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## Peoplehood Beyond the State: Rebellion in a South Asian Borderland

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# Peoplehood Beyond the State: Rebellion in a South Asian Borderland

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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**Peoplehood Beyond the State: Rebellion in a South Asian Borderland**

*The question whether humanity has a predilection towards the good is preceded by the question whether there exists an event that can be explained by no other way than by that moral disposition. An event such as revolution*

Friedrich Nietzsche

As much as the Northeastern region of India is an important and complex cartographic reality in Indian politics, with a long history of frontier politics, it has increasingly become a zone where physical power assumes a central role in the struggles to bring an end to its human crises. These crises are manifested through violence, insurgency and separatism.<sup>1</sup> This frontier space is pertinent to the debates on people's revolutions and homelands, resulting in the construction of a political discourse on citizenship and peoplehood. The region has remained, arguably, for the larger part of the nation's history, a peripheral fragment of the Indian imagination. The region's existence in the national imaginary is predicated on rebel mobilizations, unrest and resistance from the earliest times in the colonial period.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the region continues to occupy a seminal position in the territorial history of the postcolonial nation.

**Context of Crisis**

During the period of British rule, this region was closely connected with the rest of the Indian subcontinent and formed part of the continuous landmass stretching from eastern Bengal and Bihar, into the Brahmaputra valley of Assam, and further into the Burmese uplands. Despite the colonial empire's somewhat uneasy relationship with the 'Nagas' of the Naga Hills (in the erstwhile undivided province of Assam), who find mention in the earliest histories and official records, as a "people of one of the Burmese provinces", the Nagas were soon shrouded in an

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<sup>1</sup> See Sanjib Baruah, *India Against Itself* (1999)

<sup>2</sup> See Nari Rustomji, *Imperiled Frontiers: India's North Eastern Borderlands* (1983)

ambivalence that has made it difficult to recover their links to the Indian mainland.<sup>3</sup> For genealogical reasons and certain administrative measures related to the governance of ‘tribes’ in far-flung areas of northeastern India, both during and immediately after the colonial era, the Nagas were not directly part of the newly formed Indian nation-state. Once this region became, by default, a periphery of the centre, a variety of socio-economic and historical factors surfaced. This led to the rise of militant ethno-nationalism in the Naga Hills, which did not abate even after it gained statehood and was declared separate from Assam in 1963 (Misra, 265). Notions of Nagaland’s “territorial mystery” and alienation of the people have long attended the social historical imagination about the Nagas, something that was also typically noted by the British when they governed these provinces. Perhaps this could explain how the Nagas have remained known, even to the Indians, as a somewhat uncertain group, linguistically and ethnologically, exotic and “isolated” (G.A Grierson 1903; J.W Hutton 1969; Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf 1962).<sup>4</sup> These questions carry over to the Nagas’ ‘unique identity’ in the contemporary moment.<sup>5</sup>

The state of Nagaland in India's northeastern border is a region that has consequently been involved in a long and embattled struggle for its own homeland and independent nationhood for more than 70 years. Its secessionist movement, predating the independence of the nation, has its origins in a history of ancient clans and tribal communities remaining beyond

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<sup>3</sup> In the *Account of the Nagas* recorded in the *Calcutta Government Gazette* (1825), Lieutenant Pemberton who travelled extensively in these provinces writes, “this race of people...extending from the northwestern extremity of Cachar to the frontiers of Chittagong, from their poverty and peculiar situation have escaped the sufferings inflicted by a powerful enemy on the wealthier occupiers of the plains below them. With a sagacity which has at once ensured them both health and security, they have, in every instance, established themselves upon the most inaccessible peaks of the most mountainous belt they inhabit, and from these elevated positions, can see and guard against approaching danger long before it is sufficiently near to be felt.” (published December 29, 1825 p 386)

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Y D Gundevia, ‘Introducing Nagaland’, *War and Peace in Nagaland*, New Delhi: Palit and Palit. 1975(1-7)

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Y D Gundevia, ‘Introducing Nagaland’, *War and Peace in Nagaland*, New Delhi: Palit and Palit. 1975(1-7)

See also, *Democracy in Nagaland: Tribes, Traditions, Tensions* (eds) Zelle JP Wouters & Zhoto Tunyi, 2018 And, *Nagas in the 21st Century* (eds) JP Wouters and Michael Heneise (2018) Kohima Institute

the grip of the colonial state so much so that the life of the Nagas is still replete with tales of "primitive warfare", "head-hunting" and connections across the borders to Myanmar, China and beyond. The Nagas people have been caught in a spiral of nationalist resistance with several tribes mobilizing for non-state rebellion and separatist activity, making the people strangers in their own legitimate country.

While this paper briefly explores the causes and processes that chart this particular push away from the nation state, it focuses on the struggle for statehood that has, in many ways, dehumanized and dispossessed the tribal community on the fringes of the India state. Pertinent to this, are questions surrounding the reinforcement of divisions and boundaries within peoples in a country, as well as how the Naga tribes create the idea of a community while the church and civil society groups continue to demand for a homeland even as the Indian nation state attempts to broker peace with the insurgent leaders, some of whom have sought solidarity and support from across the borders.

In this context, the Naga struggle for the right to self-determination has been seen as a threat to the larger Indian identity. The Nagas were the first ethnic group to successfully mount a challenge to the process of nation-building in post independent India. It is significant that, for the first time in the history of independent India, the armed struggle of a small group aimed at achieving a sovereign status was accepted as a struggle for self-determination (Misra, 268).

The unfolding of the Naga rebellion and the formulation of a long national struggle from within the nation-state points to several realities on the ground. It questions ideas about what ethnic movements can do to the notion of democratic life, apart from the issue of human rights and gender concerns that seek to forge democratic alternatives. Therefore, it is important to understand these questions from formulations and positions drawn up by recent political theorists and philosophers in this respect and examine how people's power can energize new

forms of governance in an increasingly controlled world of biopolitics.<sup>6</sup> Made prominent in social theory by Michel Foucault, the biopolitical and its procedures of power were either meant to *discipline* the human body, to optimize its capabilities, or to extract its force while rendering it more inefficient and docile. Foucault's famously proposed series of biological processes, such as birth rates, mortality, or life expectancy, have strongly influenced and provided control over a population (Agamben 2005; Foucault 2003, 2007, 2008; Hardt and Negri 2004).

I argue that the Naga example from South Asia's northeastern Indian upland territory evokes a dynamic theatre of social revolution where people, politics, custom and tradition all come together in a curiously interconnected manner to retrieve their own sense of space and community. In Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*, the "backward" community, or tribal, is considered, as she had observed, not deserving of that stage of civilization that insures it with human rights that are only guaranteed with national emancipation.<sup>7</sup> The people of the Naga borderlands inhabited a similar space whereby they were subject to despots or totalitarian powers of the state. Thus, their history was inextricable from those who had fallen outside, what Arendt calls, "the common world", because of their mere differentiation.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the Nagas' protest and rise into a secessionist state can perhaps be traced back to this condition of differentiation. The birth of the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) in 1980 was the product of an "Indian nationalism", a sort of negotiation with the state that often ended in rejection of the plea for self-determination or autonomy of the rebel state (Banerjee, 221). The predominance of extremist non-state mobilizations and a politics of

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<sup>6</sup> First advanced in his *History of Sexuality* (1984), Michel Foucault developed the notion significantly with his College de France lectures between 1976-1979.

<sup>7</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p370

<sup>8</sup> I find it pertinent here to quote Arendt's very sharp comment on the loss of human rights, which she argued was a 'paradox', which "coincides with the instant when a person becomes a human being in general-without a profession, without a citizenship, without an opinion, without a deed by which to identify and specify himself-and different in general, representing nothing but his own absolutely unique individuality which, deprived of expression within and action upon a common world, loses all significance." p383

resistance by tribal groups in the borderlands of the Indian state have typically facilitated a policy of militarization by which governments at the centre have been extending grants to a small section of the local elite that have been co-opted into the task of governance. This is a strategic ruse to keep the masses at bay and out of the ambit of participation in the nation-state through a few feeble attempts to demonstrate a semblance of representation by calling upon the communities of the various tribes to articulate their demands and aspirations (Kikon, 2833). In recent times, the Naga tribes, who are a composite group (officially recognized as constituted of 16 ethnic groups who collectively form the umbrella community, the Nagas), have even been brought under a national framework, such as in 2015 to draft a peace accord.<sup>9</sup>

This paper looks at how postcolonial societies may often seek to look beyond the state at systems of power that emerge from older and less formal communities: multitudes that engage not merely with politics, rights, justice, and the economic question, but also significantly with that of the 'biopolitical' as a category. In this respect, the biopolitical gains credence as the Nagas have eternally been seen as societies of people who have remained deeply and organically bound up with the myths and meanings of their evolution in the mountainous territories. More importantly, they have gained recognition as an autonomous race and nation in the making that is extremely proud of its ancient heritage, its ethnic origins and local knowledges.<sup>10</sup> The inter-factional conflicts among the Nagas have often been used and exploited by centers of authority and control to keep this major community of tribes in unrest.

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<sup>9</sup> Skeptics are of the opinion that the peace-work was not a multilateral agreement involving all groups of the various Naga ethnicities but manipulated by the dominant NSCN (IM) faction, led by the very powerful duo, Isak and Muivah, among the several militant groups who had brokered a deal with the Indian government on sharing sovereignty. See, for instance, Namrata Goswami, "The Naga Peace Accord and the Troublesome Idea of Shared Sovereignty" 2017

<sup>10</sup> A S Shimray, *Let Freedom Ring: The Story of Naga Nationalism*. New Delhi: Promila and Co. 2005  
For a better understanding of the question of the biopolitics and the apparatuses of social control, I refer to Michel Foucault work on bio-power and biopolitics developed in his lectures at the College de France (1975-79) later published as *Society Must be Defended* (2003), *Security, Territory, Population* (2007) & *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008)

Also, Giorgio Agamben's theory of exclusion as he demonstrates in his understanding of Jewish marginalization in World war II in his *Homo Sacer and Bare Life*, and *The State of Exception* (2002)

Such unrest is another major spoke in the cycles of violence and aggression perpetrated both by state and non-state powers. To argue from a historical perspective, the biopolitical management of populations and the control of borders and sensitive space, as this discussion will attempt to unfold, in respect to the Naga national struggle for more than seventy years now, is crucial to the definition of being human today. Such an argument becomes clearer when examining Giorgio Agamben's and Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics to explore the relationship between spaces and borders and what it means to be human in these entangled histories. In the concluding part of this discussion, I seek to argue how the counter narratives of gender and everyday life, as well as practices within a rebel society, work back from these received frames of wisdom to undermine the official historiography of custom and tradition towards newer mobilizations of resistance and greater spaces of freedom in the Naga borderlands.

Between the 1980s and 90s, the Naga territory became increasingly militarized as New Delhi's failure to appreciate the question of a Naga nationhood resulted in the deployment of security forces that were meant to control the region and its peoples' native viewpoint. This was another powerful agent of control that was exercised upon the people of Nagaland in dramatic ways when the Armed Forces Special Powers Act<sup>11</sup>, a draconian act, was invoked in the state, as it was in neighboring Assam, and unleashed a reign of extrajudicial oppression and excesses. As Udayon Misra has argued, the realization that the Naga struggle was not a law and order problem, nor merely a secessionist insurgency fueled by foreign agents, or simply a movement triggered by ethnic claims, but a deeper political issue which could never be solved

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<sup>11</sup> The states of Nagaland and Manipur in the Northeast have been declared as "Disturbed Areas" under the Government of India's Armed Forces Special Powers Act, AFSPA (1958). This Act enables the government to deploy national army and central paramilitary forces as well as the Indian reserve battalions to control, manage and to gain a better insight into these measures of state control. It is useful to note how in the colonial regime, as early as in 1935, the Northeast frontier region had already been declared as Disturbed Areas and Excluded areas by an Act of the imperial government, Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Act (1935)



through the use of force, leading to the creation of a separate state for the Naga people within the Indian Union (Misra, 269).

The creation of a Nagaland state and the implementation of strict Inner Line Regulations (which barred entry by outsiders into this excluded zone), along with clear constitutional safeguards for the protection of their land, culture, and identity have helped to neutralize the demand for sovereignty. The state apparatuses clearly played their cards with care and sought to compensate the Nagas with such measures of protection and preservation. While the NSCN (I-M)<sup>12</sup> has been steadfast in its demand for a solution of the Naga issue outside the parameters of the Indian Constitution, it cannot disregard the collective voice of Naga civil society, which favors a peaceful and negotiated settlement of the Naga issue. Although a formal resolution of the Naga struggle is yet to be achieved, the long-drawn resistance has raised vital issues relating to the polity, emphasizing the need for a re-working of the federal priorities of the country and the constituent autonomies of its people (Misra, 270).

### **Birth of a State**

More than any other claim, the Naga movement has been asserting a distinct ethnic identity and demanding an independent homeland. Multiple attempts were initiated via memorandums and directives that emphasized the Nagas and Indians as separate with no common history and, hence, Nagas should be given independent status.<sup>13</sup>

What began as the first rebel Naga group in 1918, the Naga Club proclaimed resistance to the Indian government under the erstwhile colonial empire. This group was renamed and

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<sup>12</sup> The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) is a Naga nationalist insurgent group operating mainly in Northeast India. The agenda of the organisation is to establish a sovereign Naga state, 'Nagalim', which would consist of all the areas inhabited by the Naga people in Northeast India and Northwest Myanmar. NSCN- (IM) and NSCN-K are two factions of the NSCN.

<sup>13</sup> The Naga Club demanded of the Simon Commission as early as in 1929 to be left "alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times". The Naga Hills Memorandum to Simon Commission, dated 10 Jan, 1929 (available online in post by John Humtsoe , 5 April 2013, accessed 13 November 2017) For a clear idea of how the Naga 'nation' movement gathered momentum and has sustained and survived various challenges to arrive at a critical stage of negotiations with the Indian nation state read B G Verghese 2008; MS Prabhakara 2007, and Sanjoy Hazarika 1994, Sanjib Baruah 2010, Udayon Misra 2013

reorganized as the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946 by Angami Zapu Phizo.<sup>14</sup> On June 27, 1947 an agreement was signed between the NNC and then Governor of Assam that recognized the Nagas' right to develop themselves freely. However, Clause 9 of the agreement, stating that after a period of 10 years the NNC would be asked whether the agreement should be extended or a new agreement arrived at, created divisions amongst the Naga groups. The NNC interpreted this to mean the attainment of sovereignty by the Nagas whereas the Government of India interpreted it as the signing of a new arrangement within the Indian Union. On August 14, 1947, Phizo, along with eight other Naga leaders, declared Naga independence. In 1960, a Sixteen-Point Agreement was signed between members of the Naga People's Congress and the Government of India that included the creation of a new state of Nagaland by 1963. But even this failed to quell the movement as a majority of Naga inhabited areas was left outside the new state. In 1964, a *Nagaland Peace Mission*<sup>15</sup> was formed and signed a ceasefire with Phizo, only to last till 1968. The coopting of the church with the entry of Reverend Michael Scott, a Baptist Missionary, and one of the first among the peace negotiators in 1964, along with eminent Gandhian Jayprakash Narayan and BP Chaliha, Assam's Chief Minister, for the cause of the Naga rebels, marked a very significant aspect of the Naga national struggle. The crucial peace salvo, preceded by signing a ceasefire with the insurgents, also heralded the long and integral bond between Christian civil society groups and the Naga national movement, right up to the present.

NSCN (I-M), the later day avatar of the NNC, then emerged as the major insurgent group and succeeded in integrating rival Naga ethnic groups, which stood otherwise divided. The network of social support for the faction's political causes of establishing the uniqueness

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<sup>14</sup> Phizo contacted the Indian National Army (INA) in Burma (Myanmar) with the hope of obtaining their help to overthrow British rule from Naga areas. Interestingly, when the Japanese forces advanced towards Kohima (capital of Nagaland) in 1944, Phizo simultaneously advanced to Kohima with a group of armed Naga men in an attempt to liberate Naga areas from British rule.

<sup>15</sup> For more details on the Nagaland Peace Mission, see Y.D Gundevia, *War and Peace in Nagaland* p101-126

of Naga history (that they were independent and never conquered by the British or any other power), and Greater Nagalim (integration of Naga inhabited areas in Assam, Arunachal and Manipur, all of which are adjoining Indian states in the northeastern frontier region) struck a responsive chord in the Naga society that it aspired to represent. In 1964, with regard to the political agenda, T Muivah, the formidable NSCN chief, spoke to a gathering of about 5000 people and asked their opinions on whether to abrogate or extend the ongoing cease-fire with the Indian government. The overall popular consensus was that the ceasefire should not be abrogated and that it should, in fact, be extended indefinitely, unlike the usual practice of extending it for six months or a year in order to sustain some level of continuous peace in Naga areas.

The Peace Mission's proposals marked a major departure from what may be termed the 'mainstream' position regarding the Naga struggle and heralded the beginning of a new and positive approach to the Naga issue (Misra, 268). Over forty years of struggle and several thousand Naga youth, soldiers, and innocent civilians left dead, have left a fatigue in the revolutionary zeal, even as it promised freedom and a nation for the Nagas.

### **Civil Society Interventions: Church and Collectives**

The Naga hills resonate with the sound of church bells chiming or hymn notes lifting and falling by a choir echoing in the distance. To most Nagas, this is sacrosanct. The Council of Naga Baptist Churches is an apex body in Nagaland with a membership of 42 church associations. Not only has it been central to Naga civil society as a cohesive and cementing force among the different tribes with their traditions and customary mores, but it has also been most instrumental in bringing about the peace process since the 1960s. Thus, the Church's attempt to resolve rebellion and allay hostilities among warring militant groups in Nagaland has typically paid heed to allowing the Council to continue to be in constant contact with underground factions.

This communication has allowed the Council to dissuade the different factions from violent activities and aim for a settlement instead.

However, the NSCN (I-M) has been critical of the Council and has made claims that it is favouring the Indian state (Kumar, 156). In a manner that evokes the Foucauldian power of biopolitics as mentioned earlier, the apex Council of Nagalim Churches (CNC) has also been an agency for control at the center of negotiations for most political strategists in the Naga struggle. The CNC has served as an unfailing handle with which to prod the sensitive issues of countering insurgency in a rebel environment and for finding consensus among tribes in a divided and ethnically polarized society.<sup>16</sup> In its passionate call for a “Nagalim for Christ”, the CNC wields civil authority over, what seems to be, a society divided over ethnic differences at a time when greater human concerns of security and safety outweigh these narrow parochial issues.

### **The Naga Mothers’ Association (NMA) and Issue of Gender**

Like most women’s movements concerning political and ethnic violence, the women in the Naga struggle have witnessed severe physical, economic, and mental brutality at the hands of security forces and non-state actors. Women, those directly involved in the struggle and ordinary women, have lived in ‘states of exception’ and led precarious lives.<sup>17</sup> The preeminent Naga People’s Movement for Human Rights has extensively documented the perils and precariousness of ordinary people caught in the militarized environment in the wake of the Naga national struggle. However, the Naga Mothers’ Association (NMA), an interventionist

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<sup>16</sup> Council for Nagalim Churches (CNC) has relentlessly tried to negotiate on behalf of the various tribes and clans of the Nagas for a sustainable peace and harmony in civil society.

See also, “Nagalim for Christ”, The Morung Express, 26 November 2015

<sup>17</sup> See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (2003). People can be in a ‘state of exception’ when the legal order is not valid for them and they are excluded from but captured within the political order. According to Judith Butler, ‘precarity’ designates a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. See *Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics*, Lecture given at Universidad Complutense de Madrid. June 8, 2009

civil society group of women established in 1984, has attempted to ameliorate a lot of the tensions and trouble in Naga society, often remaining independent of church and state.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike the *Naga HoHo*, the umbrella group of civil society collectives that has led many peace negotiations in the state, the NMA works within a clearly feminist framework, beyond the concerns of clan or clout of the former. The major breakthrough came with the humanistic call, *Shed No More Blood*, which was introduced during a 1994 peace rally to combat and counter the intra-fratricidal killings in Nagaland leading to a climate of terror and unabated violence in the nineties.<sup>19</sup> It resolved, for instance, to stop the various modes of aggression in Naga society. The NMA, it affirmed, believes that violence against women will continue unless other forms of violence are also stopped. The group has brought international attention to human rights violations in the Naga Territory, particularly sexual violence. Their practice of a “politics of understanding” provides a model for how the democratic process ought to be carried out and for the importance of inclusion in democratic dialogue. With the rise of several factions within the Naga state in the aftermath of the formation of the NSCN, women’s organizations have sought to address issues of violence and exploitation perpetrated against them as a result of being caught in the violent crossfire. There have been instances when women have physically intervened in villages and towns to act as barriers between civilians and soldiers (Manchanda, 6). They have tirelessly fought for a repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

A politics of power and gender has taken over in this strife over ethnic identity and homeland struggle in the Naga hills, leading to an insidious oppression where women are attacked out of vengeance, especially if they have affiliations to suspected rebels. Women’s

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<sup>18</sup> The NMA, a collective of women who took up cudgels on behalf of Naga mothers for peace, social harmony and security of the Naga people has a chequered history and a controversial recent engagement with Naga society. See, Sangeeta Baruah Pisharoty, “The Myth of Nagaland’s Empowered Women”, 2016

<sup>19</sup> Described in Paula Banerjee, (ed) *Women in Peace Politics* (2008), which charts a historical critique of the important emergence of women’s politics in peace movements in South Asia featuring the Naga Mother’s Association of Nagaland among other such initiatives.

bodies, for example, considered to be the enemy's property, were sexually mutilated (Manchanda, 7). The struggle has caused massive destruction to resources and affected agricultural practices that are intrinsic to daily life. The destruction of agriculture has severely affected women as they were previously actively involved in this field. Under these severe conditions, the women have also supported the armed struggle by providing food and clothing for the armed opposition.

The biopolitics of survival has also led these women to the rebel camps, where they eventually took to weapons, even though it is against tradition and considered a taboo for them to participate in typically 'male' activities. Many women were trained by the outfits and came out as fully trained soldiers to join the factions. Although the NNC had initially hesitated to let women receive training or carry arms, increasing attacks on women who sought refuge in the church made them review their opinion and they sanctioned the active entry of women in the rebellion. As a critic of the insurgency in the region observes, the NMA has however, not been very successful in their attempts to curb the violence in the region. In fact, many women "reject the need for women to be involved in representative politics" (Manchand, 11).

As in other vulnerable societies, especially where male and female functions and social roles are separate, militarized zones have typically witnessed the reinscription of gender discrimination in conditions that make women doubly marginal. The victimization of women who leave homes to participate in war has already been a subject of wide debate and critical discussion.<sup>20</sup> The making of such women into political subjects, witnessed more recently in the uproar over Naga women's decision to participate in urban elections to which they had never been represented before, has now emerged as a complex issue of feminist rights where the basic safety of women as humans, their self-esteem, and the notions of bare life beg to be re-examined.

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<sup>20</sup> El Bushra 1995; Cynthia Enloe 2000; Manchanda 2001; H Ashfar 2004

As the Naga feminist, Dolly Kikon, pointedly asks, “What comes first for her people, gender or justice?”<sup>21</sup> Or should these wait till they gain freedom? Kikon’s anxiety about her tribe is vindicated in the violent clashes between men and women that took place on the streets earlier this year over the question of political rights for women. While Naga customary law is seen as the foundation of justice, the exclusion of women from the state’s powerful decision making-bodies negates this. Putting aside all other claims, the human question underpins the tragic consequences of this long-drawn battle in restive Nagaland.

The NMA has used a rhetoric of motherhood for mobilization and has been critiqued for not having a radical feminist agenda they ought to have had as a women’s group (Manchanda, 13). The NMA chose to wear as a badge of honour their larger social/moral outlook that made it incumbent on the group to look into issues of life and death in the violence-afflicted neighborhoods. They mandatorily conducted, for example, burials that they gave to each unclaimed body in order to restore the rightful dignity of those who fell to militarized operations, whether they were Nagas or non-Nagas. While such rituals were in place given the extreme nature of oppressions that were easily committed under the draconian law AFSPA which granted impunity to the Armed Forces, the NMA came to be seen less as a feminist collective and more focused on social responsibilities.

### **The Human Question**

Construction of the definitions of ‘anti-national’ severely restricted civil and political rights in militarized zones, like the north-eastern region of India, where the discourse of participation and ‘rights’ was entrusted to security institutions armed with regulations like the National Security Act, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958, the Nagaland Security Act 1962 and the Disturbed Areas Act 1955 (Misra, 2835). In his theory of the ungoverned, while deconstructing the binary that pits the civilized valley dwellers against the hill folk, or the

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<sup>21</sup> In Dolly Kikon, “What kind of Nagaland are we moving towards? in *scroll.in*, March 2017

‘zomia’, James Scott confronts the idea of disabling the non-state people with his novel suggestion that the zomia may actually escape the state (Scott 34). It can be argued that the Naga struggle for a homeland and sovereignty, coupled with its ability to continue to seek measures for a peaceful resolution of its many crises social, political, and psychological, signal toward an affirmation and belief in the power of peoplehood.

A particularly telling phenomenon that is striking about this movement is the several stages of its trajectory that mark the transition from a belligerent insurgent led group of rebels to actual peace makers and facilitators of an organic community. Also significant in this long history of a people’s revolution, are the multitudes that warred, fought, lost, congregated, mourned, commiserated and renewed vigor also while reviewing their positions in the struggle for freedom. The new peace Accord, which is currently in the making with a composite Naga civil society participation and which may decide the destiny of the Nagas, holds out promise of such a reconfiguration of energies and intentions.

The lasting effects of the conflict of the Naga conflict has resulted in a damaging rise of unemployment and a poor education system. The conflict pushed the region and its people into a state of exception that became “essentially an empty space, in which a human action with no relation to law stands before a norm with no relation to life” (Agamben, 86). In these intangible interfaces between life, the law and a native Naga society, the human has remained out of the ambit of the state jurisdiction. The law is safeguarded from any challenge to its rationale and implementation, providing the arbiters of such a justice with impunity from all authority or accountability. As Agamben notes about the contemporary human condition, “from the real state of exception in which we live it is not possible now to return to the state of law...” (Agamben 87). To resolve the crisis of humanity in the Naga borderlands, Agamben’s utopian wish for a severance between violence and law is perhaps the only way that peace can be imagined and for bare life, as it exists, without any rights, to be overcome.



Before we can even achieve peace and claims of gender justice across territorial and historical differences and beyond national and ideological boundaries, the Naga example, as demonstrated in the discussion above, firmly reiterates the need for a humane, more habitable and livable world.

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