Introduction: one mountain, many worlds

Peter H. Hansen, Paul Gilchrist, and Jonathan Westaway

Footprints break the surface of the snow, heading towards the summit of Mount Everest. Who made them? For the past century, many people looking at such footprints have imagined a singular heroic figure, certainly male, probably Western, or perhaps a pair of climbers sharing a rope, such as George Mallory and Andrew (Sandy) Irvine in 1924 or Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953. The footsteps in the cover photograph of this book lead upwards on the snows of the 'Hillary Step', the imposing obstacle below the summit on the Nepali side of Everest, named after one of the pair who together made the first ascent of the world's highest mountain.

In June 1924, Mallory and Irvine left similar footprints on the northern, Tibetan slopes of Everest that were visible to observers watching through telescopes below. After they disappeared near the summit, Mallory and Irvine were celebrated for embodying the spirit of man. Yet their deaths were not the first on the mountain. Two years before, in 1922, seven porters were killed in an avalanche on the slopes of the North Col. The porters' names were later added to a memorial for Mallory and Irvine at Everest Base Camp in Tibet, but their contributions remained largely hidden in the Everest expedition archives, overshadowed by the stories of heroic white men.

Since the 1950s, 'other Everests' has implied a mountaineering metaphor to elevate the significance of other endeavours. 'There are other Annapurnas in the lives of men', Maurice Herzog famously concluded in *Annapurna*, his account of the first ascent of an 8,000-metre peak in 1950. Echoing Herzog, the leader of the successful 1953 British expedition, Sir John Hunt, thought the ascent of Everest was justified by the 'seeking of their "Everests" by others'. Hunt concluded 'the spirit of man' could overcome any obstacle and the ascent should inspire enterprising explorers, mountaineers, and adventurers in climbing and other pursuits.[1]

Since then, climbers have often followed the footsteps of Sherpas, the ethnic group in Nepal that became the leading porters and guides on Mount Everest.[2] In the 2020s, fresh footprints in the snows of the Hillary Step were being made by Sherpas, both men and women, and the climbers following their footprints are as likely to be from India and China as from Europe or North America. By the first quarter of the twenty-first century, 'other Everests' highlights the contributions and perspectives of diverse communities on and beyond the mountain.

Other Everests is the culmination of a UK-funded research network initially concerned with the commemoration of the centenaries of the early British Mount Everest expeditions.[3] The network examined multiple ethical, social, and political challenges raised by Mount Everest, with attention being given to the meaning of historical commemoration, the agency of Indigenous labour, and the evolution of contemporary mountaineering cultures. The earliest British expeditions were linked to a geostrategic 'forward policy', including the military invasion of Tibet, which aimed to realign Tibet away from Republican China towards British India.[4] After the First World War, the assault on Everest became a gesture of imperial redemption, an effort to restore British morale and reassert the vitality of an imperial masculinity considered critical to ruling a multiethnic empire.[5] The 'epic of Everest' became a metaphor for the expedition organisers and filmmakers who saw Mallory and Irvine embodying the 'spirit of modern man'.[6] This language persisted into the 1970s, when the global counterculture transformed relations with Sherpas, Junko Tabei became the first of many women to climb Mount Everest, and a new breed of climbers entered the scene who began to replace imperial masculinities with corporate masculinities drawn from transnational business boardrooms.[7] With the advent of commercial guiding services and the discovery of Mallory's body in the 1990s, older imperial narratives were exhumed and resurrected along with artefacts from the body. Mountaineering narratives still celebrate heroic men conquering mountains in ways that perpetuate racial and gender stereotypes and continue to inform quasi-colonial practices in contemporary Himalayan mountaineering.

Postcolonial scholars examining such stereotypes and practices highlight the role of 'Othering', whereby 'individuals and groups are treated and marked as different and inferior from the dominant social group'.[8] Since the 1920s, Everest expeditions have relied on vast pyramids of Indigenous labour, an embodied infrastructure that was seldom acknowledged, except when identifying Gurkhas or Sherpas as embodying a 'martial race' or 'mountain' people.

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While traditional Everest narratives often adopt such colonial perspectives, the 'Other Everests' research network attempted to invert and subvert this rhetoric and reintroduce a plurality of perspectives – a world of multiple or alternative Everests.[9]

Other Everests attempts to clear a space to engage the many worlds that share the same mountain, the multiple ways of being-in-the-world, 'a world where many worlds fit'.[10] This introductory chapter highlights some of these 'worlds' and overlapping themes in Everest's many names, nations, genders, tourists, climates, and stories. Throughout this volume, the international and interdisciplinary array of contributors reactivate old and new archives, engage with multimedia and live performances, and participate in historical or ethnographic fieldwork. They shed light on the different ways of being in relationship with the mountain and how these are navigated by climbers and high-altitude workers alike, from ritual ceremonies to the mountain's immovable goddess through to contemporary digital practices, as global adventure tourists and guides curate their Everest experiences. The authors in the volume contribute to a plurality of new histories and perspectives. Everest can be viewed as a 'fallen giant' or the height of global prestige; a tourist's quest for adventure or a commodified package in a global adventure tourism industry.[11] Avalanches and natural disasters in the 2010s caused deaths that highlighted risks from a changing climate, but as many of our contributors make clear, these vulnerabilities co-emerged with inequalities in high-altitude labouring practice over the last century. The other Everests presented in this volume have shaped the present but do not determine the future approaches to the world's highest mountain.

Many names

Mount Everest – Chomolungma – Sagarmatha represent perhaps the most prominent example of many worlds shared by one mountain. Surveyors in British India announced in 1856 that a snowy mountain visible from the plains of India was 'probably the highest in the world, without any local name that we can discover'. After Andrew Waugh invoked his privilege as Surveyor General to name the peak after his predecessor, 'Mount Everest' was challenged by British and German naturalists in the Himalayas who advocated the place names Deodunga or Gaurishankar. Yet, as Ruth Gamble and Felix de Montety demonstrate in their chapters, Waugh as well as his British and German critics were mistaken. The mountain was known locally by yet another Tibetan name, Chomolungma.

The mountain was Chomolungma / Chomolangma in honour of the goddess Miyo Langsangma, 'the immovable, good woman of the willows', in Gamble's fresh and vibrant translation.[12] The immovable goddess was one of the five sisters of long life, Tseringma Chenga, deities who resided in mountain abodes after being subdued by Padmasambhava and Milarepa, a process recorded in Buddhist narratives and embedded in Tibetan landscapes. By the 1890s, European antiquaries retold these stories in garbled versions or in mistranslations that expressed prejudice or misunderstanding. A British medical officer, L.A. Waddell, identified Tseringma Chenga with Mount Everest after hearing stories from natives of Khumbu and studying ritual objects and texts that he purchased in Sikkim or looted from Tibet.[13] Emil Schlagintweit, a German scholar of Buddhism, read the Milarepa biographies collected by his elder brothers in India and Nepal and argued that any learned monk would identify the Mount Everest range with Tseringma Chenga. Schlagintweit proposed Gaurishankar-Everest as more melodious and memorable than cumbersome Tibetan names: 'it is always advisable to use Indian names instead of Tibetan names, which have to be ranked with Polish names due to the difficulties in pronunciation and spelling'.[14]

In the early eighteenth century, Chomolangma had appeared on maps of Tibet made by senior Buddhist monks trained in survey techniques at the imperial court in Beijing during the reign of the Kangxi emperor.[15] After the lamas' surveys, the Kangxi Atlas included *Jomolangma alin* in Manchu and Mandarin on maps before 1720 that were subsequently copied in Europe with the name transliterated as *Tchoumou lancma Mont* in French and *Mount Chumu Lankma* in English. The 1741 English edition of J.-B. Du Halde's description of China included this name and explained that its maps of the Mongol empire retained the names given by the lamas 'as being much more to be depended on, than those which travellers set down'.[16]

In 1921, British mountaineers returned from the mountain reporting that 'Everest is known and called by the Tibetans Chomo-lungma, Goddess Mother of the Country.'[17] Sven Hedin noted the resemblance between Chomo-lungma and Tchoumou-lancma on the French maps, and teased that Chomolungma was a 'French not British discovery' and 'the discovery was made by the emperor's lama topographers, and discoveries by natives naturally do not count'.[18] Climbers' testimonies and Hedin's comments were met with indignation by British surveyors. Sidney Burrard, a former Surveyor General, responded to Hedin with outrage, arguing that Mount Everest was on the border 'between the Aryan and Mongolian races' and 'the European mind is different from the

Tibetan'.[19] As Felix de Montety points out in his chapter, the British preference for exonomy – non-local place names used by outsiders – was deeply entangled with imperial and racial politics of mountain names in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The most important figure in the continuing sacralisation of Chomolungma in the early twentieth century was Zatul Rinpoche (Dzatrul Ngawang Tenzin Rinpoche), the Head Lama at the Rongbuk (Dza Rongpu) monastery.[20] Zatul Rinpoche founded the monastery around 1902 on a site where nuns had practised for centuries, and he blessed visiting climbers and porters during many Everest expeditions in the 1920s and 1930s. In his chapter, Felix Driver convincingly shows that the exchange of gifts at the monastery that John Noel filmed in 1922 took place not at the beginning of the expedition but *after* an avalanche on Mount Everest that killed seven porters. The White Tara icon that Zatul Rinpoche gave to the expedition leader, General C.G. Bruce, represented not boldness, as Bruce thought, but a deity of compassion and healing. After these encounters, Zatul Rinpoche wrote an autobiography in the 1920s expressing concern that the sahib's 'back-the-front' views threatened the sacredness of the mountain.[21]

The many worlds that fit the mountain in the 1930s were obscured, but not erased, by the politics of empire. In 1931, the *Statesman* newspaper in Calcutta published extracts from Zatul Rinpoche's spiritual autobiography about the climbers' visits to the monastery. Zatul Rinpoche reported that he asked General Bruce early in the expedition where they were going. Bruce indicated Everest and replied: 'This mountain is the highest in the world. If we can ascend it and reach the summit, the British Government will give us big pay and a great title.' After seven porters died in the avalanche, Zatul Rinpoche performed a service of blessing for the dead 'with great zeal thinking in my mind how these souls had suffered so great and untold difficulties and all for the sake of nothing'.[22] The 1931 translator of these extracts, Johan Van Manen, a Dutch orientalist and secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, also sent a translation of the Tibetan name to Sidney Burrard, the former Surveyor General, but advised him not to trust it: 'The ritualistic Tibetan who reads mystical names in books cannot identify them with geographical features', and geographers could be misled 'by information from ignorant porters'. In his guidebook to Himalayan geography, Burrard asked whether a sentence from Zatul Rinpoche that identified the location of 'Jomo-Langma' was evidence of a Tibetan name for Mount Everest. Not at all, he claimed in 1933, summing up decades of opposition to Tibetan names: 'The best service which

explorers will be able to do in future is to teach the Tibetans to adopt the name Mount Everest.'[23]

Zatul Rinpoche was also a spiritual teacher, and he wrote a pilgrim's guide-book to Rongbuk in 1932 to show visitors how to perceive this sacred place: 'Rongbuk is renowned as a supreme, sacred spot that brings liberation by hearing about, seeing, remembering, or touching it'.[24] He gave copies of his guidebook to visiting British climbers in 1936, and they published extracts a year later. The pilgrim's guide left climber and schoolmaster E.G.H. Kempson in no doubt that 'the best-known local name for Mount Everest is Chomo-langma'.[25] Gegen Dorje Tharchin also considered the proper local name of Mount Everest in 1933 in the pages of *Melong* (*Mirror*), the first Tibetan-language newspaper. In her chapter, Ruth Gamble notes that Tharchin considered the possibility of Tonting Gyelmo (*Gangs mthon mthing rgyal mo*), a name conventionally associated with Gaurishankar, before hearing from a Sherpa trade official in Calcutta and consulting Zatul Rinpoche's collected works which indicated that the British were climbing a different mountain, the abode of 'Miyo Langsangma or Chomolungma'.[26]

Visits to the Rongbuk monastery and sacred areas near Chomolungma inspired multiple stories of sacred valleys and 'ways of seeing' Tibet and Mount Everest.[27] In his chapter, Tim Chamberlain locates *Lost Horizon*'s utopian visions of 'Shangri-La' – in James Hilton's 1933 novel and Frank Capra's 1937 film – in a much wider field of films, articles, and travelogues of Tibet. Driver, Chamberlain, and Jayetta Sharma all highlight the dependence of travellers and climbers on local people and animals whose labour, mobility, and agency is visible in texts, films, and photographic images. The large quantities of comfortable gear, supplies, and imported food described by Sarah Pickman in her chapter served to insulate the climbers from the local milieu even as they relied on cooks and 'coolies' in their expeditions. This tourist infrastructure had been in place for decades as 'globe trotters' such as Mark Twain visited Darjeeling hoping to see Mount Everest. In the 1890s, Twain turned away from the mountain and was entranced by the bazaar, 'watching the swarthy strange tribes flock by from their far homes in the Himalayas'.[28] Sharma's chapter uses photographs of this marketplace to bring into focus the long-established networks of Sherpas and Sherpanis working within Himalayan labour regimes that facilitated the entry of famous Sherpas such as Tenzing Norgay and Ang Tharkay into the worlds of tourism and Mount Everest.[29] The reinterpretation of artefacts, writings, films, photographs, and gear from the early Everest expeditions by the contributors to this volume powerfully demonstrate the potential

to reactivate histories of Indigenous agency and local knowledge in expeditionary, monastic, cinematic, and photographic archives.

More frequent use of 'Chomolungma' on maps and by international media in the 1930s led a Nepali historian to the 'discovery' or invention of the name Sagarmatha. By 1938, Baburam Acharya, an education administrator, felt aggrieved that the world's highest mountain had no Nepali name and proposed 'Sagarmatha' in a literary journal, with an etymology he translated as 'brow/head reaching up to the sky'. Years later, a Nepali linguist interviewed Acharya and was disappointed to learn that his third-hand sources were colleagues in the education department and dismayed at Acharya's questionable view that 'sweet-sounding' Indo-Aryan names had long ago replaced 'harsh sounding' Tibeto-Burman names in Nepal.[30] The name Sagarmatha was little used until the 1950s – after the first ascent of Everest, Chinese invasion of Tibet, and controversies over the border between states in these mountains. Contested sovereignty over the mountain led to disputes over names, and Chinese officials viewed 'Everest' as a British imposition. China and Nepal resolved their border dispute by placing the boundary line along the summit ridge in a 1961 treaty.[31] Since then, Sagarmatha and Qomolangma (in varying transliterations) have become firmly established as official names alongside Mount Everest.

Many nations

Ascents of Mount Everest were considered matters of national importance during imperial, postcolonial, and Cold War eras throughout most of the twentieth century. Access to Everest was transformed by the independence of India in 1947, communist revolution in China and the invasion of Tibet, and by the opening of Nepal to visitors in 1950. A series of Everest ascents by British, Swiss, Chinese, American, and Indian expeditions in the 1950s and 1960s deepened and expanded the heroic, masculine norms associated with earlier imperial models from the 1920s. After the Second World War and the British withdrawal from India, attitudes towards Sherpa high-altitude workers slowly began to change. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Sherpas increasingly asserted their agency, assumed more responsibility, and demanded more egalitarian relationships in mountaineering expeditions.[32] In 1952, the Swiss Everest expedition made Tenzing Norgay a full member of the climbing team, a team led by professional alpine guides. Raymond Lambert, a professional guide from Geneva, praised Tenzing's physical and moral strength but was confused by

their relationship: 'Quite simply, I must say that I, the guide, have the confused impression, for once, of being the "client".' On Everest's highest slopes, Lambert recalled feeling like a deep-sea diver walking against an underwater current and reflected again on their relationship: 'this curious feeling comes over me: am I the client? Is Tenzing the guide? Or the opposite. I don't know, but the impression is new.'[33]

The next year, Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary reached the summit of Everest together on 29 May 1953 in a British expedition led by Col. John Hunt. News of the ascent was published in London on the day of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation, and the climbers were hailed as national heroes in Britain, Nepal, India, and New Zealand.[34] The climbers were frequently asked 'who was first' on the summit. Jonathan Pitches' chapter examines the theatrical staging of their partnership in plays about Everest. In Matt Kambic's *The Sherpa and the Beekeeper*, the play starts with the controversy over who stood on the summit first. Tenzing and Hillary engage in Socratic dialogues that hew closely to the historical record and amplify their voices. Pitches notes that Kambic and other playwrights create performances that crystallise multiple historical disputes over Everest for theatrical audiences – ownership of a sacred mountain, contested nationalities of the climbers, divisions between Sherpas and climbers, and contrasts between once untrammelled snows and slopes now littered with debris and human remains.

By the 1970s, flag-waving national expeditions with significant commercial or government sponsorships continued to be prominent, especially for women climbers, something often overlooked in mountaineering histories that emphasise the countercultural and hypermasculine individualism of elite Euro-American men. In 1975, for example, large expeditions from Britain, Japan, and China reached the summit of Everest with sponsorship from Barclays Bank, Japanese media companies, and the Chinese Communist Party. In her chapter, Jenny Hall highlights the importance of women-centred networks of national and transnational scope in leading to successful ascents of Everest by women. As leader of an all-women Japanese team, Junko Tabei became first woman to climb Everest on 16 May 1975, followed eleven days later by Pan Duo from China. On the summit, Tabei posed with Japanese and Nepali flags, and the Chinese team later flew its flag from a tripod. Wanda Rutkiewicz led an all-women Polish expedition that topped two Gasherbrum summits in 1975, which led to an invitation to climb Everest. Agnieszka Irena Kaczmarek's chapter describes Rutkiewicz's driving ambition and challenging experience on a German–French Everest expedition

in 1978, when she became the first Polish mountaineer and third woman to climb Mount Everest.

At the time, Rutkiewicz was criticised for demonstrating the same hypermasculine qualities for which male climbers received kudos. After Doug Scott and Dougal Haston became the 'first Britons' to climb Everest via the Southwest Face on 24 September 1975, Scott told reporters they had no flag because they climbed only for themselves: 'Reaching a summit was purely for you. It's the most selfish thing you can do.'[35] In 1978, Reinhold Messner made the first ascent of Everest without bottled oxygen alongside Peter Habeler, demonstrating a similar bravado. Messner paid a large fee to join the 1978 Austrian Everest expedition. Messner rejected the nationalism of his fellow German speakers in the South Tyrol, a formerly Austrian region that had been part of Italy since the First World War: his handkerchief was his flag, Messner announced, and he climbed for himself, not for any nation.[36]

Nationalism remained prominent in some places that came 'late' to Himalayan mountaineering. In their chapter, Peter Mikša and Matija Zorn describe the 1979 Yugoslav ascent of Everest via the West Ridge Direct as the culmination of Yugoslav Alpinist Himalayan Expeditions since the 1960s and the harbinger of Slovenian alpinism's continuing prominence and success. The flag of Yugoslavia that Nejc Zaplotnik tied to Everest's summit tripod represented multiple nationalisms in one banner. Since the early twentieth century, alpinism had been a symbol of Slovene national identity whether in multiethnic empires, monarchies, or states. The 1979 Yugoslav expedition was organised by the Alpine Association of Slovenia, funded by a range of Yugoslav companies (whose names were given to climbing camps), and the summit team and most of the climbers were Slovenes. A second climbing team to reach the summit included a Slovene, a Croatian, and Ang Phu, the sirdar or leader of the climbing Sherpas. Ang Phu slipped on the descent and fell to his death because he was unable to arrest his slide, having dropped his ice axe.[37] The importance of such snow and ice skills, like being able to self-arrest with an ice axe, had been evident to the Slovenian alpinist Aleš Kunaver, who turned down the leadership of the 1979 Everest expedition to start the first climbing school for Nepalis in Manang.

Unlike mountaineering schools established by India in 1954 or through foreign philanthropy in Nepal in 2003,[38] the Manang Mountaineering School was a hybrid endeavour that combined Kunaver's sense of mission, solidarity funds from Yugoslavia, and the nationalist ambitions of the Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA), founded in 1973. The NMA took over the Manang school

in 1980 with Slovene alpinists and doctors volunteering as instructors for several decades.[39] The alpine associations of two small mountain states whose national identities were tied to their climbing prowess collaborated to create this mountaineering school in a geopolitical context that encouraged international co-operation and integrated development of mountain areas.[40]

Many genders

The mountaineering achievements of women, especially Asian women, are often dismissed or downplayed in popular writing and mountaineering histories of Everest. Julie Rak's ground-breaking *False Summit* and Jenny Hall's work in this volume and elsewhere suggest adventure and mountaineering are often visualised and materialised through masculinised bodies that symbolise heroism, bravery, strength, speed, and risk-taking.[41] Yet as Sharma and Hall demonstrate in their chapters, Sherpa women were on the earliest Everest expeditions in the 1920s and joined climbing teams on other mountains in the 1950s. Hall focuses on the empowered women who have navigated gender inequalities and multiple axes of social difference on Everest since the 1970s. The women-centred approaches of Junko Tabei, Wanda Rutkiewicz, or Arlene Blum elicited misogynist criticism from some men but inspired other women to follow in their footsteps. Many climbers summited Everest in all-women teams from India led by Bachendri Pal in 1984 and from South Korea led by Ji Hyeon-ok in 1993, including Ji's ascent without supplemental oxygen. The deaths of women climbers often led to criticism, whether after the deaths of Alison Chadwick-Onyszkiewicz and Vera Watson on Annapurna in 1978, Wanda Rutkiewicz on Kangchenjunga in 1992, or Alison Hargreaves on K2 in 1995. Pasang Lhamu Sherpa became the first Nepali woman to summit Everest in 1993 and her ascent and death during the descent was a landmark event in Nepal. While Pasang Lhamu was celebrated as a national hero in Nepal and commemorated with national honours like those Tenzing Norgay had received in 1953, her achievement was derided by many Western arbiters of mountaineering status.

Ascents of Everest by women from the global North – such as Rutkiewicz, Lydia Bradey, Rebecca Stephens, or Alison Hargreaves – received much more attention than Asian women in Western media. The all-women expedition to Annapurna led by Arlene Blum used this attention to their advantage, raising USD 80,000 to pay for the ascent by selling T-shirts with the slogan, 'A woman's place is on top'.[42] In mixed-gender expeditions, women were and

are expected to conform to a climber's version of hypermasculinity, which Kaczmarek defines in her chapter as involving the glorification of risk, physical hardships, strength, machismo, and displays of dominance. The hostility, tension, and masculine selfishness that Rutkiewicz experienced from male teammates on Everest made it difficult for her to collaborate with Marianne Walter, who climbed with her husband on the same expedition. For Kaczmarek, Wanda Rutkiewicz's behaviours on the expedition embodied combinations of femininity and masculinity consistent with a hybrid identity, exemplifying many genders, not just one.

During the first decades of the twenty-first century, women climbers from the global South still rarely receive the recognition or rewards enjoyed by their counterparts in the global North, though signs of change are emerging in the 2020s. Lhakpa Sherpa first climbed Everest in 2000 and completed her tenth ascent in 2022. Lhakpa challenges gendered stereotypes of Nepali women as a ten-time summiteer, divorced single mother, abuse survivor, and worker at low-status jobs in the US. After her tenth ascent, Lhakpa has started a guiding business, received some sponsorship, and is the subject of a Netflix documentary, *Mountain Queen*.[43] A younger generation of Nepali women climbers also harness social media and online marketing, including Shailee Basnet, who organised all-women ascents and climbing projects that seek to empower women and girls. On Instagram, Dawa Yangzum Sherpa, the first Nepali (and Asian) woman to be certified as an international mountain guide, as well as the Pakistani mountaineer Naila Kiani, have garnered thousands of followers.[44] These media practices have the potential, write Jenny Hall and Martin Hall, to 'decolonise the outdoors, by foregrounding the visibility of people excluded from the narrative in tandem with realigning the histories of mountains themselves'.[45]

Women writers, editors, and translators have been at the forefront of recentring marginalised figures on Everest in response to histories that exoticised or feminised women and men in mountaineering. Walt Unsworth's well-regarded *Everest* (1981 and later editions) viewed ascents by women as stunts and called on climbers to approach the mountain with a more sporting ethos, 'less rape and more seduction'.[46] Audrey Salkeld's research in the archives of the British Everest expeditions laid the foundation for Unsworth's *Everest*, and she became a leading Everest historian in her own right. Anna Saroldi's chapter focuses on the contributions of Salkeld and Julie Summers in rewriting the history of Mallory and Irvine and asks why we do not 'see' and value women writing histories of mountaineering when they are there in plain sight. Salkeld's work as a mountaineering researcher, journalist, and translator led to invitations to

coauthor *The Mystery of Mallory and Irvine* and to serve as 'expedition historian' for a search party in 1986. After Mallory's body was rediscovered in 1999, Salkeld wrote several histories of Everest and encouraged Julie Summers, Irvine's great-niece, to write her great-uncle's biography using family papers found in an attic trunk. Unsworth, Salkeld, and others had previously documented Lytton Strachey's adoration of Mallory's male beauty as well as Mallory's romances and nude portraits in the Bloomsbury circle that led to speculation that Mallory chose Irvine as the result of an infatuation.[47] Even non-titillating accounts of Mallory and Irvine's partnership portrayed Irvine as a passive and feminised figure, an object to be chosen, without agency of his own.[48]

Letters in the family archives enabled Summers to document Sandy Irvine's love affair with his best friend's stepmother, who was near his own age, at the time of the Everest expedition. Summers' rediscovery of Irvine's hypermasculinity made it possible to see him as an embodied person with desires of his own. Summers observed that Irvine looked at Mallory as a role model and actively sought to convince decision-makers including Mallory to put him in a summit team. Saroldi notes that highlighting Irvine's agency was a critical move for women historians to gain credibility within the mountaineering community, and she recommends multivocal approaches to include the multiple voices and standpoints of Sherpas, women, and non-Western climbers.

Many tourists

After Dick Bass climbed Mount Everest in 1985 to complete ascents of the 'seven summits' – the highest peaks on seven continents – professional mountain guides actively extended their services for clients from peaks like Mount Rainier and Mont Blanc to the highest mountain in the world. On Everest, a 'race among mountain guides to put a paying client on the summit and bring them down safely' culminated with ascents of Everest by clients of two guiding companies in 1992.[49] Everest guiding services expanded rapidly in the 1990s with operators touting adventure packages catering for different tourist desires, from Base Camp to the summit.[50] Everest Base Camp has comforts of home that rely on extended supply chains and networks of labour bearing a strong resonance to the early Everest expeditions discussed by Sarah Pickman and Jayeeta Sharma. The Base Camp facilities that irked Jon Krakauer in 1996 seem rustic in comparison with the luxurious amenities available in the 2020s to 'A-listers' paying the highest fees, described in their chapter by Pradeep Bashyal and Ankit Babu Adhikari. Providing pleasurable Himalayan experiences for

large numbers of client-members is one of the central purposes of the mega-expeditions on Everest that Young Hoon Oh calls 'expedition conglomerate'. Ian Bellows also highlights the proliferation and professionalisation of Nepali expedition operators and asks whether the increased role of Nepali firms has altered structural inequities in the Everest industry.

Everest ascents were transformed in the twenty-first century. In his chapter, Ian Bellows characterises a series of events in the 2010s – from the 'Everest brawl' of 2013, the Icefall avalanche in 2014, and the earthquake in 2015 to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21 – as constituting a critical juncture in Everest's history. The conflicts and cancellations of these years suggest continuities with a century-long struggle for control, recognition, and better working conditions on Everest. High-quality training programmes at mountaineering schools improved climbing skills, deepened cultural and language proficiencies, and broadened opportunities for employment on mountaineering expeditions for Nepalis. Many Nepalis have received international certification as guides and now lead ascents of peaks around the world as well as in Nepal. The commercial guiding companies from North America, Europe, and New Zealand that dominated the Everest industry from the 1990s to 2010s are being displaced by Nepali-owned expedition operators in the 2020s.

Young Hoon Oh's chapter offers an insider's perspective on the industrial practices of Everest expedition conglomerates. The organisation of work and rates of pay for the role of climbing Sherpa (once simply called 'Sherpa') are shaped by neoliberalism, neocolonialism, ethnic politics, and weak regulation of mega-expeditions in Nepal. Colonial legacies include 'equipment fees' and rates of pay that incentivise carrying multiple loads between camps, practices established by British expeditions in the 1920s that have continued for a century. Summiting Everest provides the biggest bump in pay, yet reaching the summit depends mostly on a client's fitness rather than the climbing Sherpa's ability. Clients and loads to carry are assigned through patronage networks based on ethnicity, belonging, and social ties to the team guide (formerly sirdar, another colonial legacy role), who in turn retains or embezzles a portion of their pay as compensation for this patronage. Oh estimates that a climbing Sherpa who reaches the summit earns on average about USD 4,000 for three months on Everest and Bashyal and Adhikari estimate an average of USD 5,000 from guiding for a year – in comparison to an average per capita income of a little more than USD 1,000 in Nepal. A small number of Nepali guiding services pay their best-known and often internationally certified Nepali guides much higher rates that match the earnings of international guides.

A diverse group of commercial outfitters offer expedition packages for different consumers. With Everest ascents priced from less than USD 30,000, with special discounts, to more than USD 200,000, customers at the eye-watering top end of this range enjoy an array of perks – appetising gourmet meals provided by expedition chefs, advanced weather forecasts, almost unlimited access to supplemental oxygen, and remote support teams acting as mission control. At the lowest price points, clients have little support and must look after themselves. Some express concern that such arrangements have lessened social ties on the mountain, though similar complaints have been made since the 1990s. Margret Grebowicz viewed the 2019 climbing season as 'a profound breakdown of how most people imagine the social fabric, as climbers ignored or left behind climbers who were struggling, in an every-person-for-themselves focus on summiting'.[51]

The Nepali-owned guiding services that became prominent after the conflicts and natural disasters of the 2010s also emerged out of personal networks over a longer period. Bashyal and Adhikari note that Konjo Chumbi became the main provider of local support for international Everest expeditions in the 1950s and 1960s, and his son, Ang Tshering, founded Asian Trekking in the 1980s. Asian Trekking became the leading Nepali-owned mountaineering company competing with the largest international guiding firms on Everest in the 1990s. Moreover, several of Ang Tshering's protégés have founded their own firms including Seven Summits Treks and Tag Nepal, among others. In the 2010s, Sherpas have leadership roles in climbing agencies as well as the lucrative but less dangerous trekking industry. Many porters – who were formerly ethnic Sherpas – are increasingly from Tamang and Rai ethnic groups from nearby valleys or districts or other parts of Nepal. As the number of Everest permits and ascents has reached record levels, a deadly 'numbers game' has ensued. Everest permits raise millions of dollars in foreign currency for the government of Nepal, which provides a financial incentive not to limit the number of permits despite increasing risks of death or injury due to overcrowding on the mountain.

Visiting climbers and tourists as well as Indigenous guides and porters share mobile media and the digital infrastructure on Everest that reaches well beyond the region. In her chapter, Jolynna Sinanan notes the mediatisation of Everest throughout its history as a mountaineering destination and draws our attention to the emergence of new mobile livelihoods in the twenty-first century. Legacy climbing media in books, magazines, and films – whose content is often problematically dominated by visual and textual records of male achievement – compete with social media platforms that appear to have a

democratising effect. Instagram, for example, enables climbers as well as porters to curate visual records and 'mini-memoirs' that communicate instantaneously with followers. These platforms enhance the professional credentials of local guides and porters. The 'selfie' and other digital practices on Everest or other Himalayan landmarks have become essential to future employment for porters. Sinanan shows that controlled curatorship of images elides potentially troublesome critical perspectives of the high-altitude mountain tourism industry, which find their voice in other quarters.

Photographs of climbers stuck in long lines on Everest have made an impression around the world. Young Hoon Oh was stuck in one of these lines on the Lhotse Face in a photograph that went viral in 2012. Yet the photograph could not convey, Oh notes, the miscommunication, political squabbling, and institutional failures that caused this dangerous traffic jam. Another widely shared photograph from 2019, showing a 'conga line' of hundreds of climbers queuing on the summit ridge, was taken by Nepali-born mountaineer Nirmal Purja. Hundreds reached the summit on that day and the photograph was circulated as evidence of the mountain's surging appeal, under-regulation, and limited carrying capacity.[52] Rival guiding companies accused Purja of depicting the queue as an everyday event rather than an exceptional occurrence due to a narrow window of fine weather.[53] Purja went on to complete ascents of the fourteen highest peaks in record time, recorded in a Netflix film, and launched companies selling guiding services and merchandise. Viral photographs and widely screened documentary films of the conflicts in the 2010s, though, have raised awareness of crowded conditions and prompted questions about sustainability.

Nonetheless, as Sinanan and other contributors suggest, visual images tend to focus attention on certain kinds of technical 'solutions' – such as increasing fees, collecting garbage, posting liaison officers, or requiring prior experience – and divert attention away from broader structural contexts, such as the precarity of Nepali livelihoods highlighted by Oh or the polarised and politicised society of Nepal underscored by Bashyal and Adhikari. Questions remain about the economic and environmental sustainability of the whole Everest industry and the future viability of climbing Everest in a period of rapidly accelerating climate change.

Many climates

The 2010s witnessed climate instability on Everest and growing concern about threats posed by rising temperatures to the mountain's cryosphere and

surrounding communities.[54] Himalayan temperatures are rising faster than global averages, which causes glaciers to retreat and ice that took millennia to accumulate disappears in decades. Visitors to the mountain are struck by the dissonance between the vision of Everest fashioned by the early explorers as an unspoiled snow-capped summit to a present-day reality of thinning ice and exposed rock. Yvonne Reddick draws a contrast between the Everest as first glimpsed by Mallory in 1921, 'a prodigious white fang excrescent from the jaw of the world', and her view of Everest a century later whilst on a trek to Base Camp, where she finds a sombre and stolid peak, 'stark and dark and bare'. We are, as she says, 'balanced on the brink of a tipping point'.

Mountain residents make similar observations. Villagers in Khumbu and surrounding districts, for example, discuss winters getting shorter and warmer and the surrounding mountains getting darker.[55] Yet climate change narratives often focus on techno-managerial solutions to problems such as risks of glacial lake outburst floods. The contribution of local knowledges and personal experiences in climate change assessment and the legitimacy of more participatory and locally rooted management regimes are too often sidelined.[56] Other contexts such as the sacredness of the area, land practices, and restrictions on living within national parks also deserve attention.[57] Yet the affective dimensions of relations with mountains and glaciers across the Himalayas can still be heard. Consider Dolma, an elderly Ladakhi woman, who blames people who have become careless and unmindful rather than 'climate change' for disappearing snows: 'To care for the glacier, you have to see the glacier, you have to know the glacier, like you know a friend.'[58] Indigenous ways of understanding sentient and agentic landscapes offer other ways of understanding the landscapes and cryosphere of the Greater Himalaya region, other worlds focused on the critical interdependencies between human and nonhuman worlds.[59]

Voices concerned about climate justice have raised questions about the institutional power of Western science in monitoring Himalayan climate change. Advances in forecasting speak to important continuities on Everest in the labour of scientific mapping and monitoring that attempt to make the mountain knowable.[60] Climate assessments predict further warming in the Himalaya which may lead to more unpredictable weather, shifting monsoon patterns, shorter climbing windows, and narrower margins for climbers in the 'death zone'. A scientific study on Everest's South Col in 2022 found ice that had taken 2,000 years to accumulate disappeared in 25 years.[61] Commentators imagine future Everests transformed by instability of the regional cryosphere and threats to Himalayan 'water towers', the vast reservoirs of ice that maintain the flow of

rivers in South Asia. Receding snowpack and retreating glaciers also confront people with more macabre consequences of climate change. Would-be Everest summiteers must also contend with a ghoulish 'mortuary landscape' as they encounter the dead, given up by the mountain's thinning ice.[62]

The Khumbu Pasang Lhamu Rural Municipality – the local authority that oversees rules and regulations for Base Camp – periodically offers proposals to stem flows of waste into their communities. Bashyal and Adhikari note that abandoned tents high on the mountain are only the most visible examples of consumer and human waste on the mountain. In frozen conditions, some materials, including human waste, will never decompose until warming temperatures result in reemergence from the ice. Waste removal has been limited mostly to lower camps. More stringent regulations have been issued though waste streams exceed existing capacity to deal with them. Young Hoon Oh draws attention to the 'rationalised absurdity' evident in clean-up campaigns which pay more to bring trash down than to carry loads up the mountain. Oh suggests that the 'media fantasy' of Everest as a sewer of human debris also frames clean-up campaigns as acts of willpower and heroism, so much so that clean-ups can become semi-colonial interventions. Perversely, bounties to bring back garbage expose high-altitude workers to additional objective risks in the Khumbu Icefall. These risks are not borne to the same degree by mountaineering clients who may acknowledge principles of 'leave no trace' but also take more than photographs and leave piles of equipment and large carbon footprints.

Many stories

Thirty-five years after climbing Mount Everest without bottled oxygen with Peter Habeler in 1978, Reinhold Messner argued that Everest in the 2010s had 'nothing to do with classic alpinism. People don't climb Hillary's Everest or my Everest. They climb another mountain, even if it is geologically the same.'[63] For Messner, Everest represented many mountains and one lost world, a world of 'classic alpinism' that began at Base Camp where tourism ended. Yet even the mountain of 'Hillary' (note the singular) or 'my Everest' (note the possessive) was never an unpeopled and uniform space outside of time and history. To imagine the mountain as a vacancy and the solitary male climber as an explorer (not a tourist) are enduring fantasies that authorised the naming of Everest in the 1850s and animated visions of 'classic alpinism' even longer.[64] For more than a century, Everest climbers have relied on existing infrastructures – networks

of people and nonhuman animals, gear and material culture – which were created to provide logistical support for militaries or creature comforts for 'globe-trotting' tourists including mountaineers. It does not diminish the accomplishments of Hillary and Tenzing, Messner and Habeler, or later climbers, to point out that elite climbers remain dependent on the Everest industry even when they climb elsewhere in the Himalayas. As Young Hoon Oh observes, the predominant framing of an Everest ascent as 'man versus mountain' casts into shadow anything that happens before setting foot on the mountain (and much after that point as well), obscuring the contributions of others, and clouding the view of many worlds and other Everests.

Theatrical performances try to bring these Everests out of the shadows.[65] Jonathan Pitches' chapter on the staging of multi-sensorial plays about Everest in the 2010s and 2020s finds that Everest-as-conquest and man-versus-mountain narratives have fractured and are being replaced by a layered complexity. The partnership of Hillary and Tenzing and pairings of solipsistic tourist-climbers and business-savvy Nepali guides are staged not as documentaries but as dialogues of historical context and the theatrical imagination. *On Everest* by Lone Twin, the performance duo, mocks mountaineering masculinity in a play that can end either on the summit or by not making it to the top at all.

Exhibitions also provide opportunities to spotlight other Everests through curatorial or artistic works. Felix Driver's chapter describes the visceral impact of exhibits with enlarged, life-sized images of Indigenous intermediaries – such as a youthful Tenzing Norgay or victims of the 1922 Everest avalanche – for the 'hidden histories' of exploration at the Royal Geographical Society. Exhibition design, images, and documents combine to name the Everest 'coolies' of 1922 and tell new stories that restore something like dignity and agency to these porters. The collaboration of artists and scholars is also evident in 'Scaling the Heights', an exhibition of archival materials, artefacts, and 'action man' figures which are staged in poses to reenact British ascents in the Himalayas.[66] The action-man figures toured the UK staging 'ascents' in libraries, archives, and climbing or leisure centres. The Everest centenary in 2024 occasioned a wide range of collaborations – including this book and related exhibitions – bringing together artists, scholars, climbers, mountain festivals, and heritage institutions to reinterpret and tell new Everest stories.[67]

Creative works in poetry, mixed genres, or narratives with multiple viewpoints also highlight Everest's many worlds. 'Chomolongma' is a 'bridge between worlds', writes anthropologist Sienna Craig in sonnets on Himalayan sacred geography.[68] Faye Latham's erasure poetry blots out a

text by F.S. Smythe to reveal a poem telling a story from the perspective of an avalanche victim trapped under the snow. White correction fluid represents the avalanche but also how the 'history of mountaineering tends to be written about, erasing landscapes by transforming them into moral testing grounds for the human soul'.[69] Or consider 'Three Springs', Jemima Diki Sherpa's moving response to the deaths of family or friends in three spring seasons including the 2014 Icefall avalanche. Deaths created 'gaps, like missing teeth' in the lines of women and men in the village, gaps slowly filled by adolescents who moved 'closer to the fire to fill the spaces of the ones that are missing'.[70] Helen Mort's poems about women mountaineers engage in dialogue with Victorian women climbers, Alison Hargreaves, and Lene Gammelgaard, as well as Jemima Diki Sherpa. In the poem 'How much can you carry?', a porter shoulders oxygen tanks, hopes, and dreams, and asks 'when do I stop?' In one of the Everest poems, Mort writes from the point of view of oxygen itself, held in a bottle and breathed through a mask.[71]

Other Everests provides multiple perspectives on the many worlds of this mountain. Footprints in the snow might tell many different stories. Clearly, people following the footsteps of Mallory and Irvine on Everest in the 2020s do not have the same experience as their predecessors a century ago. Just as clearly, many people on Everest at any time in its history do not have the same experience as their own contemporaries. How should these stories be told? As Pasang Yangjee Sherpa has remarked, 'The story should be about the existence of multiple stories and about bringing them to light …. It should involve shifting our focus from one-way-of-being to recognizing the multiple-ways-of-being.'[72] The contributors to this book offer steps in this direction by reinterpreting existing archives as well as breaking new ground. The many worlds of *Other Everests* begin with Chomolungma.

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72 Quoted in Katie Ives, 'Sharp end: between the lines', *Alpinist*, 51 (Autumn 2015), 11–12, https://web.archive.org/web/20240217210337/https://alpinist.com/departments/sharp-end/