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"They are taking our land": a comparative perspective on indigeneity and alterity in Meghalaya and the Chittagong Hill Tracts

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The border region of Bangladesh, India, and Burma has been the scene of dozens of tribal autonomy conflicts since the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 (Baruah 2007). These conflicts have unsettled the whole region, impacted international relations, threatened national stability, and caused a deep sense of insecurity among the locals. The majority of these conflicts pivot on 'sons-of-the-soil' claims, invoking notions of autochthony to legitimize occupational rights to lands and regional autonomy (Cf. Vandekerckhove 2009). Most conflicts link up to the globalized discourse on indigenous rights, which has been particularly powerful since 1993 (the United Nations' 'Year for Indigenous Peoples').

Our paper addresses the notions of citizenship, indigeneity and alterity (otherness) at work in Meghalaya and the Chittagong Hill Tracts from a comparative perspective. Although a number of similar issues are at stake, the situations in the two regions differ, partly because of different political contexts which frame these discourses. British colonial policies had been geared towards the isolation of the hills from the plains in order to secure the available resources for the colonial state (Van Schendel 1992). Independent India continued such particularistic policies, granting a special position to the so-called tribal Northeast Indian hill states (Vandekerckhove 2009, 53). However, the subsequent governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh (since 1971) moved towards inclusion of the tribal territories. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts this attempt of national inclusion resulted in a vicious war between indigenous insurgents and the state. The Peace Accord of 1997 has not solved the local problems and conflicts, which are mainly related to 'land-grabbing' by Bengali settlers.

The day-to-day realities in Bangladesh and India show recurring processes of dispossession and dislocation in favor of the state, rich landowners, large (transnational) corporations, etc. Such processes have not been limited to minorities. Moreover, they are taking place under very different circumstances, taking into account that India's federal system has resulted in an alteration of minority-majority relations in Meghalaya, whereas self-determination of the indigenous population in the Chittagong Hill Tracts has been denied until today. We argue that the 'sons-of-the-soil' frame is underpinned by a dichotomous imagination of indigenous people as victims and outsiders/settlers as perpetrators and that it conceals rather than uncovers the complexity of the contemporary situation. Causes for the enduring tensions are the heavy militarization (in the CHT), forced evictions from land, immigration and land-grabbing, inter- and intra ethnic conflicts, the involvement of the army and/or of the national state, unresolved land issues, deforestation and erosion, and increasing conflicts over natural resources.

Considering the relative weakness of the state in both contexts, the feeble (local) governments, and the presence of a strong army and/or insurgent groups, it seems likely that tensions will increase. Finding solutions to these problems requires a thorough analysis of minority-majority-relations and politics of indigeneity at, and between the different administrative levels.

Performing identity: the transformation of a Tangsa festival in Assam, north-east India
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Tangsa is an umbrella term for a collection of small ethnic groups (related to the Naga) who have migrated to India from Myanmar probably within the last couple of centuries and have settled in the north-east Indian states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. In the last few decades, rapid changes have occurred to their lifestyles and to their traditional practices as a result of their migration down from the hills to the plains and their acceptance of the 'modern' way of life in the Indian state.

Furthermore, conversion of most of the Tangsa population to Christianity has implied giving up many of their old cultural practices. The newly converted Christian Tangsa had initially believed that religion could suffice as culture, but many have understood now that it cannot help them secure their ethnic identity. On the other hand, the few non-Christian Tangsa still left have also realised that putting religious divide before ethnic unity could lead to their annihilation. Therefore, there have been intense efforts in recent years, on the part of both groups, to come together to jointly celebrate a 'traditional' festival, in an attempt to create a common pan-Tangsa identity.

In this paper I wish to take a closer look at the Wihu-kuh festival organised jointly by all the Tangsa living in Assam in 2010 in the light of smaller festivals organised by the non-Christian Tangsa in earlier years, to observe the compromises that have been made from both sides in order to bring the Christian Tangsa back into the fold. The exercise of finding common shared ground has led to identity being 'performed'. The factors determining the final form of the festival and the impact this representation has on the Tangsa self-image and their projected identity will also be discussed. In doing so, I hope to illustrate that the new Tangsa identity has been consciously fashioned in a form which not only enables internal consolidation but which also bolsters the social and political position of the Tangsa in the wider world around them. Their principal aim is to project a new multi-faceted identity which draws both from their traditional ethnic past and from their modern multi-religious present.

After identity: hydropower and the politics of anxiety in the Eastern Himalayas

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Historically identity politics and has been rather well-aligned with 'developmentalism' in Northeast India. But the potential hydropower boom in the region and the construction of the hydropower infrastructure currently underway have put that political paradigm under strain. Arunachal Pradesh expects to make windfall gains from hydropower. But there is growing anxiety about the downstream impact of hydel projects in the plains of Assam. In a region where devastating earthquakes are part of the public memory and frequent floods part of the lived experience of the majority, fundamental ambivalences about the attendant risks and the distribution of risks have shaken the faith in development. Suddenly, solidarity from anxiety has become a potent social force.

Contested Imaginations of Darjeeling – Gorkhaland as an "alternative Geography"

Miriam Bishokarma, University of Zürich

Since its independence the Indian nation state has been in a process of reorganizing its internal administrative boundaries. This so-called state-reorganization process is often described as an expression of the inherent tensions between a pan-Indian ideal on the one hand, and demands of ethnic and regional groups for more autonomy, on the other. Research on these ethno-regional movements has so far mainly focused on the role of ethnicity, identity, and developmental demands within these movements. Yet, space and territorial aspects and demands or these movements were neglected. By viewing these ethno-regional movements basically as expressions of contestations about and in space, I aim to identify the conflicting imaginations of borders, boundaries and affiliations of the claimed territories, including contested ideas about the functions that these areas attain for different groups and actors. These imaginations are part of an attempt to establish an alternative geography of the claimed territory.

Such a contested space is the region of Darjeeling and its adjoining areas of Dooars and Terai in northern West Bengal, where the so called "Gorkhas" are struggling for a separate state of "Gorkhaland". The struggle over territory does thereby also reflect a struggle over political spaces of participation, and over spaces of identity and re-cognition as Indian citizens. An important aspect of these contested spaces are geographical imaginations, referring to normative constructions, inventions and representations of geographical space beyond a physical territory.

In my presentation I want to elucidate how various actors construct these imaginative geographies of Darjeeling, Dooars, and Terai in order to legitimize their claims on the territory. These imaginations can be strategic, and are often deeply rooted in selective accounts of Darjeeling's history, present, and future. The antagonists include i.e. various parties demanding

Gorkhaland, also nationalist outfits in Nepal, claiming Darjeeling as part of Greater Nepal, Adivasis, claiming 6th schedule status for the region, and the state. Their imaginations are not only used as frames to legitimize demands, and to mobilize political support, but also create a kind of Utopia, an invented space that is yet to become reality.

This space-related perspective focusing on geographical imaginations enhances the understanding of ethno-regionalism in India.

Climate, Commerce and Bureaucracy: Founding Colonial Rule in Northern East Bengal
Gunnel Cederlöf, Uppsala University

In the public debates for most of the last century, North East India remained a region at the far end of the state, cut off from the 'mainland' and the larger markets, and haunted by violence. It carried legacies of colonial governance, which had been unable to subdue and domesticate people and landscape within the larger polity.

This secluded position of the region has a comparatively short history. The interest in the mineral wealth of the hills, and of connecting Bengal (and India) with the large markets in China was a major driving force behind the British East India Company's advance eastwards. Commercial prosperity and private returns pushed forward Company initiatives to establish de facto control of the territories argued to be included in the diwani grant of 1765, located in northern east Bengal. They sought to reopen, not close the commercial overland routes to the east.

The paper focuses on conflicts involved in establishing colonial governance and will elaborate on three themes and their interrelatedness.

Firstly, the larger region's climate and natural disasters sent shock waves into the EIC in the late 18th century. Survey reports and weather observations using new scientific methods reflected a landscape out of human control.

Secondly, the right to govern territory landed the EIC in a whole new situation. As an early-modern, global mercantile corporation, the Company strove to establish monopolies within the skills, grants and agreements they held. Governing a monopoly of territory in Bengal required the integration of the governor in socioeconomic and religious hierarchies – hierarchies in which the EIC had no place.

Thirdly, revenue settlements and military force served the purpose of keeping bureaucratic control of land and people. However, the revenue settlements formed into a complete mismatch between climate and administration. Revenue administration took half a century to restructure.

When the neighbouring autonomous polities were drawn into dependent relations to the EIC in the 1820s and 30s, forms and political settlements were significantly different. Already from the

earliest subjugation of territories and people, colonial rule on the EIC's 'North Eastern Frontier' formed into dual polities under one government.

Conversion and quest for indigenous religious identity: emerging religious terrain in Arunachal

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Arunachal Pradesh, the erstwhile NEFA, is the homeland of large number of tribes with distinctive identities who spread over sixteen districts. This state is sharing boundaries with Tibet, China, Burma and known for its cultural diversity reflected by variegated tribes though some elements of commonalities can be traced in latent or manifested aspects of their culture. In spite of the presence of Buddhist tribes, majority of the tribes subscribed to the indigenous faiths, which again reflect tremendous heterogeneity evident in the nature of deities, spirits, religious specialists, festivities and oral tradition but undoubtedly defined their tribal identity. However, with in last three decades gradually Christianity emerged as one of the dominant forms of faith among majority of the non-Buddhist tribes of this state, like Adi, Nyishi, Apatani ,Galo,Tagin,Wancho ,Nokte,Tangsa, Sulung etc. In order to counter such alien faiths and practices, a new reformist movements emerged which are gradually gaining ground among some of the tribes to protect and preserve their indigenous religious beliefs and identities. Such reformist movements generated new taxonomies to contextualize tribal faiths such as, Donipoloism, Intyaism, Rangfraism etc. And this has culminated a process of institutionalization tribal religion by imagined images of Gods and Goddess, constructing temples, textualising religious chants or oral traditions under the patronage of various organisations. The present paper is an attempt to understand this very important phase of transition, which has surfaced a contested domain in reation to certain fundamental issues related to Indignity, identity and conversion. Such a discourse may help us to relocate the emerging realities of Indian's bordering state that is otherwise much in international focus for occasional Chinese claims over some of its territories.

The power of the past: constructing ethno-national identity through 'village republics' in Nagaland, North East India

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Ethno-nationalistic demand for self determination by Nagas of north-east India is situated within a discourse of 'ethnic uniqueness' based on village institution and its historic conception as independent, self sufficient, culturally homogeneous and egalitarian. The claim for an exclusive Naga nation builds its intellectual base on 'cultural difference' with the mainstream Indian identity, which is seen as internally colonizing and territoralizing Naga people's political aspiration. The image of the 'ideal village' feeds into such representation. In this paper I look at

the different stands of narrative that romance the Naga past and link it to the present for a unique homeland status based on village self dependence and autonomy. By drawing on colonial ethnographic accounts and peoples every day talk and reflection of the past during fieldwork, I will demonstrate that conceptualization of ideal villages are interwoven by exchanges, contacts and migration stories that challenge the hiatus of a ideal, detached, self sufficient and independent village. The Naga tradition of head hunting and feuds not only produced isolation and fortification of village but also compelled villages to acknowledge their neighbors by throwing feast of merit, and other cultural exchanges to end long lasting blood feuds. In the post Independence period the physical isolation of villages was bridged through improved communication, heightened state intervention (developmental and counter insurgency operation), political mediation and peoples growing mobility to town and district headquarters. Ethnographic details generated from my study among Yimchunger Naga villages reflect how peoples life are intrinsically Incorporated in the larger political and social life of the nation state through electoral politics, transnational developmental programmes and the enlightened civil society hoping to build peace through reconciliation with warring factions. Ethnic identification based on ideal village types thus remains a conflictual space for articulating identity that is enmeshed with the wider political framework of nation state. The paper will demonstrate how the village community has been conceptualized in anthropological writings and has come to occupy a strategic place in articulating Naga nationalism and ethnic identification.

"Divide Assam fifty-fifty". From movements to accords and beyond: the critical role of student organisations in the formation and performance of identity in Assam
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The paper seeks to posit that student organizations have provided crucial platforms for the performing and performance of different identities in Assam at various levels, from the inceptions and articulation of identities from within the 'movements' to acknowledgement or 'deliverance' of it in the form of accords /negotiations as well as their further 'circulation' beyond these arena. The unfolding of this process has largely shaped the discourse(s) of identity politics in the state. Post Assam movement (1979-85), student groups claiming to represent the different ethnic group in Assam had taken the initiative to forge an intimate bond between the concepts of ethnicity, identity and group rights largely reacting to the hegemonic putative univerasaliation of the Assamese identity preached and practiced by dominant student organization All Assam Students Union (AASU). In the recent times, the All Bodo Students Union's (ABSU) rhetoric of 'divide Assam fifty-fifty' has captured the imagination of many, debates have flared up on the question of Assam's territorial integrity viz a viz the question of 'homeland' and 'identity'. In a similar vein, ethnic minority student groups like the Karbis, Dimasas, Mishings among others have also rallied behind ideas of territoriality and indigenity.

The resultant conflation of ethnic-nationalist discourses has often led to demands for some measures of autonomy and at times even secession from Assam.

However, as my fieldwork with different student organisations in different areas of the state shows there co-exists a politics of solidarity with a politics of difference here due to a sharpening of the existing class-relations of mutual dependence between different ethnic groups and communities in recent years and student politics have been one of the most powerful and early receptor of these changes. Issues like the threat of displacement due to plans of big dam construction, threat of massive influx of illegal foreign migrants into the state, floods and erosions have moved many a student groups with seemingly diverse agendas into common platforms of struggle and thus broadening the ambit of the identity discourse in Assam from the path of an essentialist- exclusivist, unipolar one to one open to multiple-interpretations and implications. The relationship between AASU and the other ethnic minority student groups like ABSU, All Assam Mishing Students Union (TMPK), Karbi Students Union (KSA) is one of changing strategies and shifting narratives that throw crucial light on the observation that identities are not fixed. They are constantly being defined, redefined, reworked and reconstituted through interactions and deliberations enacted at all levels of states and societies. Identities are simultaneously being reproduced and resisted though processes that challenge as well as reappropriate meanings.

In this sense one has to critically engage with and study the formation of alliances and strategies as well as the nature of conflict and co-operation between the various student organisations in the state to understand whether Assam will move towards a multiple, nonessensialist politics of identity or that of closed circuits of ethnic consciousness.

Performing the Garo nation?
Erik de Maaker

Over the past decades Garo Wangala dance performances have increasingly gained public prominence. Performances have been staged at prime national events, such as the 2010 opening of the Commonwealth Games, or the 2008 Republic Day parade. In the Northeastern state of Meghalaya, home to the majority of the Garo, Wangala dancing is more or less routinely staged as a part of state level celebrations. In addition, it also plays an increasingly important role in the statements made by political groups, which call for greater assertion of the Garo community. Wangala dancing has come to serve as an iconic representation of that community, but one that can apparently cater to distinct and in some respects contradictory agendas. Wangala used to be (and still is) the most important post-harvest festival of a major section of the Garo, although it seems likely that it has never been of great significance among other sections of the Garo. How did it become iconic for the Garo community as a whole? How does the public visibility that it has gained over the last couple of decades connect to the religious performances that it is inspired on? And how do understandings of Wangala dancing

adopted into distinct regional and national discourses contribute to the imagination of a Garo nation?

Colliding concepts: democracy and freedom in the history of the Naga Hills
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By focusing on the conceptions of democracy and freedom in the modern history of the Naga Hills it is tried to contribute to the better understanding of these very concepts. In our world today both concepts form a normative unit. It is widely agreed that we should have democracy everywhere and also that once we have democracy then we also have freedom. Yet it is also clear that despite their global uniform, terminological omnipresence their respective form, in set-up and execution, varies considerably. These variations are often explained with local, that is historical, peculiarities. This means that what we, in our transnational and globalized world, describe everywhere as democracy and freedom is really democracy and freedom but only with local variations.

Yet, sometimes this variation can be so strong that the application of the terms becomes meaningless or even problematic. Problematic in that sense that they, in the disguise of universal democracy and freedom, are used as legitimizing tools to destroy for good, ways of life that may have held otherwise the potential for other possible, local forms of freedoms that may be truer to those who hold them. Not only the case of the Naga Hills suggests this. And not only the case of the Naga Hills suggests that the term democracy may even have been used as an instrument of imperial rule and legitimized war against the unwilling portraying them as parochial enemies of universal freedom.

So we may conclude that democracy has been the enemy of freedom, at least for some. Further, that universal freedom in the form of democracy as a formidable legitimizing tool for the powerful had to defame other forms of rule that may have held the potential for other forms of freedom. So by focusing on the modern history of the Naga Hills we try to sketch more clearly the forms of rule and being behind the deluding concepts. We will also make an effort to identify factors preventing real democracy and freedom.

'Civilised' or 'backward': the creation of the scheduled tribe category 'Memba' and its effects on local identities in Arunachal Pradesh, India
Kerstin Grothmann, Humboldt University, Berlin

This paper discusses the creation of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category 'Memba' by the Indian administration and how for the Memba settling in the Menchukha Valley (West Siang District Arunachal Pradesh) this category has led to the development of a new tribal group identity.

Different ethnic groups of the Buddhist population settling south of the Indian-Chinese border (McMahon Line) in the districts West Siang and Upper Siang of central Arunachal Pradesh have

been classified by the Indian administration as ST 'Memba.' The source of this classification is the uncritical use of the generic Tibetan term 'Mönpa' or its phonetic variant 'Memba' by early explorers serving the British Administration to report about Tibetan-speaking Buddhist groups they had come in contact with. Tibetan elites applied this name - associated with a notion of being non-Buddhist or less civilised - to different groups living on the south-eastern slopes of the Himalaya. Later this highly pejorative term was adopted by the Indian administration to subsume these communities and classify them as ST 'Memba' in order to incorporate them into the modern Indian state.

I argue that the Scheduled Tribe Category 'Memba' is an artificial creation that the groups labeled as Memba cannot identify with and therefore has been rejected among them. Reasons for this are that this externally generated classification has paid little attention to the self-perception and self-presentation of these different groups and further subsumes them under a pejorative term that is perceived as degradation and therefore has led to subtle anti-government resentments.

Taking allegedly shared cultural features without any further sufficient field studies and critical and comparative analysis of the available data, anthropological descriptions or encyclopaedia entries published in India have produced generalising and incorrect assertions about the Memba, which has led to much confusion and mistaken identities and needs to be reassessed.

Based upon their local tradition of origin, migration and language the paper will first introduce the different Buddhist societies in Menchukha and Tuting, specifically the Memba of Menchukha. A brief account of the historical events connected with the arrival of the Indian administration in Menchukha Valley in the early 1950s will illustrate the creation of the ST category 'Memba'. By comparing assertions the Memba make about their identity with the meaning and connotation the term Mönpa carries, the paper will demonstrate that an uncritical use of this generic term as such and as a name for a ST category is problematic and can evoke rejection and resentments.

The paper draws on ethnographic material collected among the Memba of Menchukha (West Siang District) and the Memba of Tuting (Upper Siang District) during several field trips to the region between 2007 and 2009, and further includes administrative documents of the British-Indian and (post-independence) Indian administration available at the regional archive of the Directorate of Research Arunachal Pradesh.

Identity of Muslims in Assam at the time of global islamism
Sazzad Hussain, Tezpur University, Assam, India

Muslims in Assam has undergone tremendous changes in the political and social domain in the last three decades for reasons which were essentially external. The six year long Assam Movement led by an ultra-regionalist students union and an equally chauvinistic group to expel

the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants randomly took all Muslims in the state as foreigners. This made the community sidelined to the corner of the society isolating them from the greater sphere of the Assamese society. They found a space in the assemblies of Tabligh Jamat, an evangelical Islamist mission for the adherence and practice of puritanical Sunni Islam which was gaining momentum in Assam from 1980 onwards. The influence of Tabligh Jamat brought some unprecedented changes in the practice of Islam to the Muslims of Assam and these became their identity marks. Internationally Islam was emerging as a big political force with the establishment of Islamic Republic in Iran, Islamaization of Pakistan by Gen. Zia, start of the Afghan Mujahedeen and Islamization of Bangladesh, Assam's immediate neighbor, by Gen. Ershad. All these led to the creation of a new narrative among the Muslims in different parts of the world that they are a part of a transnational community whose interests were need not be cared by their respective nation states but by the Umma, vaguely referring to the oil-rich Gulf monarchies who, notably Saudi Arabia were pumping their petro-dollars to set up Madrassas to impart their version of puritanical Islam (Wahhabism). The Muslims of Assam, alienated from the mainstream social life because of the insensitive policies of the Assam Movement (1979-85) were greatly influenced by this new petro-Islamism which aims to homogenize Muslims worldwide by rejecting their diversity and regional socio-cultural roots. Influenced by Ahle-e-Hadith, an Indian Islamic organization linked to Saudi Arabian Wahhabism over the years most of the Muslims in Assam have emerged as more like an Arab or Arabized Afghan-Pakistani than an Assamese or Bengali. This transformation due to their "conversion" to Wahhabism from traditional localized Sufi Islam also has caused political ramifications as they are increasingly mobilized for party politics based on Islamist identity.

This paper will discuss the transformation of identity of Muslims in Assam empirically and show how this trend has shaped the political landscape of the state amidst the politics of ethnic assertion. The paper will also focus on the consequences of these transformations of Muslims in Assam and how this can be addressed with attention to the traditional practice of Islam.

'A pastor's cloth': constructing a story of religious conversion among the Naga through objects and archives at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford
Vibha Joshi, Max Planck Institute, Göttingen

Out of nearly 7000 objects in the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM), Oxford, Naga collection from the colonial period, most of which were collected by JH Hutton and JP Mills at the behest of Henry Balfour, there are catalogue entries for only two that refer directly to Christianity in Naga Hills. These are cloths which were collected in 1930s by JP Mills, political officer and ethnographer of the Naga of northeast India. The paper will discuss how object-labels at a given time simultaneously may reveal but also conceal information about social change occurring among a people, and how an object centred story of religious change may be constructed through archival, historical and ethnographic research. The catalogue entries for the cloths make

reference to modern additions but fail to identify them as Christian motifs. As an anthropologist working on Naga material culture and religion and conversion to Christianity, I am able to put together the fragments of a wider story of conversion and conflict by relating the artifacts to the entries in tour diaries of political officers that are in the PRM archives and to my own field based research. The paper shows the importance of a particular kind of material evidence in recovering the history of a people.

Seeing like a Scott: how certain schemes to improve the historiographical condition have failed
Bodhisattva Kar, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta

The parodic ring of the title of this paper must be taken seriously. Like all parodies, this paper too simultaneously confirms and subverts the canonical status that James Scott's self-professedly anarchist histories have come to occupy in the field of the Indian northeast studies. Like all parodies, this one too pushes irony to its militant extreme, and finds a seemingly implausible continuity between the presumptions of James Scott the radical historian and David Scott the colonial administrator. In trying to understand how the Scott-inspired histories have had the unwitting and rather paradoxical effect of reinforcing identitarian politics, frontier exceptionalism and a certain shade of primitivism, this paper wishes to critically reevaluate the spate of new historical researches on the Indian northeast. At one level, Scott is a pretext for this paper to raise certain fundamental questions about the politics and ethics of writing history in and of the region. At another, the Scott moment in the regional historiography is its very text which is necessarily exceeded by its constitutive relations.

The realm of the political or is identity only political
Bengt G. Karlsson, Stockholm University

Readings from the book 'Unruly Hills: A Political Ecology of India's Northeast' (Berghahn Books. 2011).

"The village is for the poor people only". Social structure, milieus and strategies in Nagaland
Andreas Küchle, Humboldt University, Berlin

This paper investigates the relation between social structure, milieus and their strategies in the context of the State Nagaland in North-East India as the ongoing research programme for my PhD thesis. It seeks to understand how social groups reproduce themselves through social classifications in the context of State interventions, changing agrarian scenarios and economic and cultural globalization. Preliminary empirical data for the working hypothesis derives from systematic fieldwork in two villages in Mokokchung District, Nagaland and among Naga students in Delhi during several stays since 2009. It revealed that the former village-based

social structures as described in the ethnographic classics have been transformed historically in many ways. Certain older forms of inequalities have almost disappeared, others based on sex and age have been rearticulated in the framework of social inequality mainly based on the distribution of capitals. Similarly, these developments give rise to emerging regional inequalities and the rural-urban divide in contemporary Nagaland (Küchle 2011).

The current project now aims at both broadening and deepening the empirical base by adding other rural and urban areas in Nagaland, using a differentiated array of qualitative and quantitative methods suited to the theoretical framework. Starting point is the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and its advancement through Michael Vesters "Milieu Theory" (2001). In accordance with these theories, the central hypothesis is that these developments have lead to a specific differentiation of milieus and their respective strategies in Nagaland. Challenging their Eurocentric presuppositions, it is argued with Boike Rehbein (2006, 2007) that older social structures are not being replaced completely by a "modern" one based on capitals alone, but persist and are only partially transformed.

According to this argument, the social space, the social milieus and the realm of social classification, though being connected intimately, need to be analytically differentiated from each other. One realm is the distribution of the relevant capitals, which is constructed similar to Bourdieu's "space of social positions" (Bourdieu 1984) along the variables of economic and cultural capital. Milieus on the other side refer to similarities in habitus and lifestyle. They are constructed as a first step through a habitus-hermeneutical analysis of 40 structured qualitative interviews. In the second step, indicators of certain milieus are established and contrasted with the social positions, as well as with ethnic/tribal, gender and generation affiliation via correspondence analysis with data from a larger empirical base. In order to substantiate the hypothesis, milieu affiliation and social position should not be analogous to each other, but other criteria will have substantial influence. The third realm involves investigating the dynamics and strategies of milieus. Social classifications as a part of everyday life are therefore observed in actu, e.g during wedding rituals and ceremonies where people from different milieus interact.

This research will not only provide important empirical insight into social structures and its dynamics in Nagaland, it will also test the contemporary influential theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Michael Vester for their applicability and adaptability in the global South.

Influence of Buddhism and its consequences to Lepcha culture and identity
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This paper focuses on Lepchas, the indigenous people of Sikkim and the acceptance of Buddhism that changed the religion, culture and identity of the people in due time.

Lepchas call themselves "Rong" (from the Lepcha words rongcup or rumkup meaning the children of the snowy peak/ children of God). Tradition has it that the creator God, created the first man and woman from the pure, virgin snow of Mt. Kanchenjunga. They believe that they have been living in the region since time immemorial, and there is no migration history owing to where they might have come from but the foothills of their guardian deity Kanchenjunga.

Buddhism was introduced to the Lepchas of Sikkim from sixteenth century onwards. It was a gradual imposition by the Tibetan migrant-rulers who translated many Buddhist texts into Lepcha language to bring the Lepchas there under the Buddhist fold. It is believed that the invention of the written language for the Lepcha community was motivated by the religious activities of the Buddhist missionaries. Lepchas gradually accepted Buddhism but also continued with their traditional religion simultaneously. There was no resistance to the newly introduced religion as they incorporated both practices while appeasing the gods. This acceptance and practice of a new religion along with the old is a phenomenon that has been noted by anthropologists like Gorer as early as 1938 and by Bentley as recent as 2008.

With the Tibetan Buddhist influence, Lepchas were quick to imitate the lifestyle of the newcomers. From copying the dress they wore to the food they ate, Lepchas were soaking in the new sights and sounds. The elite section of the society even changed names, pretending to be of the same stock as the new arrivals. They were forgetting their traditional ways of life and the traditional religion was taking a backseat. Soon, the marital alliance between Tibetans and Lepchas gave birth to a new breed of ethnicity -the Bhutias in Sikkim.

This paper is a result of fieldwork in a Lepcha village in North Sikkim as it examines the influence of Buddhism on Lepcha social institutions like family, marriage, kinship, language, food, dress etc. It also looks into the various socio-political factors like their insignificant numerical status and political voicelessness as the constitution of Sikkim has given them the "primitive" status along with a new hyphenated identity.

It is therefore an attempt to understand and analyze the reasons that led to accepting of Buddhism, cultural changes and the formation of a hyphenated identity today.

The paradox of religious nationalism in the production of Naga identity
Abraham Lotha, Jakhama, Nagaland, India

Religion and nationalism both construct an identity for their members, share common sets of collective symbols, ritual objects such as cross (a symbol for suffering), sacred sites, and collective rituals. Both create a horizontal solidarity, comradeship and imagine a communion with fellow-members, also they evoke both strong passions and commitment from the members. Like conjoined twins, the separation of religion and nationalism can be simple or complex depending on the degree of their internal connection. Due to the symbiotic relationship between religion and nationalism, religious nationalism is a familiar phenomenon.

In many parts of the world, including the Northeast of India, religion and the production of ethnic identity is part of an everyday discourse.

Based on participant-observation, this paper will examine how Nagas' religious beliefs inform and influence their aspiration for a cultural and political self-determination (ethno-nationalism). Religion has not only played a complementary role but also partially provides the raison d'être for the production of Naga identity. This is illustrated in the following ways: 1. How the Naga traditional belief system is posited as different and incompatible with Hinduism or Islam. 2. The perception of the Naga territory as religiously homogeneous. 3. Nagas' internalization and their local understanding of Christianity, particularly Baptist Protestantism. Finally, the belief by certain Naga nationalists that Nagas are chosen by God to be a nation (even though the appointed time has not yet come) with a mission to evangelize the non-Christians in India and neighboring countries. This paper will also examine how religious nationalism can also be understood as a resistance strategy when a people's identity is threatened by a dominant culture and religion (i.e. as in Northeast India). Additionally, I will examine how the increasing level of global interconnectedness, especially with the American Baptist church, reinforces the performance stage for the production of Naga identity.

Name Magic among the Khasis
Margaret Lyndoh, University of Tartu, Estonia

The Khasis are an ethnic community inhabiting the state of Meghalaya where they number around 1.2 million. Their origin may be traced to the Mon Khmer and their language belongs to the Austro Asiatic group. The social set-up of the Khasis include the matriliny, a close knit system of clan and familial relationships and, more contemporarily, an uncomfortable relationship exists between Christianity and the Traditional Faith or the Niam Tre. A subgroup of this tribe comprise the Bhoi who inhabit the Ri-Bhoi District towards the northwestern section of the state.

And it is here, that the esoteric magical practice of Jhare finds expression. The terms commonly called pyrtuit, kyrteng or sumon, consists the secret names of objects found in nature and Jhare believes that each object, disease, misfortune etc. has a name and the incantation, and utterance of these, allows the practitioner to assume power over these ills that afflict the patient. The narrative of the origin of this may be traced back to Syngkhoi Jha and his sister, Syndor Pahari where it was she who taught this art to her brother. In this exclusively orally transmitted tale, the figure of Syndor Pahari, the giver of knowledge to Syngkhoi Jha, is portrayed to be a kind of evil spirit who manifests herself in the form of a snake. The narrative origin of this practice, is then, fraught with violence, murder and deceit and as such, Jhare has today acquired a feared, sinister reputation among Khasis.

These Jha or practioners of the Jhare from Bhoi are known across the Khasi Hills for their abilities. Within the milieu of the Khasi social system, the central ritual of the naming

ceremony, or Jer Khun follows this same principle and if examined in context, embedded beliefs about the centrality of names and the power they assume in a person's life are present.

In his Preface to his work on the Jhare, D.T. Laloo issues a grim warning to all his readers: "I have dared to write this book also, based only on the premise of this warning. If anyone gleans knowledge from this book and because of misfortune, misuses these words of power, he/she will be the bearers of all mortal sins" (Translated from the Preface to D.T Laloo's book Ki Bor Phylla U Hynniewtrep) .

An attempt will be made in this paper to locate the beliefs about the significance of names and the cultural valuations they engender when they are studied in context. Also, this practice, is not isolated to this community alone but it finds echoes in the greater tradition of the Atharvaveda. This paper will be based on material collected directly from the field area of study, and supplemented by the aforementioned book of Laloo which, I have reason to believe is the only treatise on the subject. General literature on the subject will also be referred to.

Performing anthropological identity: J.P. Mills and the Chittagong Hill Tracts
Wolfgang Mey, Hamburg

J.P. Mills, the "Naga-Mills", worked 1926/27 in the CHT. He was to inquire into the history and status of the three local chiefs. He wrote two detailed reports, made 100 photographs and collected ethnographic objects. I look into this corpus from a theoretical point of view: How did his experiences in the hills of NE India influence his and at times the British government's perception of the "tribes" and on which theoretical basis and how did J.P. Mills shape the British policy in NE India.

Did the British really invent the Northeastern tribes?
Philippe Ramirez, CNRS Paris

Reconsidering seriously the making of ethnic identities in North-east India has become an urgent task. The confortable attribution of all collective identities to the "colonial project" is not more useful in this complex region than in others. And beyond, NE India poses major questions to the current anthropological and sociological debates about the ontology of social groups. In this respect, the performance, which I think should be taken in the most general acception, is central indeed in the making, sometimes perharps in the invention of collective identities. Contributions to this workshop show how many recent works take the challenge of plunging into the intricacy of multi-layered and evolving assemblages which characterize Northeast Indian society.

My own contribution will, I hope, follow the same path. I will shortly list what I consider to be the major questions posed to the study of social identity in North-east India, through the

presentation of data, collected mostly from the Assam-Meghalaya borderland. These concern transethnic phenomena. The methodological asset of observations focused on cultural and ethnic borders, rather than centers, have proven critical in the uncovering of some little known identity processes.

"Religion Road" a series of religious sites in Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, India
Jürgen Schöpf, ÖAW Phonogrammarchiv SBT

The linguistic diversity of North East India is one of the highest in the world, and well known among linguists since Grierson's linguistic survey of India in 1904. In the frame work of the DoBeS-Project "The Traditional Songs And Poetry Of Upper Assam – A Multifaceted Linguistic and Ethnographic Documentation of the Tangsa, Tai and Singpho Communities in Margherita, Northeast India" we have undertaken a survey in the Kharsang circle of villages of Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, during our field work season 2009/2010.

Prepared for the linguistic diversity, we were particularly struck by the religious diversity and how openly it has been displayed by religious sites of different denominations, among which we found Baptist, Presbyterian, Buddhist, Hindu, and Rangfra. It has to be noted that christianity is generally on the rise in this area and many people are recent christian converts. Apparently questions of identity among these communities are dynamically negotiated in the area of religion, however intertwined with language and tribal affiliation.

The presentation will give a general introduction to the (religious) situation in the "seven sister states" as far as relevant to Upper Assam and South Eastern Arunachal Pradesh. The photographic documentation of religious sites along a rural road north of Kharsang will provide the data to a discussion that may center around the issues of identity, religion, and language in Upper Assam's multi-cultural situation.

State and indigeneity interface on construction of historical identity: an ethnographic study in Arunachal Pradesh
Sucheta Sen Chaudhuri, Central University of Jharkhand, Ranchi, India

This is an ethnographic account based on fieldwork and documentary evidence on a first centenary celebration of colonial town Pasighat (2011) of Arunachal Pradesh, India. This study locates the state and indigenous people's interface in perceiving centenary celebration and locates indigenous intellectuals' apathy to incorporate colonial intervention experience within their history of celebration (festival) as part of heritage. In fact the establishment of colonial government and establishment of colonial post in Pasighat happened after British defeated the indigenous people in the same year 1911. That year is earmarked as the year of establishment of the town of Pasighat by tribal state government. The colonial town of Pasighat established around administrative centre which was altogether a very new concept in culture to the then

communities stayed in that region. Therefore, the very idea of town emerged as Pasighat using British administrative centre as well as military post within the cultural ecology of the Pasi, Padam and Minyong communities. Those communities mentioned here are known as 'Abor' tribe in colonial literature and by neighbouring communities of plains and categorised by the Government of India as Adi, as one of the scheduled tribes in independent India. The growth of the town of Pasighat in one hundred years transformed demography of Pasighat and social relations of the neighbouring communities as well as identified as a centre for modernity in the region. In this backdrop the present paper locates different dimensions in perceiving history by the people on the hundredth year age of the town and influence of differences of opinion across the communities.

Perspectives on Zomia: Social and cultural relationality in the Asian uplands
Guido Sprenger, University of Heidelberg

In his book „The Art of not being governed", James Scott argues for the relationality of social and cultural representations of the societies in the uplands between Southeast Asia, China and India. However, the state- non-state distinction at the base of his analysis is much too simplistic to account for the cultural diversity in this region. This paper attempts to view upland societies as defined by their connections to several socialities, including neighboring uplanders, lowland polities and non-human (cosmological) actors and forces. However, as the connectivities vary in different areas of the region, local social structures vary accordingly. Thus, uplanders interacting with Southeast Asian galactic polities develop different modes of exosociality than, for example, those interacting with the Chinese empire. These exosocial relationships influence internal models of sociality, just as if the mirror image of a society emerging at its boundaries turns into its actual practiced identity. Thus, identity formation and exosociality become comprehensible as features of social structure.

Tigermen in Nagaland: collective imagination or intimate knowledge of other worlds?
Rebekka Sutter, University of Zürich

Labelled as „lycanthropy", the phenomenon of tigermen was extensively discussed in the colonial monographies and is despite the radical Christianisation up to this day vividly alive: tigermen are a collective „fact" among all Naga tribes – not only in form of folktales but also in form of accounts from individuals who tell of personal experiences as or with tigermen and their related "soul-tigers". In remote areas of Nagaland (Sangtam-, Yimchungrü-, Chang- and Khiamniungan-area) tigermen even still act as local diviners, spirit mediums, and healers.

Inspired by Ingold („The perception of the environment", 2000), I approach the topic by looking not only at the (widespread) vague and wild, nocturnal stories about tiger-spirited humans and human tigers but at all aspects of Naga culture which reveal any insight to the relationship

between human beings and tigers: origin myths which trace a common origin of men and tiger, general notions of the forest, hunting (tigers), traditional political structures and means of conflict mediating. And first of all: the intimate (zoological) knowledge, that the Naga hunters have (resp. did have) of the „most devil beast", the „real" tiger in the jungle. As a result I present an emic world-view that considers the "worlds" of humans, animals and spirits as equally real. This approach will also allow me to address the following two core questions which led me through my research and focus on the social function of the Naga-tigermen: To what extent can the tigermen be called religious specialists? How do they act in the present context of the Catholic religion? Therefore the soul-conception(s) of the Naga are of a pivotal point and shall be of special interest in the present context of religious syncretism in Nagaland.

My paper will be an extract of my M.A. and will be based on data collected in several fieldwork trips in Nagaland between 2006 and 2011.

North-east India: a challenge to anthropologists
Barend Jan Terwiel, Academy of Sciences, Göttingen

After relating how in January 1979, I was introduced to the Tai Phake, Aiton and Ahom and devised a comparison of cultural aspects with those of Tai-speaking peoples in Mainland Southeast Asia and Southern China, I draw attention to the unusual ethnic ambitions of the Ahom minority. When analysing the contrast between the assertiveness and sophistication of the Ahoms on the one hand and the unobtrusiveness and authenticity of the other Tai minorities on the other, the concept of cultural contamination is introduced, and a model presented with which various minorities may be assessed.

Towards a media historiography of borderland regions: a case study of Mizoram
P. Thirumal & C. Lalrozami (Hyderabad University, India)

Media history in India has been perceived as political history, and political history has been another name for writing the post-colonial history of the mainland nation state. But borderland regions like North East require a different frame to narrate the nascent philological, literary and print related journalistic traditions.

Broadly, we want to read media history as cultural history of the border regions and cultural history as seeking a deeply hermeneutic approach. Among other things, this interpretative method is required in order to negotiate with a lack of an elaborate textual tradition and therefore the absence of a conventional archive in this part of the country.

In this intervention, we argue that media history of Mizoram should be narrated alongside its immediate transnational neighbors like Myanmar and Bangladesh, and its local neighbors like Manipur, Assam and Tripura. Generally, media histories like print or newspaper history are narrated from a mainland, sedentary, nationalistic/ civilisational perspective. Is it possible to

arrive at a Zomia-like conception of media history where Zomia stands for the South Asian uplands?

On examination of the philological and literary practices in the erstwhile Lushai region, we are of the view that a more 'locale=specific' and a deeply inclusive tradition informed their pre-colonial/pre-Christian interconnected practice relating to language, religion and society. This deeply embedded implicit understanding of language and utterances gave way to a more scientific and theological idea of language. It seems to have moved from an ecological practice of language to a broadly Christian humanistic conception. The genealogies of Lushai language gleaned from colonial ethnographic accounts seem to give the impression that language was accessible both to human beings and animals as well. Language was not considered to be rational or innately human enterprise.

It may not be a large claim that the Bible written in Lushai (Mizo) language is still recognized as the most important literary text in contemporary Mizoram. The Lushai language was scriptless and the need for script arose to redeem the 'evil worshippers'. In the process of literisation (committing the dialect to writing) and literarisation (language aspiring to become literary or seeking an elaborate code), the Lushai language, which was supposedly pre-reflective and myth-inspired, became a more reflective language. From a supposedly language of 'feeling' it became a language of 'will'. For instance, the oneric chants of the traditional priest called the 'puithiam', which may have reflected the pre-conscious of the Lushais is all but forgotten.

A related point about the standardization of Lushai language is that the colonial rule did not merely provide a script to an otherwise scriptless Lushai language. But the idea that the erstwhile Lushai region had twelve dialects and that the Lushai dialect was distinct from the rest of the dialects seem to be a colonial invention. In some sense, prior to colonialism, people inhabiting these dialects moved easily from one to the other. For instance, war songs across the various dialects were generally sung in the Hmar and Paihte languages.

Ours is an attempt to posit a methodological intervention. We have elsewhere suggested that the history of language, literature and print in Mizoram is the history of the Protestant Church. Among other things, the latter history connects itself to the making of the contemporary Mizo. This assertion needs a many layered engagement and a deeply interpretative approach may help uncover the layered history of this region.

The politics of identity formation among the ethnicities in Northeast India: a case study of the Kuki Mizo Chin

Lianboi Vaiphei, Indraprastha College, Delhi University, India

The demarcation of political borders is one of the man made realities that has a profound impact and its consequence influences the societies, especially when the borders demarcation is made by external factors and not by people within the borders. One of the colonial legacies that have percolated to the contemporary politics is the ambiguous construction of the borders

region in Northeast India that demarcates South Asia from South East Asia. The political boundaries being man made demarcates across the habitats of ethnic communities to become transborder ethnic communities as they live across the political borders of India with the neighbouring Southeast Asian countries.One of the ethnic communities that represent ethnological transition across the

international political borders is the Kuki Mizo Chin. The people of the Kuki Mizo Chins live

across the political border of India and Myanmar, while the Kukis and Mizos live in the Khuga Sadar hills of Manipur and Lushai Hills respectively which is within the national sovereignty of India and the Chins live across the border in the Chin state of the present day Myanmar, although they share the same cultural and social trait and identify themselves as kinsmen.

The term Kuki Mizo and Chin are generic names which has been appropriated by the different ethnic communities as an identification of being an indigenous people. The process of identity formation occurred when the process of socialization began with the 'others' and therefore the need to assert its distinctive identity arise in the wake of the anti colonial struggle during the Colonial period. The need for an identity to distinguish and define what constitute as 'self' viz a viz that of the 'other' was felt, when the Kuki Mizo Chins started having an encounter with the others. They lived in close proximity with different social and ethnic communities who are distinct from them and their inhabitants are spread across different hills in northeast India and beyond.

The invincibility of the hills has alienated them from the mainstream and these perceptions has percolated to the state' policies and administration. The sense of alienation has marginalized the people in asserting their ethnic identity and has spread ethno nationalism in northeast India. The plurality of the term Kuki Mizo Chin witnessed the assertion of the ethnic identity in its singularity from the erstwhile struggle of the Mizo National Front in the Lushai Hills of Mizoram to the Sadar Hills of Manipur and the adjoining hill districts of Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills in Assam which has become one of the factors to define the political dynamics in northeast India and its neighbouring places.

The paper seeks to study the Politics of Identity formation taking the case study of the Kuki Mizo Chins by analyzing the historical factors that has led to Identity formation and the causal factor that has influenced the political dynamics that has occurred in Northeast and its neighbouring places due to the assertion of ethnic identities and ethno nationalism.

The mythic landscape of religious conflict and conversion: notes on the place-lore of Assam
Ülo Valk, University of Tartu

Place-lore is a folkloristic category encompassing a variety of genres that blend storyworlds with social and physical environments and charge landscapes with narrative plots, such as the mythic events of the past that turns places into arenas of action for deities and heroes. The

scale of place-lore ranges from widely spread grand narratives to the micro-scale of personal experience stories. These localised narratives may take realistic, fantastic and other generic modalities, but they always manifest a historic dimension, sometimes explicitly but very often in a symbolic way. As Assam is a land where a variety of religious traditions have co-existed within the relationship of dialogue and conflict, its place-lore carries traces of tensions between different religious groups. The tribal kings, such as Naraka and Bāṇa, were identified with the demonic asuras in Brahmanic mythology and thus the local religious and political institutions became included in the pan-Indian tradition. However, mythic narratives about these rulers express tensions and conflicts between religious traditions. Thus, Naraka was cursed by the sage Vaśiṣṭha, abandoned by the goddess Kāmākhyā and finally killed by Kṛṣṇa. Bāṇa was involved in the Hari-Hara war between Kṛṣṇa and Śiva, which can be interpreted as a symbolic expression of the historic tensions between Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions. In the 15th and 16th centuries the great religious reformer Śaṅkaradeva introduced the bhakti movement and condemned the cult of idols (mūrti) in temples, preaching the supremacy of Viṣṇu. Tensions between tribal and Brāhmaṇic traditions are expressed in the myth about the furious sage Vaśiṣṭha who cursed Śiva and the goddess Ugratārā, so that barbarians (mleccha) became their devotees and worshiped them according to the left-handed (vāmācāra) path. Hugh Urban has recently shown that the Tantric traditions of Assam are strongly influenced by the local tribal religions.

The paper will explore the place-lore of Assam as an expression of religious conflicts, encounters and conversion. The landscape of Assam has been hinduised in narratives that confirm the presence of Hindu deities in the region (e.g. the body parts of the Goddess Satī have fallen in multiple places, today marked by temples). The paper will also discuss contested place-lore of controversial narratives about Saint Mādhavadeva's birth place, which is claimed to have been mysteriously discovered by followers of two competing religious traditions. Place-lore thus becomes a manifestation of religious identity, providing tradition-bearers with a sense of belonging to certain religious and narrative environments.

Negotiating Gurung identity with and against the state in Sikkim
Mélanie Vandenhelsken, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna

The All Sikkim Gurung (Tamu) Buddhist Association of Gangtok has been founded in 1994, when a large majority of the Gurungs of Sikkim was Hindu. One of the objectives of the association was to obtain Scheduled Tribe status for the Sikkimese Gurungs. As part of the Indian state welfare system, this status guarantees the most benefits, like quotas in public employment, etc. Cultural criteria are central to this system, and the Sikkim state supports the display of cultural differences, as the reclassification of Sikkim 'ethnic' categories has become a part of its political programme. But since the foundation of the Gurung association, its members have been

divided over the question of religion, one faction arguing that Gurungs should "go back" to Buddhism, as Hinduism poses a hindrance to the acquisition of Scheduled Tribe status, and the other that Gurungs should remain Hindu.

This paper addresses the role of the state in the construction of ethnicity in Sikkim. Among the various interacting political fields producing ethnicity—like trans-border networks, globalization, etc.—the relation of mutual influence between the Sikkimese state's various agencies and the Gurungs is at the core of my analysis. The Gurung association, as an interpreter of the state policy, is a key actor in this process, and will be given particular attention.