The making of the 'Ecotourism Subject' in the Himalaya: Political Ecology and Multiple Environmentalities at the peripheries

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Acknowledgements and Foreword

Abstract

This research aims to theoretically contribute firstly by explaining the negotiation of subjectivities promoted by environmentalities and secondly by examining ecotourism discourse from the margins, specifically in the context of the Himalayan Borderland. In doing so, I uncover the complexities involved in the making of the 'ecotourism subject', as I call it, in the Himalayan borderland. I address each of my research questions in Chapter 5. Firstly, I highlight variegated governance strategies involved in promoting and implementing ecotourism in Sikkim that are all wound up with colonial imaginations and neoliberal logics that undermine local people. Subsequently, I dive deeper into multiple ways that local communities understand (or misunderstand) ecotourism driven by their creative use of agency and technology of self thus resulting in the commodification of the home, culture and entire landscapes. Overall, often driven by the subject's technology of self, ecotourism in Sikkim is increasingly understood by locals as 'off-beat' tourism as my research reveals. These understandings in addition to the interaction of multiple existing governmentalities have all shaped a multiplicity of subjectivities which I have understood in terms of competing

environmentalities and resulting, what I refer to as, 'variegated subjectivities'. Thus finally, I draw from examples that led me to explore multiple meanings, interests, aspirations, and relations of local communities. I do this specifically in terms of how such a study reveals crucial insights about aspirations of the modern Sikkimese unemployed youth, independent entrepreneurs and in terms of residents of a Khecheodpalri, a transformed neoliberal landscape. In this section, I extrapolate these findings to broader works of research and context.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Problem

I came across a particular sentence from a report titled 'Mainstreaming Ecotourism in Sikkim's Economy' written by the State Forest Department and Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC) a local NGO involved in community-based ecotourism projects in Sikkim, India. I begin this proposal by reflecting on an excerpt from the report that quotes Mr. Phupu Tshering Bhutia, a local 'ex-[yak] herder', who reflects on ecotourism and his new profession of being an 'eco-guide':

"The biggest impact has been in the mind, the herders who used to damage the forests have now shifted to trekking tourism. I earn more incomes now as an eco-guide, it has been a transformation from being a Himal Rakshash (mountain devil) to Himal Rakshak (mountain guardian)." (Tambe, Bhutia, & Awwawatia, 2007)

If anything, a combination of financial incentives and renewed environmental values instilled by ecotourism significantly motivated Mr. Bhutia to protect his home from further ecological damage. In this effort he gives up the so-framed ecologically damaging livelihood of yak herding to become an eco-guide and contribute to conservation while also earning better income. This rationale is in line with notions of neoliberalising nature: forests can be valued through market-based systems and can then be harvested in a rational way to transform them into a marketable resource (Duffy, 2008). Additionally, Foucauldian poststructuralist thinkers would tend to inquire into various technologies of power within ecotourism that seems to 'conduct subjects', like the ex-yak herders, to internalize new sets of norms and values that conduct them to abandon traditional livelihood practices such as of yak herding. The former herders seem to have been led to instead find renewed meanings in neoliberal conservation strategies such as ecotourism. Governance approaches involve 'identity politics' (Hutchins, 2008) of racializing, peripheralizing, fetishizing the region in ways that perpetuate colonial imaginations of 'Northeast' as 'primitive', 'barbaric', 'exotic', 'hill and forest tribes' belonging to the 'Mongoloid race', distinct from the rest of India, leading to the regions' exclusion at multiple levels (Gergan, 2020). Sikkim is thus subsumed within this postcolonial power-relation. In this manner, there has been immense effort by the central and the state government to push ecoutourism as a means of livelihood and conservation in rural parts of Sikkim.

In the Eastern Himalaya, ecotourism, as a form of support for nature conservation, is a discursive process of conditioning local communities with a culturally specific set of beliefs and values (Fletcher, 2009) involving the promotion of economic incentives and other techniques propagated by various technologies of power (Fletcher, 2010). Often supported by various actors, community-based village homestay ecotourism appears to have brought several changes among local people. This has shaped people as 'ecotourism subjects' constantly negotiating through various subject positions that often shape life in these borderlands. Given this backdrop, this proposed research aims to investigate ecotourism in the Himalayan state of Sikkim, through a post-structuralist lens, to explain how multiple forces construct the modern 'ecotourism subject' and thus resulting variegated subjectivities in the Eastern Himalayan borderland. This study will examine how variegated subjectivities are co-constructed by various technologies of power that govern society and ecotourism and how these transform lives and meanings people attach to places, particularly for those located at the global peripheries. To do this, I intend to draw from the 'Multiple Environmentalities' framework (Fletcher, 2010), built on Foucault's notion of governmentality, to inquire into governance strategies that shape the 'politics of identity' (Hutchins, 2008) or the formation and negotiation of variegated subjectivities in the context of ecotourism. As such, I intend to shed light on the political ecology of the oft-neglected Himalayan borderland, described as the postcolonial 'Orient of the Orient' (Wouters & Subba, 2013) or neoliberal 'periphery of the periphery'; and by studying the particular case of Sikkim, this study overall seeks to understand how modernity itself is aspired, imagined and articulated in these borderlands. What does it mean for individuals like Mr. Bhutia to transform from 'mountain devil' to 'mountain guardian'? *How do ecotourism subjects in Sikkim negotiate specific subject positions promoted by multiple environmentalities? What environmentalities inform ecotourism discourse in Sikkim? What does ecotourism mean to people in Sikkim? How do they relate to it? How does it shape lives and meanings people attach to their homes?'* – These are the research questions that will guide this study as I explain later.

I begin with Chapter 2 consisting of a review of literature. I begin by reviewing an extensive body of literature that addresses ecotourism as a neoliberal form of conservation through a poststructuralist, political ecology perspective. Subsequently, I review literature that situates

Sikkim within the broader context of the postcolonial 'Northeast' and the Himalayan borderland. Furthermore, in Chapter 3 I develop my theoretical framework by doing a review of literature associated with multiple governmentalities, environmentalities and subjectivities in the context of development and conservation. Thus, I define concepts such as environmentalities, governmentalities and subjectivities as deployed in this research that focuses on understanding the 'ecotourism subject'. I end chapter 3 by using this framework to develop and outline my research questions. Additionally, in Chapter 4, firstly I outline and justify my use of ethnographic and autoethnographic methodology, including semi-structured interviews, life history interviews and discourse analysis. Secondly, I address issues related to the research context i.e. the access, ethics, limitations and reflexivity of the research. Subsequently, in Chapter 5, I organise and expand on my results, analysis, and discussion. I organise Chapter 5 into 4 sections where firstly I present a small anecdote to establish the context of the postcolonial state and the governance of people. In the remaining three sections, I address various themes that emerged while addressing each of my three research sub-questions. Chapter 5.2 explores multiple environmentalities and subjectivities embodied in the state (eco)tourism policies and in ecotourism organizers and 'specialists' thus addressing my first sub-question. In Chapter 5.3, I explore three broad themes that capture what ecotourism means to local people in Sikkim. Subsequently, Chapter 5.4 delves deeper into variegated subjectivities in terms of meanings, agency, interests, and aspirations as captured thematically in the resulting three sub-sections. In chapter 6, I conclude the thesis by identifying and summarizing the main conceptual contribution to environmentalities studies and other insights gained by the thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this section, I do a review of the emergence of ecotourism as an object of enquiry in the social sciences and situate it in the broader context of globalisation and in the context of the Eastern Himalayan Borderland. In doing this, my aim is to view ecotourism as a global phenomenon in the complex context of globalised peripheries such as the Himalayan borderland which requires a poststructuralist approach to explain what really goes on in the playing field in terms of transformed meanings and lived experiences of local communities via multiple influences. This study thus helps promoters of ecotourism beyond the context of the Eastern Himalaya and other globalised peripheries to understand and consider the deeper implications of the phenomena on local communities.

I address the review of literature in two sections. The first section situates ecotourism in the context of neoliberalism and globalisation. Thus, I begin by discussing current definitions of ecotourism as employed by institutions that promote it. I then trace the origins of ecotourism as a defined global strategy for achieving sustainable development that emerged in the late 1980s. Subsequently I focus on recent literature that situates ecotourism in the political-economic context of neoliberalism, globalisation, and development. These studies focus on the implications of ecotourism on local communities used as a neoliberal form of conservation to bring sustainable development. In doing so, I intend to situate ecotourism within the broader context of globalisation. I conclude by identifying a gap in literature and establish how despite its emergence in the Eastern Himalaya, ecotourism as a phenomenon is sparingly studied in this light from the margins of globalised peripheries. Thus, I venture into the second section where I situate developmental infrastructure such as tourism and hydropower projects in the postcolonial and neoliberal context of the 'Northeast' of India to show how this understanding relates to understanding the specific context of Sikkim and the Eastern Himalaya in India. I then touch upon literature that generally address various issues by establishing Sikkim in the

Eastern Himalaya as a globalised periphery. In doing this, I establish the need to study ecotourism as a global phenomenon in Sikkim through a political ecology perspective. Furthermore, I explore an emerging body of literature that discusses complexities involved in the process of subject formation and subjectivities in the context of neoliberal conservation and international development. Subsequently, I establish the need for using multiple environmentalities as a theoretical framework to study ecotourism in Sikkim that considers the interactions of various technologies of power in shaping subjectivities or the 'ecotourism subject'.

2.1 Political Ecology of Conservation and Ecotourism

Ecotourism emerged as a specific kind of tourism that claims to be distinct from adventure tourism, nature tourism or outdoors recreation as it is specifically designed to support and meet conservation and development goals. Fennell (2001) identifies the following variables as represented in a content analysis conducted of 85 ecotourism definitions: 'Conservation', 'education', 'ethics', 'sustainability', 'impacts', and 'local benefits'. While activities carried out within ecotourism are usually place-based and definitions vary from consumptive to non-consumptive depending on place, a trend that characterizes the conceptualisation of ecotourism definitions across contexts is variability and change (Fennell, 2001). Thus, there is no precise universal ways institutions and studies define ecotourism, however what is held commonly as a principle is that it should help address a vast array of social and environmental goals that contributes to nature conservation and development (Fennell, 2001; Stronza, Hunt, & Fitzgerald, 2019).I make use of this principle to identify ecotourism initiatives in this study. The most widely cited definition of ecotourism is offered by The International Ecotourism Society which uses: "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (TIES - The International Ecotourism Society, 2015). Thus, ecotourism is designed and implemented based on the assumption and hypothesis that tourism can benefit wildlife and biodiversity, create incentives to protect landscapes and support local communities (Stronza et al., 2019).

As a conservation strategy and intervention, ecotourism began appearing in the late 1980s, in the advent of sustainable development in order to channel tourism revenue towards conservation and local development (Stronza et al., 2019). However, its origins, in terms of sets of values and beliefs that construct the current ecotourism phenomena, can be traced to western ideology and values thus its practice is frequently dominated by Western interests (Cater, 2006). Cater (2006) points out how the advocacy of ecotourism as a universal template arises from Western cultural hegemony that seeks to maintain power relations of the centre-periphery. In order to understand this, Cater (2006) calls for ecotourism to be viewed in the backdrop of the global political economy. I will now refer to literature that draws from a vast array of literature on political ecology, where power relations around 'natural resource' use come into the picture, to trace the emergence of ecotourism as a neoliberal form of conservation in a globalised world starting from its origins in fortress conservation. I examine the ways in which conservation experiences transformations in relation to the broader global trends that modernity brought with itself such as the hegemonic interplay of neoliberalism and globalisation.

In explaining ecotourism, critical social researchers have uncovered its roots in the early twentieth century from the way national parks in the US brought tourism and conservation together. In the US, national parks became a site where tourism and recreation served as engines for nation building and economic development which relied on the idea that these

places and cultures are pristine, unspoiled and untouched by westernisation, industrialisation and even mass tourism and thus need to be protected through conservation (Duffy, 2008). Fortress conservation, or the creation and protection of national parks, was thus founded on the Euro-American notions of 'idealized nature' untouched by the human hand (Cronon, 1996). It was characterized by the idea of building a homogenous national identity with complete state control, dominated by 'experts' and eventually linked to commodification of nature (Castree, 2003; Vaccaro, Beltran, & Paquet, 2013). Constructed as 'sublime' forms of natural beauty (Cronon, 1996), national parks in the US became a matter of national pride and identity especially when it converged with ideas of the 'collective public good' thus making it accessible to visitors and seekers of leisure (Vaccaro et al., 2013). Driven by this idea, protected areas took shape as sites of leisure and recreation that are worth paying for to see and experience giving rise to an industry that commodifies (Castree, 2003) and exploits these areas of untouched 'wilderness'. The fortress conservation model emerges in a moment in which colonialism, with remote authoritarian institutional control and thus an exclusionary approach is dominant (Vaccaro et al., 2013). In this backdrop of western dominance, colonialism imports fortress conservation into the Global South thus bringing along Euro-American narratives about nature that guide conservation. This leads to the displacement and eviction of indigenous and local inhabitants whose livelihood practices are framed as destructive, such as 'poaching', in the name of nature conservation (Igoe & Brockington, 2002). The idea of these areas being escapades for the dominant White colonists spreads across continents which results in its rising value as areas for tourism and leisure. The fortress conservation model of conservation, while still implemented today, however came to be viewed as 'imposed' due to local resistance and environmental injustices coming to light. This has led to the transformation of conservation policies to those grounded on participatory approaches that focus on the development of local inhabitants. These changes come in the context of the 'tripartite marriage' between globalisation, development and sustainability (Mowforth & Munt, 2003) thus bringing together conservation and development.

The vast literature of political ecology refers to this as Community-based Conservation (CBC) model or Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) or co-managed conservation (Vaccaro et al., 2013). The CBC model is characterized by 'participatory methods' which involves partnerships with various state, non-state agencies and communities on various levels where conservation became embedded with the development agenda. International organisations such as the World Bank began 'greening' their policies taking into account sustainability while conservation organisations like International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) started to redefine seemingly Western-centric concepts of 'nature' and its use in order to foster their relationships with local communities and to tie together nature with culture (Vaccaro et al., 2013). National parks and protected areas began to transform into Biosphere Reserves (BR) through the UNESCO-led BR program, with varying degrees of human use permitted within the protected areas as a result of indigenous resistance. However, within the context of a rapidly neoliberal and globalised world, the CBC model became victim to 'economic sustainability' and long-term viability, given that conservation projects needed resources to function which they could not generate themselves. Globalisation and thus Western hegemonic ideology of neoliberalism grounded their view of 'nature' as described previously, manifests itself in the form of global partnerships wherein Western or First World agencies fund CBC projects in the Global South or in the Third World (Cater, 2006). This involves supra-national funding agencies like the World Bank and USAID channelling conservation funds through Western-based INGOs like WWF into the Global South on the condition that local communities fall in line with 'First World thinking'(Cater, 2006).

It is in this context of networks and partnerships that ecotourism emerged in the 80s as a neoliberal process (Bianchi, 2004; Duffy, 2008) driven by the wider global changes such as globalisation and the end of Cold War. Post-Cold War waves of globalisation is described as a crucial driver of fostering ecological dominance and processes of colonization of systems by the capitalist economy (Jessop, 2000). Jessop (2000) in his paper argues that globalization "is a contradictory, conflictual, contested and complex resultant of multi-scalar, multi-temporal, multi-centric processes that develops unevenly in time and space, and, indeed, exploits and intensifies differences as much as, if not more than, it produces new complementarities and uniformities" (Jessop, 2000). As a complex emergence, globalisation helps foster processes of uneven development. Bianchi (2004) in his study of the European periphery of Canary island establishes how the existing legacy of uneven development, and the entrenched power of regional economic and political élites, is sustained by sustainable tourism and thus by ecotourism as part of it all. Furthermore drawing from the African periphery of Madagascar, Duffy (2008) argues how the social and political dynamics such as taking into account power relations of following these policy choices is often overlooked or obscured (Duffy, 2008). The expansion of tourism industry and thus ecotourism relied crucially in the backdrop of globalisation and the networks of uneven power relations that emerged dominated by Western hegemony. These were facilitated by the processes of opening up of markets and diversification of economies and a hegemonic focus on sustainable development agendas that dominated the Global South. These studies show how the rise of ecotourism comes as a tool that progresses the neoliberalisation of nature by the commodification of nature including landscapes, wildlife, and cultures. These had multiple implications for the ones who were meant to benefit from sustainable development through ecotourism as I explain now.

Not only has the CBC ecotourism model been widely critiqued for its common failure to achieve conservation goals, but it has also been critiqued as a form of neoliberal conservation (Fletcher, 2010; Igoe & Brockington, 2007). A crucial element of neoliberal conservation that critics often refer to is the commodification of nature that in turn has several implications on local communities. They are increasingly represented in the form of a discourse, which effectively associates the central elements of neoliberal conservation without using a single related word (Igoe & Brockington, 2007). Additionally, in their paper, Igoe & Brockington (2007) highlight how in neoliberal CBC, local people, as the most proximate and visible threat to protected areas, are often treated as the primary threat. To go back to the example of Mr. Bhutia from Sikkim that I began this thesis with, we can see how being an eco-guide provides him with increased income, and it makes him and other ex-herders believe that they actively contribute to nature conservation in their home by forgoing their flawed traditional livelihood practice. According to the dominant perception, their hope lies in being brought out of nature and into the market so that they can return to nature as competent conservationists (Igoe & Brockington, 2007). This is reflected in Mr. Bhutia's comment that provides an insight into the transformations experienced by beneficiaries of neoliberal CBC projects that gave them 'great hope' as he shares further. This apparent hope is captured in their transformation from a 'Mountain Devil' to a 'Mountain Guardian.' In Goldman's (2001b) words, who sheds light on how global institutions such as the World Bank produce environmental development projects based on 'authoritative green knowledge', local communities must become 'eco-rational subjects'─ the 'eco' in this case standing both for *eco*nomic and *eco*logical (Igoe & Brockington, 2007).

While the fate of local people in neoliberal CBC is understudied, the works that do exist works refer to issues that emerge in terms of how local communities in Southeast Asia and South

America eventually lose capital and competitive advantage as a result (Holmes & Cavanagh, 2016; Berlanga & Faust, 2007; Li, 2002). Additionally, examples from Africa shed light on how removing or altering local communities from their land to foster investments came with assumptions about its benefits to the communities (Büscher & Dressler, 2007; Igoe & Croucher, 2007). Levine (2007) also explores how tourism is a fickle industry, one that is especially vulnerable to changes in the global economy and the impacts of distant political events with reference to how the tourism industry of Zanzibar, Tanzania, a region predominantly inhabited by Muslims, experienced a downturn following the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the USA. In addition, just as is the case in the example of Mr. Bhutia in Sikkim I presented, a small body of recent work ventures into how neoliberal conservation often devalues local environmental knowledge and undermines local environmental initiatives (Berlanga & Faust, 2007; Fay, 2007; Igoe & Brockington, 2007; Igoe & Croucher, 2007). What can be concluded by assessing these works is that firstly, while CBC promises 'hope' to attain modernity to rural communities, only a select few get real opportunities to succeed under the conditions of transforming into 'eco-rational' subjects while the rest simply become 'disposables' in the emerging free-market (Giroux, 2015).

While on a global scale, these bodies of work have critiqued and questioned neoliberal features of institutions also embodied by the particular context of 'hybrid governance' (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999), few also centre discussions around perpetuated colonial structures such as in South Asia (Baviskar, 1995; Sivaramakrishnan, 1995). These works venture into the complexities that arise in the encounters of the postcolonial state with local Adivasi communities. While conservation literature is relatively rife with discussions about postcoloniality in conservation, very select few works talk about these encounters in the context of peripheral borderlands such as the Eastern Himalaya and the 'Northeast' of India, where Sikkim is geographically and politically located within South Asia. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by addressing the phenomenon of neoliberalised ecotourism from the margins of the Eastern Himalayan periphery in the context of a globalised world. In order to do this, I review literature that establishes the context of the Eastern Himalayas within which development infrastructure like tourism and ecotourism shapes lives in the borderlands.

2.2 The Context of Postcolonial 'Northeast' India and the Eastern Himalayan Borderland

As highlighted before, I intend to understand the production of ecotourism discourse in Sikkim through a lens of multiple environmentality. By referring to the vast body of literature on political ecology, I have established that ecotourism can be viewed as a process of neoliberalisation of nature that is fostered by the wider context of globalisation. However, to situate ecotourism in the Eastern Himalayan periphery, I will do a review of literature that helps in establishing the context within which I study ecotourism. I refer to a growing body of literature that conceptualizes the contemporary 'Northeast', where Sikkim is located in India, as a continuation of the colonial 'Mongolian Fringe' invoking the centre-periphery framework. Within the emerging literature of South Asian studies, several authors have contextualized the 'Northeast' region of India within the postcolonial frame (Baruah, 2008; Bhaumik, 2000; Gergan, 2020; Haokip, 2011; Patil, 2011). Much of these works highlight the 'Northeast' as a postcolonial construct serving several geopolitical and nation-building projects of the Indian state. In general, the literature highlights how the region is made "passively dependent on the centre/core without any scope of self-development" (Haokip, 2015). While many of these studies have ventured into the political economy of postcolonial development, such as infrastructural projects (Gergan, 2020), trade (Haokip, 2011) and indigeneity (Baruah, 2008)

few shed light on tourism as a hegemonic postcolonial tool of governance (Patil, 2011). Through her work, Patil (2011) demonstrates hegemonic political narratives embedded in the Northeastern region's racialized and sexualized tourism discourses. However, in doing so, Patil leaves out the case of Sikkim due to its unique history different from that of other Northeastern states. Before delving deeper into the context of the Northeast and the Eastern Himalayan Borderland, I introduce and summarize the theoretical context of postcoloniality and its emergence.

Postcolonial theory, as pioneered by Fanon (1952, 1963), Said (1978) Bhabha (1994), Spivak (1988), Chatterjee (1993) and others, is an established field of inquiry being employed in South Asian studies. Owing to its interdisciplinary nature, postcoloniality intersects with several other critical discourses like poststructuralism, postmodernism and feminism within humanities and social sciences. Postcolonialism, as a field of inquiry, sets its context in the lasting aftermath and legacy of European colonialism known as postcoloniality. It creates space for critical inquiry into the aftermath of historical 'colonial encounters' in societies at the discursive, structural and material levels from the moment of colonisation until the present day (Rai, n.d.). Within its framework, it recognizes postcolonial subjects (the subaltern) and the postcolonial state as the perpetuator of imported legacies and ideas from colonialism. The perspective aims to unpack and dismantle structures that perpetuate the residues of the socio-political and economic past of colonialism into the future. For the purpose of this paper, it is crucial to situate Sikkim in the intersectional context of postcolonial Eastern Himalayan periphery or borderland as well as the peripheral 'Northeast' region of India. Within South Asian studies, an emerging body of postcolonial literature argues "that much like the British, the Indian state functions as an imperial force, subsuming ethnic minorities under hegemonic nationalist projects and ideologies (Akhup, 2013; Bodhi, 2013; Kikon, 2014; Nongbri, 2006; Podar and Subba 1991; Xaxa, 2016; Gergan 2020). As an emerging postcolonial neoliberal state, several national and state-level policies have been passed with relation to tourism that embodies neoliberal logic.

This study draws from Gergan (2020) and Patil (2011), who situate the Eastern Himalaya as a postcolonial frontier or periphery located in India's North-East, and ecotourism within this context is the object of my enquiry. Tourism and developmental discourses on the Eastern Himalayan borderland are centred on economic globalisation, ethnic politics, visual culture and cultural heritage, postcolonial neoliberal governance and legacies of colonial and pre-colonial imperialistic history (Arora, 2009; Benwell, Hopkins, Smith, & Gergan, 2018; Chettri, 2015; Gergan, 2020; Patil, 2011; Shneiderman & Turin, 2006; Wouters & Subba, 2013) such that tourism in the 'Northeast' of India can be seen as a hegemonic postcolonial tool of governance (Patil, 2011). Governance approaches often racialize and sexualize the region in ways that perpetuate colonial imaginations of 'Northeast' as 'primitive', 'barbaric', 'exotic', 'hill and forest tribes' belonging to the 'Mongoloid race', distinct from the rest of India, leading to its exclusion at multiple levels (Gergan, 2020), with Sikkim being subsumed within this postcolonial power-relation. In relation to tourism, Sikkim today receives visitors on a global scale, which drives various actors at the local, regional, and national levels to commodify natural and cultural heritage. Troubled by longstanding problems of rural poverty, unsustainable tourism, substance-abuse and unemployment, ecotourism discourse is also being moulded by the state as a symbol of 'hope' to address these socio-economic problems particularly by creating jobs (DownToEarth, 2002). As a result, in 2011 Sikkim became the first state in India to frame its eco-tourism policy that seeks to achieve these socio-economic goals. This has also resulted in an increasing number of rural residents taking up homestay ecotourism, by using their cultural and natural heritage as selling points. This research aims to theoretically contribute firstly by explaining the negotiation of subjectivities promoted by

environmentalities and secondly by examining ecotourism discourse from the margins, specifically in the context of the Himalayas.

However, within Sikkim, there is also recognition of heterogeneity within the living population. While mostly designated as non-tribal by the state, the above-mentioned Nepali groups' long-standing demand for the ST status and its privileges, reify and perpetuate "the explicit display of the tribal-ness of ethnic groups in a bid to legitimise the claim to benefits that are distributed by the state" (Chettri, 2015). Chettri (2015) highlights how annual cultural festivals in the state such as 'Namchi Mahautsov', organized by the Tourism Department embodies this persistent longing for 'tribal-ness', it is a perpetuation and justification of "why that group is worthy of being labelled a tribe" (Chettri, 2015) as perceived by both the tourists and locals. While her work sheds much light on 'tribal-ness' used as a tool for advancements in internal ethnic politics, it leaves space for analysing tourism project as a wider postcolonial nation-building project in the Himalayan frontier that "actively reproduces the devaluation of racialized [and sexualized] geographies and peoples" (Gergan, 2020). The longingness of the '11 left-out communities' (ethnic Nepalis demanding ST status) to be subsumed into the 'ST' category points towards how gradually the postcolonial state widens the centre-periphery gap in the Himalayan borderland. Tourism plays a role in putting forth racialized and sexualized 'tribal-ness' as hinted by Patil (2011) and Chettri (2015). Thus, this study engages in trans-border history and postcolonial framework in order to gain deeper insights on those realities of the Himalayan borderland that is often framed out of tourism, hence also constructing the devalued postcolonial subject. By studying ecotourism as a phenomenon experienced in myriad ways such as those experienced by the Nepali-speaking population of Sikkim, this study aims to shed light on history that is being re-made by exercising technologies of power on the ethnic Nepalis. Thus, by considering ecotourism as a globalised neoliberal phenomenon and the postcolonial heterogenous and neoliberal context of Sikkim, this study aims to uncover the interplay of multiple technologies of power that shapes the subjectivities and lived experiences of the 'ecotourism subject'. I will now delve into the theoretical framework of 'Multiple Environmentalities' which I use to fulfil the goals of this study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

In this research project, I intend to combine three theoretical frameworks to gain a political ecology understanding of the making of the ecotourism subject. Firstly, I will use the concept of ecotourism as a neoliberal discourse as explained before and the concept of the postcolonial neoliberal state to view institutions that produce ecotourism discourse. Secondly, the study will draw from Fletcher (2010)'s concept of multiple environmentalities to explain the making of ecotourism subjects. Thirdly, this study draws from the conceptualisation of 'technology of self' to explore variegated subjectivities. In this section I will describe how I intend to use this combination of conceptual framework to explain the political ecology of ecotourism and ecotourism subjectivity formation in Sikkim.

3.1 Multiple Environmentalities

In this study I use a poststructuralist political ecology perspective to study various 'environmentalities' and governmentalities that compete to define ecotourism discourse in Sikkim (Fletcher, 2010). Through the literature review carried out above, I have identified and justified a literature gap which I aim to bridge through this study. In doing so, I draw from 'multiple environmentalities' framework (Fletcher, 2017) to study multiple modes of environmental governance used to create environmental subjects. By applying this framework

and taking into account the specific context of Himalayan borderland, I seek to define the making of the ecotourism subject in the global peripheries and bridge the gap between variegated governmentalities/environmentalities and resulting variegated subjectivities of people from these margins (Fletcher, 2017) thus filling the existing literature gap between environmentalities and subjectivities. In this section, I will begin by illustrating a poststructuralist approach to studying the political ecology of Sikkim. Subsequently, based on this approach, I relate this approach to how Foucault (2008) coins the notion of governmentality (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Foucault, 1982, 2008) following which I introduce and define multiple environmentalities (Fletcher, 2010, 2017; Montes, Tshering, Phuntsho, & Fletcher, 2020) and environmental subject-making and illustrate how I use this in my study.

Through a poststructuralist approach within social sciences, research seeks to identify, expose and deconstruct truth regimes that construct multiple versions of oppressive truths while marginalising certain 'others' (Søndergaard, 2002). As per this view, oppressive truth regimes can be understood as discourses and deconstructed using discourse analysis. Every version of reality hence is constructed by human behaviour and interaction which are in turn shaped by cultural conditioning such as language (Foucault, 1982). Post-structuralists recognize the complexity of the world as driven by underlying structures characterized by hybridity, fluidity and multiplicity that can only be stabilized temporarily and provisionally but never be fully understood (Gudmand-Høyer & Hjorth, 2009). As Foucault puts it, this approach views knowledge and power as complementaries that shape power regimes (Foucault, 1982). Therefore, the purpose of research is viewed as to expose and deconstruct power regimes through discursive analysis as opposed to knowledge production. Following this poststructuralist worldview, I describe the emergence of and features of governmentality and resulting 'Multiple Environmentalities' as a theoretical tool to investigate and uncover 'arts of government' (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999) that shape ecotourism and resulting subjectivities in the context of Sikkim.

In his lectures series entitled 'Birth and Biopolitics', Michel Foucault refers to various 'art of governments' in his discussion about the relation between truth and power regarding state authority(Foucault, 2008). Foucault discusses how different art of modes of governance shape the 'conduct of the conduct' of 'subjects' referring to the conduct of people within an establishment or the subjects of a state. Governmentality or the 'art of government' is described using the example of how a panopticon or a circular prison works. A panopticon is a circular prison where a guard is placed in the centre of the circle to observe and supervise the conduct of all prisoners around the circle. The prisoners are thus supervised, monitored, and watched in general which shapes them as individuals who follow rules and norms in order to prevent threats of punishment. This conducts the behaviour of prisoners in the long term in ways that no more requires anybody to watch them. Foucault describes the panopticon to stretch beyond prisons "as a procedure for institutions like schools, factories, and prisons which would enable one to supervise the conduct of individuals while increasing the profitability" (Foucault, 2008). Panopticism thus is described as a political formula that characterizes a type of government and how states work (Foucault, 2008).

Governmentality thus can be understood as a governance strategy that involves the creation and implementation of rules, regulations and norms enforced those citizens adhere to thus becoming subjects. These are done in intimate ways from a distance (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999) that does not require the presence of law enforcers and in turn shapes individuals to conduct each other's conducts on moral and ethical standards set by the government. In this manner, governmentality shapes subject out of people whose 'conduct' in terms of behaviour and

subjectivities are conducted by the state or by each other in order for the state to function in the most optimal ways that benefits those in power. The conduct of behaviour in terms of disciplinary governance and normative, ethical values is characterized by disciplinary governmentality. Foucault also describes neoliberal governmentality that "seeks merely to create external incentive structures within which individuals, understood as self-interested rational actors, can be motivated to exhibit appropriate behaviours through manipulation of incentives" (Fletcher, 2010, p.173).

The example of Mr. Bhutia described earlier can be described as a neoliberal subject who was shaped as a rational individual who's conduct from a yak herder to an eco-guide was significantly shaped by financial incentives involved. Additionally, Foucault also describes sovereign and truth governmentality where the former is a form of "rational governance of a territory through compelling subjects' obedience to sovereign will by direct threat of punishment" (Fletcher, 2010, p.176). In other words, sovereign governmentality involves the invoking of codified rules such as the constitution to shape sovereign subjects. For instance, many countries having codified rules that threatens any kind of 'anti-national' behaviour, or behaviour that is stated as going against the interest of a country, with punishments is considered to a sovereign mode of governance strategy. This gives shape to subjects that are 'nationalistic' and contribute in national building agendas. Additionally, truth governmentality conducts its subjects based on "systems of beliefs and practice concerning the fundamental order of the universe"(Montes et al., 2020). Distinct from the idea of codified rules, it comes from prescribed various worldviews that view the order of nature and life in distinct ways. The conduct of several indigenous and religious groups is understood to be governed by truth governmentality that shapes 'cosmological subjectivities' in Bhutan as described by Montes et. Al. (2020) (Montes et al., 2020).

Fletcher (2010) and Agrawal (2005) draw from Foucault's concept of multiple governmentalities to introduce the conceptual framework of multiple environmentalities that captures the making of environmental subjects. In his paper, Fletcher describes "several discrete environmentalities embodied in competing approaches to conservation policy" (Fletcher, 2010). This paper draws from the understanding that conservation policy and initiatives, such as ecotourism, are embedded with multiple distinct conservation governmentalities or 'art of government' that accordingly give shape to self-regulating environmental subjects who behave in conservation friendly ways. Within the multiple environmentalities framework, Fletcher identifies three distinct environmentalities: (1) neoliberal: ''manipulation of external incentive structures,'' as seen in the implementation of Payments for ecosystem services (PES) and ecotourism which involve the commodification of nature and culture (2) sovereign: ''top-down creation and enforcement of regulations,'' as seen in 'fortress conservation' that was discussed earlier and (3) disciplinary: ''encouraging internalization of norms and values'' as seen in the carrying out of environmental education (Fletcher, 2010). The motivations put forth by conservation policy or projects to create environmental subjects is therefore subject to the distinct type of environmentality that is operationalized. However just as in Foucault's governmentality, environmentalities too are not mutually exclusive and are constructed complementary to each other such that they tend to co-exist (Fletcher, 2010). The multiple environmentalities framework seeks to shed light on these motivations taking root within distinct forms of environmentality. Keeping in mind the interaction of these environmentalities, it is a useful tool to understand governance strategies within the ecotourism discourse employed by the postcolonial neoliberal state to create 'ecotourism subjects' such as in the case of Mr. Bhutia that I began this proposal with. Additionally, to justify my use of the multiple environmentalities framework to understand

ecotourism discourse and ecotourism subject-making in Sikkim, I draw from Fletcher (2009a) who takes the example of the 'ecotourism discourse' as a truth regime where disciplinary and neoliberal environmentalities interact to shape rational, ethical and self-regulating rational environmental subjects who are motivated to act accordingly in pursuit of economics incentives.

3.2 Subjectivities and positioning

In the above discussion, I have discussed how various environmentalities and governmentalities 'conduct the conduct' of people who can be thought of as 'subjects' with varying subjectivities. Thus, multiple environmentalities is a poststructuralist theoretical framework that helps uncover the question of how subjectivities are shaped by various technologies of power. However when it comes to explaining what is usually meant by 'subjectivities', various works have explored it through various lens in the context of ecotourism (Fletcher, 2014; Hutchins, 2008; Ortner, 1999; Shrestha, 1993). In an ethnographic sense, subjectivities can be thought of "as actors' thoughts, sentiments, and embodied sensibilities, and, especially, their senses of self and self-world relations" (Holland & Leander, 2004). By drawing from the body of works on cultural studies of Clifford Geertz, Ortner sheds light on discussions on subjectivities that surround individual as well as a collective consciousness in anthropology and cultural studies. Thus a central question to studying subjectivities is "how subjectivities are created by experiences of being positioned and, in turn, contribute to the production of cultural forms that mediate subsequent experiences" (Holland & Leander, 2004).

Coming from this ethnographic backdrop, few existing works refer to subjectivities and how actors negotiate through subject positions in discussing the cultural dimensions of development and conservation including ecotourism (Fletcher, 2014; Hutchins, 2008; Ortner, 1999; Shrestha, 1993; Vivanco, 2001). For instance, Fletcher (2014) sheds light on how ecotourism "is a particular cultural practice with profound implications for the lives, institutions, and worldviews of the people who host ecotourism ventures" (Fletcher, 2014, 5). In particular, within the context of ecotourism in Costa Rica, Fletcher discusses how "neoliberalism can be construed as a discursive project aiming to reconstruct not only actors' view of the world but their very subjectivity" (Fletcher, 2014, 137). Additionally, Hutchins (2008) through his discussion on 'identity politics' and 'politics of identity' in Kichwa communities, Ecuador, identifies multiple ways in which ecotourism, as a globalised phenomenon controlled by neoliberal and development discourses, produces reified meanings of culture and place rather than nurture culture and preserve nature (Hutchins, 2008). Hutchins (2008) explores subjectivities through 'politics of identity' which focusses on "counterhegemonic efforts through which local peoples, transnational migrants, or diasporic communities struggle to create new spaces for meaning construction, personal identity, economic survival, and political security" (Hill & Wilson, 2004). Through this concept, Hutchins (2008) explores how "indigenous Amazonians negotiate change as global market forces extend further into their daily lives" (Hutchins, 2008). The author demonstrates how Kichwa communities "have also learned how to work the system, discovering ways to exert their own forms of power to gain legal status for their projects, direct profits into productive activities, and learn new skills that help them adapt in an ever-changing world" (Hutchins, 2008). Thus, a focus on politics of identity helps shed light on the effects of ecotourism and other forces in various peripheral contexts in terms of how communities negotiate through various subject positions and create new meanings as adaptations to change.

Additionally, a growing body of literature use Foucauldian concepts to gain deeper insights about subjectivities and subject formation in the specific context of development and conservation (Asiyanbi et al., 2019; Nepomuceno et al., 2019; Deutsch, 2020; Choi, 2020). Several of these works do so in order to provide explanations about the vision-execution gap in development and conservation projects. For instance, Asiyanbi et al (2019) and Nepomuceno et al (2019) use Foucaldian concepts of 'counter-conduct' and 'technologies of the self' to provide in-depth insights about how local communities negotiate and exercise their agencies in neoliberal forms of conservations such as ecotourism from a bottom-up perspective. Analysing the failure of neoliberal conservation by focusing on subjectivities within a community considers complexities thus going beyond viewing local communities as passive beneficiaries (Asiyanbi et al, 2019). In that sense, a focus on 'technologies of self', like technologies of power, entails a multiplicity of practices and diverse targets – bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being (Asiyanbi et al, 2019). Thus, through their work, Asiyanbi et al (2019) show how such a focus unveils "local aspirations, granting insights into how and why contemporary conservation regimes repeatedly find a foothold in communities, despite the emptiness of their promises" (Asiyanbi et al., 2019). By doing this, these bodies of work highlight multiple complexities that emerge when neoliberal conservation and resulting variegated subjectivities are viewed from a post-structural lens that focus on local communities as beyond passive beneficiaries (Fletcher & Cortes-Vasquez, 2020).

Additionally, many scholars who focus on environmental governance discussion have done so to shed light on the vision-execution gap of neoliberal conservation. Fletcher's (2010) work on multiple environmentalities has provided clarity towards the use of a variegated and multiple environmentalities framework to help build on these discussions about the gap and changes in resulting subjectivities. Going beyond the environmentalities discussion (Fletcher & Cortes-Vasquez, 2020), Deutsch (2020) and Choi (2020) show how variegated environmentalities produce subjectivities in multiple and creative ways. Deutsch (2020) sheds light on the importance of such a variegated environmentalities perspective in understanding how competing rationalities impact the execution and changes in subjectivities of conservation projects in different contexts (Deutsch, 2020). Additionally, Choi (2020) explores multiple and variegated environmental subjectivities through ecotourism in South Korea to explain subjectivities from a bottom-up approach that goes beyond viewing local communities as passive subjects. Through both works, it is understood how communities navigate and negotiate various subject positions in creative ways that further diversified local ideas, attitudes, and practices towards the environment in ways that produced positions that went beyond those of the desired environmental and empowered citizen. Choi (2020) stresses on thinking through multiplicity which offers a nuanced analysis of environmental subjectivities by allowing us to "notice" various, unusual, and awkward negotiations (Choi, 2020).

Closer home in the Himalayan context, Shrestha (1993), drawing from personal lived experiences and ethnographic studies in Nepal, discusses the making of the developmental subjects that "reveals how and why the discourse of development, with the help of foreign aid, solidifies the colonial mindset in the post-imperial world, crafting cultural values, thinking, behaviour, and actions" (Shrestha, 1993).Shrestha's work indicates how developmental discourses perpetuate colonial notions that has further widened poverty and income gap between social groups in the Himalayan peripheral lands of Nepal. Similarly, Ortner's book 'Life and Death on Mt. Everest' provides an ethnographic account of the heterogeneous landscape of subjectivities that emerge as a result of mountain tourism, histories of colonialism and Western hegemony and how various groups among Sherpas negotiate through subject positions and use agency in the Solu Khumbu landscape (Ortner, 1999).Additionally, in the

context of conservation in the Haa Highlands of Bhutan, Montes et. Al. (2020) describe cosmological subjectivities of local people shaped by particular truth environmentalities lead to conservation-conducive behaviour (Montes et al., 2020). However, there is little work that sheds light on variegated subjectivities in Sikkim. For instance, in the context of ecotourism in Dzongu indigenous reserve of ethnic Lepchas of Sikkim, Gergan in her forthcoming work, highlights diverse subjectivities among the Lepchas that are shaped by identity politics in the background of a postcolonial hegemonic state (Gergan, forthcoming). Thus there is a gap in literature when it comes to explaining subjectivities in the context of ecotourism in the Himalayan borderland that captures groups other than ethnic Lepchas who, as Gergan describes, appear to be largely influenced by their continued struggle against destructive hydropower infrastructure in Dzongu (Gergan, 2020). Additionally, there is also a scope for variegated environmentalities and governmentalities studies to be bridged with variegated subjectivities by focusing on both technologies of power and technologies of self. This study aims to fill these gaps by addressing variegated subjectivities that emerge in the rural population of Sikkim.

Thus, going beyond the current environmentalities discussion (Fletcher & Cortes-Vasquez, 2020), this thesis aims to follow up on the call for new directions in research exploring environmental governmentality. In this aim, the thesis builds on the growing body of research about subject formation in the context of ecotourism and neoliberal conservation (Hutchins, 2008; Asiyanbi et al., 2019; Nepomuceno et al., 2019; Choi, 2020; Deutsch, 2020) to provide in-depth insights about how local communities negotiate through neoliberal forms of conservations such as ecotourism from a bottom-up perspective that considers existing and resulting complexities. I explore subject formation in terms of how multiple arts of government, whether pre-existing in society or promoted through ecotourism, with multiple underlying values, clash and interact to influence subject positions as embodied by local communities. By doing this, I highlight multiple complexities that emerge when neoliberal conservation and resulting subjectivities are viewed from a post-structural lens that focus on local communities as beyond passive beneficiaries in the specific context of the Himalayan borderland (Fletcher & Cortes-Vasquez, 2020). The central focus in this study considers how variegated environmentalities promoted by ecotourism interact or clash with existing governmentalities and technologies of self to thus produce variegated subjectivities. Thus this study aims to engage in discussions of subject formation in ways that demonstrates how people living in rural Sikkim make strategic uses of a diverse range of sociocultural practices or kinds of resources to construct social identities that mediate relations of power, disparities of wealth, and sentiments of (non)belonging that often emerge in the context of ecotourism (Hill & Wilson, 2004).

3.2 Research Questions

I intend to use multiple environmentalities and governmentalities to shed light on various arts of government that shape various subject positions of individuals engaged in ecotourism in Sikkim. Seeing that Mr. Bhutia's subjectivity is positioned in terms of structural incentives through environmental education in following a certain desired behaviour, one can interpret this as the working of both disciplinary and neoliberal environmentalities. Additionally, given the wider postcolonial, neoliberal and cultural context of the Himalayan periphery as described earlier, these can be understood by making use of a combination of neoliberal, sovereign and truth environmentalities to understand how subjects negotiate their positions conducted by competing environmentalities which can be seen in the story and meanings behind Mr. Bhutia's switch from yak herding practice to ecotourism where practices such as yak herding is viewed

as unsustainable, unprofitable and 'savage' through the postcolonial sovereign lens. As put forth by Agarwal (2005b) decentralized forms of governance strategies or 'government at a distance' by the postcolonial neoliberal state makes possible the intimate control over individual subjects as opposed to the biopolitics of populations. Thus, I intend to weave together these concepts within the framework of multiple environmentalities and governmentalities to shed light on the 'ecotourism discourse' and variegated subjectivities in the Eastern Himalayan borderland of Sikkim. Going by this I have formulated the following research question and sub-questions that guide this study:

'How do local actors in Sikkim negotiate specific subjectivities promoted by multiple environmentalities in the context of ecotourism development?'

The research question is divided in the following sub-questions:

o   *What environmentalities and governance strategies inform ecotourism promotion and discourse in Sikkim?*
o   *What does ecotourism mean to local people in Sikkim? How do they relate to it?*
o   *How does ecotourism discourse and practice shape lives and meanings people attach to their communities and biophysical environments?'*

Chapter 4: Methodology

In this section, I outline my research methodology. Firstly, I introduce, explain, and justify the use of a combined ethnographic and autoethnographic methodology, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, life history interviews and discourse analysis. I justify the combination of ethnographic and autoethnographic methods in relation to the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, I address issues related to the research context i.e., the access, ethics, limitations, and reflexivity of the research. This project adopts an interdisciplinary approach to qualitative research, using autoethnographic methodology, including life history analysis and discourse analysis, to achieve 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) vital in understanding lived experiences.

4.1 Ethnographic fieldwork/ participant observation

I partially carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Sikkim to understand how meanings and lived experiences vary in the context of the Himalayan periphery within ecotourism by living with them and empower voices in doing so. I could only do so partially due to restrictions brought about by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In this part, I justify the use of ethnography for the purpose of this research in general and then explain limitations I faced in the context of the physical distancing and travel restrictions in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Ethnography is distinct from laboratory or clinic based methods in that it does not involve control by the researcher (Madden, 2017). Ethnography is characterised by writing about people by being with people and then theorising about people based on the ethnographic fieldwork while also being constantly reflexive about one's own role and body (Madden, 2017). In order to study people in their typical and routine circumstances, which is crucial in understanding meanings and subjectivities reflected by the researcher's 'thick descriptions', ethnographers cannot control, and do not want to control, what happens in their field situation (Madden, 2017). Thus, this research involved participant observation for three months from

April 2021 until the end of the fieldwork in June 2021. Ideally the idea was to embody roles of observer and participant in an open experimental field of a homestay village where I would immerse myself and live with the participants in order to gain rich information about lived experiences of the research participants in their daily lives. In doing so would have enabled me to approach the fieldwork by constantly engaging in participant observation thus observing and participating in the lives of a homestay village. However, I do not completely adhere to this due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and thus resort to autoethnography as an alternative which I justify in the next section. However I engaged in participant observation in the first month while based out of Gangtok. This involved participant observation of ecotourism organizers such as the state Forest Department, local NGOs, travel agents and cafes where ecotourism is usually organised out of Gangtok. I enhanced these participant observations by supporting it with informal talks and resulting daily fieldnotes and memos for rich first-hand data (Madden, 2017). Informal talks about any given topic of relevance also helped build rapport with research participants which is crucial for participants to express themselves.

4.2 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a type of ethnography that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation by the researcher (Koot, 2017) wherein personal and cultural issues become blurred and are experienced as continually interconnected (Koot, 2017; Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739; Maréchal, 2010). Autoethnography enables researchers to place the self within a social context (Besio and Butz, 2009) thus allowing me, as a native of Sikkim, to access my personal experiences as a professional in ecotourism projects and relate these analytics to the wider phenomena. Besio and Butz (2009) argue that autoethnography allows "academics' systematic efforts to analyse their own biographies as resources for illuminating larger social or cultural phenomena" (Besio and Butz, 2009: 1660). In this research, I draw from Koot (2017) to rely on retrospective autoethnography that goes beyond the binary of two emerging forms of autoethnography namely evocative (Ellis and Bochner, 2000) and analytic (Anderson, 2006). On the one hand, evocative autoethnography emphasises on "the importance of the connection between the researcher's personal experience and a wider, sociocultural analysis" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 739) and thus 'writing from the heart' since 'we enact the world we study' (Denzin, 2006: 422-423). On the other hand, analytic approach focuses autoethnography around an analytic research agenda that helps improve theoretical understandings of wider social phenomena (Anderson, 2006; 373-375) thus going beyond personal experiences.

I employed retrospective autoethnography in a self-reflexive and ethical manner that allowed me to address crucial and interconnected elements of memory, power and unawareness as outlined by Koot (2017). As a result, I relied on a retrospective autoethnographic approach that allowed me to access memories of my lived experiences as project coordinator in ecotourism with Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS) of two years from 2017 to 2019. During these years, I have engaged in numerous ways with the local people of Sikkim such as but not limited to environmental education, homestay training, content creation, strategizing village tourism, solid waste management, being a guest in homestays or mobilising communities for conservation. Additionally, given that in terms of environmentality, "environmental education would constitute a paradigmatic example of this environmentality in action, whereby, through diverse decentralised institutions (state schools, NGO trainings, community workshops, ecotourism excursions, etc.), norms intended to encourage in situ natural resource preservation are advocated" (Fletcher, 2010), accessing autoethnographic memories of any such workshops and events that is organised by the government or promoters

of ecotourism such as NGOs thus took shape as an alternative to the partially carried out participant observation. Drawing from Koot (2017), I argue for my access to these memories by considering my 'unawareness' of being a researcher at that point of time and by reflecting on my position of power retrospectively as a project coordinator and currently as a researcher.

My justification for the use of a retrospective autoethnographic method lies in Koot (2016) 's insight that even when the awareness of 'doing research' is absent, knowledge is acquired which can be used analytically at a later stage (Koot, 2017). In that sense, I consider these past experiences as completely 'open' (Koot, 2017). However, retrospective autoethnography that makes use of memories are inevitably clouded (Koot, 2017). This is precisely because the past is 'a social construct that only emerges referentially and selectively, inevitably formed and transformed by means of re-experience and interpretation', in which 'memory allows us to structure the past in relation to the present' (Argenti and Röschenthaler 2006: 33). Thus, in doing retrospective work, I acknowledge the complexities of my thoughts and feelings. For instance, my reflection on my prior experience in Sikkim has taken various shapes as I began my master's program in WUR. I did not necessarily hold any views about ecotourism and the ways it is tied up with colonial imaginations during my time in Sikkim, however this changed as I evolved academically in WUR thus changing the way I remembered or made sense of my past experiences. During the period of this study, there were also occasions when I remembered certain aspects that I normally wouldn't have but possibly did because I carried a research agenda. Having said that, it still does not change that in my prior experience, I was 'open' to reality as I encountered it (Koot, 2017) and thus that the knowledge generated through the manifold experiences of everyday life is very different from that gained from a specific research perspective (Koot, 2017). This makes my research epistemologically valuable as it flows beyond the binary of evocative and analytic autoethnography.

Additionally, I acknowledge that another complexity that inevitably arises because of the autoethnographer's central position is the decisive position of power that their memories hold (Koot, 2017). This means that both as an unaware project coordinator and as an autoethnographer, I moved from one asymmetric position of power to another. In other words, using my memories as analytical data implies a perpetuation of the position of power that researchers occupy in the representation and interpretation of events and experiences (Koot, 2016). Thus, I moved from being an educated local youth worker to being a foreign-educated researcher. In the situation of being a project coordinator, it certainly helped that while I am English-speaking, Nepali is my mother tongue. In addition, what made it more suitable for me to do this work is the fact that I am an ethnic Nepali, born and raised in both rural and urban Sikkim. Additionally, I was a young project coordinator of a small-scale local NGO (that pays peanuts) in my early twenties in a place where social hierarchy is ordered in multi-faceted and intersectional ways that include age, gender, sexuality, government job (or not), race, class, tribe, and caste. Therefore, as a project coordinator, I experienced power asymmetries in complex, non-linear, multi-faceted and intersectional ways. However, what this truly means is that the voices of the people who were not involved in ecotourism projects with ECOSS would possibly be excluded. I have mitigated this issue by combining semi-structured life-history/biographical interviews with people that I did not encounter in my prior experience and gained their contact through other means. This proved to be valuable as it enabled me to base my research both on my personal experiences from the inside, thus emic, and those of others. While using my experience as a project coordinator as the basis of my research has provided me insights from an emic point of view at the expense of excluding voices that I did not encounter, I also add inclusivity to this approach by combining a methodology that allowed me to have a biographical approach as I justify next.

4.3 Semi-structured Life-history interviews

Interviews provide an opportunity for researchers to learn about social life through the perspective, experience, and language of those living it. Participants are given the opportunity to share their story, pass on their knowledge, and provide their own perspective on a range of topics (Boeije, 2010). I carried out semi-structured interviews with multiple stakeholders of ecotourism such as state officials, bureaucratic officers, community representatives, and NGO representatives in relatively formal settings where at times I required prior appointments. With state officials and other NGO officials, I made use of formally conducted interviews to talk about specific topics such as the context of ecotourism policies, projects, and education programs to find information about multiple environmentalities that govern ecotourism. I used semi-structured interviews to keep the conversations as flexible, participatory, and open as the purpose is to gain a true understanding of the interviewees in their own words. Being a Nepali-speaking person, I carried out interviews in either or both in Nepali or in English as interviewees preferred. I used purposive and snowballing strategies to reach out to interviewees using my contacts that I have made during my two years of working experience in the ecotourism sector in Sikkim. I made use of snowballing to reach out to people involved in ecotourism in multiple ways such as my previous employer, Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS), and the Travel Agents Association of Sikkim to find out about possible interviewees beneficial for the goals of the study.

Additionally, I also drew from biographical narrative interpretative method (BNIM) to understand subjectivities among 'ecotourism subjects'. BNIM enables the privileging of personal narratives to outline change and transformation caused by a certain social phenomenon (Roseneil, 2012). BNIM enables, and indeed requires, the researcher to focus on both the individual and particular in biography and personal meaning, and on wider socio-cultural processes and historical contexts (Roseneil, 2012). The narratives are sought in interviews where participants guide their own narratives with little interferences from the interviewers. The method hinges on the interviewer creating an open-ended and safe space where participants can flow in and out of memories of their lived experiences. For this research, biographical interviews were conducted through multiple telephone calls because of the ongoing pandemic that prevented physical meetings.

I conducted 15 interviews out of which 10 were semi-structured interviews and 5 were guided by BNIM. Each interview lasted around an hour on average and were carried out in an open-ended and ethical manner where, especially in life-history interviews, both particular (experiences and views in ecotourism) and individual (life history, aspirations) were ventured into. Research participants were contacted through my personal networks of homestay operator, guides and individuals occupied in ecotourism throughout Sikkim. At times, snowballing sampling was used to be connected to potential participants.

4.4 Discourse Analysis

I used discourse analysis of official and unofficial publications, visuals, policies, website contents and training materials to understand how ecotourism is discursively constructed. Discourse analysis is a analytical tool used by researchers who are particularly interested in the use of language and communicative processes (Boeije, 2010). In discourse analysis, the analysis of data is language oriented thus considering jargons, words and language that are suggestive and reflective of certain discourses as in a set of beliefs and values. In this study, I conducted discourse analysis of two policy documents namely the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy

2011 and the Sikkim State Tourism Policy 2015 in terms of the kinds of environmentalities propagated by these materials. Discourse analysis served as an alternative method of studying the propagation of environmental discourses that construct ecotourism in Sikkim. Therefore, discourse analysis involved identifying and analysing documents, such as the two earlier mentioned policy documents, that reflect any of the environmentalities discussed earlier.

4.5 Research Context

4.5.1 Access

As mentioned before, my two years of experience working on the ground with various individuals involved in ecotourism in multiple parts of Sikkim helped me gain access to a rich source of valued personal contacts such as state officials, (I)NGO officials, community representatives, ecotourism homestay operators, travel agencies, associations and guides in multiple locations. My tenure with Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS), a local NGO that implements CBC ecotourism projects in partnership with INGOs like WWF and funding organizations Asian Development Bank, the state government, and local communities, allows me to use purposive and snowball sampling methods to identify key participants in interviews and the fieldwork. With the absence of a particular field visit, as was initially planned, the research context only became particularly relevant during life-history interviews where different parts of Sikkim grew to hold relevance such as Khecheodpalri, Pelling, Hee-Martam and Lachen where participants were based out of which were mostly held through recorded telephone calls. However, offline semi-structured interviews were held in different locations in Gangtok as per the wishes of the participants. There were, of course, several participants that eventually had to be excluded due to various reasons such as health issues, unavailability, or unreachability through telephone. One such example being Mr. Phupu Tshering Bhutia who's example I began this paper with.

4.5.2 Ethics

Every phase of ethnographic research has an ethical backdrop (Madden, 2017). In this study, from designing to conducting research and analysing and writing processes, there were always ethical decisions being made. These could involve deciding the structure of the research design, negotiating the field situation in terms of implicit power relations for instance and issues of privacy and confidentiality that arise throughout the process (Madden, 2017). Additionally, ethical issues arise even during and after departure from the field when researchers have to consider the nature of their departure and ongoing associations with the participant group (Madden, 2017). During this study, autoethnography and ethnography from start to end was viewed as an ethical commitment where all responsibilities and obligations was dealt by the researcher that come with immersing oneself into the life of others as a researcher. Thus, I was and will always be committed to being reflexive about my decisions and actions. Furthermore, having worked in ecotourism projects in Sikkim for two years in the past, I am also familiar with ecotourism practices, and I used this, as I always have, to nurture respectful, ethical, and meaningful relations during my encounter that will benefit the goals of the project rather than engaging in exploitative relations. In this study, ethical issues related to confidentiality, informed consent, and anonymity regarding informants were prioritized and respected. In order to achieve this, I shared the goals of the project and intend to share possible results by signed consents in case of interviews or by communicating in advance in words in situations such as participant observation. However, whether they wanted to sign a contract or agree in other ways, this aspect was usually left to the discretion of the participants. In this communication,

it was made clear that this is an independent research study and has no affiliations with any organisations, companies, or governments. Sensitive information was be dealt by either maintaining strict anonymity of informants or by not including it to analysis to avoid conflicts and misunderstandings. Talking about subject positions in a context where traditional practice of yak herding has been viewed as degrading, it was possible that participants may express views that they feel is sensitive information. Thus, I took into full consideration and awareness that the possibility of sensitive information exists thus making it imperative to maintain anonymity. Sensitive information may also lead to exploitative relations between the researcher and the participants (Madden, 2017), this was avoided at all costs again by engaging in constant reflexivity about my role as a researcher in the research context.

4.5.3 Positionality and Reflexivity

As I also touched a little earlier in my justification of autoethnography, being a Nepali-speaking native of Sikkim, I approached the research context as a site of shifting, negotiated, and fluid positionalities (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020). As someone born and raised in Sikkim, who is also a foreign-educated researcher, my positionality drew out the complicated dynamics between the categories of 'insider' and 'outsider'. I also explain this in terms of power relations in my justification of autoethnography by taking example of my position as project coordinator in ECOSS. As an additional example, my fluency in Nepali gave me the chance to study Sikkim from a relatively more insider's perspective. However, given my background as a foreign-educated individual, I am aware of possible implicit power-relations in the field. Furthermore, my age, 27, would be perceived in the lower hierarchy as well as my identification as a non-binary queer person. In order to manage these complexities, I used the initial days of the fieldwork to immerse myself within the field and create trustful relationships for instance by speaking casually in Nepali with people, catching up with those I already knew and creating an open space that invites others. I also positioned myself in a way that reflects my intentions and interests in understanding, seeing, and listening to the voices of people rather than attempting to alter their opinions, lifestyles, or viewpoints. It also helped that my native village is situated in a rural part of West Sikkim from where I coordinated all communications with the life-history interview participants. It helped break ice, flatten asymmetries, and build rapport by simply hearing familiar soundscapes of a rural and forested village unfold through each other's telephones. Speaking to people about their lives by locating oneself and belonging in a similar setting where we may sense similar things made both the researcher and the participant's lives relatable, even if it lasted only for the length of the interview. I consciously and consistently reflected on my own opinions and viewpoints and employed ways to drive objective research so as to not let it impact and influence the research.

4.5.4 Limitations

As repeatedly brought up earlier, considering that this research was undertaken amidst the global COVID-19 pandemic, this might influence the ecotourism activities being carried out in the state of Sikkim such as educational trainings or operation of village homestays. By the third week of my research work in Gangtok, the second wave of the pandemic had already unfolded rapidly which changed the fate of my research. Therefore, most elements of the fieldwork was carried out remotely or with social distancing if offline. All measures as prescribed by the government of Sikkim was followed. With this restriction, this meant that there was a shortage of guests and visitors in homestays which further prevented, for instance, participant observation of visitor-guest interactions. Therefore, for the most part, this research does not draw from direct insights that emerge during guest-host interactions in homestays but

rather implicitly through the perspectives and stories of homestay operators and other participants. Additionally, due to the ongoing pandemic, educational trainings carried out by the government were all cancelled. For this reason, a discourse analysis of documents was carried out instead.

Chapter 5: Results and Analysis

5.1 The postcolonial state and its subjects: disciplinary governmentality in action

I write this brief section considering that subsequent sections explore the interaction of environmentalities promoted by ecotourism with local governmentalities. When I first visited the Ecotourism cell at the Forest secretariat, I waited for about two hours early afternoon to meet the District Forest Officer of ecotourism (DFO ecotourism) to schedule an interview with her. During that hour, there was a slight commotion going about in the building as people frantically discussed about the visit of a certain journalist coming to check if employees had been reporting to work on time. The same discussion became a viral conversation in local new outlets and among the people including my home. I begin writing this part by analysing this incident with the intention of contextualizing Sikkimese bureaucracy and political climate within the setting of a postcolonial state and the kind of disciplinary subjects that are shaped consequently.

On the previous day, state governments across the country held functions to commemorate Ambedhkar Jayanti, a national holiday that pays tribute to the economist and social reformer who fought against caste-based discrimination of the Dalit community and is also known as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution. Ambedhkar Jayanti is celebrated every year as a matter of nationalistic honour and pride for the Indian constitution. As a norm bureaucrats and public officers are expected to attend and be seen with the ministerial cabinet. In Sikkim, when several officers failed to show up at the function held in Gangtok, the Chief Minister (CM), Prem Singh Golay, during his speech openly criticised public servants for the low turnout. He expanded further and openly criticized the employees for not adhering to office hours and norms. Subsequently, he directly addressed a local journalist, Ajay Agarwal, known for tailing politicians, "the media must play an active role in policing employees who are late." (Dhungel, 2021) The next morning, all government employees in Gangtok rushed to office, as Ajay Agarwal made several rounds of government offices disciplining public servants on punctuality. This was followed by a wave of social media memes portraying Ajay Agarwal crashing against public employees as all rushed to make it to work on time. Within the postcolonial structure of the state government, disciplinary forms of governmentality are often operationalized in ways that polices people to internalize underlying ethical values and norms. Ethical norms and values that maintain positions of power and thus direct such a governmentality is implied and assumed in the following outburst of a statement made by the CM during his Ambedkhar Jayanti speech:

> "We have broken laws to ensure the best for the employees. When it is time for their promotion, they come in queue. Any employee who doesn't respect a national festival or a government function is wrong. Today is a national festival; but here on Ambedkar Jayanti, how many of our government employees are present?" (Dhungel, 2021)

Thus, for any public servant aspiring to be promoted to a higher position of power, the norm is to *queue up* and find various ways of becoming politically favorable in the eyes of the government (such as summoning relatives with greater political power or access) which is

achieved by adhering to implicit norms. Resisting these norms, thus, might result in "no one [being] spared [even] if vigilance (state action against political and financial corruption) is necessary or inquiry needed, there will only be time-bound promotion" (Dhungel, 2021) as authoritatively declared by the CM. This statement holds utmost power in a peripheral state beyond the so-called chicken-neck corridor (read *mainland*) where the government continues to employ and provide for much of the population. As I show later in this paper, subjectivities and aspirations are shaped in ways that privilege government jobs and provisions while anything else is never wholeheartedly considered or aspired. A regional news outlet further reports that the CM "further warned the employees that he will show who the real PS Golay is, claiming he has both pen and other means to punish such employees" (Dhungel, 2021) as though monitoring prisoners from the middle of a panopticon. Two days later, the Office of Chief Secretary released an Order that named eleven high-ranking bureaucrats who would hereby be treated as being on 'Extra Ordinary Leave (without pay)' for the day that they arrived late to their office despite the public warning by the CM and the journalist. Thus, in Sikkim, disciplinary and sovereign forms of governmentality such as naming, shaming, and explicitly or implicitly threatening with political consequences is common practice and normalised.

Most of all, the CMs statement implies how the postcolonial Indian state sits atop this hierarchy of power: "I have come here to work for the public and expect the same. The Constitution has given us our duty, the same must be respected. That service must be provided." (Dhungel, 2021). In a state bordering China, that was made part of India in as early as 1975, nationalization projects disciplines state government who disciplines subjects into citizens that internalize an unquestionable national identity through national holidays and the Indian Constitution. This culture of disciplining to maintain power imbalances is reflected in the way ecotourism development takes shape, or falls out of shape, in the Himalayan borderland as I show through my research in the upcoming chapters. The failure of addressing this complexity by interventions makes ecotourism into a project of '*rendering technical*' (Li, 2002).

5.2 Ecotourism and Multiple Environmentalities in Sikkim

In this section, I begin addressing my research questions. In the first section, I explain and analyse various ecotourism governance strategies employed by the state in terms of governmentalities. Subsequently, I explain the complex ways in which ecotourism discourse, as my research reveals, is constructed in Sikkim thus addressing my second question. Furthermore, I attempt to understand the complex ways people in Sikkim understand and operationalise ecotourism by shedding light on how multiple ideologies compete, collaborate, or interact with each other to give shape to ecotourism discourse and resulting variegated subjectivities in people. I unpack these complexities by viewing it all in terms of the interplay of multiple environmentalities, governance strategies and technologies of self. I, then weave the focus into addressing my third research question where I explore the resulting complex ways in which findings indicate ecotourism and other local governmentalities shapes lives, experiences and meanings people attach to various aspects. For the purpose of this study, I intend to employ the findings of Fletcher (2009) who contends "ecotourism planning functions as a 'discourse', a particular approach to thinking and speaking about the phenomenon that 'define[s] various forms of agency, administer[s] certain silences, and prescribe[s] various forms of intervention'" (Brosius, 1999: 278; in Fletcher, 2009: 271). In this sense, ecotourism discourse serves to reproduce ideological discourses and shape power relations. In addition to neoliberal ideology, Fletcher identifies several ideologically charged and culturally specific dynamics that constitute a unique tourism discourse.

This chapter serves to explore these aspects of ecotourism discourse as revealed through rhetoric found in websites, interviews, brochures, and policy documents, my remote research, and autoethnographic experiences. I intend to highlight these aspects through the lens of multiple environmentalities. Research carried out partially remotely and through autoethnography reveals multiple crucial aspects of ecotourism discourse promoted by diverse actors and shaped by the interplay of multiple environmentalities. Thus, ecotourism discourse appeared to be multiple and influenced by the interplay of multiple environmentalities taking various shapes over time. To consider the crucial interplay of multiple environmentalities, I address how environmentalities interact and inform crucial aspects or themes across ecotourism and people's lives.

5.2.1 Neoliberal Conservation in the Postcolonial borderland: The Sikkim Ecotourism Policy 2011 and the Sikkim State Tourism Policy 2015

In Sikkim, ecotourism is developed and promoted as a priority developmental option for the future (DowntoEarth, 2002; Shenga & Jha, 2014). Influenced by the sustainable development goals, there seems to be a national and a global agenda to "make Sikkim a model of ecotourism for India and the world (DowntoEarth, 2002) along with organic agriculture as a former union Tourism minister had grandly announced. In 2002, this agenda began to materialize as Gangtok hosted the South Asian Regional Conference on Ecotourism welcoming various international actors to the playing field of ecotourism intervention in the Himalayan borderland. Recognising conservation value in Sikkim's natural and cultural diversity and the economic prospects linked to it, the former Chief Minister, Pawan K. Chamling, openly put together the state's sustainability agenda declaring that "Sikkim cannot afford to have large polluting industries. Along with education, computers (high-tech), agro-based industries, ecotourism is a way towards sustainable development for us (DowntoEarth, 2002). Keeping in mind that around 80% of public property, including protected areas, came under the control of the Department of Forest, Environment and Wildlife Management (Forest Department) (Directorate of Ecotourism, 2016), nature conservation through ecotourism too eventually took shape as a core dimension of the department. While tourism is regulated by the Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, ecotourism is regulated by the Forest Department. Therefore, both the Sikkim State Tourism Policy 2015 and the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy 2011 aim to regulate the kind of tourism underlined by the sustainability agenda of the state. In this sub-section, I intend to address both these policy documents as understood in terms of environmentalities and governmentalities to paint the playing field of state-led neoliberal conservation in the postcolonial borderland.

Sikkim State Tourism Policy 2015

In this sub-section, I intend to highlight capitalist neoliberal ideas such as, but not limited to, commodification of landscapes as 'natural capital', marketization and individual competitive entrepreneurship. The State Tourism policy (2015) document produced by the State Department of Tourism and Aviation, Government of Sikkim is seemingly consistent with the neoliberal logic that aims to create and regulate environmental subjects. The 'Vision' of the policy lays explicit emphasis on the specific neoliberal logic that endorses tourism as a key means of contributing to Sikkim's economic growth:

> "Make Sikkim a highly valued responsible tourism destination such that it contributes significantly to the state economy while conserving its natural and cultural heritage and ensuring visitor satisfaction." (Government of Sikkim, 2016)

Additionally, the 'Vision' overtly states the neoliberal state's intentions to pursue ecotourism as guided by the neoliberal conservation logic. Rife with colonial imaginations, the state's vision extends to a future where locals shift from supposed damaging "agrarian livelihoods" and practises which may not figure into the GDP to tourism which contributes significantly to the state's economic growth. This is nostalgic of McAfee (1999) where she notes that as per neoliberal logic in the case of herders in Botswana, "the most efficient way to 'develop [the savanna] ecosystem would be to set up a tourism enterprise and employ the former pastoralists as eco-safari guides" (McAfee, 1999: 139). As was the case in Botswana, the cultural significance of herding in Sikkim does not figure in the policy while simultaneously yak herders are branded as 'mountain destroyers' in need of incentives that motivate their shift to ecotourism as I establish earlier in this paper. This (perverse) perception of local livelihood as damaging in addition to the distinction between 'natural' and 'cultural' heritage that needs to be 'tapped on' further alludes to deeply rooted postcolonial Eurocentric narratives that otherizes traditional means of livelihood. The colonial imaginations perpetuated by the postcolonial state becomes apparent in the way the livelihood of yak herding is viewed as degrading. The specific use of the term 'responsible tourism' further suggests that the state may possibly be open to other forms of tourism that conserves natural and cultural heritage while also ensuring visitor satisfaction for as long as Sikkim is rendered 'highly valued' in the global markets. Further explicit statements of commodification of nature and culture is captured precisely by Goal 1 of the policy:

> "The Human Development Report (HDR) 2014 recognizes that Sikkim has a comparative advantage in tourism with its beautiful landscape, diverse flora and fauna, culture and traditions, and hospitable locals. Other factors that contribute to positioning Sikkim as a prime tourist destination are its peaceful environment, political stability, high literacy rate, its green policies such as organic farming and easy accessibility. Sikkim's Tourism Mission 2015 aspires to "make tourism the main livelihood of the people of Sikkim, and each and every household and individual, a skilled force for the tourism industry". (Government of Sikkim, 2016)

In making this statement, the policy assumes not only that 'nature' is 'natural capital' to be assigned a monetary value, but also lists an assortment of other characteristics that could be commodified such as 'culture', 'traditions', 'peace', 'literacy', 'political stability' and 'accessibility'. The statement is seemingly a large assumption based on essentialized colonial assumptions that imagine people of the colonial periphery as naïve simpletons and their peaceful, hospitable locals (Baruah, 2008; Gergan, 2020). Its intentions to marketize or subsume into the market not only nature but also (skilled) 'households' and 'individuals' highlights the neoliberal logic within which the postcolonial state and thus ecotourism operate. Additionally, all of it is woven together with economic jargon such as 'comparative advantage' and 'skilled force' automatically transposing subjects into the capitalist neoliberal realm.

Furthermore Goal 3 of the policy crucially highlights the neoliberal lens through which landscape, people, homes, and practices take shape as factors of production that are to be squeezed to contribute to the overall economic growth in the state and hence place it on the global map:

> "By focusing on supporting and promoting nature and culture-based tourism over recreational or leisure tourism, Sikkim can attract tourists that will spend more time, appreciate the natural and cultural heritage of the state and contribute more to the local economy." (Government of Sikkim, 2016)

The urgency and crucial objective of placing Sikkim somewhere high up on the global competitive market is clearly felt all throughout the policy document. Thus, from the above analysis of the policy rhetoric I contend that Sikkim's conservation goals are highly influenced by neoliberal logic and colonial notions of the Eastern Himalayan borderland significantly shaping state-produced ecotourism discourse. As such, neoliberal ideologies embedded within and promoted by the policy is in effect embodied in action by various programs and efforts that are influenced by the policy.

The Sikkim Ecotourism Policy (SKE) 2011

The Sikkim Ecotourism Policy 2011 (SBFP, 2011) produced by the Forest Department is a policy document that is an outcome of the Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project (SBFP) funded by JICA. The document lays out key institutions and strategies formulated to regulate and promote conservation through ecotourism in Sikkim and thus acts as guiding principles for all activities implemented by SBFP. In particular, the sections describing the vision, objective and principles of Sikkim ecotourism hold ideological importance. The policy identifies and defines various strategies to be used for the development of ecotourism in Sikkim. These strategies usually fall under the executive responsibility of the Sikkim Ecotourism Directorate working under the Forest Department. Additionally, the Sikkim Ecotourism Council operates in village-level consisting of various stakeholders from other relevant governmental or non-governmental bodies. The implementation areas are divided in 11 ecotourism zones that are interestingly fringe areas surrounding protected areas such as bird sanctuaries and reserve forests. In this section, I will be analysing parts of the document in terms of the ideological set of beliefs that are implicitly promoted through ecotourism in Sikkim.

Upon reading the policy document, I aim to analyse it in terms of the discourse it promotes supported by visuals. Unlike the Tourism Policy document, the SKE policy document appears as a publicly available marketing material implicit in the use of vivid images and colour schemes throughout all pages. The format, structure, and language utilised appear 'professional' that involved the workings of marketing professionals and tourism experts such as the one interviewed for this thesis. Considering the availability of funds provided by JICA, the Forest Department certainly allocated funds to create a visual branding strategy to be maintained in the document. From images of White tourists being welcomed by the previous CM to those of locals adorned in traditional ornaments or doing traditional 'village tasks' and iconic landscapes found in North Sikkim, the policy is rife with the kind of visual imagery that promotes a certain image of Sikkim catering to the postcolonial neoliberal gaze. If anything, for a policy, it is surely an inviting document to read. Images of urban areas, hydropower dams or pharmaceutical industrial complexes that increasingly occupy riverbanks and towns in National Highway 10, the 'lifeline' that connects the state to the rest of the country, are conveniently framed out as it would not be beneficial in marketing terms. Images of people usually appear doing manual labour tasks or posing adorned in traditional clothes outsides their possible homestays implicitly catering to the postcolonial and neoliberal gaze. Other images feature exotic, charismatic plant, and animal species as well as iconic wetlands, mountain

passes and pastures that are mostly located in North Sikkim and northern parts of East and West Sikkim.

Furthermore, the vision statement of the SKE puts these images to a clearer perspective:

> "The vision of the policy is to establish Sikkim as an ultimate and unique ecotourism destination offering memorable and high-quality learning experiences to visitors, and to contribute to poverty alleviation as well as to promote nature conservation" (SBFP, 2011)

While the attention of the reader must flow down to terms such as memorable and high-quality learning experiences, what is implicitly conveyed is the idea of establishing and marketizing Sikkim as an ecotourism destination for high-end visitors who are visibly different from the people in the photographs and thus can afford high-quality learning experiences. This idea was echoed by the JICA national ecotourism expert who was involved in drafting the policy and thus influenced it as he explained during our conversation:

> "Destination should also be choosy about the tourists they receive. It is a fragile ecosystem and we should be careful about what kinds of tourists come and what kind of orientation should happen before they come. Pro-activeness from govt side is important. We always take this example comparing Nepal and Bhutan. Bhutan is always choosy about who comes there. But Nepal is not choosy it is quite open where anybody can visit… we should adopt a conscious approach. We might get footfall but in the longer run how is it going to be beneficial?" (Nahaar, 2021, Interview)

Both the consultant and the policy document thus seem to be influenced by the manners in which Bhutan manages to bring high-quality tourists for high-quality neoliberal conservation through ecotourism. The discourse produced in this effort is one that caters to the postcolonial neoliberal gaze as I further illustrate below.

Additionally, it is also assumed that people involved in ecotourism need poverty alleviation along with conservation-friendly behaviour which explains some of the images that for instance portrays an elderly man physically weaving a *doko* (hand-woven bamboo baskets) in a 'nature' setting. This image is featured in the page titled 'Strategies for benefiting the economically disadvantaged people' thus implicitly associating poverty to the traditional livelihood and practice of weaving dokos. On the same page, a traditional Nepali style earth and wooden house has been featured with a man standing in front of it dressed in traditional clothes that further appears as exotic in the eyes of the high-end tourists. Therefore, the policy document constructs a discourse where implicit associations are made between traditional style homes and poverty that satisfies postcolonial imaginations of the Himlayan Borderland. The neoliberal logic that dictates the vision is distinct from the Tourism Policy as the SKE specifically distinguishes ecotourism in Sikkim as high-quality learning experiences.

Therefore, through this brief analysis, it is implicitly understood the emphasis that Japan-funded SBFP-interventions may lay on marketization and branding in the promotion of its ecotourism zones. The intervention is one that promotes the Forest Department as a neoliberal space with an official Ecotourism Marketing cell housed in the Forest Secretariat. Thus, the SBFP and the SKE are significant indications of the increasingly neoliberal space that the Forest Department is being shaped into, that was earlier known to prevent tourism in protected areas but now has taken up its promotion as a core activity (Nahaar, 2018, Interview).

Additionally, when viewed together, these two policies appear incongruent and competitive rather than collaborative and constructive. For instance, my conversations with officials and NGO members shed light on how ecotourism is regulated competitively, rather than collaboratively, by both the Forest Department and the Tourism Department and thus often in isolation with each other. This explains the absence of any linkages or collaborative policy that addresses and regulates ecotourism. On the one hand, the Tourism Department has laid out schemes for homestays while on the other hand the Forest Department has executed the SBFP intervention in the 11 ecotourism zones without considering previous interventions. For instance, while searching for an appropriate research participant regarding homestays, some pointed me towards the Tourism Department while others pointed towards the Forest Department. The competitive atmosphere that dominates the collaborative space within bureaucratic structures thus create confusion about the way ecotourism functions and specifically who regulates it. Additionally, that the Tourism Department is not funded by the Japanese agency certainly contributes to increased tensions between the two departments. Japanese funds trickling in the Forest Department has transformed the postcolonial structure into a globalised neoliberal space. Thus, my research reveals that there is an absence of a link or a connection between the Ecotourism Policy and the Tourism Policy which leads to the implementation of competing variegated governance strategies within ecotourism in Sikkim. In the next sub-section, I address the 'ecotourism expert' which happens to be one such embodiment of neoliberal environmentality in action.

5.2.2 Embodying neoliberal environmentality: The Ecotourism Specialists

Apart from the state, Ecotourism in Sikkim is promoted by various other independent actors. In this section, I explore these set of emerging, and often self-proclaimed, 'ecotourism specialists' in terms of the implicit ideologies that underpin their views and actions in ecotourism. My conversations with private ecotourism organizers reveal how every actor believes to be their own kind of expert when it comes to ecotourism. For instance, many of my research participants identified how it is commonly felt that state-led ecotourism interventions necessarily and naturally fail due to the absence of marketing and business professionals in the departments. There was a general lack of trust when it came to opinions about bureaucrats trying to promote ecotourism. Thus many such participants, motivated by entrepreneurship and the ecotourism market, pointed out how firstly it would be quite natural for state-led interventions to eventually fail because of their bureaucratic background:

> "The govt. has done many things… trainings, ecotourism zones, so many assets and infrastructure have been created. But at the end of the day, they are not marketing professionals.. bureaucrats can't do marketing... locals need to push themselves... only about one out of all the ppl who come for trainings flourish and get things going in a proactive manner... the rest don't push themselves... to go out there and bring people into Sikkim and into their homes." (Manisha, 2021, Interview)

Similarly, successful ecotourism entrepreneurs, who are more than often educated individuals, tend to implicitly frame ecotourism in terms of neoliberalised notions relating to business, marketing and ecotourism ventures. Therefore, bureaucratic structures, without any background in business education or tourism, spearheading ecotourism interventions are deemed to fail as they are not experts in the field. Successful, educated entrepreneurs with land and capital have thus emerged as visionaries in terms of ecotourism promotion. One such self-organized group of entrepreneurs known as Homestay Association of Sikkim, recently organised the 'Homestay Congress' in Okhrey, West Sikkim, in this endeavour. The Congress

involved workshops, trainings and lectures from successful entrepreneurs of Sikkim. One member from HAS expresses:

> "It looked as though the JICA project even though it ran for ten years was a failure… People in the rural areas do not need to be trained about 'culture' and 'nature' because they know these things as it is inherent. They need skills that are actually valuable for them in business. They need to be trained in marketing, using social media, having an online presence." (Phintso, 2021, Interview)

While conscious about the workings of the postcolonial state, the HAS member, and thus the Homestay Congress, function as a neoliberal counterstrategy of governing ecotourism that emphasizes on eco-rationality, costs and benefits. Implicit in the belief that people in Sikkim need to be trained in marketing, social media and having an online presence to have a successful homestay are essential neoliberal logics that need to be internalised and operationalised. Therefore, the kind of influence that HAS would bring to the playing field of ecotourism is one of independent entrepreneurs who are specialized in skills that any business individuals would require to gain profits from their products.

Thus, as seen above, it was commonplace for educated individuals to talk of state-led ecotourism projects in terms of failure. Most of the individuals attributed this failure to the lack of professional experts in the bureaucratic structure that the Forest Department represents. This tension between the strategy (state-led) and the counterstrategy (self-organised by educated entrepreneurs) is symbollic of how different conflicting governmentalities, environmentalities and technologies of self compete to gain influence over subjects. This results in the production of variegated subjectivities as I explore in subsequent sections. Similarly another instance of competing governmentalities is indicated in how the CEO of ECOSS explained in precise terms why he believed state-led programs were usually bound to fail:

> "a collaboration between JICA and Tourism department would be beneficial. Incidentally Tourism policy 2018 was co-written by ECOSS and WWF but now it isn't to be found there in the website.. because it was passed by the previous govt... they did not make use of the homestay report. They formed the homestay establishment registration rules.. but they created categories without really describing what comes under that.. registration became compulsory but it was promoted and people weren't sensitized." (RP, 2021, Interview)

Implying an existing power struggle between the previous and the successive government, the CEO described how the state changes in radical terms, such as removal of the earlier published State Tourism Policy 2018, as soon as the new government steps in. Similarly, another participant from ECOSS explained with much frustration about her tedious experiences with multiple bureaucratic officers posted within the ecotourism project who are shuffled among Departments on a regular basis thus disrupting the life of development and conservation projects. Additionally, some anonymous participants also referred to these projects as rife with narratives of scams, corruption, and financial misappropriation by stakeholders particularly in terms of tourism infrastructural development such as trekking routes (Anonymous A, 2021, Interview). These projects were believed to be more of the 'soft kinds' involve nothing beyond a few trainings and capacity building programs which rarely brought any real changes to people. Therefore, when viewed in terms of arts of government, ecotourism environmentalities can be seen to compete and interact with multiple variegated existing local governmentalities that significantly influence the success of the project.

Furthermore, going beyond just being critical of state-led projects, some of the educated self-employed participants went on to sketch innovative ideas of how ecotourism and homestays should or should not be done:

> "There are some impressive ventures in rural areas though… in villages like Chalamthang people are doing quite well… These days, as compared to Gangtok, it is these rural kids who are more educated. But they can also be lazy at times. For ecotourism, they need to see around them… what all do they have? They do not investigate their village trails... They just suddenly open their homestay and sit and wait for people to show up. They don't do the necessary running around. They need to have knowledge about their environment, village, species, birds… They need to conduct recces which means walking around at least 24-25 kms… See now Biksthang calls themselves luxury homestays for example.. its apparently a "luxury swimming pool homestay"… but which concept of homestay includes swimming pools? How can they use this term 'homestay' to promote their property? It is absurd because the sightseeing they conduct and promote are all located in places far away from them like Pelling but nothing in their local area at all… They could've simply invested in a camera or borrowed one from Tourism Department and hired the village kids to conduct sightseeing recces… you could surely hire these local people too." (Yangchen, 2021, Interview)

Thus critical of twisted ideas of homestay, such as luxury homestays, certain educated self-employed individuals promote the idea that homestays need to promote the surroundings of the homestay and should include working with locals. Therefore through this it can be seen how variegated environmentalities and governmentalities promoted through ecotourism interact and often conflict with each other or existing local governmentalities which usually shapes the success full realization of the aims of these projects.

5.3 Ecotourism in Sikkim: understood and misunderstood

In this section, I will address my second research question. As I establish in the previous section, ecotourism discourse in Sikkim serves as a hegemonic form of governance that perpetuates colonial imaginations powered by neoliberal ideologies and logics of commodification and marketization. Additionally, in the previous it can also be seen how variegated environmentalities interact and often conflict with other local governmentalities causing tension to the realization of the aims of ecotourism promoters. In this section, I dive deeper into various understandings of ecotourism prevalent among local people specifically in terms of associated variegated modes of governance that underpin it all. My research reveals that Sikkim's general climate of 'eco-friendly' development and the sustainability agenda, which includes ecotourism interventions and promotion, has brought about multiple interpretations and understandings of ecotourism. Thus, this implies that there is diversity in the way people understand and make sense of ecotourism. I failed to find any sense of uniformity and clarity in the way ecotourism is conceptualised and operationalized in Sikkim by local people. The CEO of ECOSS with a decade of experience in ecotourism promotion in rural settings puts together how there is no clarity as such about what ecotourism truly means to people. During our conversation, the CEO explained how for some ecotourism is a primary business opportunity, for others it is merely a form of supplementary income and for many others it is an opportunity to 'diversify' tourism in Sikkim and to ensure that locals benefit from it in an environmentally sustainable manner. However, while there were various interpretations motivated by multiple modes of governance, my conversations with other actors

such as entrepreneurs, 'specialists', and other workers made evident the commonalities in terms of neoliberal and colonial groundings on which people operationalize ecotourism in their lives.

In this section, based on certain themes that emerged through these findings, I analyse what ecotourism means to local people in Sikkim. Firstly, I address, what emerged as one of the most popularised ways people operationalise ecotourism in Sikkim i.e. homestay tourism. Thus, I give insights into subjectivities that have taken shape because of homestay tourism within ecotourism where local people essentially host tourists within their homes as opposed to hotels and lodges. Subsequently, I address the aspect of cultural showcase within ecotourism that emerged as another crucial aspect embedded within the political ecology context. In this section, I also draw from autoethnography, specifically from my memories of experiences working together with homestay operators to create a 'homestay operators manual' and show how this relates to other broader agendas within the political economy of Sikkim. I end the chapter with an exploration of another emergent theme i.e. the 'neoliberal landscape' where I investigate the ways in which my research reveals the occurrence of commodification of *in situ* resources for carrying out ecotourism in Sikkim. I explore the ways in which this is operationalized by various actors in Sikkim. Therefore, this chapter brings greater focus to 'counterstrategies' or counter conducts thus exploring how local people negotiate through previously mentioned variegated environmentalities in terms of deploying their agencies and developing their technologies of self.

5.3.1 Commodification of 'Home'

In this part, I establish that one of the most prevalent ways people in Sikkim understand (or misunderstand) ecotourism is by relating it to homestay tourism. Additionally, I also explore multiple ways in which homestay-based ecotourism tourism, or just homestays, are understood and operationalised by people as revealed by my research. I conclude this part by shedding light on the motivations behind the trend of 'homestay washing', similar to the idea of green washing, by using the multiple environmentalities and governmentalities framework. Thus, I draw from my data and analysis to explore this aspect of homestays and how multiple (and lack of) understandings of homestay tourism have led to the rise of certain trend of 'homestay washing' governed by the interaction of multiple ideologies.

During my interview with the tourism specialist hired by SBFP, I was explained how an important aspect of ecotourism as sustainable development is ensuring that the economic benefits of ecotourism are directly received by the locals. This notion of ensuring economic benefits for the locals is captured in the way TIES defines ecotourism. Inspired by this logic and success stories in neighbouring Nepal and protected areas in India, institutional and internationally funded efforts to promote community-based ecotourism through homestays started in Sikkim following the South Asian Regional Conference on Ecotourism 2002. A crucial organisation involved in conceptualising ecotourism and thus homestay tourism was ECOSS who put together what became the first international ecotourism summit in South Asia.

A crucial outcome of the conference henceforth was adoption of the idea of ecotourism as defined by the TIES and taken forward by ECOSS. In our conversation, the CEO recounted examples of successful ecotourism conservation case studies where local communities have benefitted. There were used to draw lessons from. For instance, the CEO fondly remembered the example of a Gurung community village in Sirubari, Nepal (RP, 2021, Interview) that had successfully initiated sustainable homestay-based ecotourism (or just homestay tourism).

Through the conference, the CEO declared, with much caution, that while ECOSS initially sowed the seeds for community-based homestay tourism in Sikkim, it took off and evolved on its own thereby implying the emergence of multiple understandings of homestay tourism driven by diverse motivations. In other words, this suggests that disciplinary strategies initially deployed to promote certain norms and values were negotiated by potential environmental subjects in various ways through their own technologies of self.

For instance, the conference attracted several internationally funded projects such as the UNESCO funded Strengthening Himalayan Homestays project implemented by ECOSS and WWF, the NABARD rural tourism project and the SNV funded pro-poor tourism projects each using disciplinary and other variegated strategies to promote values through community-based interventions. Additionally, seeing the potential ecotourism had in poverty reduction, employment generation and in curbing the unsustainable effects of mass tourism, the state government too entered the playing field. In the last two decades, homestay-based ecotourism has thus evolved and been negotiated in ways that can be well embodied by the formation of the Homestay Association of Sikkim where the people themselves have come to self-organize and self-discipline homestay tourism as it begins to occupy more space as a market sector. In other words, over time people in Sikkim have been governed by and negotiated through multiple sets of ideologies that underlie these projects embodied by various technologies of self such as the HAS. From definitions and ideas set forth by the TIES and UNESCO based on sustainability and conservation to the notions of pro-poor and rural tourism set forth by NABARD and SNV, and finally the state's bureaucratic ways of promotion and institutionalisation rife with political agendas have all given shape to multiple ways people understand, counterconduct and deploy norms and values within the context of ecotourism.

When it comes to the state, the involvement of the Tourism and Civil Aviation Department (Tourism Department) as central to the development and promotion of homestays in Sikkim has been crucial in the popularisation and mass rise of homestays. For instance, the Sikkim Registration of Homestay Establishment Rules (SRHER 2003) that defines homestays as having not more than 5 rooms and as an experience "in which tourist experiences the personal local family touch" (Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2013) was an effort to regulate and bring uniformity to the establishment of homestays in the state. In other words, it serves as a variegated strategy to shape subjects that cater to norms and values that they feel are beneficial in a combination of disciplinary and neoliberal terms. Not only do the rules define and thus conduct physical standards such as "attached toilets" (Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2013) or conformity to "traditional and ethnic architecture preferably using local materials like wood, bamboo and stone" (Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2013) that should be maintained within homes, but it also promotes and cultivates a certain kind of experience that involves "the personal local family touch" (Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2013). Additionally, any homestays having more than five rooms are to be categorized as a 'village lodge'. The rules also incentivize registration of homestays through certification under the categories of 'Class A (Gold House)', 'Class B (Silver House)' and 'Class C (Bronze House) which are given to applicants based on the facilities and quality of the accommodation as prescribed by the Rules (Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2013). Thus, disciplinary strategies work in combination with neoliberal incentives gained through the certification of homes.

Additionally, the Homestay construction project under the 13th Finance Commission is another such effort to incentivize, streamline and monitor this sector. That the previous ruling government (SDF-led) found motivations to include homestay construction as part of their

finance budget is reason enough to question political agendas that successive ruling parties are popular for in Sikkim (Chettri, 2015). Following this, the state sanctioned and constructed over 737 homestays with a budget of over INR 80 Crores (RP, 2021, Interview). My conversations with multiple actors of the tourism sector about homestays in Sikkim necessarily always involved a quick criticism of the failure of this specific state-led project without having to bring it up. For instance, the CEO of ECOSS expressed disappointment over how the project essentially failed and instead created confusion over what homestay means which were evidently not aligned with the conceptualisations and vision imagined and promoted by ECOSS projects. The government sanctioned double roomed cottage-style concrete homestays with attached toilets wherein beneficiaries were to invest in furniture. Additional infrastructural development included construction of community and interpretation centres. When ECOSS was asked to carry out an impact evaluation, the organisations' findings shed light on how these concrete structures built as homestays truly entered people's lives as an alien object. The findings revealed how only about 27 of the 737 sites were operationally run as homestays while the rest were lying idle, incomplete, or even used as storehouses for agricultural produce (RP, 2021, Interview). Thus, it can be understood that most beneficiaries were clueless about what ecotourism or homestay means. The CEO commented further "they were not using it because they were not interested, they were not able to market it. They did not have their investments in it… it was free, so they had no incentives" (RP, 2021, Interview). In other words, my research reveals that several people in Sikkim who were targeted as beneficiaries of homestay-based ecotourism essentially do not understand what it means. However, this failed attempt to introduce homestay tourism in rural areas through neoliberal incentives reveals a variety of neoliberal strategy serving not to shape environmental subjects but rather to shape citizens that are faithful to the current ruling government. This strategy, while it failed to achieve conservation goals, was a successful strategy in the sense that it incentivized the notion of favouring the ruling regime. This is evident in the way the current Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM)-led ruling government plans to roll out a similar 'Mega Homestay Project', promising to sanction over 1000 homestays in their upcoming finance budget (Sikkim Express, 2021). All in all, influences from the collisions and tensions among variegated local and ecotourism governmentalities through this project has influenced the general political ecology and resulting power relations of the landscape which I dive into in an upcoming section.

Furthermore, my conversation with a member of Travel Agencies Association of Sikkim (TAAS), builds on this insight on the lack of understanding on homestay-based ecotourism because of the failed homestay project to explain how it has also shaped other multiple understandings or rather misunderstandings in the perspective of the TAAS member. With the understanding that homestays are essentially a form of accommodation where hosts open their spare rooms for guests in their existing homes, the member explained with much disappointment on how people intending to enter the tourism market, exploit 'homestay' as a label to promote their multi-storied hotels and lodges. Owing to the growing popularity of the homestay project and marketing of Sikkim as a landscape with abundant natural and cultural heritage that includes homestays, it is seen as an emerging trend for hotels and lodges to advertise themselves as homestays. For instance, in a bid to promote his resort located in rural West Sikkim, one of my participants, emphasized that what he built as a resort is run as a homestay which was nostalgic of the homestay experience as defined by the SRHER (Basu, 2021, Interview). Thus, for him, a homestay is less about homestay-based ecotourism, or even that it should happen in a home, and more about the kind of ambience that is staged and performed. When asked about how according to him, a homestay should be run, he talked about the ways he creates the kind of ambience that feels like home as opposed to the impersonal experience of a hotel (Basu, 2021, Interview). In other words, for some, it takes a simple cost-

benefit analysis to decide whether to use the homestay label to enter their businesses into the tourism market irrespective of the norms and values promoted by ecotourism interventions.

Thus on the one hand, homestays are little understood by most beneficiaries of the state-sponsored homestay construction project, while on the other hand some have a different negotiated understanding serving their own personal projects in developing technologies of self. One of my participants who has evolved into a 'jack of all trades', as he called himself, from being an employee trekking guide, explains how starting a homestay was a way of preserving the traditional Nepali style *ekra* house made by his grandparents (Ganesh, 2021, Interview). He then went on to passionately explain how, to be a jack of all trades, means that one's got to do it all i.e. from milking cows to cleaning toilets, to *goru jotnu* (manually plough fields), knowing local names of species, making sure there is efficient waste management and maintaining the traditional look of the ekra house thus having evidently internalised certain ecotourism and thus nature and culture conservation friendly norms and values. Participants with similar internalised values like him are increasingly associating themselves with self-disciplining independent bodies such as the HAS. Similarly, several other participants who have had years or even generations of experience in running their homestays in different locations in rural Sikkim understand homestay-based ecotourism as a lifestyle predominantly defined by manual labour and tasks more than just business and an additional source of income. Another young participant who is starting to take over the homestay from his parents located in Khecheodpalri spoke passionately about how certain *busty ko kaam* or *village tasks* are considered as more eco-friendly and normatively a part of running homestays. On a similar note, participants from NGOs like WWF and ECOSS facilitating homestays lay great implicit emphasis on this by recommending people to simply *be themselves* with an implicit reference to village tasks and thus merge ecotourism into their lives in ways that does not transform them negatively (Laku and Priya, 2021, Interview). A key commonality among these kinds of operators was that they are all educated at least up until high school if not beyond and could communicate in English. While a specific network of such educated youths has begun to define themselves as formal bodies such as the HAS, the operators from Kheocheodpalri are similarly organised as informal networks that share similar disciplinary values as described above. These informal networks are driven by both disciplinary and neoliberal strategies. For instance, while these actors discipline each other to internalise *village tasks* and other such conservation friendly behaviour, they do so based on incentives in promoting each other's establishments among their guests (word of mouth). Therefore, at the end of the day, negotiating through values goes hand in hand with a cost-benefit analysis on what values would be more profitable. Kheocheodpalri homestays and other similar homestays where operators are seen to carry out village tasks often also come under the gaze of the global Western white tourists. In this way, local people in all parts of Sikkim have negotiated through various ecotourism governance strategies to develop their own technologies of self as embodied by informal networks, establishments, and associations.

source: self https://www.instagram.com/p/BdAhW1glkq4/

Conversations such as the ones described above make me recall several personal experiences that I have had being hosted by families in Lachen and Kitam. When I reflect on these notions of being the jack of all trades, doing village tasks and 'being oneself', I recall life unfolding as it genuinely would as I made my arrival in many of the cluster of Kitam homestays in South Sikkim while on a work visit. There were kids running around the *aangan* (courtyard), a middle-aged woman sitting on the ground sorting and scattering through previously stored *kaalo daal* (black lentils) on the *naanglo* (traditional bamboo-woven trays), an elderly man carving ox-driven plough out of a tree bark, like my grandfather would in our village, while I entered their home embodying the promise of an "additional income to villagers" (RP, 2021, Interview) as held and promoted by ECOSS.

All in all, while I analyse multiple ways people understand homestay-based ecotourism in Sikkim, my research reveals how different understandings of homestay necessarily involves commodifying and marketizing one's home or the very idea of a home. Whether it serves as additional income or primary income, running a homestay is understood as a business of the hospitality industry first and foremost. Additionally, whether it is resort or hotel owners promoting their properties as homestays while hiring outside staff, families hosting guests in their ancestral homes or people hosting guests in concrete homestays constructed free of cost by the government, all of it involves commodifying the notions of 'home' and other associated notions of 'family' or 'village tasks', if not just the physical home itself. Furthermore,

discourses of success are defined and negotiated by people in multiple ways, as analysed above, depending on the set of ideologies that underpin it and thus the governance strategies employed.

5.3.2 Commodifying 'Culture'

Apart from homestay tourism, festivals emerged as another prominent way people in Sikkim understand ecotourism. During my interviews, the notion of failed ecotourism festivals frequently came up as a topic of conversation in relation to cultural aspects. Thus in this section, I explore how ecotourism is understood by people in terms of commodifying and performing one's cultural heritage through so-called ecotourism festivals. I will shed light on what festivals entail, how they are promoted, operationalized and understood by the people of Sikkim through the perspective of governmentalities. For this part, I draw autoethnographically from my memories and experiences in addition to interviews, and documents. I take the example of ecotourism festivals and the ways in which they are governed and used to commodify cultural aspects thereby symbolising ecotourism as a whole. My research reveals multiple disciplinary and neoliberal strategies used by interventions to internalise norms and values that encourage discourses of 'cultural revival' which is promoted as ecotourism festival products.

For instance, one of the most prominent ways that the SBFP and other state-led interventions have encouraged cultural promotion is through ecotourism festivals targeting tourists that were otherwise rarely organised in remote villages. These festivals largely serve the purpose of creating new and additional tourist attractions that are meant to be environment-friendly while also highlighting cultural aspects such as traditional cuisine, clothes, music and handicrafts. These festivals often feature staged cultural performances, musical and folk artists, kiosks and stalls with a traditional look given to various self-help groups or small local traditional food or handicraft businesses. Furthermore, these festivals are advertised and documented by the Forest and Tourism Department in a bid to attract tourists. As part of setting up a sustainable ecotourism sector in Sikkim, SBFP and all stakeholders involved, encouraged and guided actors from all 11 ecotourism zones to organise these festivals with the intention to eventually hand them over to the locals. For this purpose various local actors and bodies were involved such as local Eco Development Committees (EDC) and at times even the joint forest management committees (JFMCs). In other words, ecotourism festivals are organised using disciplinary strategies that aim to nurture tourism and conservation-friendly behaviour. Various institutions such as EDCs and JFMCs are created and deployed to create self-disciplining environmental subjects. While the Forest Department frame these festivals as success stories in their documentations (ENVIS Centre Sikkim on Ecotourism, 2016) , my conversations with most participants spoke of them as failed attempts of doing ecotourism.

Firstly, a prominent aspect of these festivals involve performance of culture in apparently absurd ways that does not come across as authentic to someone familiar with the area. An anonymous participant, who was invited as a stakeholder to one of the familiarisation tours organised by SBFP for national tour operator companies, described the festival as *purano style ko* (old style) implying how 'culture' is performed and engineered in ways that perpetuate the colonial imaginations and fantasies of the then-Mongoloid fringe of British India. Additionally, implicit in the member's seemingly tedious descriptions about being welcomed and received by guests in traditional ways were disciplinary norms and values involved in having to perform culture and traditions from welcoming guests to feeding them in certain ways or even just interacting with guests. Furthermore, the colonial gaze to which these festivals cater become

evident as the member went on to describe a strange encounter with a local woman during the festival lunch:

> "Right before we were given lunch, the host woman began telling her sad life story to me. Apparently she is the first of the two wives, the second wife stays around the corner. She had just begun to pour out her feelings to me when I had to intervene and teach her never to disclose such personal details with guests. I told her that I may understand your feelings as a local but the tourists, they do not come here to listen to your sad stories… they are here to escape their own busy lives." (Anonymous, 2021, Interview).

From this description, it becomes clear that the host woman in question had been performing all this while until she breaks the norm only to be disciplined by another into the desired ecotourism subject who caters to the gaze of tourists escaping from tedious post-industrialization lives. Thus festivals are governed by disciplinary strategies and in terms of showcasing culture is usually understood by people as a tedious performance that represents the perpetuation of colonial imaginations.

Additionally, festivals are also a representation of a compartmentalized version of ecotourism which is nostalgic of Li (2002)'s notion of 'rendering technical'. Rather than promoting a holistic understanding of ecotourism, the WWF team leader regrettably explains how ecotourism education is compartmentalized in ways that renders it a matter of getting it technically correct. For instance, the team leader expands with an example:

> "sometimes it is only about the architecture. For instance in ecotourism festivals, one makes make bamboo structures (for cultural showcase). [In that way] ecotourism then becomes [symbolised] by that bamboo structure with roofs made of natural items but all the snacks inside that stall are Lays chips, Kurkure [multi-layered plalstic packaged chips], Frooti [tetrapak mango juice] and Pepsi… then what is 'eco' about that? You don't see the whole picture of what it should be [because] it's too compartmentalized." (Priya, 2021, Interview)

Thus ecotourism festivals embody a space where multiple cultural aspects are compartmentalized, rendered technical and thus never clearly understood. Another WWF member that I spoke to pointed out similar instances where ecotourism festivals essentially served as "grand entertainment shows for the locals to get drunk and party to outsider DJs with no such authentic and true cultural representation" (Laku, 2021, Interview). In one such touristic festival known as 'Namchi Mahotsav' organized by South Sikkim Tourism Development Society (SSTDS), firstly there were no tourists (Laku, 2021, Interview). The member then went on a tirage critiquing absurdly offensive stalls that showcased the head of a pig carrying incense sticks while others were stalls that mostly sold alcoholic drinks mostly bought by locals themselves (Laku, 2021, Interview). She went on to empathize with the local medicinal plant stalls that sold plants found in the area who were apparently only given a metal sheet and were settled on the ground along with the blind-community children with their *mayalagdo* (sympathizing the pitiful state of another) upcycled products. The member expands how these festivals that misrepresent and compartmentalize makes evident of an ongoing trend of doing ecotourism much like a fashion statement or greenwashing. Thus festivals promote the greenwashing of the ecotourism label by misrepresenting culture.

However my conversation with the TAAS member and an anonymous participant involved in SBFP community-driven conservation projects explain why despite disciplinary strategies, ecotourism festivals fail to be understood by locals and instead are negotiated in ways that

gives rise to greenwashing and compartmentalization. Having endured much frustration working with various state bodies and actors, the Anonymous B member explains:

"festivals fail because the forest department bureaucrats are not made for this kind of work. They are not marketing or business professionals. Neither do they ever have a background on social sciences research. They are administrators and bureaucrats who have secure jobs with the government and are often subject to transfers and to political pressure" (Anonymous B, 2021, Interview).

Thus the failures of the festivals in making people have any understanding of ecotourism originates from the way the postcolonial state functions and is structured. It can be seen that disciplinary strategies in neoliberal conservation employed by the postcolonial state eventually loses its disciplinary power when confronted with its own structure and when negotiated through technologies of self. The TAAS member felt that a connection and collaboration between the Forest and Tourism Department would have been beneficial however the two departments are usually caught up in power struggles over who gets to regulate ecotourism. Most of my research participants were of the opinion that an ideal situation would have had the Forest department-led SBFP project complementing the Tourism Department-led homestay project. In the current scenario, the disciplinary strategies of the Forest Department to create environmental subjects are in conflict with those employed by the Tourism Department to create their own kinds of subjects. In this manner, the sensitivities and depths of 'ecotourism' is never quite understood by the locals as it is intended to due to the tensions created by conflicting dominant governmentalities and environmentalities. Instead 'ecotourism' becomes negotiated by individuals and takes shape as a label representing perverse environmental and cultural values. In the upcoming section of this chapter, I take up the 'compartmentalised' idea of ecotourism and explore how my research reveals people understand and operationalise these compartments of ecotourism within the neoliberal landscape or the 'village economy'.

5.3.3 The 'off-beat' neoliberal landscape

In this section, I explore the premise and setting of the village in Sikkim as a way of a portraying the neoliberal landscape that ecotourism in the eastern Himalayan borderland embodies. Thus, I shed light on features and characteristics of the so-called village economy that came to light through my findings. I explain this from the perspective of governance strategies employed to construct and monitor the landscape and its subjects along with insights on the political ecology in rural Sikkim that my research revealed. I draw significantly from life stories and lived experiences of my research participants for this analysis. My exploration of what 'compartmentalized' ecotourism means to people led me to the notion of 'off-beat' destinations as a site where ecotourism as it is understood is operationalised by people. Most participants who were involved in ecotourism are people who were born in and spent a significant amount of their lives in their respective villages and have witnessed and been part of transformations that ecotourism initiatives brought. I created this section about the village economy to address various sets of emerging aspects that corresponded to the 'compartmentalized' ecotourism in the neoliberal landscape.

A majority of the participants explicitly referred to the off-beat characteristics of their village and the village economy while talking about their understandings of ecotourism. For instance, Chewang who until recently had been running a homestay in his village of Lachen, North Sikkim, believed ecotourism was a way of contributing to the village economy by promoting various aspects of his village in a conservation-friendly way:

"We began homestays here [in Lachen] to promote the village economy… to let the village benefit, let guests get to know the culture here and the cuisine. We were also hopeful of solving unemployment by getting revenue and income into the village." (Chewang, 2021, Interview)

Similarly, implying that economic benefits in particular from Sikkim's immense tourism growth had not been felt by much of rural Sikkim, a participant who runs a homestay in Hee-Martam expands on why he started homestay ecotourism:

"I decided that [the homestay] will be a good venture where tomorrow people in Sikkim will have incentives to return to their *busties* (villages) and it is also a challenge and test for me to take up. If I set this up successfully, tomorrow I hope many of our own will feel the inspiration, I hope many of us will return to our villages. I wanted to be that inspiration and model, I wish to do something to control the [rural to urban] migration, so there will be self-employment in the villages." (Ganesh, 2021, Interview)

Thus at a time when the rural areas had little hope in providing income and livelihood for its people (Ganesh, 2021, Interview), individuals like Ganesh and Chewang saw ecotourism as a tool to incentivize the prospect of remaining or returning to the villages for people in rural. However, while neoliberal strategies have contributed in creating subjects that are always driven by incentives to take up ecotourism, it has also posed as a barrier when it comes to community-driven interventions as anonymous participant B explains:

"There always needs to be something in it for [the local people], like a wage or something economical. Else they don't engage in community-building. Only those who were educated, enterprising and environmentally conscious understood ecotourism." (Anonymous B, 2021, Interview)

This particular conversation with Anonymous B gave insights about how the educated youths are distinct from the ones without education as I show in this section. Ganesh, who became involved in tourism first as a guide in a village tourism outfit in neighbouring Kalimpong, goes on to fondly reflect and describe his village:

"If this man is successfully doing it [tourism] in such an off-location [in Kalimpong], our village too is beautiful… we can see the Nepal-border here, we see mountains, clear views of valleys and an abundance of natural resources" (Ganesh, 2021, Interview)

Thus ecotourism is understood and negotiated by people in ways that requires them to see their homes through a neoliberal lens. For instance, it took Ganesh years of advice and training as a guide under the wing of a non-Sikkimese businessman to be able to able to bring ecotourism in his village as he explains:

"For me, the main guru [of ecotourism] is [the retired army officer turned businessman]. He is the one who first explored this concept here. His professional posting was in Northeast and he is a very knowledgeable person. His family are people who have lived in London and Europe. At first he made Sikkim into his program point.. We can't truly claim we did it all by ourselves. But it was him who was looking to carry out such programs for such off-

beat areas. These were 2-3 days tours and he would get people from his connections in Europe… there was this '100 years flashback program' because itineraries were usually about cities.. but this one was meant for off-beat places where for e.g. there is no internet. It was perfect for us because we were some educated guys in the village in exactly that kind of an off-beat location. We became the hosts to the people coming in that tour." (Ganesh, 2021, Interview)

Thus it was his experience as an educated employed guide in a tourism venture in Kalimpong that enabled or shaped Ganesh to see several aspects about his village in new light. He began to see his village and the abundance of "off-beat" biophysical elements, that were otherwise always there, as resources beneficial for ecotourism and the village economy. What came across as implicit is the way itineraries or off-beat packages such as the '100 years flashback program' worked as governance strategies that influenced aspiring individuals like Ganesh to internalise long-held colonial imaginations about the Himalayan Borderland in combination with neoliberal logics of commodification and marketization. The kinds of guests that his village was to receive was decided the moment individuals like Ganesh became influenced by such experiences. He further remembers memories of struggle in bringing guests from as recent as 2006 :

"I had a lot of struggle to bring in tourists because this is a rural place that nobody would ever visit. Back then in this village, people from the community would come with their torch lights in the evening to spread the news of foreigners coming to visit. It was such a new thing to have foreigners here." (Ganesh, 2021, Interview)

Similarly, Chewang speaks of similar experiences of having been influenced by interacting with past foreign tourists that eventually led him to set up the 'homestay concept' and to revive his distinct Lachenpa culture that had been undermined by mass tourism:

"Travellers dropping by in Lachen was quite common since ages... foreigners have always come here since a long time. I used to love talking with the old folks. I was also in Sikkim Mountaineering Association. I loved mountains and expeditions.. Many foreigners used to come through them. And I got to know some more.. I used to get them home for tea and snacks free of cost when I was a little younger. That's where the interest to interact with travellers came from" (Chewang, 2021, Interview)

Having struggled to bring guests otherwise, it appears that internalising colonial imaginations embodied in the 'flashback programs' or even personal memories with guests was a way out of the struggle. Thus it was experiences such as these that governed the fate of how ecotourism was to evolve and through which lens the village was to be portrayed and seen. Ecotourism, driven by internalised colonial notions, was thus understood by educated returnees of rural areas like Hee-Martam and Lachen, as a promise or an incentive of economic prosperity in their villages. Thus one of the necessary conditions that enabled this promise was the transformation of their villages into the neoliberal 'off-beat' landscape where aspects like culture, cuisine, mountains, valleys and views were to be commodified and valued in colonial and monetary terms. In other words, many aspects of village life including biophysical elements, cultural elements and people, figured into off-beat ecotourism packages created by the emerging educated returnees in villages. Furthermore, this required the educated returnees to influence their communities in ways that makes 'off-beat' visible to everybody's eyes in order to have consensus and avoid conflicts. This was done by mobilising other educated youths into informal institutions. In other words, both participants use their personal projects

to develop technologies of self that "permit [themselves] to effect by their own means, or with the help of others a certain number of operation on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault, 1982, p. 225 ; as quoted in Asiyanbi et al 2019, 130). Thus both Chewang and Ganesh, as educated individuals in their villages, inspired by the way people from outside saw their villages, thus mobilised other educated youths to incentivize ecotourism with promises of economic prosperity and conservation. In both cases, informal and formal groups took shape with the role of employing disciplinary and neoliberal strategies to set conditions for the offbeat neoliberal landscape as Chewang explains with respect to what emerged as Lachen Tourism Development Committee (LTDC):

> "Through LTDC, many changes came and the youth came together. Our main objective was to include conservation [cultural and nature] into tourism. We kept doing it year after year and people started to become more aware… for example in solid waste management we did some concrete work here so people started to gain our trust… Earlier we didn't have a system of hosting cultural programs. We started this culture. One day we showcased Lachenpa dance and culture and the second day we got people from outside to create entertainment for locals here to encourage them to join this effort." (Chewang, 2021, Interview)

In other words, disciplinary and neoliberal strategies, which also included forms of entertainment like in Lachen, were used to make others, such as school dropouts and elders, begin to see their biophysical and cultural elements of their homes in monetary terms as well as the guests they were to host. Thus in Sikkim, both informal and formal interventions (such as SBFP) involved disciplining locals to behave in ways that was deemed appropriate in ecotourism as neoliberal conservation. For instance, in order to create and execute authentic and successful village walks, disciplinary strategies such as ones described above were used to transfer norms and values and influence in the way locals began to develop environmental consciousness in Lachen or in the way guides were shaped to communicate with guests in Hee-Martam. In Hee-Martam, these trainings eventually evolved into activities where guests experience farming and other normal routine village activities by participating in them or by going in walks to other so-called 'heritage homes' as part of the village tours. It is noteworthy that these heritage homes do not often figure into revenue sharing as they are not paid. Ganesh explains that the locals who live in such homes apparently enjoy taking photos with tourists (incentive) as much as guests do.

My conversation with Ganesh reveals how these strategies employed on the youths without education or those who can at the most communicate with guests, often are disciplined to become *chelas* (followers/disciples). These followers often are trained to show, run and manage the off-beat characteristics of the neoliberal landscape through roles such as driving, portering, cooking and other supporting-paid tasks. In Lachen too, the WWF Team leader spoke at length about birders, eco-guides and photographers who have truly begun to appreciate biodiversity significance and thus their homeland following trainings and capacity building provided by WWF (Priya, 2021, Interview). From my personal experience in Lachen during a recce for a nature trail, I became acquainted with one such youth who was influenced to value the knowledge he had gathered as part of his growing up about local mushrooms in the forests. He brought back and offered wild mushrooms to us after a long day of recce in the wetlands of Lachen. Thus trainings provided by formal and informal bodies have shaped all kinds of youth, and especially those without education, to nurture norms and values that includes them as

valued workers within the neoliberal landscape. Successful strategies have managed to construct the kind of an off-beat neoliberal landscape where almost all aspects of 'village life', such as foraging mushrooms or farming, that otherwise people desired to escape from, became assets to be conserved. Therefore ecotourism is understood as a phenomena that brings prosperity and dignity to the village economy for as long as it caters to the gaze of the neoliberal colonial gaze.

In another sense, ecotourism is thus understood as a playing field of business where land-owning educated people train and hire those without education or school dropouts to "create other jobs [in the village] as guides, drivers, porters, trekking staff, cooks at homestays etc." as Ganesh revealed. Both in Hee-Martan and Lachen, school drop outs or other unemployed youths were given ample training on various aspects such as cooking, treatment of guests, guiding, bird watching and portering among others which necessarily involved a lot of struggle as per both.

> "There was a lot of struggle there. We had to learn things ourselves.. we had to study the clients. how to give lunch and meals to clients, how to create activities…had to create village walks, jungle lunches and walks .. we created a lot of these things ourselves in order to create an authentic taste/experience.." (Ganesh, 2021, Interview)

In Lachen where ecotourism seems to be less popular than in Hee-Martam among people, it involved other kinds of struggles as Chewang highlights:

> "Some people have run homestays for months… but some felt harassed and didn't have the patience to deal with these kinds of tourists.. they were exhausted and felt harassed.. so we just have three [homestays] now. As per our plans in 2008 we should've had many more homestays by now… they should've been experienced operators by now. but many left the idea because of the kinds of guests we got in our own homes.. and here in Lachen, people apparently felt ashamed even by eating with guests and engaging with them and also after facing all of these incident with guests (a constant reminder of superiority)" (Chewang, 2021, Interview)

In Lachen the struggle differed from that in Hee-Martan, as Lachenpas were heavily influenced by and had internalised norms and values that had emerged following years of mass tourism. This is evident in Chewang's decision to convert his successful homestay into a hotel in order to sit well with the values and norms symbolised by the small cluster of tall hotel buildings that Lachen has come to represent and will probably forever do so. In contrast to Hee-Martam that is a new entrant to the tourism market entirely. Having failed in convincing potential homestay operators in Lachen otherwise, LTDC also seems to have resorted to influencing people through entertainment by organizing festivals with DJ music to apparently show "them how others do it." (Chewang, 2021, Interview)

Furthermore, many of these aspects of village life came to be often packaged as 'value-added products and services' (VAP). From local food, culture, agriculture, knowledge and crafts to traditional style homes, seasonal flowers, birds and surrounding national parks, multiple elements of the 'off-beat' village destination were brought into the purview of the neoliberal landscape through the means of packaging them as VAPs. Yet again, in several of these villages, governance strategies were implemented through local informal self-organised groups of educated youths thus also involving the exercise of technologies of self to influence each

other. Local food, labour/youths and traditional crafts are considered as crucial resources for income generation within the village as Ganesh explains:

"Main thing is food and locally grown organic vegetables. Currently we have our products but we do not have a direct market. [The quantities] are very little but if we start this kind of concept [of homestays] then we can get a direct market. We can bring the market to the homestays. The idea is that we make creative or local style dishes with these vegetables and we sell it in triple rates for instance. Other things like guiding [are a resource too]. If there are some *bhai-bahinis* (local youths, brothers and sisters) in the village then we include them into our guides training too. Then there is also wine-making and handicrafts that can be tapped into." (Ganesh, 2021, Interview)

In nearby Khecheodpalri, similar strains of packaging products and services have taken shape that differ from Hee-Martam in what they are combined with as an educated youth Lathup explains:

"There are so many nearby village paths here that have a huge scope in tourism as long as it is sustainable. For as long as we use those trails for hiking without littering it with any trace of waste and garbage it will be successful. My activities include trekking, meditation, pizza-making and lake tours. I always tailor it as per what guests want." (Lathup, 2021, Interview)

Coming from a place that is not nearly as new to ecotourism and homestays unlike Hee-Martam, individuals from Khecheodpalri seems to be significantly influenced by their European guests. This is evident in the way, the cultural landscape of the holy Khecheodpalri lake consists of his homestay where a previous Italian guest helped install a hand-made authentic pizza oven where much of his activities take place. I address this aspect of how places like Khecheodpalri have evolved from peripheral to pizza central while answering my next question. Additionally both in Kheocheodpalri, as seen above, and Lachen, environmental consciousness, specifically with regards to waste management, has also taken priority in the way people understand and negotiate ecotourism:

"Now we have managed to revive so many things about our culture including music, dance etc… [mass] tourism brought lot of water and pollution problems… drains and streets were being choked with litter and plastic waste. Now under Dzumsa, we took several actions from banning plastic bottles, cleaning streets, testing drinking water etc. WWF gave us a lot of support in all of this.. so a lot of awareness came to the village.. how to conserve environment and culture. Compared to 2006 people know a lot more now." (Chewang, 2021, Interview)

The TAAS member too believes cleanliness and awareness about plastic pollution in rural and urban areas is increasingly synonymous to ecotourism. From my personal experiences in co-creating the homestay operator's manual under the UNDP-WWF-ECOSS collaboration, an entire section of the manual was dedicated to household sustainable waste management and practices. However sometimes in reality it takes perverse shape as the TAAS member claims:

"It isn't ecotourism simply by throwing the plastic bottle into the trashcan. People have not really understood what [ecotourism] means. One has to also question oneself [in terms of what we consume] like I do. By doing this, I got some sense in me. Others do not have it. They go around saying 'plastic free' without knowing what it truly means. Just banning

plastic bottles and Waiwai (packaged instant noodles) packets isn't ecotourism." (Yangchen, 2021, Interview)

This insight on the perverse use and understanding of plastic waste sheds light on the compartmentalised ways in which ecotourism is understood by the local people. In this sub-section, I have drawn from various interviews and lived experiences to paint a portrait of the ways the neoliberal landscape is governed in order to render villages as off-beat and conservation friendly enough for them to gain legitimacy in the ecotourism markets.

5.4 Ecotourism, Aspirations and Subjectivities

In this section, I address my third research question, which aims to shed light on how ecotourism discourse and practice shape lives and meanings people attach to their communities and biophysical environments. My research findings and analysis led me to address the question thematically focusing on three sub-sections. Firstly, I address the aspect of people's aspirations and how ecotourism has begun to disrupt disciplinary strategies that maintain 'government job-mentality' in the community. Secondly, I dive deeper into how this disruption is embodied by the rise of entrepreneurship and its neoliberal gaze. Thirdly, I draw from the examples of a few locations in Sikkim to describe how years of ecotourism has contributed to the transformation of landscapes of the peripheral Eastern Himayala through the lens of multiple governmentalities.

5.4.1 Governmentality, Government job-mentality and aspirations of a people

Ecotourism in Sikkim is not seen as a 'real' opportunity, except by those who aim to fulfil other broader agendas such as those of the indigenous Lepchas in Dzongu, North Sikkim (Mabel, 2020). For example, my conversation with members of SBFP revealed that a major challenge in setting up JICA-funded ecotourism has been state government employment schemes such as the 'One Job, One Family Scheme' (OJOF) implemented by the recently elected SKM-led government:

> "As soon as the scheme was passed by the new govt, people within our projects stopped doing ecotourism completely and got these jobs instead. I do understand that this is quite a natural choice as these OJOF jobs will bring them stability. But it has also caused the ecotourism project to fail in certain levels." (DFO, 2021, Interview)

The OJOF scheme instantly triggering people, who were otherwise gearing up to kickstart their ecotourism initiatives, to instantly grab the job is symbolic of the ways in which government-job mentality is deeply rooted in Sikkimese society. In this scenario, governance strategies to create ecotourism subjects' conflict with those of the state that aims to shape subjects that are tied to the government through employment. Thus, while ecotourism, to some extent, has successfully incentivized interested educated land-owning youths, it has been proven to be a weaker governance strategy for the rest who find themselves powerless against neoliberal strategies such as OJOF. A participant who runs a travel agency and a backpacker's hostel/cafe explains further:

> "Over here, especially in rural Sikkim, people are still hung up about government job…such that when opportunities for it comes up like the OJOF scheme, it is instantly taken up… I see many urban educated youths who come to here to the café and are waiting to give exams [for bureaucratic posts] but are highly educated people. It is as though people here are still

viewed, in an internalised way, that they can't do business and thus can't take up entrepreneurship" (Manisha, 2021, Interview)

Therefore, even those who are highly educated individuals are disciplined in ways that situate all aspirations at the centre surrounding the state bureaucratic structures. This aligns with Pigg (1992)'s findings based on Nepal's society that "education is both a symbol of *bikasi* (more socially developed and modernized) status and the route through which people can hope to move from farming in the village to an office job in a bikasi place" (Pigg, 1992, 502). Thus in Sikkim too, government job-mentality disciplines subjects in ways that promises modernity and stability nostalgic of the ways in which British colonists, officials and landlords were viewed and aspired. Aspirations, as shaped by government jobs, thus discipline people to internalise colonial values and norms that view locals as not rational enough to do business or take up entrepreneurship. For this reason, entrepreneurship among the locals can be understood as resistance to colonial imaginations, as I explain in the next section. Additionally, as a neoliberal disciplinary strategy, the OJOF scheme sheds light on the uneven power relations that Sikkimese society is subject to where those who do not feel the need to grab such opportunities are those who 'cannot be tamed' due to their higher positioning in society in terms of class. Several such people believed they do not anymore relate having a government job to a stable life. Similar to the findings of Pigg (1992) and Shrestha (1993), my research reveals how it is a norm for people from rural areas to often situate 'aspirations' outside of their villages in the urban centres and large government office complexes where *bikas* is situated. My working days in Lachen revealed how it was a norm for people to migrate to the centre, Gangtok, to find 'real' opportunities rather than staying back and starting a homestay. Even those with homestays, like my participant, rely primarily on a 'real' stable government job with ecotourism as something that feels like a passion and thus fulfilling (Chewang, 2021, Interview). For him, life revolves around travelling back and forth to Mangan and Lachen while his wife and child live as migrants in a rented space in Gangtok. Similarly, those from Khecheodpalri work in their village on a seasonal basis during tourism peaks and otherwise migrate to urban centres to look for 'real' employment. Ecotourism discourses that promote homestay as a source of 'additional income' thus play into the government job-mentality. Whereas discourses that frame ecotourism or homestay as primary business cause disruptions to government-job mentality causing meanings around dreams and aspirations to transform while resisting colonial notions. While ecotourism attempts to govern people to situate aspirations back in their peripheral villages, government job-mentality does so in ways that reaccumulate these aspirations at the centre. Thus, in Sikkim, when interventions with the aim to empower the economically marginalised try to disrupt these uneven power relations, it backfires as soon as multiple governmentalities are deployed by the state to regain control over its subjects.

However, it is increasingly felt that entering the market economy liberates the self from government job-mentality in the way my participant took an elaborate example of the Sherpas in Solu Khumbu, Nepal who have apparently broken free from government jobs. The participant's emphasis was on how Sherpas, through entrepreneurship, became an empowered community that was free from the influence of the government in terms of employment. Therefore, in general, there is tension between modern aspirations (stable govt jobs nostalgic of colonists, officials, and landlords) and neoliberal entrepreneurs who are striving to be included in the market and are competing among each other and global and national players. Another participant, a successful, educated, land-owning homestay in West Sikkim operator emphasizes further:

"There are ample of people who are interested in ridding themselves from being dependent to govt jobs. People in this village see him as an example case of ridding the self from toxic govt jobs that do not help anybody grow as such… These people lack capital and some kind of a push to break free… which can be given by the government itself." (Ganesh, 2021, Interview)

It is as though ecotourism, for educated individuals such as the participant and those like him, thus brings an opportunity of ridding oneself from government jobs to walk into a world of limitless opportunities and interactions. However, the conditions that need to be realized for this to come true involve underlying neoliberal logics such as the requirement of capital, a push (an investment?) and those would lead to the kind of growth that feels valuable. In general, I observed that ecotourism entrepreneurs promoting off-beat destinations were the first to be critical about government-job mentality. They embodied a community of neoliberal subjects, with enhanced technologies of the self, that were exposed to Western values and experts of neoliberal logics, as seen in the quote above, which empowers them to resist postcolonial disciplinary strategies. I explore the complexity of the recent emergence of this group and its implications in the next sub-section.

5.4.2 Entrepreneurship as resistance? Independent entrepreneurs and their gaze

Ecotourism and the variegated ways it is interpreted and operationalised, as mentioned earlier, has brought to significance the passionate, land-owning educated groups and individuals to the forefront of Sikkim's ecotourism landscape. This group of people, embodied by organisations such as HAS and other similar formal and informal networks, have come to symbolise the disruptions that government job-mentality is in tension with, thus challenging colonial values and norms underlying what it means to aspire and dream. In this part, I explore the emergence of entrepreneurship and its implications in terms of governmentalities that are being operationalised. As such, I make use of governmentalities approach to shed light on implicit norms and values that are being upheld and promoted as a result.

Educated land-owning entrepreneurs (or just entrepreneurs) in Sikkim have emerged as a self-organised network of local people with successful ecotourism businesses. In other words, organisations such as HAS, have emerged as a novel governance strategy of ecotourism in the landscape underpinned by variegated sets of beliefs, ideologies and subjectivities. My conversation with one HAS core member reveals an emphasis on organizing and regulating the homestay and ecotourism sectors in ways that do not require performance of cultural diversity, as opposed to SBFP or other state-led interventions:

"We need to organize and regulate the homestay and ecotourism sectors better in Sikkim. People need skills that are actually valuable for them. They need to be trained in marketing, using social media and having an online presence... word of mouth isn't a reliable tool for everyone. They don't also need cooks training.. cuisine, culture, hospitability are all innate in everyone. What is required is for them to be themselves in addition to some basic skills trainings and some minimum standards such as sanitation etc." (Phintso, 2021, Interview)

By resisting the postcolonial state's internalisation of colonial imaginations, HAS intends to promote ecotourism in ways different from colonial disciplinary strategies that assume people need to be trained to be hospitable towards tourists. Grounding governance strategies on norms and values that assume knowledge about 'culture' and 'biodiversity' to be innate, thus not

requiring technical capacity building trainings, is in implicit ideological conflict with colonial imaginations. Furthermore, the member lays emphasis on dignity:

> "Knowledge about culture and biodiversity are innate in all of us and these need not be taught to the people… for instance, we know our species in our local names and culture, and there is dignity in knowing local names of species, we don't have to know their Latin names.." (Phintso, 2021, Interview)

Therefore, entrepreneurs in HAS are motivated by the notion of attributing dignity to one's own culture in ways that does not require performance as opposed to the festivals that I explained earlier. Elements of truth environmental governance strategies becomes evident with the operationalisation of worldviews, different from Western, that places value on cultural meanings and truth regimes about the biophysical environment. While HAS comes as new entrant to the ecotourism landscape in the borderland resisting colonial norms, it does so also often by catering to the neoliberal gaze as my research reveals through conversations with multiple entrepreneurs as implied in what the HAS member believes:

> "…certain things like 'minimum standards' for homestays can't be negotiated. Agya spoke of making a rich experience for tourists... where the richness lies in nature and in rural practices and knowledge as they are without any polishing. This in combination with high price and low volume of tourists is what is going to get people to do ecotourism…" (Phintso, 2021, Interview)

With reference to aspects such as sanitation, cleanliness and hygiene, the member spoke of 'Minimum standards' as non-negotiable implying as though these are not already innate in people's homes. The language of minimum standards, social media, online presence and 'rich experiences' in other words imply the commodification and marketization of biophysical elements and rural practices. This was echoed by Ganesh, homestay operator in Hee-Martam, who was one of the successful operators asked to be a resource person during the Homestay Congress, who explained to me explicitly how homestays can be operationalised without polishing:

> "In my household, I have my son, my parents, my wife and let's say a staff who lives on the other side. I have segregated the home from my homestay. I have 5 rooms in the homestay including a separate cottage. In the rest of the compound my family stays. My wife is a teacher but she also joins sometimes in hosting like while eating, cooking or talking to the guest… we all do these general works. Parents including father and mother too.. they show the farm and chickens, also photography.. so small things.. like serving tea and water my mom does too.. it's all general work.. not the physical kind (these me and the staff does)." (Ganesh, 2021, Interview)

Segregating the home from the homestay in addition to the 'small things' such as serving tea, interacting, showing the rural and the cultural as it unfolds is what thus figures into the rich experience offered by an off-beat destination. In additional to this, other conditions to gain and maintain one's entry into the market are explicitly explained by the HAS member:

> "HAS has a focus on financial education so we involved banks and people who have succeeded in homestays and ecotourism like guides, birding guides, homestay operators, banks, MSME banks etc to teach those who lacked knowledge and skills in these things that bring success to you in business." (Phintso, 2021, Interview)

Boiling down to business as usual, my conversation with the HAS member sheds further light on how their purpose as a network and organisation lies in gaining sustainable entry and access into the larger global ecotourism market by tapping onto local 'village resources'. However as per market norms, gaining successful entry into the market is tough and not everybody, especially not those without education and capital, seem to be convinced. The travel agency operator who runs a backpackers hostel in Gangtok tries to explain this implicitly:

> "[when it comes to setting up ecotourism infrastructure] think of the govt. as our parents.. they support us, they do it all but at some point we also rise on our own feet and get things going and those who don't fight for that or those who are not proactive in creating their own lives end up depending on parents to create assets ready for them to draw income from. The govt has done a lot to get homestays running in rural areas." (Manisha, 2021, Interview)

Drawing from her own success and lived experience as an entrepreneur, the café owner enthusiastically elaborated on how doing successful business means fighting for the self, rising on one's own feet as opposed to depending on the government or parents to create assets. Another homestay operator from Pelling held the same views but spelt them out in starkly different terms:

> "The local Sikkimese youth are too entitled to be doing meagre jobs and they do not break their sweat...they are all lazy simply put. I am quite independent from the government and have always done things myself.." (Ruby, 2021, Interview)

Echoing Gergan (2020) findings about the educated lazy youths, doing business and neoliberal ecotourism is thus synonymous with structures of government that otherwise feel limiting and oppressive. The particular participant happens to be a self-taught videographer and guiding expert. She was also a tourism student and excitedly told me how she could relate to me doing a thesis in tourism. Having travelled most of her earlier days before setting up her successful homestay in Pelling, she was exposed to a rich network of Western and 'like-minded' Indian tourists who visit her often. Taking such proactive steps thus involves establishing networks of relationships from all over the world and then tapping on that particular market in combination with *in situ* resources. Internalising neoliberal norms and values are thus viewed by the educated as liberating and those who do not find success in ecotourism as per a successful young homestay operator from Khecheodpalri who puts it together with explicit economic terms:

> "They are not being courageous enough to take risks and collaborate... they seek security which only govt jobs provide in the state. I employ only locals despite several outsiders coming in and offering to lease the land and homestay. I always refuse them. Village youths in Khecheodpalri have not had a fate like mine as my family was already engaged with hosting guests since generations... these youths need to be pushed in ways that makes them risk-takers.. they need to 'open their mind' and take risks... they are opening hotels and promoting as homestays.. works something like green-washing." (Lathup, 2021, Interview)

Neoliberal governance strategies that involve incentivizing people to 'open their mind' and taking risks is thus a pre-condition to doing ecotourism successfully which is synonymous with entering the market and earning market shares. The neoliberal gaze casted upon the youths without education or capital, like inherited homestays, becomes more evident once the same participant reveals what he truly felt was a crucial cause for failure:

"Community-based tourism has failed in my village to a great extent. My village is dominated by Lepchas and they are the kind of people who are lazy, often alcoholics and have very little business acumen..." (Anonymous C, 2021, Interview)

Echoing colonial tropes about the indigenous Lepchas (Gergan, 2020) that are perpetuated and internalised even by the self-proclaimed 'open-minded' individual, it becomes evident that neoliberal governance strategies also operationalises colonial imaginations in twisted ways. The particular notion of 'open-mindedness' as propagated through neoliberal strategies thus disciplines subjects to privilege the Western tourist as opposed to the local who are continued to be seen as further from *bikas* (Pigg, 1992; Shrestha, 1993). In other words, one is open-minded for as long as it is directed towards Western tourists. Therefore, my research reveals that while the emergence of entrepreneurs resisting postcolonial strategies by developing their technologies of self, attempts to disturb centre-periphery relations positively, however it is done so by catering to the Western neoliberal gaze. In general, all travel agencies, homestay operators and other private players of ecotourism spoke of the rural population as though they are in need of development and the kind of rational mind, intelligence and business skills that allows Sikkim to enter, grow and flourish in the open market.

5.4.3 From the sacred to the neoliberal: Transformations in Khecheodpalri

While usually portrayed as a peaceful, 'faraway' nature destination situated in a remote corner of West Sikkim, my research reveals how Khecheodpalri is constantly evolving into a modern and globalised tourism space with various implications. Thus, in both implicit and explicit ways as I explain, it is beyond just a peaceful sanctity where post-industrialist workers may come seeking peace and 'nature' as it is usually framed. Today, Khecheodpalri has transformed from the sacred lake landscape to the neoliberal ecotourism destination thus disrupting the usual idea of a rural peripheral land away from the busy and exhausting life of urban societies as a participant puts together:

"Our place Khecheodpalri… well it is pretty much a tourist place now." (Lathup, 2021, Interview)

Additionally in Sikkim, spaces such as Khecheodpalri and Gurudongmar lake embody multiple governance strategies that have given rise to transformation from what used to be detached and inaccessible depths of rugged mountains to a space that symbolizes a thriving global centre that regularly receives long-term visitors from around the globe. My research reveals how the story of Khecheodpalri *pabitra* (sacred) lake can be understood in terms of multiple environmental governance strategies. In other words, my conversations, and interactions with people from the lake have revealed multiple ways through which prevailing ecotourism discourses shape lives and meanings people give to their community and biophysical elements.

Firstly, in Khecheodpalri, tourism is a crucial source of livelihood and income for the people in direct and indirect ways. However, what underlies the discourse of income and livelihood are strategies of the self and truth, disciplinary and neoliberal governance that have shaped environmental subjects and thus the meanings people attach to the sacred lake as implicit in how Bhaichung views the lake:

"[people from around the region] worship the lake because it is a wish-fulfilling lake, it always was... this is a pabitra lake. People are able to survive here because of the Lake. The

lake is here and that's why tourists come to visit… Otherwise there wouldn't be any reason for people to come here… and so we are living here very happily… and we have got to show them this. The whole village depends on tourism... not only the homestays but also those who have shops, the farmers who supply vegetables and supplies… hotels and lodges, teashops, restaurants and all kinds of souvenir shops etc." (Bhaichung, 2021, Interview)

In this case, truth environmentality works in combination with disciplinary and neoliberal environmentalities to shape environmental subjects, such as Bhaichung, who are motivated to conserve the lake and the forests because they have come to view benefits brought by tourism as wishes fulfilled by the sacred lake. Khecheodpalri Lake, popularly known as the wish fulfilling lake, is situated in West Sikkim that is considered as sacred by people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. My grandparents, from a village just an hour away, made annual pilgrimage visits to the lake to make wishes and offerings. Thus travellers such as pilgrims coming to visit the lake due to its sacredness is not new. However neoliberal induced transformation of the landscape from a sacred wish-fulfilling lake to a peaceful getaway can be traced two generations before Bhaichung, when his *pala* (grandfather) began a homestay as he recalls:

"[the homestay] was started by my grandfather… He used to actually run Pala tea shop by the lake… so his homestay, Pala homestay, began as a tea shop 20 years ago. The foreigners had started visiting the lake… they asked my Pala at his teashop for local accommodations located in peaceful areas.. there weren't any such things back then so then Pala tapped on that idea and thought of it as something beneficial and worth trying. So he opened some rooms and started cooking food and hosting people, welcoming them as family. We didn't just look at the money though. We wanted to treat them as family. Soon after he retired, *Appa* (father) took over completely.. Appa started 'Sonam homestay' right next to Pala Homestay on the hilltop above the lake. I do more of the running around though... like guiding, taking people around.. for walks, hikes in the area… we have a lot of natural adventurous activities or even day hikes or yoga meditation, everything can be done here." (Bhaichung, 2021, Interview)

The transformation from sacred to neoliberal becomes evident in the way life and thus lived experiences took shape from the time foreign travellers started visiting the lake in search for "peaceful areas". Ecotourism governance strategies unfolded in these times in implicit ways where neoliberal environmentality began competing with truth environmentality with implicit promises of economic growth and development the moment foreigners demanded a peaceful accommodation for hosting travellers. Thus, while earlier, villagers were motivated to behave in conservation friendly ways owing to the sacredness of the lake, today conservation friendly behaviour is significantly shaped by the need to maintain *in situ* natural resources to boost ecotourism which is a major source of livelihood and income in the village. My conversation with Bhaichung sheds light on how everyday encounters with Western tourists have disciplined locals like him to become environmental subjects as he passionately reflects on some of his most important learnings from ecotourism so far:

"[One of the most important learnings is] Discipline and respecting nature. Nature gives us only good things so we must also treat nature in good ways. Tourism has taught me this. Discipline means for example 'what and how and how not one should treat and speak to guests'. Also, plastic pollution and littering reflects undisciplined behaviour. Over here, people never think about how and where to sustainably discard wastewater from washing

clothes. It seems one cannot just throw that wastewater anywhere and everywhere. But [the foreign tourists] think about these things and, to our surprise, they always ask us where they can discard wastewater. It seems we need to discipline ourselves in these small things too like them. You will not believe it but [the foreign tourists] even ask us about where they should discard toothpaste wastewater after brushing teeth. They really ask about these things. That is how I have come to understand that these people are way ahead of us… because they acknowledge that even these small things have a negative impact on nature. It is like a slow poison. It will all certainly show in the future. I learn this from them that these small things matter" (Bhaichung, 2021, Interview)

Therefore, evident in Bhaichung's lessons about disciplining the self and others to become environmental subjects are disciplinary governance strategies intimately deployed through interactions with urban-based foreign tourists. As modes of governing environmental subjects, for instance by disciplining people's way of thinking about wastewater, these strategies implicitly initiate the internalisation of Western norms and values about sustainability and environmental-friendly behaviour which is based on the nature-culture binary evident in Bhaichung's use of the term 'nature'. In other words, these instances reveal the rural aspiration towards modernity when bikas itself arrives in the bodies of Western tourists. Thus, disciplinary strategies work in hegemonic ways that create power hierarchies that eventually shape environmental subjects in Khecheodpalri who perceive foreign tourists as 'ahead of them' in terms of progress as humans or *bikasi* (Pigg, 1992; Shrestha 1993). This was implicitly echoed by another 25 years old homestay operator, Lathup who believed:

"I feel I can connect better to people of my age. But foreigners are real travellers [as opposed to tourists]… with them it feels so much more open and they have open minds. Whereas the kind of people who only travel with their families are just a different kind. Later in life, I plan to open another homestay with only the foreigner kind and not the Indian family type… more like a hostel for foreign travellers." (Lathup, 2021, Interview)

Therefore, it can be argued that intimate disciplinary governmental strategies deployed through guest interactions influence locals and thus technologies of self in ways that internalise western norms, relations and values relating to 'nature', 'culture'. However, young individuals such as Lathup and Bhaichung have also been 'exposed' to Western tourists since as long as they can remember. They are individuals born into the sacred-turned-neoliberal landscape where globalisation of homestays take shape as the centre of transformed values. This has also resulted in the creation of environmental subjects that conduct each other's conduct in the community as implied by Bhaichung's passionate explanation about the village's plastic waste initiatives:

"Tourism has its plus points.. the kids here become disciplined, they learn to speak in English, they will learn to care for nature, they will not litter spaces with plastic waste, we have placed dustbins everywhere now.. for all these things the first time we were certainly inspired by tourism.. now we have dustbins across the village in all houses and nobody litters and trashes our places… the villagers even gather and conduct clean-ups every weekend." (Bhaichung, 2021, Interview)

Therefore, tourism or influence from Western tourists, have transformed environmental behaviour reflected in norms such as weekly clean-ups. The inspiration (read influence), as implicitly pointed out by Bhaichung, comes from Western visitors who conduct local conducts in intimate ways that locals perceive as 'open-mindedness', 'forward' and thus more developed

in comparison to themselves. Furthermore, the globalised space that Khecheodpalri village has evolved into where homestays have become the central point, is best symbolised by Lathup's family:

"I have one *mama* (mother's brother) he has a homestay a little bit above mine. His wife is Japanese. It has been around ten years now since their marriage. Before corona times, they were teaching Japanese language in Geyzing sponsored by the Government. But they stopped because they wanted to do the homestay… mama stayed in Japan for about two years.. but mostly they have been over here itself… they met over here … I was in school back then... mama was running his homestay.. just like that, some Japanese backpackers had been visiting and stayed at his homestay… and then they met that way and fell in love and got married.. they had a love marriage. My mama stopped being a lama then on." (Lathup, 2021, Interview)

Thus, rather than an isolated rural area that is a peaceful destination for nature-based tourism as it is always framed as, Khecheodpalri truly is a globalised space where people, including Lathup's uncle, speak and teach Japanese. The homestays of Khecheodpalri, those that have been established for generations, are thus the centres of this emerging modes of governance and enhanced technologies of self, that lead to transformation of the landscape and thus meanings. Additionally, while Lathup's aunt visited to stay back for good, others visit on a regular basis as Bhaichung excitedly described:

"I have become friends with many of my guests. Most of them are from France, Germany, Israel… they visit us a lot because they like remote areas. They love trekking, adventure and homestays. I even have people who visit us every year. One such group of two started visiting us since 2000 and they've come around 8 times so far. They are from Stuttgart in Germany. Michael and Oliver. They come continuously year after year. They were here in the pandemic lockdown too. I had to drop them off to Siliguri [nearest airport in West Bengal state] where they were stranded for a month or so more due to the situation. They come here live with my family very nicely. All of them are in contact with me." (Bhaichung, 2021, Interview)

It is during long-term visit such as these that disciplinary environmental strategies are deployed in intimate ways that shape environmental subjects with Western norms and values about nature, culture and conservation. This makes homestays in Khecheodpalri an important source of transformations in terms of values, norms and meanings. These strategies work in ways that invite other villages into the globalised space of the homestay thus shaping subjectivities of the entire community in intimate ways such as through homestay activities:

"We often do bonfires in the evening. Those times all villagers join us and interact with the guests. Even during times, we are eating special dishes such as barbequed meat. Villages and guests interact, chat and also sing. We also have traditional *chhyang* [fermented alcoholic millet drink]. They play old Nepali songs and sing and dance together. The guests like these kinds of simple types of celebrations. We also invite guests to local festivals like *Losar* [Buddhist New Year] and *cham* [Buddhist dance form]" (Bhaichung, 2021, Interview)

Other embodiments of the globalised space that the village has become is symbolized by Lathup's homestay which happens to host the only 'authentic' pizza oven in Sikkim made by an Italian chef:

"I was once talking to an Italian guest about pizza, and he seems to really want a pizza at that moment. So we were both just casually agreed that we should probably make one.. and before we knew it we had already started working on one! Once we made the oven and started to sell and advertise our pizzas, it turns out everybody really loves pizza! There aren't pizzas ovens anywhere here so this is my homestay's highlight. I even do pizza class and courses because the guests also wanted to learn. So that is it… some guests stay really long and if they wish to learn I always teach them. Only guests take the courses though.. the locals don't come to learn this." (Lathup, 2021, Interview)

Governance strategies thus work in intimate ways with the homestay as the centre of disciplinary transformations where making 'pizza' has emerged as a symbol of attaining modernity in Khecheodpalri and keeping up with their European counterparts. This can be seen in the way locals do not come to learn pizza-making as they cannot relate to it. However individuals such as Lathup and Bhaichung absorb Western norms and values and attach it to their homes in myriad ways as described above. Thus whether it is through disciplinary strategies of waste management, neoliberal strategies of encouraging organic farming or making use of truth environmentality to validate ecotourism, homestays occupy a central space in the transformation of Kheocheodpalri as a globalised centre that it truly embodies.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Reflection

In this chapter, firstly I outline my conclusions where I highlight the main conceptual contribution this study makes towards environmentalities studies and further expand on a three-fold argument about 'the ecotourism subject'. In the second section, I engage in a reflection of the research process where I highlight limitations and areas for further study.

6.1: Conclusions

In this section, firstly I summarize the results and analysis of the thesis followed by an outline of the main overarching conceptual innovation that this study makes towards environmentalities studies. Subsequently, I expand on this to make a three-fold concluding argument about the 'ecotourism subject' and what it reveals about neoliberal conservation.

This research aims to theoretically contribute firstly by explaining the negotiation of subjectivities promoted by environmentalities and secondly by examining ecotourism discourse from the margins, specifically in the context of the Himalayan Borderland. In doing so, I uncover the complexities involved in the making of the 'ecotourism subject', as I call it, in the Himalayan borderland. I address each of my research questions in Chapter 5. Firstly, I highlight variegated governance strategies involved in promoting and implementing ecotourism in Sikkim that are all wound up with colonial imaginations and neoliberal logics that undermine local people. Subsequently, I dive deeper into multiple ways that local communities understand (or misunderstand) ecotourism driven by their creative use of agency and technology of self thus resulting in the commodification of the home, culture and entire landscapes. Overall, often driven by the subject's technology of self, ecotourism in Sikkim is increasingly understood by locals as 'off-beat' tourism as my research reveals. These understandings in addition to the interaction of multiple existing governmentalities have all shaped a multiplicity of subjectivities which I have understood in terms of competing environmentalities and resulting, what I refer to as, 'variegated subjectivities'. Thus finally, I

draw from examples that led me to explore multiple meanings, interests, aspirations, and relations of local communities. I do this specifically in terms of how such a study reveals crucial insights about aspirations of the modern Sikkimese unemployed youth, independent entrepreneurs and in terms of residents of a Khecheodpalri, a transformed neoliberal landscape. In this section, I extrapolate these findings to broader works of research and context.

By uncovering the findings outlined above through empirical research, this thesis makes an overarching main conceptual innovation to environmentalities studies. This thesis demonstrates how promotion of ecotourism ends up resulting in a multiplicity of local subjectivities as ecotourism interacts with other forms of governmentalities as well as subject's own personal projects in developing technologies of the self. In other words, this thesis sheds light on multiple ways how variegated environmentalities promoted by ecotourism interacts and often conflicts with existing local governmentalities and technology of self thus resulting in variegated subjectivities. Subsequently, this study reveals how these complexities, unfolded by a multiple environmentalities approach, often ends up undermining ecotourism promoters' intentions as their forms of subject cultivation comes in conflict with others that keep their aims from being realized. By doing so, this study altogether demonstrates how the robust use of multiple environmentalities lens to explore variegated subjectivities gives crucial insights into the gap between vision and execution in ecotourism promotion thus providing a lens for analysing similar situations by others in different contexts beyond the specific context studied here. By acknowledging and considering the complexities behind the vision-execution gap through similar robust studies, ecotourism promoters and communities would benefit in terms of fulfilling their overall project aims.

Furthermore, in conceptualising 'variegated subjectivities' that emerge in the research findings, this thesis proposes the 'ecotourism subject' which I explain using a three-fold argument. Firstly, building on Choi (2020), I argue that the ecotourism subject involves thinking through multiplicity which offers a nuanced analysis of [environmental] subjectivities by allowing us to notice various, unusual, and awkward negotiations (Choi, 2020). While Choi (2020) speaks of variegated, environmental subjectivities, this thesis expands this focus to the interaction of various other kinds of competing governmentalities, environmentalities (technologies of power) and subjectivities (technology of self). For instance, this thesis explores how subjectivities grounded in postcoloniality related to and/or interacted with environmental subjectivities resulting in more complex subjectivities. This kind of a broadened understanding helped explain rationalities within communities that require a wider lens of multiplicity. In this sense, I also attest to findings that show how impacts of neoliberal conservation projects such as ecotourism goes beyond shaping environmental and empowered subjects thus justifying the conceptualization of the 'ecotourism subject'.

Secondly, building on Asiyanbi et al (2019), I argue that the 'ecotourism subject' can be better understood as embodying Foucault's 'technology of self'. This is evident in how for instance, local people in Sikkim negotiated what 'ecotourism' or 'homestays' mean. Rather than adhering to principles put forth by the state, exercising 'technology of self' enables people to make 'homestays' their own which explains the lack of uniformity in how people understand homestays in Sikkim. Therefore, understanding subjectivities with a focus on technology of self allows for a deeper understanding on local aspirations and interests. This thesis shows how in Sikkim people negotiate through complex ways that involves self-organising in networks, deploying local youths, doing all kinds of village tasks, mobilising communities towards better waste practices or just nurturing values that help in village development. Therefore, rather than being passive beneficiaries as often portrayed, local people in Sikkim are actively exercising

their agencies in ways that bring empowerment. In doing so, as demonstrated by this thesis, a focus on technology of self thus gives crucial insights on the gap between vision and execution of ecotourism projects and how these complexities often keep ecotourism's aims from being realized in contexts beyond the Himalayan Borderland.

Thirdly, I argue that analysis of the 'ecotourism subject', especially in the context of globalised peripheries, necessarily exposes power dynamics grounded in multiple discourses within communities. This could be better addressed by future work. For instance, my findings attest to Giroux's (2015) view that, while CBC promises 'hope' to attain modernity to rural communities, only a select few get real opportunities to succeed under the conditions of transforming into 'eco-rational' subjects while the rest simply become 'disposables' in the emerging free-market (Giroux, 2015). As I explained in Chapter 5, this was evident in the emergence of seemingly 'eco-rational' entrepreneurs and the gaze they cast upon 'disposables' who end up becoming their followers or just people they could use for physical labour. Entrepreneurship, in that sense, can be viewed as an embodiment of colonial and neoliberal values. In order to address that, this thesis stresses on Jessop's (2002) understanding that views globalisation as "a contradictory, conflictual, contested and complex resultant of multi-scalar, multi-temporal, multi-centric processes that develops unevenly in time and space, and, indeed, exploits and intensifies differences as much as, if not more than, it produces new complementarities and uniformities" (Jessop, 2000). Studying the ecotourism subject from this vantage point creates space for a critical understanding on the vision-execution gap of neoliberal conservation.

6.2: Reflection

There were multiple limitations to this research in terms of research process. Firstly, the earlier proposed ethnography research methodology took a different shape as the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded in India while I was to begin my research visits to West Sikkim homestays. Thus, I was confronted with the challenge of excluding ethnographic methodology and instead giving a different more 'remote' shape to the methodology and setting up online or telephonic phone calls in an area with an unstable good cellular network. Therefore, based on the lack of ethnographic work, this leaves space for this thesis to be further expanded perhaps as a PhD dissertation.

Nevertheless, while this thesis lacks ethnographic richness gained from immersive fieldwork, I still believe that it was beneficial for the thesis that I was based out of my village (Omchung) in West Sikkim during the life history interviews. Personally, living in Omchung triggered an internal process of remembering my childhood memories spent in the village. Unearthing these memories enabled me to engage in deep listening as the participants shared about their similar and relatable childhood growing up in their respective villages. Thus, living in Omchung for the life history interviews helped create an open and comfortable space to share and relate in unexpected ways. Sometimes cows mooing from both ends of the phone would bring us to a comfort shared space while in other times it was interruptions from neighbours foraging ferns around our respective physical spaces that brought us to the same page. With these 'soundscapes' unfolding throughout our telephone conversations, in terms of mitigating implied power dynamics, I came to be perceived more as a local person belonging to Omchung rather than a MSc thesis student living in the Netherlands. Additionally, as I heard them passionately paint a portrait about their villages, families, personal selves, and memories, I was naturally pushed to make similar reflections about my own thus enriching my personal aspiration to become a reflexive researcher. I believe that having relatable backgrounds,

language, and memories with the participants of the life-history interviews helped me truly step into each other's shoes as I made the analysis. Being an insider also helped me address conversations about social norms, values, and other complex details about social life in the hills.

On the other hand, it was also challenging to navigate through interviews given the apocalyptic developments of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in India. Firstly, I personally was confronted with multiple anxieties of contracting the virus without any vaccinations. Several of the initially planned interviews had to be cancelled or rescheduled due to complications brought by the pandemic in the participants personal lives. Thirdly, the pandemic also influences the dynamics and course of the interviews as several participants were experiencing distress which also resulted in the cancellation of some planned interviews. This influenced how conversations took off and what was expressed by participants. All of this provides an opportunity for a potential post-pandemic PhD project. Therefore, while this thesis relies more on autoethnography and remote interviews, on the brighter side, a PhD dissertation supported by both ethnographic and autoethnographic methodology in addition to life-history interviews would add more richness to these research findings specifically in terms of understanding complex subjectivities. An ethnographic fieldwork would help bring in perspectives of those who were left out during this research, such as porters, homestay household members, cooks and vehicle drivers and thus their perspectives, life-histories and the dynamics they share with their 'educated' counterparts. This could potentially reveal more insights about complex subjectivities and technology of self that is shaped by various social factors such as, but not limited to, caste, tribe, and race. Thus, by doing so, the future study could aim to generate concrete beneficial recommendations to ecotourism promoters based on these potential findings.

Furthermore, the use of retrospective autoethnography proved to be beneficial for the purpose of the study. In retrospective, I believe that retrospective autoethnographic data helped enhance other forms of data by adding thickness to descriptions. On several occasions, interviewing my former colleagues and collaborators brought back vivid memories of shared experiences that became part of my analysis. Another crucial source of memories were the photographs and my previous work outputs that I made during my two years of experience working in ecotourism. Usually, my use of autoethnography was limited to its use as a manner of enhancing my analysis with rich details from my past experiences. However, what was limiting about the autoethnographic part was that my past work experience was my first ever professional experience thus of a younger freshly graduated person. Furthermore, I only drew from two years of such an experience. I do not say this in a way that undermines my experience but more to specify how it can be limited in many ways. However, on several occasions this worked as an advantage where engaging in retrospective reflection of the self from several years ago, a fresh graduate in their first ever full-time job, as the self today, a critical interdisciplinary student, made me view the past through a critical lens that I would otherwise not have known back then.

Apart from this, another challenge that I faced was translating interviews from Nepali to English. If not all, most interviews were conducted in Nepali. As a speaker of both Nepali and English and due to lack of funds, I took up the task to translate the interviews thus posing a limitation to the research. Therefore, an expanded PhD where funds are pooled in for professional translation work, would prove beneficial. However, on the brighter side, what helped mitigate this issue was the consistent debriefing and field notes that provided for rich analysis. From the very beginning, it became a norm personally to make summarizing notes,

whether it be in the format of voice memos or written notes. Consistent notes about observations, conversations, interviews including life-history interviews, significantly helped shape my interpretation and analysis. Not only was this useful in terms of making efficient use of time, but it was also useful in terms of organizing my data, coding thematically and analysing with a certain focus.

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