

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Copying, Collecting, Naming: Women's Writing and Colonial Knowledge in Assam's Frontiers, 1916–1953

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ABSTRACT

This article examines four books by three European women who wrote about Assam and its frontier regions between 1916 and 1953: Jessie T. Moore's *Stray Leaves from Assam* (1916), Jean Kingdon-Ward's *My Hill So Strong* (1952), and Ursula Graham Bower's *Naga Path* (1950) and *The Hidden Land* (1953). It places these works alongside selected writings by T. T. Cooper, F. M. Bailey, Frank Kingdon-Ward and Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf in order to examine how colonial knowledge was assembled, transmitted and recorded. Rather than treating gender as a self-evident determinant of textual perspective, the article distinguishes two recurrent registers: a transmitted documentary register, consisting of reports, statements, returns, correspondence and other materials reproduced from institutional sources, and a situated relational register, through which writers recorded the labour, translation, payment, negotiation and interpersonal relationships that made movement and knowledge production possible. The distinction is most visible in the paratexts and documentary insertions of the women's books. Moore's mission volume incorporates conference statements, statistical returns and resolutions while also recording the staff, linguistic work and domestic circumstances of a station. Kingdon-Ward's account of the 1950 earthquake preserves an expeditionary staff structure, payment arrangements and the labour behind botanical collection alongside official reports. Bower's *The Hidden Land* places an account of administrative methods and personnel beside an extended narrative of interpreters, traders, slaves and local intermediaries. Comparison with male-authored commercial and learned-society publications, including two authors who wrote in both venues, suggests that genre, institutional audience and publishing venue strongly shaped the visibility of local intermediaries and of documentary authority. The article argues that these women's writings are valuable not because they offer an alternative or inherently less colonial perspective, but because their particular institutional and practical positions preserved evidence of the relational and material labour through which colonial knowledge was produced. Read as composite textual archives rather than homogeneous narratives, these books disclose people and transactions that official records frequently rendered peripheral.

KEYWORDS Travel Writing, Women's Writings, Assam, Northeast India, Colonial Knowledge, Archives, Kingdon-Ward

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I. INTRODUCTION: HOW COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE WAS MADE

Colonial knowledge of, in and about the northeastern frontier of British India is unusually rich and dense in official reports; but comparatively poor in accounts of the practical labour that made those reports possible. Who translated? Who carried the loads? Who negotiated access to a valley? Who was paid, how much, and on whose security? Who supplied the information that a monograph later presented as a finding? These questions tend to disappear the very moment moment field experience is transcribed into administrative or scientific prose. The disappearance is so absolute that the erasure is rarely noticed.

They are recoverable. But not from the sources historians of the region conventionally use. They are recoverable from works that stay lower in the pecking order of historical sources.

Consider one example. *The Hidden Land* was published in London in 1953 by a commercial publishing house and marketed as travel and adventure. Its author was Ursula Graham Bower, at that point the wife of a Political Officer, writing about her two years in the Subansiri region, a stretch of upland north of the Brahmaputra river. Libraries have shelved the book as travel writing. Tucked into its preface is a passage of methodological analysis with no counterpart in the anthropological literature it describes.

Its subject is Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf, an Austrian-born anthropologist assigned by the Government of Assam as Special Officer for the Subansiri. In due course of his tenure, he had entered the Apa Tani valley, a densely settled upland basin known in the plains largely by hearsay. Bower is particularly concerned about his mobility. She first sets out the previously existing method he abandoned: a heavy escort, a slow baggage train, and a route chosen along empty river valleys; on the assumption that the local inhabitants were dangerous. She then describes what he substituted, a small and barely armed party moving from village to village, paying for carriage in cloth and salt, halting at each stage to build relations. She is precise about the costs. The method was cheaper and more effective, but far more dangerous. It depended on personal tact and on reading what she calls “tribal psychology” correctly. It was “purely for exploration” and nothing else, and was susceptible to collapse the moment it came in collision with administration. But above all it required constant vigilance, so that neither the travellers nor the local villagers could turn the visit to their private advantage (Bower, 1953, pp. xiii–xiv).

Fürer-Haimendorf's own publication on the region, issued six years earlier by the Assam Government Press, contains nothing of this kind. Its introduction describes the notes as factual reports rather than anthropological essays, aimed at solving administrative problems (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1947, Introduction). The text proceeds

by numbered heading through land, slavery and ritual. How the material was obtained is not examined there. It is examined in the front matter of a book marketed as adventure.

This paper takes that asymmetry as a problem in the history of knowledge rather than as an irony. It examines accounts written by three women, reading each not as a homogeneous narrative but as a composite object assembled from materials of different provenance. Across these accounts, two kinds of writing share the page. The first has been lifted in whole from elsewhere: papers, statements, summaries, judgements handed down by someone else. The second is built as the writer goes, among the people concerned. The paper compares this composition with male-authored writing on and about the same territories. By doing so, the paper argues that the difference between the registers is produced by institutional setting, genre and audience rather than by any distinctive female way of seeing. Gender enters the account at a different point, and a more interesting one. Gender is engaged through the division of labour and access that placed these three women unusually close to the interpersonal infrastructure of colonial knowledge, and therefore required their books to describe it.

The three women stood in quite different relations to the frontier, and it is worth setting out those relations before the books are read. Jessie T. Moore sailed for India in October 1879, three months after marrying P. H. Moore, who had been appointed to Nowgong, now Nagaon, under the American Baptist Missionary Union and who served for many years as treasurer of the Assam Mission (Moore, 1916, pp. 117–118). *Stray Leaves from Assam* (1916) is the last of four volumes of her station journal, and by her own account it completes thirty-six years and more of work in the province (Moore, 1916, Preface). Ursula Graham Bower crossed into the Naga Hills in 1937 as a visitor of twenty-three (Bower, 1950, p. 3), returned the following year with a list of photographic subjects supplied by J. H. Hutton at Cambridge and by the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford, and obtained permission to work alone in the hills with no institution backing her and no training (pp. 14–15). She spent the better part of seven years among the Zemi Naga, joined the guerrilla organisation V Force when the war came up through Burma, married Lieutenant-Colonel Betts of the same organisation, and went with him into the Subansiri when he was gazetted its first Political Officer (Bower, 1953, pp. 4–5). *Naga Path* (1950) records the first of those phases and *The Hidden Land* (1953) the last. Jean Kingdon-Ward, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, left for the Lohit valley in January 1950 with her husband Frank Kingdon-Ward on a plant-hunting expedition whose funds fell short of its costs, returning ten months later with the diary she had kept throughout (J. Kingdon-Ward, 1952, p. 13). *My Hill So Strong* (1952) is built from it. A missionary wife of long residence, a self-trained anthropologist who married into the Political Service, and a collector on a single expedition: the three held different institutional positions and wrote for different readers, which is precisely what makes the comparison informative.

Three limits should be stated at the very outset, since each corresponds to a claim this paper does not make. It does not argue that women possessed a distinct or more

accurate way of seeing colonial society. It does not treat relational writing as standing outside colonial power, since all three women were participants in missionary activities, scientific collection, administration or wartime intelligence; and sometimes in more than one. And it does not claim to recover any “indigenous” voices. What the sources used in this paper permit is the recovery of traces of participation, labour and negotiation; not direct access to the perspectives of the people represented.

The paper is also bounded in/by time. Its primary corpus runs from 1916 to 1953. Earlier writing by T. T. Cooper in the 1860s is used as comparative genealogy rather than as part of the corpus. The work of Barpujari, Guyot-Réchard and others is treated as historiographical reception, examined as a distinct problem.

A note on naming is necessary in an paper about classification. Where the historical texts are being described, their own terms are retained, since the categories are themselves objects of analysis. “Dafla” is the term used throughout Bower’s and Fürer-Haimendorf’s books for communities now generally known as Nyishi. Similarly, “Hill Miri”, “Apa Tani”, “Mishmi”, “Khamti” and “Naga” are colonial-era usages of varying precision. Place names follow the same rule, with present forms given at first mention: Nowgong is now Nagaon, Gauhati is Guwahati, and the Apa Tani valley is now commonly called the Ziro valley.

II. FROM WOMEN’S TRAVEL WRITING TO THE LABOUR OF KNOWLEDGE

Three bodies of scholarship frame this article, and a fourth supplies its regional ground.

The first concerns women’s travel writing. Mary Louise Pratt (1992, p. 7) supplied the contact zone, where the two sides of an imperial relation occupy one ground on radically unequal terms, and the seeing-man, the European observer whose looking amounts to claiming. Her reading of Maria Graham and Flora Tristan is more directly useful here, because she finds their narratives organised inward around a residence rather than driven outward by conquest, and sets that manner against the statistical and technical description that carried official authority (pp. 159–163). Sara Mills (1991, p. 12) explains how such books were cut down to size in their reception: reviewers called them autobiographical, which she reads as a refusal to treat women as makers of cultural artefacts, and then questioned the accuracy of what they had just classed as raw fact. Her more fundamental claim is that the difference in this writing arises from the conditions of its production and reception rather than from a distinct female way of seeing (pp. 5–6), and she warns against recruiting these writers as feminists ahead of their time, since selective reading can prove them proto-feminist or anti-feminist at will (p. 4). Indira Ghose (2000, pp. 1, 13, 15) carries the argument into colonial India, notes the shared root of gender and genre, and places her travellers awkwardly between two positions, held down by sex and raised up by race, producing knowledge that did the work of power.

The second concerns colonial knowledge, and it does more work in this article than any other. Bernard Cohn (1996, pp. 6–9) sets out the investigative modalities, the

routine procedures by which the colonial state settled what it wished to know, went out and found it, classified it and turned it into paperwork. Three are directly relevant. The survey modality covers any systematic official investigation of the empire's natural and social features, and Cohn lists the collecting of botanical specimens among its practices, which places a plant-hunting expedition inside the apparatus rather than beside it. The museological modality treats the country as a vast museum, a source of collectibles for European museums and botanical gardens, its people standing in for past ages. The enumerative modality turns populations into returns. A specimen sent to Kew, a photograph sent to the Pitt-Rivers Museum, a verdict of Late Neolithic and a table of baptisms belong to interconnected but distinct regimes of knowledge, with different institutions, protocols and audiences. What they share is that all four passed through the hands of the women examined here. Talal Asad (1973, p. 18) shows how anthropology's pose of detachment separated the anthropologist from traders, missionaries and officials while resting on a relation of force the discipline preferred not to discuss. Johannes Fabian (1983, pp. 32–33) names the operation by which living communities are placed in a time earlier than the observer's, calling the denial of coevalness the allochronism of anthropology.

The third concerns the archive and the paratext. Ann Laura Stoler (2009, pp. 2, 50) urges historians to take colonial paperwork first on its own terms, as a record of what officials believed and feared, and only afterwards to read it for what it conceals. Antoinette Burton (2003, pp. 5, 10, 25) asks that private and domestic writing be admitted as evidence rather than as colour, which is the permission this article uses. Gérard Genette (1997, pp. 1–3) supplies the formal vocabulary. In the taxonomy of transtextual relations that opens *Palimpsests*, architextuality is the set of general categories, types of discourse and genres from which a singular text emerges, and is assigned from outside rather than announced by the text itself; paratextuality covers the relation between a text and the materials attached to it, which Genette illustrates with chapter headings, drafts and abandoned conclusions, and which he elaborates at length in a separate study. Where this article refers to prefaces, notes, indexes and lists as paratext, it extends his category to the apparatus of the books examined here. The distinction matters because the paratext is where provenance becomes visible, and because a reader guided by the architext, in this case adventure, will not look there.

The fourth is the regional historiography. Sanghamitra Misra (2011, p. 1) traces the slow conversion of an interconnected region into a borderland, while its economy remained bound to events in the hills (Saikia, 2011, p. 167). Jayeeta Sharma (2011, pp. 122–123) describes the Non-Regulation system, instituted in 1822 for newly annexed territories, under which Assam was governed by officers exempt from the general regulations and in practice ruled by military men serving as civil officials, largely unfettered by the rule of law. Ray (2023, p. 20) argues that the flatness and crudity of colonial descriptions of hill communities was not a failure of understanding but served ideological and political ends.

These literatures have examined what colonial texts said. This article examines the traces such texts preserve of how the knowledge recorded in them was produced. The gap is not that women's writing has been ignored, since Pratt, Mills and Ghose have addressed it at length, nor that colonial knowledge has been under-theorised. It is that the internal textual composition of frontier books, the mixture of reproduced documents and situated observation within a single volume, has not been systematically compared across genres and venues in order to recover the practical labour underlying knowledge production.

III. READING THE BOOKS AS COMPOSITE ARCHIVES

Since the argument turns on a distinction between two kinds of material, both need definition, and the procedure for identifying them needs to be stated.

The transmitted documentary register refers to material incorporated into a narrative from an already constituted documentary source: reports, resolutions, returns, correspondence, official statements, telegrams and administrative histories. Such material enters the book finished. Its authority belongs to the institution that produced it, and the incorporating writer can reproduce it but cannot revise it.

The situated relational register refers to knowledge generated through sustained interaction with persons encountered in the course of missionary, domestic, expeditionary, administrative or ethnographic work, and is identified here wherever a text records names, wages, translation, bargaining, recruitment, refusal, labour arrangements or negotiation.

Three kinds of textual evidence are examined for each book. The first is paratext: prefaces, introductions, footnotes, indexes, lists, *dramatis personae* and appended documents. The second is documentary reproduction: government reports, correspondence, conference resolutions, official returns, diaries and administrative statements incorporated whole. The third is relational and transactional information: interpreters, porters, guides, cooks, scouts, wages, payments, translation, bargaining, recruitment and the recorded interests of intermediaries.

The male corpus is selected on two principles. Cooper and Frank Kingdon-Ward are included because each published on closely related material in both commercial and learned-society venues, which allows genre to be compared while holding the author constant. Bailey is included because he was honoured by the Royal Geographical Society and had served with an official survey expedition, yet published this journey commercially, which tests whether affiliation to a learned society rather than publishing venue accounts for the difference. Fürer-Haimendorf is included because his monograph covers the same country and the same personnel as Bower's book, within a few years of it.

One caution about method should be entered here. Counting quotation marks is not a reliable index of transmission, since they may mark reported speech, translation, technical usage, unfamiliar terminology, irony or citation. The relevant unit is the document reproduced whole, identified by provenance rather than by punctuation.

On that measure, none of the male texts examined here reproduces the kinds of documentary material that structure the women's volumes, while all four women's books do so repeatedly.

The composite character of the books can be set out directly.

Author	Textual component	Provenance	Function	Register
Moore	Conference statement on schoolhouse (p. 34)	Mission conference	Institutional authority	Transmitted
Moore	Provincial church returns (p. 82)	Mission and government	Enumeration	Transmitted
Moore	Resolutions and eulogies (p. 86)	Other hands	Commemoration	Transmitted
Moore	Letter on Darjeeling sunrise (pp. 17–18)	Miss Long	Description	Transmitted
Moore	Staff tenures and schooling limits (pp. 6, 15, 97)	Station experience	Labour and access	Situated
J. Kingdon-Ward	Assam Rifles patrol report (pp. 199–200)	Military	Official record	Transmitted
J. Kingdon-Ward	Footnote to Nature (pp. 170–171)	Scientific press	Corroboration	Transmitted
J. Kingdon-Ward	Mainprice tour diary (p. 48)	Manuscript, official	Verification	Transmitted
J. Kingdon-Ward	Staff list, wages, hiring (pp. 14–15, 59, 216)	Expedition	Labour and logistics	Situated
Bower	Administrative history of frontier (pp. xii–xiv)	Government	Territorial authority	Transmitted
Bower	Verdict of “virtually Late Neolithic” (p. xv)	Anthropology	Classification	Transmitted
Bower	Interpreter list with clan and village (p. xix)	Field experience	Mediation	Situated
Bower	Buda's trading and landholding (p. 114)	Field experience	Economic life	Situated

What the table shows is not a division between official and personal books. It shows movement between registers inside single volumes. Moore's supposedly personal journal carries government-funded budgets; Bower's commercial adventure narrative opens with an administrative history; Jean Kingdon-Ward's travel book prints a military report. The object of analysis is therefore not a binary between two kinds of writing but the traffic between them within one text, and what that traffic leaves visible.

IV. GENRE AS A CONTROL: COOPER AND KINGDON-WARD

If the difference between registers were a property of the observer, it should hold when the writer is held constant. It does not.

T. T. Cooper worked for a merchant house and spent the 1860s searching for a trade route from Assam into Tibet and China. The book he sold commercially, *The Mishmee Hills*, names Chowsam, his Khamti guide, 170 times, and records that the order of march of the party “had been arranged by Chowsam, and was never afterwards varied” (Cooper, 1873, ch. 13). His letter to the Royal Geographical Society, covering the same journey, names no local person at all. An interpreter appears once, as something to be acquired, when he complains of losing more than twenty days while he got hold of “mules, ponies, and an interpreter” (Cooper, 1868, p. 339).

Frank Kingdon-Ward did the same across fifty years. His trade books name his headman Tashi seventy-two times in *Assam Adventure* and a man called Yarter twelve times in *Plant Hunter in Manipur*, the volume in which he also describes the making of an earlier book: “I wrote the chapters, then Jean typed them, gave good advice, and corrected my spelling mistakes” (F. Kingdon-Ward, 1941; 1952, p. 17). His paper on the 1950 earthquake for the *Geographical Journal* gives the sediment carried by the Brahmaputra at Dibrugarh, stunned fish, dogs going silent and three porters buried by falling rock, and across fourteen pages names no local individual (F. Kingdon-Ward, 1953, pp. 175, 176, 178). His Royal Central Asian Society paper on the Assam Himalaya does the same (F. Kingdon-Ward, 1939).

Nor is it a matter of amateurs against the learned societies. F. M. Bailey had served on the Younghusband expedition of 1903 and as interpreter to a Survey of India party in 1904, and his title page announces him as a Gold Medallist of both the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. Published with a trade house, his account of the 1911 journey from Tibet to Assam names his Tibetan servant Putamdu twenty times, and gives a sustained passage to Kintup, who accompanied two of the Survey’s pundit-explorers into Tibet in the 1870s as their servant and afterwards carried out the log-floating scheme himself (Bailey, 1945).

Counting requires definition. Named here means a personal name attached to an individual, not a title, an ethnonym or an occupational designation, so “the interpreter” and “a Mishmi” do not count while “Chowsam” and “Putamdu” do. Local means a person of the region, or of the wider subcontinent working within it, which includes Tibetan trade agents and men employed by the Assam Rifles, since the relevant contrast is between European authorship and the personnel on which it relied. Frequency is counted because it registers textual visibility: a man mentioned once is an incident, and a man mentioned seventy-two times is part of the book’s structure.

Text	Genre and venue	Local individuals named	Documents reproduced
Cooper, <i>The Mishmee Hills</i> (1873)	Commercial book	Chowsam, 170 times	None

Cooper, PRGS letter (1868)	Learned society	None	None
F. Kingdon-Ward, Assam Adventure (1941)	Commercial book	Tashi, 72 times	None
F. Kingdon-Ward, Plant Hunter in Manipur (1952)	Commercial book	Yarter, 12 times	None
F. Kingdon-Ward, Geographical Journal (1953)	Learned society	None	None
F. Kingdon-Ward, JRCAS paper (1939)	Learned society	None	None
Bailey, China, Tibet, Assam (1945)	Commercial book	Putamdu 20, Kintup 21	None
Fürer-Haimendorf, Ethnographic Notes (1947)	Official monograph	Kop Temi, Nendin Tagum	None
J. Kingdon-Ward, My Hill So Strong (1952)	Commercial book	Phag Tsering, Akkey, Samdup, Nima Tsering	Several
Bower, The Hidden Land (1953)	Commercial book	Seven interpreters, Buda, Kago Tajo	Several
Moore, Stray Leaves from Assam (1916)	Mission volume	Lucas Borua, Neyai Pandit	Many

Two conclusions follow. One conspicuous variable is the publishing venue, and it operates on men and women alike. But venue is not the only variable, since genre, audience, length, editorial convention and purpose move together with it, and the table cannot separate them. What the comparison does establish is that the distribution of visibility is not a property of the observer. The same man, on the same journey, made his guide structurally central in one book and invisible in the other.

V. JEAN KINGDON-WARD: BOTANICAL LABOUR AND THE EXPEDITIONARY ARCHIVE

In the summer of 1950 the Kingdon-Wards were camped near Rima, on the Lohit close to the Tibetan border, when an earthquake later measured at magnitude 8.6 struck the region. The figure comes from modern reconstruction (Guyot-Réchard, 2015, p. 2) and appears nowhere in either of the contemporary accounts examined here. My Hill So Strong is Jean Kingdon-Ward's narrative of the expedition and the disaster, and it is the fullest surviving record of how a plant-collecting expedition of this period actually worked.

Her technical writing is exact. At Denning she notes mould creeping over the earlier specimens because the air was too wet for them to dry, and at a later camp she works quickly to press a camellia, *Camellia drupifera*, recording that the Tocklai Tea Research Station at Jorhat, the laboratory serving the Assam tea industry, wanted every camellia whether tea or not, and that these were the only camellia specimens found above Denning in the Lohit (J. Kingdon-Ward, 1952, pp. 30–31, 46). Condition,

provenance, institutional destination and distribution are all present, and the passage quietly links a Himalayan camp to the research arm of the industry that had remade the plains below. This is the survey modality being carried out by hand.

The same manner of writing preserves what no other source does, a working staff list. Phag Tsering cooked and collected plants efficiently and spoke Hindustani, Tibetan, Bhutanese, Nepali and Sikkimese. Akkey, thirty-seven years old, spoke all of those with some English and German, and did the translating (pp. 14–15). Forty porters were engaged through Samdup, the Tibetan Trade Agent, because the Mishmi of the Lohit valley were already carrying rations for the Assam Rifles outposts and would not be free until mid-month; the Tibetans hired in their place were, she notes, a good deal more expensive to employ. The porters had their own headman, Nima Tsering, and the party that came to be paid was thirty-four Tibetan men and six women. A Jemadar, a junior Indian officer of the Rifles, stood by at the pay-out as what she calls an unbiased witness that their side of the contract had been fulfilled. Each porter received Rs. 44 (pp. 15, 59, 216).

Two details there deserve emphasis, because they show intermediaries acting on their own interests rather than merely being available. The Mishmi could not be hired because they had already contracted with a better-resourced employer. The porters arrived with their own headman and required a witness to the settlement, which is to say that the terms of their employment were negotiated and that they took steps to secure them. Elsewhere the same men buy brown gym-shoes in Sadiya, develop foot sores from wearing them and walk barefoot to save the shoes for later (p. 44). None of this makes them free agents. It does make them participants whose cooperation had to be secured, negotiated and maintained rather than presumed.

The chain of labour behind a scientific result can be followed almost to its end. The find of the season was a *Cornus chinensis*. Phag Tsering had located the tree in April, on the south side of the La Ti torrent above a run of landslips. When Frank went up in August and failed to relocate it, Phag Tsering volunteered to take a local man and return, coming back after ten hours with his pockets full of the fruit. Kingdon-Ward calls it the find of the expedition. It entered the botanical record as K.W. 19300, a number formed from her husband's initials (pp. 174–175). The sequence runs from local ecological knowledge to a collector, through an expedition, into a specimen number, and thence to a botanical institution, a scientific publication and eventually a horticultural market. The labour disappears at the third step, when the specimen acquires its number, and it is recoverable only because Jean Kingdon-Ward's index enters Phag Tsering as a plant collector with eleven page references.

Her book also performs two operations that its genre did not require. Frank told her that no other European woman had been so far up the Lohit valley. She wrote that she thought he must be mistaken, doubting that no Political Officer's or Assistant Political Officer's wife had ever taken the opportunity her husband's tours afforded, and then produced a source against him: in the tour diaries of an officer named F. P. Mainprice she had found "an elderly lady" who twice went several marches up the neighbouring

Delei valley to collect insects for the Natural History Museum (J. Kingdon-Ward, 1952, p. 48). The diary supplies no occupation for that woman and no city for the museum, and neither should be invented; what the passage shows is a writer checking a claim against a manuscript and printing the reference. Second, sleepless through weeks of aftershocks, she wrote that she had become more sensitive to the tremors than any seismograph, a remark placed among ground fissures three or four feet deep, a monastery leaning forty degrees to the east, and a clinical thermometer broken when the mercury rose above 110 degrees (pp. 169, 170, 177). Ghose (2000, p. 96) argues of the women's Mutiny narratives that, unlike the disembodied traveller of most travel writing, the body of the narrator underpins the account, so that suffering reinforces its authenticity. The Lohit material extends the comparison rather than fitting it. That is not the operation here. Her exhaustion is entered as a reading beside other readings, with its range stated.

What this book preserves, then, is not simply what the expedition saw. It is how the expedition functioned.

VI. URSULA GRAHAM BOWER: INTERMEDIARIES AND ADMINISTRATIVE KNOWLEDGE

Bower's position was not that of an observer standing outside colonial power, and the argument depends on saying so plainly. She entered anthropology deliberately and from outside the universities, writing from London to J. H. Hutton at Cambridge, formerly an officer in the Naga Hills, and to the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford, and establishing that a gap existed which she could fill: crafts such as brass-casting, weaving and pottery had been described by trained observers but never photographed. She then obtained the Political Agent's permission to go into the Manipur hills alone, which she calls "a revolutionary step" (Bower, 1950, pp. 14–16). Years among the Zemi Naga followed. During the Second World War, with Japanese forces on the Burma border, she built and commanded a network of village scouts and runners reporting strangers, downed aircraft and movement through a junction of tracks (pp. 193–194). She later married a Political Officer and moved with him to the Subansiri.

That sequence matters. Bower supplied photographs to a museum, produced military intelligence for a wartime administration, and lived inside the establishment of a frontier official. She was an agent in the production of colonial knowledge rather than a witness to it, and the value of her books lies in what that participation required her to describe.

The Hidden Land opens with the region's administrative past, passes through the analysis of Fürer-Haimendorf's method quoted above, and closes its front matter with the staff. Kop Temi, an elderly educated Dafla from a plains village, is Head Interpreter; Bat Heli, much younger, is second; Nada Rika, Koj Karu, Tenyo Bida, Hage Tara and Kago Tajo follow, each with clan, village and standing (Bower, 1953, pp. xii–xiv, xix). Into the same pages the borrowed judgement that Apa Tani culture was "virtually Late Neolithic" passes unchanged (p. xv), which is Fabian's (1983, pp. 32–33) allochronism

in a single phrase, reproduced without comment by a writer who then spends two hundred pages describing people it does not fit.

Those pages record intermediaries with interests of their own. Kop Temi keeps a neat record of his cases in a pocket notebook (p. 7). Buda, a slave, went down to the plains to trade, buying cattle, Assamese silk, worn iron hoes and salt and carrying them back to sell at a margin; when his master Kago Tajo had to sell his best fields to pay for curative sacrifices, Buda had the cash to take them cheaply; wages from Bower's own household raised him further, until he owned land worth eight mithan, the cattle that served as the valley's currency, which she converts for the reader at £120. Tajo, entitled as an overlord to broker the sale, calculated his commission with evident pleasure (p. 114). Salt came from burning fern and sedge and washing the ash (p. 116). A classification scheme does not by itself explain the relationships and transactions through which such information became available, and this information required knowing the same men across years.

The book also carries what can only be called decision papers. The longest works through treaty obligation, illegality, the force available and the likely consequences before Bower pays Rs. 200, about fifteen pounds and the usual ceiling, to ransom a kidnapped Dafla boy (pp. 133–134). The passage is worth more than its narrative interest. An administrative category such as raiding records that an offence occurred. This narrative records the price of a person, the ceiling set on that price by custom or policy, the legal ambiguity of paying it, the calculation of whether force was available as an alternative, and the fact that a British official's wife exercised discretion in the matter. Almost none of that survives categorisation.

Fürer-Haimendorf's monograph handles the same country by another route, and the contrast is not between a sympathetic observer and a cold one. He was simultaneously anthropologist, fieldworker, colonial official and advocate of administrative reform, and the interest of his text lies in that combination. Apa Tani slavery arrives under numbered headings, from the standing of slaves through slaves acquired by inheritance, purchase and debt, with bride-price sums determining whose children belong to whom (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1947, pp. 28–29). One Nendin Tagum paid twenty mithan for land, nine of which had reached him as ransom for captured Daflas, entered as one form of money among others (p. 12). The work is careful and detailed. It is also an official document, and Asad's (1973, p. 18) objection to anthropology's claimed neutrality bites hardest on a monograph whose fieldworker was the administrator. He was not unusual in this. Ray (2023, p. 129) shows P. R. T. Gurdon thanking missionaries and other colonial figures for their information about the Khasis, thanking no local person, and saying nothing of a century of missionary activity in the hills he described.

What the monograph does contain is relational knowledge in transformed state. Fürer-Haimendorf states that when he first entered the Apa Tani country the dealings between a community of twenty thousand and the Government of India rested almost entirely on one Dafla interpreter, Kop Temi, the only man with both Assamese

and Apa Tani (p. 60). He then recommends turning that improvisation into a system: interpreters placed on the Government payroll, village spokesmen given red mantles to mark them out, porter headmen granted formal status and retainers, since interpreters, red-cloth holders and gang foremen will be the “three pillars” of Government influence (p. 55). The point is not that the monograph omits intermediaries. It is that it converts them into an establishment.

A similar arrangement was already in use with Bower, in a different setting and some years earlier. During the war her Zemi scouts came back complaining that they had no standing without red cloths, “the outward and visible sign of official status”; the civil supply having been cut off, she asked headquarters for red blankets from a woollen mill (Bower, 1950, pp. 193–194). Nothing here proves that he learned it from her, and the claim should not be made. Red cloth as a badge of official standing was common administrative currency in these hills, and the two cases lie in different provinces and different years. What the pairing shows is where such knowledge was generated and what happens to it in transit. In her book it arrives as a complaint from the men doing the work; in his it arrives as a recommendation, with the complaint removed.

VII. JESSIE T. MOORE: THE MISSION STATION AS DOCUMENTARY ARCHIVE

Nothing extraordinary happens in Moore’s book, and that is what makes it valuable. Nobody is rescued. No mountain is crossed. A school opens, a grant is banked, a girl dies, a headmaster completes his twenty-second year.

The volume is not simply a journal, and the distinction matters. *Stray Leaves from Assam* is a journal-derived compilation, assembled from dated entries and from documents supplied by other hands, and published by Moore herself as the fourth instalment of a series (Moore, 1916, Preface). Its institutional setting is documented. In 1846, Sharma records, the American Baptists resolved to bring out an Assamese periodical, the *Orunodoi*, under a masthead promising “Religion, Science, and General Knowledge”, and opened branches at Guwahati, Jorhat and Nagaon (Sharma, 2011, p. 135). Seeking educated converts and finding few, the mission had by the 1870s swung its effort toward the hills and toward supplying rudimentary medicine and schooling where the state provided none, with particular success among the Garos (pp. 144–145). Moore’s station belonged to the earlier valley project in its later, school-centred phase.

The form is that of a ledger. Entries carry dates, sit one after another without hierarchy, and price things twice over. A car from Gauhati to Shillong, sixty-three miles, came to eighteen rupees, six dollars; the government put up fifteen thousand rupees, five thousand dollars, towards a schoolhouse (Moore, 1916, pp. 13–14). The double currency suggests a volume written for an audience beyond the station while retaining the accounting habits of station life. Against that spine the transmitted material stands out: a mission conference statement about the new schoolhouse, with Public Works Department drawings, a government grant of Rs. 15,000, a matching \$2,500 from the Woman’s Baptist Foreign Mission Society and 170 pupils of whom 150 were

girls (p. 34); provincial totals for churches, members and baptisms (p. 82); and a closing quarter of resolutions and eulogies by other people (p. 86).

The evenness of the prose is a formal fact rather than a lapse. A colleague leaving for a holiday in the hills, a small girl dead of acute diarrhoea in the school dormitory, and a warning about the drinking water arrive in a single entry, in consecutive sentences and at one pitch (p. 16); Woodrow Wilson's election and Moore's own fifty-fifth birthday sit five days apart in the same shape of sentence (p. 23). Nothing outranks anything else. Ledgers do not rank, they list, in the order things happened, which is Cohn's enumerative modality caught one stage before it becomes a return. The single moment when the book reaches for beauty confirms the point, because the prose is not hers: Moore prints a letter from Miss Long, watching sunrise on the snows above Darjeeling, and lets her supply the roseate light and the gold-tipped peaks (pp. 17–18).

Her own writing supplies what the totals cannot. She records 987 girls at Christian schools across Assam, 520 of them Garo (p. 6), a distribution matching the mission's documented move from plains to hills. She is equally exact about limits. Hindu and Muslim girls received two or three years, and at twelve were married or withdrawn into the zenana, so that only Christian families' daughters continued (pp. 14–15). At one prize day, open to women and girls alone, Hindu and Muslim mothers came in curtained bullock carts and kept purdah (p. 7). Her gender and her position within the mission community gave her access to domestic and women's spaces that male officials did not routinely possess, and the record of that afternoon is a consequence of it.

The station's staff appear by post and length of service. Lucas Borua was a small boy in Nowgong when Moore's husband arrived thirty-six years earlier, and had long since become his right hand in building, pundit work and evangelism; Neyai Pandit had served as headmaster of the mission school for twenty-two years or more (p. 97). So does the linguistic labour that mission life involved: revised Assamese copy for the third part of a primer, *Line Upon Line*, reaches her from Henry Goldsmith to be forwarded to Calcutta for printing, with the proofreading left to her (p. 17).

Set that beside the mission's own historian. Barpujari (1986, pp. xxxvii–xxxviii) credits the American Baptists with the *Orunodoi* of January 1846, the first Assamese periodical, along with translations, tracts and hymns. In his account Brown's *Grammatical Notices* and Bronson's *Assamese-English Dictionary* put the language on solid ground, while Mrs H. B. L. Cutter's *Vocabulary and Phrases* of 1841, revised and reissued in 1864 by Mrs S. R. Ward, occupies a subordinate clause between them. The labour is in the sentence. The credit is not, and the mechanism is visible: the men's works are named as foundational acts, while the women's are described as revisions of existing material, so that the same activity is recorded under a category that does not confer authorship.

One further feature of the compilation bears on how the book should be used, since its evidentiary status varies from page to page. Moore was in the United States when

her husband Pitt Moore died at Calcutta on 3 March 1916, and heard by cable (pp. 83–84). The much-quoted detail of his last journey, a night in an ox-cart and twenty-seven hours by rail, therefore comes from another person's account bound into the volume rather than from anything she witnessed (p. 101). Read the book as a life and the difference vanishes. Read it as a file and it does not. A published volume of this kind is not a homogeneous authorial text, and the question of who authored a composite book is a real one, since Moore is by turns author, editor, compiler, transcriber and publisher.

VIII. THE AFTERLIFE OF THE RELATIONAL REGISTER

What later readers extracted from these books is a separate problem, and a documented one. Two moments of reading are involved, the contemporary and the scholarly, and the second is much the better evidenced, which is a limit on the available evidence rather than a conclusion about the period.

Moore's case shows attribution becoming unstable across bibliographic systems, and the instability begins inside the book. The title page of *Stray Leaves from Assam* reads "Mrs. P. H. Moore", and the imprint states that the volume was edited and published by her under that name. Three pages later the preface is signed Jessie T. Moore (Moore, 1916, Preface). Four distinct processes are involved and should be kept apart: title-page naming, publication responsibility, authorial self-identification, and later scholarly citation. Barpujari, quoting two volumes as evidence, copies the title page faithfully as "Mrs. P. H. Moore" (1986, pp. 175, 178). Guyot-Réchard (2015, p. 3, n. 5), reconstructing the earthquake of 12 June 1897, cites the first instalment beside the Government of Assam's report and two volumes of the *Assam District Gazetteer*, and the name given is "P. H. Moore". Whether the 1901 title page carried the courtesy title cannot be settled here, since that volume has not been consulted, and the reconstruction is therefore documented but incomplete. What can be said is that a woman whose own name appears once, at the foot of her preface, entered the catalogues under her husband's initials, and that the last marker of sex was subsequently dropped by a modern historian citing her as a primary source alongside government reports. The gazetteers in that same note were printed at the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta, which indicates how far the official record depended on mission infrastructure.

Bower's material travelled in two directions at once. The photographs she had been asked for supplied museums with images of craft processes they lacked (Bower, 1950, pp. 14–16), and the scout network became a working arm of the wartime administration (pp. 193–194). Her preface preserved an analysis of Fürer-Haimendorf's method that his own publication did not contain, so that the fullest account of how the Subansiri was first entered survives in a trade book. His monograph, meanwhile, proposed for the region a system of paid interpreters, red-cloth holders and porter headmen resembling the arrangement she had already been operating.

Knowledge of this kind evidently circulated among people working the same ground. Citation did not follow it.

Jean Kingdon-Ward's case is the most precisely documented and the least acknowledged. The provenance of the season's principal find is recoverable from her book and nowhere else, and only her index identifies the man who spent ten hours on broken ground to fetch it. Naming caught her too, in the opposite direction. J. R. Sealy named the Manipur lily *Lilium mackliniae* in her honour, using the name she carried before marriage, and the honour was earned: she had done much to bring the plant into cultivation, and the scheme for shipping mature bulbs home and popularising them was hers (F. Kingdon-Ward, 1952, p. 122). The recognition was real, and it was also the only kind available. Phag Tsering ends inside another man's collection number and she ends inside another man's binomial, and neither performs any naming.

That sequence suggests a distinction worth stating generally, between who produced knowledge, who documented it and who was credited with it. Phag Tsering performed the collecting labour; Jean Kingdon-Ward documented it; Frank Kingdon-Ward received the specimen number and the scientific credit. The same three-stage sequence runs through the Subansiri material, where an interpreter mediated the information, Bower recorded the mediation, and an administrative text converted it into a proposed establishment.

Later readers have also got small things wrong about these books, and the pattern of error is consistent. No magnitude appears anywhere in Frank Kingdon-Ward's earthquake paper; the figure of 8.6 comes from Guyot-Récharde's reconstruction long afterwards (2015, p. 2). Bower's preface offers Fürer-Haimendorf a technical assessment of method rather than the warm tribute sometimes quoted from it. Errors of this kind accumulate around books that are cited from memory rather than opened.

IX. CONCLUSION: KNOWLEDGE, LABOUR AND THE ARCHIVE

Several conclusions follow, and they are narrower than the material sometimes tempts one to claim.

The difference between the two registers did not originate in gender. Cooper, Bailey and Frank Kingdon-Ward crossed it according to their publisher, Gurdon thanked his European informants and no others, and Fürer-Haimendorf's policy recommendation is written throughout in the situated register. No single variable accounts for the pattern: institutional location, intended audience, genre and the writer's practical responsibilities all bear on which kinds of knowledge become textually visible.

Gender matters, but at a specific point. It structured what work these women were assigned, which spaces they could enter, whom they could speak with and what forms of labour were expected of them. The positions available to them, missionary worker, expeditionary participant and collector, independent researcher, wartime organiser and, in Bower's later case, a Political Officer's wife, placed them close to the interpersonal infrastructure of colonial knowledge, and a book about that work cannot easily

omit its terms. Mills (1991, pp. 3, 5–6) locates the difference in production and reception rather than in temperament; this material specifies the difference in production as a difference in what the writer spent her days doing.

Three cautions belong in the conclusion rather than in a footnote. Naming does not recover Indigenous voice. Phag Tsering, Kop Temi, Buda and Chowsam can be counted, dated and placed, which is more than the learned-society papers permit, but what they knew and what they declined to say cannot be recovered here, because even the obliging register recorded them as staff. An employment record is not a testimony, though it is a place to begin. Relational knowledge is not more truthful than documentary knowledge; it can be coercive, selective, strategic and self-serving, and Bower's long acquaintance with the Zemi does not make her descriptions transparent. And official records are not empty of relational knowledge. Fürer-Haimendorf names Kop Temi and describes the interpreter system. The issue is not absence but transformation, since relational knowledge was regularly converted into administrative categories, recommendations and establishments, and the conversion is what removes the conditions of its production.

Nor is the useful object a binary between official and personal writing. Moore's journal-derived volume carries government budgets, Bower's adventure narrative opens with an administrative history, and Jean Kingdon-Ward's travel book prints a military report. What repays attention is the movement between registers inside a single volume, and what that movement leaves visible.

By working literature this article means writing that records the practical processes through which information, movement and institutional action were made possible: hiring, translation, transport, payment, correspondence, negotiation, domestic labour and intermediary work. Some of the most revealing surviving examples from this region came from these three women. Their books were classified as travel, adventure and mission memoir, and used, where used at all, for the least consequential material in them. The less frequently cited half of the evidence is the half that permits reconstruction of the infrastructure of knowledge production.

The final observation is the simplest. The specimen taken from above the Lohit landslide still stands in the record under the initials of a man who never walked up to it. The book that names the man who did has sat on the shelf since 1952, with the name in the index.

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