those tumultuous days. “Ghisingh was a sinner. . . . He called for a forty-day strike. His brain was twisted. He made brother kill brother. Is it possible to get a state doing that?”

History has rendered this a rhetorical question. The 1980s left hundreds dead and thousands of homes destroyed.<sup>24</sup> But a separate state of Gorkhaland was not to be. In 1988, Ghisingh and the GNLf relinquished their demands and signed a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) establishing the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), a semiautonomous administration that granted Gorkhas a marginal degree of self-governance in the three hills subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong. The gestures to ethnic autonomy aside, the DGHC and the hills remained squarely under the jurisdiction—and thumb—of West Bengal.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, this was no Gorkhaland.

The effects (and affects) of the first agitation still ripple through the hills. In its logics, tactics, experiences, and disappointing ends, the GNLf's movement became the archetype for all future agitations. The 1980s agitation promised a homeland. In the end, the MoS that brought it to a close only reinstituted familiar forms of domination. The settlement termed it a "restoration of normalcy."

Nowhere was this "restoration of normalcy" more apparent than on the cinchona plantations where West Bengal's rule emerged from the agitation curiously intact. The MoS laid out nineteen "subjects" that would be brought under DGHC control. Among them were forest management, agriculture, water, public health, sanitation, tourism, and fisheries. Not once did the MoS mention the cinchona plantations. In the government's adjudication of ethnic autonomy and territory, the cinchona plantations didn't figure at all. As territories lost in the lost cause of Gorkhaland, the default was that they would remain under the control of West Bengal.

Which isn't to say things didn't change. Nearly everyone nowadays looks back to the 1980s agitation as a tipping point from which the cinchona plantations have never recovered. The agitation inflicted lasting material damages. Acreage under cultivation and quinine production dropped precipitously during the struggle, never to return to its pre-agitation levels. With workers increasingly dragging their heels, cinchona trees left to grow wild on the hillsides, and a factory sputtering through its dying days, many look back to the 1980s agitation as the time when the plantations lost their way. It was when "everything went wild," as one respondent put it, "when nothing ever again came under control."

The West Bengal government emerged from the crisis even more reluctant to invest in a "sick" industry where the government itself had become the enemy. As a plantation GNLf leader explained, "The movement was very violent. No scientist, bureaucrat, or technocrat could come here. The situation was that of terror, so the government did not want to invest in any scheme at all." At the same time, the violence also underscored the political dangers of abandoning the plantations and their residents outright. Faced with this predicament, West Bengal effectively put the haggard industry on life support, providing just enough to keep the plantations going but never enough to revitalize—or heal—these lands and lives.

Managers tried their best to get workers back to work after the agitation—to capture some of that *anushasan* and pride of earlier eras. But "the hangover of the agitation was still on," as one told me. "Workers' attitude against the administration was as strong as ever. It would take a lot of time for this stubborn defiance to cool down." The defiance may have cooled, but nothing would be the same. Emboldened by the agitation and frustrated by its disappointing ends, trade unions continued to threaten managers. Rowdies continued to kidnap and extort officers.<sup>26</sup> Workers continued to drag their heels, get their names in the books, and hedge their bets. Lacking buy-in from workers and government alike, the

workday shortened, yields waned, and the factory sputtered. India's quinine industry crumbled further into remains.

The same can't be said of the cinchona community's politics. Hardly had GNLf fighters given up their guns to end the agitation in 1988 when the threat of privatization emerged in the early 1990s. Cinchona workers and their unions subsequently girded themselves for a different fight, the battles of which were covered in the previous chapter. The vitriol with which they chased off the representatives of Hindustan Lever, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, and McKinsey & Company might not have been as violent as the Gorkhaland agitations, but they underscored the plantations' political volatility.

The West Bengal government appeared increasingly unsure how to handle the plantations. The Directorate of Cinchona and Other Medicinal Plants was, at the time, overseen by West Bengal's Department of Commerce and Industries, which focused on the "promotion and development of large-scale industries." The cinchona plantations dubiously fit that bill. Yes, the land and manpower were large in scale, but products were selling at barely a trickle. The quinine factory had recently closed. Financial losses were accruing by the crore. In 2004, West Bengal appointed the Standing Committee on Commerce and Industries and Industrial Reconstruction to investigate. Its findings were troubling. The Standing Committee found that the cinchona plantations' cost to produce one kilogram of bark was more than triple the price it could fetch on the open market. "The high cost of inferior raw material," the committee's report noted, "totally shattered whatever commercial potential" the cinchona directorate might have. It went on to lament "the insidious growth of manpower," before floating an array of half-baked suggestions—none of which offered a definitive way out of the "crisis."<sup>27</sup>

The situation looked intractable. For the moment, privatization seemed off the table, thanks to the trade unions' resistance. The desires for Gorkhaland, which surfaced periodically through the 1990s and 2000s, added a whole other set of contingencies to the equation. Unsure what to do, the West Bengal government did what bureaucracies are well geared to do: it passed the buck, transferring the cinchona directorate from Commerce and Industries to the smaller Department of Food Processing Industries and Horticulture in 2006. The latter's agricultural expertise seemed an altogether better match than the former's focus on "large-scale" industries. Cinchona workers saw this move as a signal that, going forward, the government would be looking to other crops to offset cinchona's losses.<sup>28</sup> Gorkha plantation officers, for their part, were given little explanation of the transfer. In talking about it years later, one union leader speculated that the transfer from Commerce and Industries to the less prestigious Horticulture was "revenge" for thwarting the government's attempts at privatization. Perhaps the officials at Commerce and Industry were simply fed up—fed up with the cinchona community, its politics, and, ultimately, its unwillingness to adhere to West Bengal's designs.

All of this—the Gorkhaland agitations, the resistance to privatization, the bureaucratic passing of the buck—transpired against the backdrop of quinine’s gradual fall from the world stage. Decades earlier, decolonization and the advent of synthetic compounds like DDT and chloroquine had touched off an external crumbling of the quinine assemblage, hatched at negotiation tables and labs far from the Darjeeling Hills. The Gorkhaland agitations marked an internal crumbling, driven by the passions of ethnic belonging, yet inseparable from the imperial histories that brought these lands and communities under the ambit of empire. The fact that the Gorkhaland agitations found such violent expression in the cinchona plantations comes as less of a surprise when we account for these histories. The Gorkhas have said it clearly: these were and remain sites of colonial domination—first by the British, now by West Bengal. So long as that was the case, agitation would be a potentiality sown in the people and plantations that remained.

#### AGITATION RETURNS

The second Gorkhaland agitation began on a different stage. In September 2007, one of Darjeeling’s native sons was crowned the winner of the popular television show *Indian Idol*. Prashant Tamang’s victory brought euphoria to the hills. For the marginalized Gorkha community, this was a coming-out party on India’s national stage. But the euphoria soon turned to rage when a radio DJ in New Delhi made discriminatory remarks on air, joking with his Delhi listeners that there would be no one to serve them their *momos* (dumplings) or guard their houses now that the Nepali guy had won *Indian Idol*. The comments played on stereotypes of Gorkhas as *chowkidars* and menial workers there to serve upscale Indians. The DJ’s discriminatory comments thus struck a nerve and sparked protests across the hills. On September 28, thousands of Prashant supporters marched in the nearby city of Siliguri to file a complaint against the DJ in the Siliguri court. A skirmish broke out at the front of the procession. A Bengali mob then turned on the protesters, forcing eight hundred Gorkhas to seek refuge in the courthouse grounds. Bricks rained over the courthouse walls, vehicles burned outside, and the police vanished. The mayhem only ended when the army was finally called in to free the Gorkha hostages.<sup>29</sup>

Groups like the All Gorkha Student Union (AGSU) quickly connected the saga to the unrequited cause of Gorkhaland. “The recent Siliguri riots have prompted us to speak out,” AGSU declared on September 30. “The incident made us feel that the Gorkhas are not safe. We always have to prove our identity in this country. This is happening because we do not have our own land. . . . The Gorkhas require their own land!”<sup>30</sup>

Previously unimaginable political transformations ensued. Just over a week after the riots, on October 7, more than twenty thousand Gorkhas took to the streets of Darjeeling to birth a new liberation front, the Gorkha Janmukti

Morcha. Led by former GNLF henchman, Bimal Gurung, the new party promised to deliver what the GNLF had not: Gorkhaland. Seizing the affective potential of the moment, the Morcha violently ran Ghisingh and the GNLF out of power. By early 2008, the hills were again convulsing in agitation.

On the cinchona plantations, Gorkhaland 2.0 followed a familiar script. First came the closing of ranks. You had to take a side: either convert to the Morcha or stay with the GNLF and face violent consequences. Nearly everyone chose the Morcha. Down came the tattered and faded green flags of the GNLF that had flown over the plantations since the 1980s. Up went the freshly sewn green, white, and yellow flags of the Morcha—also bearing the Gorkhas' signature weapon, the *khukuri*, this time with blades crossed. As agitation coursed through the body politic, the cinchona plantations again transformed into a battleground. With Morcha cadres targeting the plantations, go-downs ablaze, the police and CRPF a constant threat, protests and strikes crippling everyday life, and profound uncertainty over what tomorrow would bring, the agitation felt more like a return than something new. Still, there was a widespread belief that this time things would be different.

To most plantation residents' relief, the second agitation's violence never reached the levels of the 1980s—though it did reactivate those earlier traumas. The similarities were uncanny. However, there were important differences, particularly concerning how the Gorkhaland movement framed the cinchona plantations. Unlike during the first agitation when the plantations got largely subsumed and lost within the greater territorial demand for a separate state, the Morcha made gaining control of the cinchona plantations a major—and clearly articulated—objective of the movement. This impetus emanated from *within* the cinchona plantations, where local Gorkhas insisted that they and only they had the wherewithal and right to take the plantations forward. The Morcha party heeded their call and made it an express goal to pry the plantations' lands, industry, and sundry resources from West Bengal. Unlike during the first agitation, the cinchona plantations consequently emerged as a territory within a territory, one requiring special liberation.

On the ground, there were changes toward that end. In 2008, G. C. Subba became the first son of the cinchona soil to be promoted to director of the plantations, breaking a glass ceiling that had long kept Gorkhas from the top rank of plantation leadership. The energetic scientist brought vision and deep connection to these lands and communities. They were, after all, his own. Dr. Subba set in motion a range of projects (orchid cultivation, experiments with *Taxus baccata* production, ecotourism development, etc.) to revitalize and diversify the plantations. Subba's proactive approach resonated. But as the agitation gained steam, his allegiance to the Morcha became complicated. More and more demands came his way—some of them of dubious legality. More and more "proposals." More and more "good ideas" for the plantations. The agitations deepened. The purse strings loosened. Checks got signed. Account ledgers did not. But things were happening—by "hook or crook," as plantation workers like to say.



After three years of strikes and sporadic violence, the second agitation ended much like the first: with an agreement, signed in 2011, to establish a semiautonomous district council, this time rebranded as the Gorkhaland Territorial Administration. Formally established in 2012, the GTA offered marginal gains in terms of autonomy. Yet like its predecessor, the DGHC, it remained squarely under the jurisdiction and power of West Bengal. Not surprisingly, this latest arrangement met a lukewarm response on the streets.

There was reason for optimism on the cinchona plantations, however. Morcha negotiators had pressed hard for the plantations to be brought under Gorkha control. Their work seemingly paid off when the settlement brought the Directorate of Cinchona and Other Medicinal Plants under GTA control. With Dr. Subba presiding over the plantations and answering to the Morcha-dominated GTA (with which he was close), there was finally a sense that the cinchona plantations were in good hands. Gorkha hands.

Only they weren't. The first indication that the plantations' newfound sovereignty was not what it seemed came with the question of who was to lead the directorate. The Morcha-led GTA wanted their man, Subba, to stay on as director (despite his term being up). West Bengal wanted a fresh face and launched a search to replace Subba. The government hired Dr. Samuel Rai, a preeminent agricultural scientist from Kalimpong, who specialized in ginger cultivation. Rai was a Gorkha, but, importantly, he had no relation to the cinchona plantations or to the ruling Morcha party. With the GTA's and West Bengal's respective directors chosen, a proxy battle over who really controlled the plantations ensued. The Morcha-led GTA tried everything to keep Subba in power, including unsuccessfully intimidating Rai to defer a year (potentially nullifying his contract), having Subba refuse to vacate the director's bungalow, prompting the staff to all but ignore Rai when he first arrived in the office, and even creating a new advisory position to install Subba between the directorate and the GTA, effectively superseding whatever power Rai would have as director.

West Bengal was having none of it. The state government leveraged its considerable bureaucratic might to oust Subba and install Rai. Subba soon found himself under investigation and eventually arrested by West Bengal's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) for financial irregularities during his tenure.<sup>31</sup> This battle of directors was the first shot across the bow.

Elsewhere, plantation leaders and workers had a slower but no less painful realization that the GTA's victory of obtaining the directorate was not what it seemed. Morcha leaders and real estate developers were eager to capitalize on the 26,000 acres of plantation land now at the GTA's disposal. But their plans began running into legal trouble. Bureaucrats and attorneys muddling through the details of the GTA settlement found that, in fact, it was only the directorate—that is, the *administration* of the cinchona plantations—that had been transferred. And even that transfer was dubious; the directorate was still listed under the Department of Food



Processing Industries and Horticulture portfolio. What had clearly not been transferred were the plantations' lands, infrastructure, and capital resources.<sup>32</sup> Those remained the property of West Bengal. Subsequent years would see a raft of GTA-supported development projects—ecotourism resorts, an ashram for the colorful Hindu yogi Ramdev, and other endeavors<sup>33</sup>—thwarted on the grounds that the GTA did not have the legal standing to sell or develop these lands. Legally, they were still under the control of the government of West Bengal.

This created the confusing arrangement of plantation leadership having to answer to the GTA and West Bengal—two masters with very different designs on the plantations. Rai spent much of his first years as director shuttling between various departments and ministries in Kolkata and the GTA's headquarters in Darjeeling trying to figure out, first, who controlled what and, second, how to navigate and appease these competing forces, all the while trying to keep the plantations afloat. The confusion translated down to workers, who didn't know who owned their land or where to take their appeals. Consider, for instance, the Allays. For years, the family had been embroiled in a dispute with the directorate, stemming from a road that the plantation had cut through their fields in Munsong. Standing on the terrace of his homestead, K. B. Allay pointed to the road snaking its way down through the fields flush with corn and other crops that the family was growing. "It's confusing now," he told me. "Before, all this was handled by the Bengal government. Now it's been given to the GTA, and we don't know what exactly was given. It is said that it is within the GTA's authority, but we have no idea what has been given to the GTA. It's confusing."

The confusion was pervasive. Everyone I spoke with during fieldwork, from the top rungs of the plantation hierarchy to laborers in the field, seemed unsure about who controlled what. One thing, though, became gradually clear: the plantations remained the property of West Bengal. This was painful to accept. The cinchona community had fought hard and sacrificed significantly for this land. They had seen their home and lands become a battleground, but for what? Amid the agitation's fruitless aftermaths, many felt duped and at a loss. How, after so much agitation and suffering, could the plantations remain the territory of West Bengal?

Chalk it up to a sovereign sleight.<sup>34</sup>

#### UNREQUITED DEMANDS

A hundred days is a long time to go without. A hundred years is even longer. By 2017, the Mungpoo and Munsong cinchona plantations were well over a hundred years old. The Gorkhas' unanswered calls for ethnic autonomy had also crossed the century mark.<sup>35</sup> Quinine had risen and fallen from the world stage, yet on the cinchona plantations frustratingly little had changed. Amid these remains, one had to ask: How much coloniality could—or would—a people take?

In May 2017, the West Bengal government announced that the Bengali language would be made a compulsory subject in Darjeeling schools.<sup>36</sup> Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee soon thereafter visited Darjeeling for a cabinet meeting and conspicuously neglected to meet with any local leaders. Seeing these affronts as the latest instances of West Bengal's colonial designs and needing a boost before upcoming elections, Bimal Gurung's Morcha party launched violent protests on June 7, 2017. Police shootings on June 17 left three dead in the streets of Darjeeling Town. The Morcha responded by calling an indefinite strike (*bandh*) across the region. Local Gorkhas were unprepared for what lay ahead, but they banded together in powerful solidarity. The protests and indefinite strike rapidly escalated into a full-blown agitation. Facing renewed demands for Gorkhaland, the government imposed an internet blackout and deployed the paramilitary companies of the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and the vaunted CRPF to counter the insurgency. Curfews, sporadic violence, food shortages, and crippling uncertainty ensued, as the agitation spanned more than a hundred days over the summer months. When it was finally called off in September 2017, the agitation had left over a dozen dead and the Gorkha community once again traumatized and at a loss.

I was not there for the 2017 Gorkhaland agitations. I left India to get married in the United States just weeks before West Bengal announced the imposition of the Bengali language. As I followed the ensuing events from afar, I can't say I was surprised. The imposition of Bengali, Banerjee's disregard for Gorkha leaders, and the state violence all reactivated a longer history of colonial and neocolonial domination. These expressions of power had their antecedents. And so too the project and experience of agitation.

When I returned three months after the agitation, the hills bore the scars. Peeling graffiti demanding Gorkhaland told of the cause. Burned carcasses of government vehicles told of the means. Bewildered eyes told of the ends. The stories I gathered in the wake of the 2017 agitations sounded a lot like those from earlier agitations: go-downs burning in the night, CRPF raids, arrests, solidarity, suffering, and, in the end, disappointment.

Munsong felt the effects acutely. The blockades and strikes left the remote cinchona plantation largely to its own devices. In 2019, two years after the agitations, I sat down with a group of youths and two teachers to reflect on the tumult. As we sipped tea in Munsong's schoolhouse afterhours, they took me into their experiences. "There was an absolute halt to everything. The strike was very strict," the teacher shared. "If anyone plied a vehicle, it would be attacked. It was not allowed even within the village. It was sheer foolishness." As food supplies dwindled, the Morcha and other organizations eventually organized regionwide relief efforts to offset the shortages. In the meantime, the crops and livestock that Munsong residents had growing on their homesteads helped them get through. Rationing was nevertheless necessary. The teacher continued, "The situation was such that what they typically consumed in a week had to be managed for a month." Because

schools and the plantations were shut, he, like many others, had little choice but to secretly cross into neighboring Sikkim for work, which he found (ironically) at a pharmaceutical plant manufacturing state-of-the-art drugs.

Chesa, at twenty, abandoned her studies in Kalimpong Town to ride out the agitation at her family home in Munsong. For Chesa's family, even putting food on the table involved significant risk: "There was no shortage of vegetables, but we had to go to Sikkim to buy rice and daal. We wouldn't be allowed to go over [the border], so we had to go in the darkness either at dawn or at night."

Others set up more professional blockade-running operations. Ever the businessman, K. B. Allay put his taxi and entrepreneurial skills to another kind of work. He teamed up with a local Marwari trader and began making 3:00 a.m. runs to Siliguri to fetch crucial staples for villages up and down the Munsong plantation. Hearing K. B. tell his story, I got little sense of profiteering. Rather, he talked of his blockade running as *seva* (social work). When K. B. and his business partner finally got caught, the Morcha blacklisted them and threatened to destroy their property if they continued to defy the party's blockade. But K. B. had no regrets. He and his community had made it through. They would do it again.

The agitation was particularly hard on Munsong's youth. Back at the school-house, Chesa and her friend Diki walked me through the difficulties. "The children were at home," Chesa explained. "Studies collapsed. Many students sought admission in Sikkim. Those who wanted to study in the cities were not able to fulfill their dream. Some lost a year." This was the first agitation of Chesa's and Diki's adult lives. Now generations removed from the 1980s agitation, I was curious to know about *their* emotional investment in Gorkhaland. Did they go to rallies, march beside their elders, and sacrifice for the cause?

"It was compulsory," Chesa answered, leaning into Diki and beginning to giggle. "We did go sometimes. There was a Gandhian *dandi* march [a civil disobedience protest modeled on Gandhi's famous Salt March of 1930] in Kalimpong. We took part in it. We reached Kalimpong on foot from here [a 15-mile distance]. It was really painful. We came back walking and soaked our feet in hot saltwater. But the result of it is zero."

Zero. It was a telling figure but one that elides the accumulated effects of now three agitations and counting. Summoning over one hundred years of unrequited demands, the third Gorkhaland movement and its 104 days of agitation met a familiar fate. When the dust had settled, Darjeeling's ruling party, the Morcha, had split. Its once-beloved leader, Bimal Gurung, was out of power and on the lam—the subject of a massive manhunt.<sup>37</sup> West Bengal appointed in his place a less troublesome Morcha leader, Binoy Tamang, to lead the GTA. Handed power by Mamata Banerjee, Tamang and his deputy, Anit Thapa, commenced with the vanilla refrains of working with West Bengal to bring peace and development to the hills. As these newly appointed Gorkha leaders cozied up to Banerjee, her TMC party continued its steady advance into the hills. On the cinchona plantations and

beyond, many began converting to the TMC. Never mind that the Bengali-dominated TMC brooked no possibility of Gorkhaland; aligning with West Bengal's ruling party had its advantages. And everyone was tired. Tired of agitation. Tired of false hopes and stymied dreams. Tired of sacrifice. Tired of zeros.

Reconnecting with my friends amid these aftermaths, it was hard not to see the effects of counterinsurgency. The Gorkhas' demands for territory again had been violently suppressed. The unity of the 2017 summer was gone. The Gorkhas were splintering into rival factions. The Bengali TMC, the erstwhile enemy, was creeping farther into the hills. The plantations also bore their damage. Experimental plantings of crops like ginger had gone to rot. Workers were trying to recover lost wages. Students were trying to get back on track. Unions were struggling to navigate an upended political landscape. Socially and materially, the plantations were divided and exhausted. And to what end? If anything, Gorkhaland and a viable future for the cinchona plantations appeared less attainable after this latest agitation than before. This was the tragedy of the new normal. Scarred and unrequited, these lands and lives would remain under West Bengal. The dream of Gorkhaland, deferred.

. . .

What then are we to make of the Gorkhas' unrequited demands for autonomy, rights, and justice? How are we to weigh the acute expressions of agitation on the cinchona plantations? What do the cumulative zeros of three Gorkhaland agitations say about the prospects of resistance, revolution, and justice amid the remains of quinine and empire more broadly?

On the cinchona plantations, the oppressions of the past are hauntingly present. In these places where one form of domination (British) has given rise to another (Bengali), coloniality is written in layers. It is ever evolving and recursive.<sup>38</sup> The Gorkhaland movement poses a critique of—and redress for—these undying colonialities.<sup>39</sup> It is an intensely local struggle, but the movement needs to be read at multiple scales. One can understand neither the political project nor the experience of its agitations without recourse to the world history through which Darjeeling and Kalimpong were brought under British control. This is particularly the case on the cinchona plantations. Since their colonial founding, these places have remained a distinct territorial formation. And as West Bengal's methods of counterinsurgency illustrate, they *still* require their silences, violence, and oppression to function as such.

Consider again the rumor. Like a good myth, the tale of the CRPF's raid at Munsong explains the order of things across the ages—not only in quinine's colonial heydays but also after. Like Ghisingh's deconstruction of the colonial treaties on which the power of West Bengal stands, the rumor provocatively questions the triumphant narratives of Munsong colonial founding. In so doing, it helps unsettle one form of territory in order to make way for another. Through their agitations,

the Gorkhas have made it potently clear: this is *their* place, not West Bengal's. The demand for Gorkhaland turns on a different logic of territory from those of West Bengal and the British Empire before it. It articulates a vernacular theory of territory based not on silencing the secrets of the past but on giving them voice; not on disappearing a people but on recognizing their presence; not on the violence of state formation and counterinsurgency but on the belongings of a community and their unrequited quests for rights and autonomy. The Gorkhas' audacity is to imagine—and demand—territory based on the embodied truths and presence of the people who call a place home.<sup>40</sup> To hear their call is to brook a very different horizon of territory. To hear it echo through the cinchona is to fathom another horizon of life after quinine.

At present, however, the cinchona plantations remain largely under the thumb of West Bengal. That *continued* control, for the cinchona community, represents the grounds for—and grounds of—agitation. The historical roots of Gorkhaland may run deep into the colonial past. Ultimately, though, it is these conditions of life after quinine that have made the cinchona plantations such a potent arena of subnationalist struggle. Whether it was sixteen-year-old Gebu hiding behind the chorten with gun in hand, GNLG guerrillas waging war on the cinchona plantations, or youths like Chesa and Diki rallying for the cause, the takeaway is clear: until and unless the coloniality of the present is redressed, quinine's remains will carry in them the potential for agitation.

Power works in quieter but no less insidious ways in the downtime between agitations. The flash of hope that the plantations were coming into Gorkha hands has since given way to the hard reality that West Bengal still controls their fate. With no market for Indian quinine, many residents fear the day when West Bengal pulls the plug on this "sick" industry once and for all. What such a "death" would mean for the cinchona community, and when it might come, is unclear. For now, the cinchona plantations remain.

Coloniality stalks the cinchona community, in these ways, as a form of control over both space and time. In the next chapter, I extend this interest in time and temporality to explore who, what, and how people are becoming-after quinine. Doing so, I shift attention from the Gorkhaland movement to some *other* projects through which people are seeking to forge dignified lives in quinine's wake. In tracking these more hopeful makings of the life thereafter, we would do well to heed the lessons of agitation and remember the possibilities that stir amid the remains. Particularly when the end seems nigh, remains have their ways of finding new life.

It is to these becomings that I now turn.