

Interning Insurgent Populations: the buried histories of Indian Democracy

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Darzo (Mizoram) was one of the richest villages I have ever seen in this part of the world. There were ample stores of paddy, fowl and pigs. The villagers appeared well-fed and well-clad and most of them had some money in cash. We arrived in the village about ten in the morning. My orders were to get the villagers to collect whatever moveable property they could, and to set their own village on fire at seven in the evening. I also had orders to burn all the paddy and other grain that could not be carried away by the villagers to the new centre so as to keep food out of reach of the insurgents.... I somehow couldn't do it. I called the Village Council President and told him that in three hours his men could hide all the excess paddy and other food grains in the caves and return for it after a few days under army escort. They concealed everything most efficiently.

Night fell, and I had to persuade the villagers to come out and set fire to their homes. Nobody came out. Then I had to order my soldiers to enter every house and force the people out. Every man, woman and child who could walk came out with as much of his or her belongings and food as they could. But they wouldn't set fire to their homes. Ultimately, I lit a torch myself and set fire to one of the houses. I knew I was carrying out orders, and would hate to do such a thing if I had my way. My soldiers also started torching other buildings, and the whole place was soon ablaze. There was absolute confusion everywhere. Women were wailing and shouting and cursing. Children were frightened and cried. Young boys and girls held hands and looked at their burning village with a stupefied expression on their faces. But the grown men were silent; not a whimper or a whisper from them. Pigs were running about, mithuns were bellowing, dogs were barking, and fowls setting up a racket with their fluttering and cracking. One little girl ran into her burning house and soon darted out holding a kitten in her hands.

When it was time for the world to sleep, we marched out of Darzo – soldiers in front, with the Mizos following, and the rear brought up by more soldiers... We walked fifteen miles through the night along the jungle and the morning saw us in Hnahthial. I tell you, I hated myself that night. I had done the job of an executioner. The night when I saw children as young as three years carrying huge loads on their heads for fifteen miles with very few stops for rest, their noses running, their little feet faltering..for the first time in my life as a soldier I did not feel the burden of the fifty pound haversack on my own back.

But there was something more to be carried out. I called the Darzo Village Council President and his village elders and ordered them to sign a document saying that they had voluntarily asked to be resettled in Hnahthial PPV (Protected and Progressive Village) under the protection of the Security Forces as they were being harassed by the insurgents, and because their own village did not have communications, educational, medical and other facilities. Another document stated that they had burnt down their own village, and that no force or coercion was used by the Security Forces. They refused to

*sign. So I sent them out and after an hour called them in again, this time one man at a time. On my table was a loaded revolver, and in the corner stood two NCOs with loaded sten-guns. This frightened them, and one by one they signed both the documents.*¹

The ‘Age of Camps’

*‘How will our century go down in history? Will it be under the name of the ‘Age of the Camps’, of flesh turning cancerous?’*²

For a counterinsurgency strategy which has affected the lives of millions in the 20th century,³ and which continues to be popular with governments and ‘security experts’,⁴ regrouping, forced villagisation, or strategic hamletting, as it is variously known, is a surprisingly understudied topic. At best, it gets a few paragraphs or pages in a larger description of a particular counterinsurgency, and quite often, the account is teleologically couched, in terms of the outcome for the incumbent military power. For instance, we are invariably told that the Malayan regrouping ‘succeeded’ while the Vietnam strategic hamlets ‘failed’.⁵ While it is true that regrouping and the starvation associated with it helped to militarily defeat the Malay Communists, as acknowledged by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) leader, Chin Peng, in his memoirs,⁶ counterinsurgency never stoops to question its ends – that success in the Malay

¹ An Army officer’s reminiscences reproduced in Lalkhama (2006: 177-180).

² Bauman (1995: 192)

³ In South Africa, during the 2nd Boer War (1899-1902), Boer women, children and blacks were regrouped in British ‘concentration camps’ leading to far more deaths among them than among Boer male combatants; in Malaysia some 570,000 Chinese were resettled in New Villages (1948-60); in Vietnam, over 8.5 million people had been settled in 7205 strategic hamlets by 1963; in Algeria between 1954-61, anywhere between 1.9 to 2.3 million civilians were grouped by the French; and in Kenya over a million people were resettled in 854 villages to crush the Mau Mau revolt. On the Boer war see Stanley and Dampier (2005); on Malaya see Stubbs (2004); on Vietnam see Osborne (1965); on Algeria see Porch (2008), on Kenya see Elkins (2005).

⁴ In 2009, the Sri Lankan government has proposed putting the Tamilian population of the north into five large camps. Sri Lanka plans to house war refugees for 3 years, *International Herald Tribune*, February 11 2009. <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2009/02/11/asia/AS-Sri-Lanka-Camps.php?page=2>, accessed 22 March 2009.

⁵ See Marston and Malkasian, (2008: 16-17), Greenhill (unpublished: 2), Busch (2002), Varsori (2003), Osborne (1965) on the comparison between Malaya and Vietnam; Sim (1979), Hack (1999), Stubbs (2004), Short (1975) on Malayan ‘success’.

⁶ Chin Peng (2003: 395).

counterinsurgency, for example, was about maintaining empire and harnessing the revenues of Malaya for the reconstruction of post-war Britain. Nor does it look at ‘success’ from the point of view of those regrouped, uprooted, imprisoned behind barbed wire fences, and subjected to ‘food denial’. Had the Axis won in WW II, perhaps we would have been told that German concentration camps had ‘succeeded’. As Aimé Césaire argued, what the European bourgeoisie could not forgive the Nazis for was not genocide as such, but for having applied to Europe procedures that had been reserved for the colonies.⁷ As insurgents get dehumanized as ‘vermin’, ‘terrorists’, ‘bandits’ or ‘hostiles’, the people associated with them get reduced to statistics and populations, enabling internment to be seen as merely an administrative act, rather than as part of a war waged on real people. Not surprisingly, all the victims of internment have been colonized populations, groups who are part of the internal colonies of democratic countries like the Philippines or India, or ‘enemy races’ as in the US.⁸

In the Indian context, regrouping we are told, ‘succeeded’ in Mizoram where a peace accord was signed between the Mizo National Front (MNF), which had been seeking independence and the Indian government in 1985, but it ‘failed’ in Nagaland, where the movement for self-determination continues.⁹ This paper argues that while regrouping may or may not contribute to militarily defeating an insurgent movement, if viewed in terms of principles like democracy, citizenship, or the rule of law it is always a failure. For democracies, in particular, it is profoundly destabilizing, since the government divides its own population into enemies and collaborators, in ways that begin to weaken the fundamental edifice of citizenship. The exceptional legal space of the camp becomes normalised as a way of dealing with citizens, even outside the camp. In the camp, writes Agamben, ‘a state of emergency linked to a colonial war is extended to an entire civil population’. The juridical basis for the Nazi camp, was the principle of protective custody, ‘a preventative police measure insofar as it allowed individuals to be “taken into custody” independently of any criminal behaviour, solely to avoid danger to the security of

⁷ Césaire cited in Stratton (2003: 509), see also Diken (2004: 83).

⁸ See Saito (2005) on Japanese internment in the USA, Mindanao Documentation Committee for Refugees (1982) on the Philippines.

⁹ See Chadha (2005: 288-289) on Nagaland and (2005: 324) on Mizoram, which voices the standard security view.

the state.’¹⁰ In other words, whatever the overt reasons given for regrouping, (and I discuss these later), what underlies it is the assumption that civilians are potentially hostile and a threat to the state. If they get killed or otherwise suffer, this is acceptable as military necessity and justified in the higher interests of state sovereignty and continuity. Based on the dehumanizing concept of ‘collateral damage’ at one end to a genocidal mentality at the other, with a whole range of punitive and retributive rationales in between, forced relocation during war is an example of a profoundly anti-civilian ideology.¹¹ Yet the ease with which much of the literature – even that by historians or political scientists – deals with it, as an incidental byproduct of counterinsurgency, a mere means, displays what Bauman describes as the lack of a ‘moral calculus’ emblematic of a bureaucratized modernity.¹²

Based on interviews with civilians who endured grouping in the Indian states of Nagaland and Mizoram in the 1960s and 1960s, this paper shows how for them, there was no ‘success’, only hardship.¹³ What they remember is not the agricultural extension agents, the pharmacists or the administrative officers who ostensibly manned the regrouped villages/ camps as part of a supposed ‘hearts and mind approach’,¹⁴ but the army search operations, the starvation, the regime of curfews and the reduction of identity to a roll call and a piece of paper. Separation from their fields, their homes, and their forests filled them with a yearning which no amount of ‘improved poultry and piggery’ could compensate for. Villagers described themselves as objects: In Mizoram, the grouping was called khokhom, which literally means driving villagers here and there; a term that sums up a world of terror, like the Palestinian Nakbah or catastrophe to refer to the forcible evacuations of 1948. People in Nagaland also mark time with reference to grouping and the extended sojourns in the forest which preceded it: ‘the year we came back from the jungles.’ While some acknowledge that their lives are better off than they might have been had

¹⁰ Agamben (1998: 166-167).

¹¹ Slim (2008: 71 -119). The distinction between civilians and combatants is, of course, of relatively recent origin. See Tooley (2007).

¹² Bauman (1989: 29)

¹³ I carried out these interviews in May (Nagaland) and August (Mizoram) 2008. In Nagaland, I interviewed 17 individuals, and had two group interviews with retired soldiers of the Naga army, and serving police in the Naga Reserve Battalion. In Mizoram too, I did 17 individual interviews. 20 additional interviews (with 6 women and 14 men) were done by H. Lalthuamlia, my interpreter for the other interviews. I interviewed a range of prominent citizens, intellectuals and ordinary villagers in both places.

¹⁴ See District Gazetteer of Mizoram, reproduced in Nunthara (1989: 63)

they not been grouped, this is not the only way they could have been drawn into ‘modernity’; and certainly that was not the benign intention of the government. Although Naga and Mizo histories of insurgency are now beginning to be locally published,¹⁵ and there is a range of literature on the Naga movement and to a much lesser extent the Mizo struggle,¹⁶ there is practically no independent or scholarly analysis of the impact of grouping as a counterinsurgency tactic.¹⁷

Grouping: understanding the links between civilians and insurgents

The central logic behind grouping is to isolate insurgents from the general population from which they derive their support, cutting off their food and other supplies.¹⁸ In the counterinsurgency literature, however, for example, in the writing of Sir Robert Thompson, the British counterinsurgency expert on Malaya who also advised the American government in Vietnam, this is euphemistically described as ‘protecting’ the population from the insurgents, who are portrayed as lacking legitimacy and preying on the people. By concentrating populations under government control, it is also possible to organize them into supporting the government.¹⁹ In its ostensibly more benign form, the ‘winning hearts and minds (WHAM or sometimes simply HAM) approach’ pioneered by General Richard Templer in Malaya as an advance over the Briggs Plan, grouping must involve improving the economic and living conditions of villagers, so that they have a reason to support the government rather than the insurgents.²⁰ Grouping is thus something that is positively good for people. When cast in these terms, population relocation for counterinsurgency is not very different from ‘voluntary’ relocation or collectivization,²¹ as well as displacement for large hydel or industrial projects.²² Small,

¹⁵ See Iralu (200?), Atsongchanger (1994), Zamawaia (2007)

¹⁶ See for example, Nibedon, (1978, 1980), Verghese (1996); Nunthara (1996); Baruah (2007).

¹⁷ For two exceptions, see Nunthara (1989) and Rangasamy (1978) Nibedon (1978, 1980) does provide some details of grouping in both books, but that is not his primary focus.

¹⁸ Shafer (1988: 62-63), Kalyvas..

¹⁹ In practice, this really meant the creation of loyalist home guards from among the regrouped population. See Elkins (2005: 241), Stubbs (2004: 162-163).

²⁰ See Thompson (1966: 14-125); Short (1975) for all these views.

²¹ See Scott (1998), on Ujamaa in Tanzania. Even before grouping was carried out in Mizoram for counterinsurgency reasons, a Planning Commission Study Team headed by Tarlok Singh in 1966 is said to have advocated the merging of smaller hamlets into larger units for developmental purposes. See District Gazetteer reproduced in Nunthara (1989: 62).

scattered hamlets are seen as breeding not just insurgency, but also social and economic ‘backwardness’. Some re-locations are required by war, and the others by modernity and ‘development’.

In the more honest, if less palatable for public consumption, ‘cost-benefit approach’, counterinsurgency must focus on making the costs, including starvation, torture and other brutal forms of pacification, far higher than any benefit the public gains from supporting the guerillas. At best, as Shafer points out, this coercive approach rests on a morality of consequences, the notion that the order imposed by pacification is better for people in the long run.²³ It also ignores the possibility that the same outcome might have been achieved through alternative means. In practice, there is often little difference between the two approaches, and while governments may claim to be focused on rehabilitation, the process is overwhelmingly coercive.²⁴ In the Malayan case, despite the stated adoption of a ‘more humane’ ‘hearts and mind approach’, which was what ostensibly accounted for its ‘success’, this was accompanied by the collective punishment of villages where curfew was imposed and rations cut, stringent policies of food denial and identification parades where people are said to have disappeared.²⁵ In almost all accounts of grouping, it has led to major civilian mortality, decline in food production, and severe dislocation of the social fabric.²⁶

²² While dismissing the Narmada Bachao Andolan claim against the Sardar Sarovar dam, Justices Kirpal and Anand argued that those who had been displaced by dams and steel plants were actually better off: ‘It is not fair that tribals and the people in undeveloped villages should continue in the same condition without ever enjoying the fruits of science and technology for better health and have a higher quality of life style. Should they not be encouraged to seek greener pastures elsewhere, if they can have access to it, either through their own efforts due to information exchange *or due to outside compulsions*. 2000 Majority Judgement by Justices Kirpal and Anand in WP (C) 319 of 1994, *Narmada Bachao Andolan vs. Union of India and ors*, pg. 172-3, emphasis mine.

²³ Shafer (1988: 73).

²⁴ See Elkins (2005) on the systematic destruction of British records on the Mau Mau repression, and their retention of those records which emphasized rehabilitation.

²⁵ See Stubbs (2004: 169-172). Francis Loh Kok Wah notes that villagers had been pacified: ‘But this is very different from saying that their hearts and minds had been won. At most a small group of elites came to identify with the British cause’ Loh (1988: 161). Chin Peng (2003: 278) also mentions that the Korean war boom had led to soaring donations for the party, hardly a sign of hearts and minds being won over to the British. For other scholars who contest the received hearts and minds wisdom, but from varying positions, see Hack (1999) and Newsinger (2002: 58-59).

²⁶ see Elkins (2005), Shafer (1988), Greenhill (unpublished).

Both these approaches assume the fundamental illegitimacy of the insurgent goal, and thereby the illegitimacy of civilian support for that goal, which in turn justifies punitively subjecting civilians to severe hardship. At best, when governments or analysts want to make a distinction between people and insurgents, they portray people as uncommitted; and likely to support whichever side has more power.²⁷ People may often describe themselves as pawns caught in the conflict between two more powerful forces, but this is often mere playing to the gaze of a ‘human interest story’ driven media or the depoliticised practices of humanitarian intervention. What both of these do is deny people their rights as citizens or political beings (the right to support any ideology they choose), and reduces them, as Agamben notes for the refugee, to ‘bare life’ signaling thus a complicity or ‘secret solidarity’ between humanitarian organizations and ‘the very powers they ought to fight.’²⁸ The default ideology, as far as most writers on counterinsurgency are concerned, is support for the status quo, even when this includes colonialism or imperialist invasion; and even where grievances are recognized, they become a threat only when they are exploited by ‘conspirators’, or ‘communists’.²⁹

This view, however, simply does not get at the core of civilian support for insurgents in most cases. This is not to say that everyone is equally committed to the guerilla cause, that there is no variation in support over time, that guerillas are honest about the cause, or that negotiation is always possible; but simply that without attending to the political reasons behind the insurgency in the first place, pacification is often simply the imposition of state terror.

While the Indian state, like every other proponent of grouping, thought it could commandeer political affiliations - it only buried them underground. Both in Nagaland and Mizoram, everybody I spoke to agreed that grouping hugely increased the support for the insurgents. In Nagaland, they told me the entire population became ‘UG’ (underground) or as they preferred to call themselves ‘national workers’.

²⁷ See Stubbs (2008: 116); Short (1975: 236-239).

²⁸ Agamben (1998: 133); see also Diken (2004: 89). Bare life is opposed to political life in the Aristotelian sense, ‘that whose exclusion founds the city of men’ (Agamben 1998: 7, 177).

²⁹ See Ahmad (2006: 57).

Naga Movement for Independence

While the Naga movement traces political consciousness back to the formation of a Naga Labour Corps in World War I, concrete political organization began with the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946. Disputes arose over the interpretation of a 1947 agreement between the NNC and the governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari: while the Nagas interpreted it to mean that they would be given the choice of independence after ten years, the Indian government interpreted it to mean that the Naga hills had become an integral part of India. In 1951, the NNC organized a plebiscite, in which they claimed to have got 99% support for independence; this plebiscite, however, was not recognized by the Indian government. The Nagas boycotted the 1952 first general election in India and by 1953 had extended this to a boycott of government schools and officials. The Army too started search operations, and the first of the Emergency regulations was passed. In 1956, the Federal Government of Nagaland was announced, along with its standing army, the Naga Home Guards, which began to attack police posts etc. The Indian government further militarized the area - in 1956 nearly two divisions of the Army and 34 battalions of the paramilitary Assam Rifles and armed police were operating in the Naga hills.

The Indian army estimated the 'Naga hostiles' as between 1500-2000, but with the support of a much larger number of villagers. An extract from a 'Top Secret Document April 23, 1959' gives orders for villagers to be 'isolated, searched and all inhabitants gathered at central places in the village for identification/apprehension of hostiles.'³⁰ It was also during this period, 1956-59, under Nehru's orders, that several (hundred?) villages were burnt and their inhabitants grouped into camps which were guarded by the army.

But even after villagers were allowed to go back in 1959, serious human rights abuses continued, with one of the most egregious incidents being Operation Bluebird in Ukhrul district of Manipur in 1982, when villagers were severely tortured and raped by the Indian army. In 1973, there was aerial bombing in Longjang, in which helicopter gunships were used.³¹

³⁰ Copy No. 2908/AC signed by one Cap. Offg Adjt Kanwal Singh, reproduced in IWGA (1986: 141).

³¹ See Luithui and Haksar (1984); IWGA (1986).

Pressure by Naga moderates on both the NNC and the Indian government bought some peace in the form of statehood for Nagaland in 1963, but this was seen by the underground army as a quisling government. Like the Hydari Agreement, the 1975 Shillong Accord between the central government and the Naga fighters died a quick death, and in 1980 the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) was formed. This in turn split into two factions, named after their leaders, the NSCN (Isac-Muivah) and NSCN (Khaplang). From 1997 onward, again due to pressure by civil society groups like the Naga Hoho, the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), and the Naga Mothers Association (NMA), there has been a ceasefire and talks between the NSCN (IM) and the Indian government.

The Mizo Independence Struggle

Unlike Nagaland, the Mizo merger with India was actually desired by the Mizo Union, which won the 1952 District Council elections, and saw it as a way of abolishing unpopular Chiefships. In 1958, the cyclical fifty-year flowering of the bamboo, accompanied by an explosion of crop-destroying rats, led to widespread famine. This phenomenon is known locally as the *Mao Tam*.³² Despite being warned by the Mizo Union in charge of the Hill Council, the Assam government did nothing for a long time. Eventually when it did provide famine relief, because of the lack of roads, rice bags had to be dropped by air leading to some 40% wastage as they would break upon impact.³³ People were starving, there were deaths in the interior, and the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF), formed by a former army *havildar* (sergeant) Laldenga at this time, was successful in arguing that the Assam government had imposed an economic blockade on the Mizo hills.³⁴ The MNF was renamed the Mizo National Front in 1962, with the aim of getting Mizo independence: 'During the fifteen years of close contact and association with India, the Mizo people had not been able to feel at home with Indians or in India, nor have they been able to feel that their joys and sorrows have really even been shared by India.'³⁵

³² See Nag (2008)

³³ Nibedon (1980: 39); see also Rangasamy (1978).

³⁴ Nibedon (1980: 36-39); Nag.

³⁵ Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India by the Mizo National Front General Headquarters, Aizawl, Mizoram on October 30 1965; reproduced in Zamawia (2007: 969-972)

On February 28, 1966, the MNF launched Operation Jericho, in which they simultaneously attacked army posts in the major towns, Lungleh, Champhai, and Aizawl, and took over communications. On March 2nd, the Indian government responded to the MNF's declaration of independence by declaring the entire Mizo hills a 'disturbed area' under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Troops were moved in to retake all the army posts, on March 5th and 6th the Bara Bazaar, the biggest market area in Aizawl town, was burnt down and Aizawl was aerially strafed. Both the Chief Minister of Assam, BP Chaliha, and the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi initially denied that bombing had been carried out, saying that the Air Force had been used to drop men and supplies.³⁶ The Reverend Lalsawma, who was later to participate in the mediations between the government and the MNF, recalled that on 13 March 1966, he and his students from the Aizawl Theological College buried 13 people killed by the security forces. 'The very first committee we formed was a Citizens Committee, the main purpose of which was to clear the town of dead bodies, as well as the bodies of animals who had died during the bombings.'³⁷

In the months of fighting and ambushes that followed, anger over the deaths of Indian army personnel were often taken out on neighbouring villages, in the form of burnings, killings and rape. A 1974 memorandum submitted by the Human Rights Committee set up by Brigadier Sailo to Indira Gandhi listed 36 cases of human rights violations, with details of the army officers involved.³⁸ For its part, while the MNF did not harm ordinary villagers, local leaders of the Mizo Union were suspect; and later, the MNF 'dagger brigade' began to assassinate former MNF leaders who had surrendered. In 1974, notices were issued to non-Mizos to leave the place. Laldenga's several feelers to the Indian government from the early 1970s onwards, basically seeking an honourable position for himself in any future set up, finally resulted in an accord signed in 1986 between Laldenga, the Mizoram Government, and the Government of India. The MNF became part of the government in Mizoram, and Laldenga became Chief Minister. Mizoram had been given union territory status in 1972 and statehood in 1986.

³⁶ Hluna (2006: 8, 21).

³⁷ Interview with Rev. Lalsawma, Aizawl, August 2008.

³⁸ Human Rights Committee Mizoram, 1974. A copy of this document was given to me by Brigadier Sailo in Aizawl.

But the most lasting impact of the war was Operation Security, launched by the Indian government in 1967, which involved forcibly regrouping villages into smaller concentrations. Mr. Dengnuna, a Mizo civil servant who was involved in the resettlement operations recalled that Major General Sagat Singh carried around with him Brigadier General Thompson's book on counterinsurgency in Malaya, showing not only that 'imperial networking provided a kind of doctrinal continuity' but that it flowed over into the post-colonies,³⁹ despite their own recent histories of freedom struggles. The national media co-operated in the idea of regrouping, even while expressing caveats. An *Indian Express* editorial, dated 7 January 1967 writes: 'Evacuation of the entire village population over 4000 sq miles is a spectacular operation which implies either that the situation is more serious than the authorities want the country to believe or that a newer determined effort is about to be made to wipe out the last vestiges of rebellion. The evacuation will help in isolating and mopping up the rebel bands but resettlement of 60,000 people far away from their houses will present serious difficulties. Operation Security will involve a measure of force.'⁴⁰

Law and Location in the Cartography of (Counter) Insurgency

Most scholarly accounts of Indian democracy argue that it is strong on procedural features such as elections, independent courts, a free press and so on, even if relatively weak on substantive achievements, given the inequalities of class, ethnicity, caste and gender.⁴¹ Most would agree too that the Emergency of 1975-77 marked a significant watershed in Indian democracy, even if they disagree on whether it has been downhill or uphill from there, and where to begin dating the crisis, assuming there is one.⁴²

This paper shows, from the perspective of borders populations who have suffered emergency rule since the 1950s and 1960s, much before the rest of India knew what it meant, how questions

³⁹ Townshend, (2008: 36); see also Elkins (2005: 101, 105), on the direct links between grouping in Malaya and Kenya.

⁴⁰ Cited in Nibedon (1980: 106-7)

⁴¹ See for instance Guha (2008), Jayal (2001).

⁴² See essays in Jayal 2001. For some commentators, the multiplicity of religious, ethnic and caste movements cast an unbearable burden on the state, while for others they are a sign of a thriving democracy.

of social contract, representation and voice have been configured very differently in the outposts of the Indian state (as well, perhaps, as at its inner frontiers).⁴³ The worrying issue is not just the gap between procedural and substantive democracy, but the ease with which democratic procedures are suspended in the name of counterinsurgency.⁴⁴ In a sign that the borders may finally be having their revenge, these issues have now moved to the centre-stage of the debate in India and elsewhere, in the context of anti-terror laws.⁴⁵

In both Nagaland and Mizoram, location at the borders of the Indian state has played a major role in defining the nature both of the insurgency and the counterinsurgency. What was sought was not just independence within the current boundaries of India, but ‘recognition’ of the unity of ethnic and cultural communities who had been divided by the nation-state boundaries of India, Burma and Bangladesh, a demand for the undoing of a partition which has never been given its due place in the history of India.⁴⁶ The Mizos (Zomi, Zo) or the Chin-Lushais as they were earlier called, are divided between the Chittagong Hill tracts in Bangladesh, the Chin Hills of Burma, and India within which they are further divided between the states of Mizoram, Assam, Tripura and Manipur.⁴⁷ A man could serve in the Burma army as late as 1962 and return to live in Mizoram.⁴⁸ The Nagas are similarly distributed between the current Indian states of Nagaland,

⁴³ Villagers engaged in the Telengana armed struggle of the late 1940s, in Andhra Pradesh, were also put into camps. See Sundarayya (1985)

⁴⁴ While there was some protest over both the regrouping and the passage of emergency laws, as Hluna, shows in his compilation of debates in the Assam Legislative Assembly, it was overruled in the name of the security imperatives of the state. Hluna (2006).

⁴⁵ See Singh (2007).

⁴⁶ See also Van Schendel (2005: 363-364).

⁴⁷ The ‘Chin-Lushai land, hereinafter referred to as ZORAM or Zoland ..is roughly between 91,000 square miles with a population of about 5 million in 1991. The Zo dynasty or Zo kingdom was built sometime between 200 AD and 800 AD.’ Memorandum from Zo Re-Unification Organisation (ZORO) to Bill Clinton, Mizoram, Aizawl, May 20, 1993. Reproduced in Zamawia (2007: 1020-1023).

⁴⁸ See the example of MNF Intelligence Chief, Vanlalngaia, cited in Nibedon (1980: 52). WW II was an important influence on insurgency, reinforcing the tenuousness of empire, the importance of a local knowledge of place to the maintenance of that empire, and a sense of the possibilities of military engagement. Nibedon writes that Nagas who were caught up in the war and the occupation of their villages by either side, ‘aided all, endorsed the actions of none’ (Nibedon 1978: 23) While the Lushais escaped direct occupation by the Japanese, the Kohima war cemetery in Nagaland bears witness to the range of religions and regiments who fought for the British. Many Nagas served as trackers and guides to the British; and many Lushais fought on the Allied side. Two key figures in Mizo politics, Laldenga and Sailo, both had army backgrounds.

Manipur, Assam and Arunachal, as well as Burma. The demand for a Naga nation (Nagalim) which would encompass all areas claimed as Naga homelands remains a sticking point in the negotiations between the Indian Government and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) –IM, in part because of resistance from the other states, like Manipur, who fear a diminution of their territories and identities. Insurgency here has been less about alternative politics to those practiced by the Indian government, as against alternative cartographies, since the federal government of Nagaland and the Mizo National Front both set up parallel governments and armies with similar structures of command, and there are perhaps as many underground movements supported by the Indian state as opposed to it.⁴⁹

In the case of both Nagaland and Mizoram, the boundaries are also drawn in religious terms, as a defense of Christianity versus the imposition of Hinduism by the Indian state.⁵⁰ Yet far from the Church being a purveyor of secessionist sentiments, as the Hindu Right would have it, the natural conservatism and non-violence of the Church meant it often sided with the authorities, whether the authorities were willing to recognise this or not; also putting it at odds with the insurgents whom it condemned.⁵¹ In both states, given its centrality in the lives of the people, church elders have played a significant mediatory role.

Being located on the boundaries of the nation influenced the ease with which the insurgents could get arms and sanctuary from neighbouring states like China, Pakistan or Burma, and the ease with which they met and influenced each other, the Naga movement providing the original inspiration and practical help to many of the others. While the help provided by neighbouring countries was critical, it did not explain the rise of the insurgency or the local support for it. On the other hand, it enabled the Indian state to attribute resistance to outside conspiracy, and

⁴⁹ See Baruah (2007), Samaddar (2007).

⁵⁰ On mass conversions to Christianity among the Nagas, see Eaton (1997: 271). Tours by government officials on Sundays, were cited by the MNF as an example of official discrimination against Christians. This perceived anti-Christian bias was reinforced by the Indian army's occupation and burning of churches. Hluna (1985: 91, 101).

⁵¹ In March 1966, the Presbyterian and Baptist Churches issued pamphlets condemning violence as un-Christian and against human rights, which the MNF tried to block (Hluna 1985: 107-8).

strengthened its determination to prevent secession, which would further render the nation's boundaries vulnerable.⁵²

If insurgency challenges existing maps of Indian citizenship, the Indian government has used 'law' in a similar fashion, by demarcating 'insurgent spaces' as spaces of non-citizenship. For fifty years now, North-East India has effectively been under Emergency. The Defence of India rules under which the population was first grouped in Mizoram was introduced by the British during WWII to deal with enemy aliens, and also used extensively against communists in 1962. The Assam Maintenance of Public Order (AMPO) (Autonomous Districts) Act 1953, the Assam Disturbed Areas Act 1955, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) 1958, and the Nagaland Security Regulation 1962, provided the legal sanction for army operations, and the cover of impunity for acts of rape, killings, and arson. Under AFSPA, which gives the army the right to shoot to kill on suspicion, and destroy any structure they believe shelters insurgents or arms, everyone is potentially a 'hostile'. The regrouped villages or camps, were the zenith of this space of exception, where everything depended on the will of the individual guard, rather than any rule or law.⁵³

But despite the defacto operation of Emergency laws, the Indian government has taken to heart Templer's injunction in Malaya to keep civilian government going at all costs.⁵⁴ Emergency law has been accompanied by the formal trappings of democracy – elections, political parties and so on, with the Centre attempting to rule through a mixture of co-optation and repression, and creating states in order to deflect the thrust of the independence movements. Although important decisions could not be taken without the consent of the central government in Delhi – even on such matters as putting an end to grouping and allowing villagers to go home – elected governments like the Mizo People's Conference headed by Brigadier Sailo have played an important palliative role.

⁵² See also Schendel (200: 270); Mullik (1971: 620) describes Chinese support for the Nagas, Mizos and others as an act of war on India.

⁵³ Agamben (1998: 167, 170)

⁵⁴ see Stubbs (2004), Short (1975)

Houses Die When their Inhabitants are Gone

- *Why did you leave the horse alone?*
 - *To keep the house company, my son*
- Houses die when their inhabitants are gone....*

Mahmoud Darwish, The Eternity of Cactus⁵⁵

In Mizoram, the grouping was far more extensive than in Nagaland and lasted much longer, almost fifteen years, compared to the two-three years for Nagaland. After regrouping ended, almost all the families in Nagaland went back to their original villages, but many in Mizoram stayed on in the grouping centre or moved to Aizawl. On the other hand, the conflict in Nagaland continues, so when people talk about grouping, it forms part of an ongoing continuum of perceived oppression. In both cases, the grouping was preceded by burning, so that villagers could not return home, and the insurgents could find no shelter; and was almost always accompanied by search operations.

The 1967 order on grouping in Mizoram, made under the Defence of India Rules, makes this scorched earth policy explicit. It specifies a date, time and route by which villagers were to leave their own areas and move into the grouping centre. ‘All buildings,’ the order says, ‘except places of worship and all moveable and immovable properties situated or left behind in those areas shall .. be destroyed or rendered useless before 11.1.1967’⁵⁶

There were four phases to the Mizoram grouping– the first involved the grouping of 106 villages with a population of 52,210 into 18 grouping centres called Protected and Progressive Villages (PPV), and was completed in ten weeks.⁵⁷ The second, third and fourth phases involved shifting villagers into what were called New Grouping Centres, Voluntary Grouping Centres and Extended Loop Areas, and although the official orders for this were passed in 1969 and 1970, the

⁵⁵ In Darwish (2006)

⁵⁶ Order Co. CLD 1/1-67/1 dated Silchar the 2nd January 1967, signed by BC Cariapa, Liason Officer of the Central Government for the Mizo District, Silchar, reproduced as Appendix XI in R. Zamawia, Zofate Zinkawngah, Aizawl, 2007, pp. 988-989

⁵⁷ Nunthara (1989: 5)

process had started earlier.⁵⁸ Ostensibly run by the regular civilian administration, these grouping centres were, in fact, attached to a military unit. In all, over 200,000 people or 82 % of the total population of Mizoram was shifted, and the total number of villages came down from 764 villages to 248 villages (including 138 ungrouped villages). Aizawl district was particularly affected, with 95% of the population being moved (Nunthara 1989: 5-6, 48-49).⁵⁹

Figures are unavailable for Nagaland, but from the accounts I was given, the process was similar. In Mokokchung district, except for two or three villages like Changki (which had the largest number of graduates and civil servants in Nagaland, and is described by others as a village of collaborators) and Ungma (which was too large, too close to Mokokchung town and had an army camp), almost every village was burnt, not just once but several times, as a prelude to grouping. Mongjen was burnt seven times in order to force the villagers to leave; while Mametong was burnt 19 times. Army trucks would come and inform the Gaonbura or village headman that the village would be burnt. Mongjen was grouped along with two other villages to Warumong village, 10 miles away, but, said Ao, 'we still went everyday to look at our village'. In 1958, when orders came from the government that the villages could go back, 'we were given six days to come to camp and six days to return. But people returned within one day.'⁶⁰

Sometimes the grouping took place much after the village had been burnt, and villagers spent the intervening time in the forests or in the fields around their homes. For example, Lungdai village (Mizoram) was burnt in 1967 but constituted as a grouping centre only a year later. At that time, the Church was the only building still standing, but it was occupied by the Army. It was only

⁵⁸ For the three later phases, the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act of 1953 was invoked rather than the Defence of India rules, which had been challenged as a basis for grouping in the Assam High Court (*Chhuanvawra versus The State of Assam and others*). The history and outcome of this legal challenge needs to be clarified further.

⁵⁹ The exact population figures vary –with Nunthara (1989: 6) saying that 236,162 people were regrouped; but the District Gazetteers Part I (reproduced as Appendix I in Nunthara 1989: 61-66), giving a figure of 241,435 grouped plus an urban population of 45,500. Only 36,431 villagers were not grouped. The figures provided by the Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Aizawl (reproduced as Appendix II in Nunthara (1989: 67-71) also give slightly different figures regarding the number of grouping centres (104) as against 110 (Nunthara 1989: 48).

⁶⁰ Interview with Professor Lanungsang Ao, of Mongjen village, who now teaches sociology at Mokokchung University.

after a local resident, who was both a Church elder and a soldier in the Assam Rifles, intervened that they agreed to leave.⁶¹

Many people gave accounts of their time in the forest. Sometimes, as in Mokokchung, all the men joined the Naga army in the forest, while the women and children stayed on in the village. Elsewhere, the whole village would flee. Pi Zamani, originally from Chungtlang (Mizoram), who now runs a grocery store in Reiek where her village was regrouped, described the terrible and constant fear:

Whenever we heard the army come, I would cradle my baby, collect my belongings and run into the forest. We could hear shooting all the time.....Once while we were hiding inside a cave, the Indian army fired mortars and it exploded right next to us. Thank God we are still alive. The hardest part was getting the babies not to cry.

A neighbouring village Rulpui, which was also regrouped to Reiek, was bombed because an MNF battalion had been formed in that village. This village was evidently deemed so unsafe for the army that they never got direct orders to move, but were told by their neighbours.

The grouping centre, in both Nagaland and Mizoram, was chosen on the basis of size, proximity to the main road, and suitability for the location of an army camp. Smaller villages - within a radius of 10 to 15 miles - would be brought there. In some cases, the residents of the original village would be asked to take in families from the regrouped villages, while in others, they initially moved into the church or primary school building, or into makeshift bamboo shelters in the open, before constructing their own houses. In Mizoram, many people recounted the residents of the grouping centre being made to work as unpaid porters to help carry the belongings of those being relocated. In some cases, the grouping was done within a week, while in others people were given more time. Sometimes a village could negotiate the move. For instance, in Lungpher (Mizoram), the army gave notice to the village, but since it was December, the Village Council President (VCP) pleaded with the army to allow them to spend Christmas in the village, in exchange for burning their own houses. Eventually they moved to Phullen grouping centre in January 1969.

⁶¹ Mr. Romingliana, who managed this, died fighting for India in the 1971 war.

In Mizoram, the houses built after grouping were small tin sheds of 10 feet long, and some got only 6 feet long corrugated tin sheets, which would barely cover one room. If they were lucky, the army would allow them to dismantle their houses and take some of the material to the grouping centre. The houses then, unlike now, where they exhibit a solidity rarely found in other parts of rural India, were made of straw and burnt easily. While one person in Mizoram mentioned getting compensation of Rs. 6000 for each burnt house, in Aliba village of Nagaland, Imsengkala said bitterly that all they had ever got from the government was one mosquito net.

Earlier land was communally owned, and could be sold only by the community. In every cycle, the village council president would allocate land to households for *jhum* or swidden cultivation. After grouping, this practice was simply extended to include those households who were grouped in, putting tremendous pressure on the land. In some cases, if their original village was not too far, the villagers who had been relocated would be allowed to return for cultivation. But combined with curfew, roll calls and the distance to be traveled, this was, of necessity, tenuous. The grouping process also put a strain on the forests, which not only now had to provide timber for so many houses to be rebuilt, but also fuelwood to a much larger population. Rangasami found, from conversations with villagers in 1978, that the grouping centres had no land for fruit trees, or places to rear pigs.⁶² People told me that animals were either consumed or sold at throw-away prices to businessmen from Aizawl, Kohima or Mokokchung, when villages were moved.

What used to be small scattered settlements now became semi-urban centers. For instance, in Thingsultia, a big grouping centre south of Aizawl, there were 150 houses before grouping. During grouping, 9 other villages were brought in, and the number went up to 7-800 houses. In 1986, even after people started going back or left for Aizawl, there were 600 houses. Those who stayed on in the grouping centres were usually the younger ones who saw more opportunities of employment or business there. Sometimes people retained fields in both places. The grouping eventually destroyed the old land allocation system in these centers. Once it was declared a town,

⁶² Rangasami (1978: 656)

anyone could be given a land settlement certificate by the Village Council President and acquire land. This has led to rich people from Aizawl buying land in these centres.

While some villages expanded, many smaller villagers like Kelzam, Lailak and Lunghret have disappeared altogether, because their inhabitants never went back after grouping or moved to Aizawl. Elsewhere, the pattern of settlement was permanently altered, from scattered homes spread across the hills, to homes strung along the main road in straight lines. In Nagaland, while fewer villages have disappeared, villages like Khonoma, which was the NNC leader Phizo's village, used to have more extensive fields before its inhabitants were displaced, and the Army took over.

When orders came for grouping, villagers were often caught between the MNF and the army, not knowing who to follow, and trying to take their own counsel in the midst of conflicting orders.

Mr. Lungmuana of Kelzam in Mizoram, a village which no longer exists, recounted:

We were forty households in our village. We were forced out of our village on February 13, 1968. I can recall most of what happened because I was 19 years old at that time. We were supposed to be grouped in east Phaileng village. When the Indian army came, they ordered us to leave the village the same day. We feared them, so we did exactly as they ordered us to do. We thought they would escort us on our way. But they didn't. They just gave the orders and went on their own way. But out of fear, we still left our village. We carried what we could and followed the road to east Phaileng. While we marched on we met lots of MNF underground who were patrolling the area. They told us to go back to our village and that they would protect us. So we marched back to our village while the MNF escorted us. Then came the next morning, the MNF got a message and had to leave. We pleaded with them to stay but they said they couldn't. The whole village was scared. The day went by and that evening the villagers met together. The elders explained that if we stayed on in the village it wouldn't be safe, since both the Army and the MNF were coming in and out, and we could be caught in the firing. After much discussion, all the villagers agreed to leave the village and head for Aizawl. We marched through rough roads, forest and were always aware of the MNF and the Indian army. We spent many nights in the forest as well. At Sihphir village we were detained for about three months, because the officials wouldn't let us go to Aizawl. In Sihphir we set up a tent like refuge, and after much discussion between our elders and the officials, headed again for Aizawl. But we only made it to Durtlang village, where we were again detained for a few days.

When they finally reached Aizawl, the villagers were allotted a specific area, and given some immediate rations and tin roofs for house construction. Eventually in 1972 they were given land passes or ownership papers for their new settlement.

Ironically, when people began to go back to their original villages in Mizoram by 1971, the government termed them *thlawbawks*, the term the villagers used for their temporary huts on their jhum fields. They had to get temporary permits to be renewed every month to stay near their fields.⁶³ The grouping centres were now seen as the permanent villages, while the thlawbaks were not recognized, and therefore it did not matter if they had no schools or health services. Going back itself was dangerous because the army would come and find them.

Surveillance: seals on the arm

'In all life under heaven, the grouping of villages was the sorriest thing.'

Popular Mizo song

The grouping centres were surrounded by high bamboo fences, sometimes as high as 24 feet, which ran along the entire length of the villages. In many cases they had a second layer of spikes, sometimes 60 feet or more. There was just one gate. While this was justified as 'protection' from the insurgents, the villagers who had to build these prisons knew exactly what these were. The fencing took months to complete, with all the village men being conscripted, unpaid, to perform the job.

Army camps were usually located at the top of the village from where the army could look down and be looked up to. The issue was not just making the population legible to the state – which is what regrouping shares with other high modernist projects – but equally, making the state visible to the people. As Bauman writes, the panopticon was a 'model of mutual involvement and confrontation.'⁶⁴ The families of men in the underground were singled out for special surveillance. For instance, in Longkhum grouping centre (Nagaland) the main army camp was up

⁶³ Nibedon (1980: 158); Nunthara (1989: 29)

⁶⁴ Bauman, cited in Diken (2004: 86).

on the hill, while a smaller guarded one for these families was near the Church building in the centre of the village.

Entry and exit into the camps, even for everyday purposes like going to fetch water or firewood, was strictly regulated through the use of ID cards,⁶⁵ as well as the branding of individuals. Those not covered in the camp census were assumed to be with the guerillas. Each camp had ‘women searchers’. Lanungsan Ao describe the procedure in Warumong camp in Nagaland:

‘Every individual who left was given a number. The army would call out names and then brand their forearms. After working in the fields all day, the sweat would often wipe out the seal, or it would get scratched out by the paddy stalks. People were terrified because if they went back to camp without the stamp, they would be taken for the underground and beaten, unless the gaonbura intervened. Later the seal was put on the forehead, and sometimes, with women, it was put on their chest.

The roll call in the morning took two hours; which reduced the time for cultivation. Men and women would be separated. The villagers would laugh at the pronunciation of their names in the roll call, at which the soldiers would get incensed and beat them, and then the villagers would laugh some more.

People were always tense about informers, whether in their homes or even in their fields, where they worried about Indian army soldiers hiding in the bushes and spying on them. Personal animosities, including conflicts over women, were often an occasion for informers to accuse someone. ‘We were not afraid of the Indians’, said L. Ao in Mokokchung, ‘we were afraid of our own people. We were more afraid of the informers than of wild animals.’ Spies were given extra army uniforms and had their faces covered. If they were discovered, the villagers would themselves finish them off with *daos* (traditional Naga sword), and not wait for the Naga army. But Reverend Lalsawma in Mizoram recalled that even if the ‘pointers’ were killed, there was never any retaliation against their families.

Equally, any hobnobbing with the army could put one at risk from the insurgents. Kapkungi of village Bualpui (Mizoram) recalled that her father was a retired *sepoy*, so army men would come to their house on a regular basis to chat. One day, an MNF soldier, unaware of the army presence

⁶⁵ Nibedon (1980: 109) writes that no photographer from Assam was ready to work taking photos for these ID cards out of fear of MNF.

inside, asked for food through the window of their house. The army men rushed out to inform the others at their base camp, and within minutes their house was surrounded. The soldiers patrolled there all night. Kapkungi's family was scared that the MNF would think they had deliberately called the army.

Search operations: 'perhaps they beat me because I had long hair'

A feature that everyone consistently recalled and would describe vividly was the constant search operations. Ambushes by the underground were always times of tension for the villagers. Hrangtinzula Jahau of Kelkang village recalled how, after an ambush by the MNF just outside his village in which 14 paratroopers died, the Army came back to the village and gathered everybody in the church for a week:

They took our VCP Aizika and shot him there and then. Then the I.O. told us that those who want to go home may do so, but the first to come out would be shot. When no one left the Church, the Army came in with sticks and started beating everyone, men, women and children. There were cries of pain all over. Then they went out again and their commander ordered each door and window to be opened and aimed their guns at us. He gave the firing order. But due to one of our villagers who knew Hindi, who spoke with the commander and pleaded with him, not a shot was fired. Then when the army was about to leave our village, they marched the whole village about 5 km on foot and they just left us there and said we could go back to our village, and we did.

Being called out of their homes, herded in the open fields or in the church or school, were common features. Young men were particularly vulnerable during this time, since any of them could be suspected as an underground worker, and sometimes people would get randomly killed in the crossfire, when working in their fields. There was not much point to complaining. When the villagers of Maite complained to Army Head Quarters regarding the random death of one Malsawma, the local officers army gathered all the youth and whipped them.⁶⁶

Humour was often the only way that people could resist, even under conditions of severe torture. Lanungsang.Ao in Mokokchung describes an incident after the villagers had returned home from the grouping centre in 1959:

⁶⁶ Interview with Tochunga, village Maite, Mizoram, by Thuamliaana.

The army came looking for my brother-in-law, Temchen, whose presence had been betrayed by an informer, and rounded up the entire village by torchlight. “Get up get up” they said, and herded everyone into the church. Temchen was hiding in the rafters of the church. He recounted to us later how he was desperate to pee, and had to piss into his cloth to prevent it falling on the people assembled below. Not having found Temchen, the army started beating the men. They put them into jute sacks and rolled them down the hill, beating them with rifle butts. After that, they tied them upside down to posts, so that their loin cloths fell off and they were exposed. One man called out to the others, from this upside down position, “this year we have to clear both the old and the new jhum fields. In this position, how will we work in either, leave alone both?” At that, all hundred men started laughing, and again, the army was so angry at this, that they beat them more.

One of the old men who had suffered this indignity, and who till then had been just an ordinary farmer, now became a committed messenger for the Naga army, escaping suspicion because of his age.

Starvation: ‘we were always out of food’

Hunger ruled in the camps. This was not an accidental byproduct of the dislocation, but an intrinsic part of what grouping involved.⁶⁷ Seeing the grain that one had laboured year long to produce, burn, was traumatic, and people salvaged whatever little they could. L. Ao recalled returning with his uncle from the forest where they had fled to the sight and smell of a smouldering granary:

We rushed. My uncle got two bamboos to separate the half-burnt grain from the rest. He gave me the smaller bamboo to control the fire. I couldn’t. He tried and tried to save the paddy, collapsed and tried again after half an hour. Somehow he managed. Because of him, we managed to get 50 tins of paddy, and lived on this for a month.

⁶⁷ Greenhill describes the Minnesota experiment in the 1940s when healthy men were starved, with long lasting effects on their confidence and ability to resist. This was also at the heart of the food denials in Malaya and Kenya.

People hid their grain in makeshift bamboo containers in the forest if they had advance notice from the army. Sometimes when they went to retrieve it, they found themselves competing against birds and wild animals.

Starvation deaths were common in the camps in both Nagaland and Mizoram, and a casual survey by Rangaswamy among one group of 10-12 men in Vanhne (Mizoram) in 1978 revealed that everyone had lost someone.⁶⁸ The army provided little or no rations. Hrangtinzula Jahau, remembered of the Ruantlang grouping centre: 'Even if the army provided us with rations, it was the worst kind. It just wasn't fit to be eaten. Diseases started spreading in the village and many died. I helped to dig a number of graves at that time.' Jahau's brother was on the MNF hit list for being the treasurer of the Mizo Union, showing the grouping and the starvation that accompanied it was a blanket punishment, regardless of political affiliation.

Many described the humiliation of having to go begging for food to other villages which might be slightly better off, because they were working their own jhum fields or had managed to save enough of the harvest. This practice was called Pur Phur.

We were always out of food since we were not given any lands for jhum. So, since we were given ID cards, we would go around our neighbouring villages and beg for food. Sometimes we would gather whatever we could from the forest and take it back home. We were poor beyond words. Its hard even to talk about it.⁶⁹

Eventually, when people were allowed to work in the fields – either their own, or the new jhum fields allotted to them at the grouping centre, there were severe restrictions on what they could carry with them. Hunting was prohibited, because of restrictions on guns. Nobody was allowed to wear khaki pants or carry matchboxes; and people were checked to see that they were not carrying out food. They also had to make sure that all the harvest was transported back to the village – and sometimes this was done under armed escort, to avoid any leakages to the MNF.

⁶⁸ Rangasamy (1978: 656-7).

⁶⁹ Interview with Khianzika, age 71, village Chhawrhi, by H. Lalthuamliaana.

But still women like Imsengkala of Aliba village, managed to smuggle out some food for her husband and other insurgents in bamboo sticks.

The underground also tried to use food as a weapon. Malsawmi Ralte who had to move with her family from Selig to Tingsulktia remembers that Saitwal was an MNF stronghold, and was not grouped. After the army stopped their rations, they had to go to Saitwal for their daily necessities, and the MNF would tell them: 'If you want food, come to our side. Over there you are mixing with the Indian army.'⁷⁰ But even in these ungrouped villages, cultivation was difficult because people were scared of getting caught in crossfire or being subject to army raids.

Food was not the only item in short supply. Khianzika of village Chhawrhi (Mizoram), now aged 71, described the abruptness of the move:

The army wouldn't allow us to take anything except what we were wearing. Almost half the village went with only their farming clothes on.. When we reached Khawhai, the army allotted us an area where our village would settle down. Each family was given a rice sack as a blanket. This too, we were not allowed to cut. A single rice sack for a family of 2, 3 or maybe 10. Just think of it.

Forced labour

Everyone also recalled the grouping as a time of forced labour, when men, in particular, suffered. Apart from being forced to get the bamboo and build the spiked fences that ran around the grouping centers, men had to do odd jobs for the army like constructing their barracks, digging bunkers and trenches, and fetching water. In Longkhum, during the day, the men were taken to build the main road to Mokokchung, and at night they had to construct a motorable road to their own village. Rangasamy reports that men were even taken from Mizoram to work on the border

⁷⁰ Hluna notes that the MNF issued rules to counter the grouping, telling Mizos not to go to the grouping centre, or run away if they could; to not help the security forces in any way, to refuse to be enumerated in the census or participate in election. People were forbidden to work in or use the Indian postal services (Hluna 1985: 109).

roads in Kashmir, thus reducing the numbers available to work on the fields and further aggravating an already bad food situation in the camps.⁷¹

Men were often conscripted as coolies or porters for the army to carry their rations and other belongings from village to village, or used as human shields. Pamayongba of Aliba village (Nagaland) said that one man had to accompany every 5-6 Indian army soldiers on patrol. Zamawii, now in her early fifties, and living in Aizawl, gave a vivid account of the multiple complicities as well as the helplessness of those who died:

I was only 12 years old at the time but what I can recall was that in 1966, before the grouping, the Indian army led by Major Nathan entered our village. They made their way from the lowest point of the village to the highest point in a single file. Then they spread out carrying sticks and forced all the families out of their houses and gathered us at our village field. While doing so, they beat everyone, men, women and children. There were cries everywhere. My mother and I were carrying my brothers on our backs. We were lucky we were not beaten. When all the villagers had gathered at the field, they announced through their interpreter that they were going to burn Buang village. No one knows why. That village was about 6 km from ours. Then they said that when they returned, they were going to burn our village too. They did burn Buang village. We were so scared that the whole village started to dismantle the houses since we didn't want it to be burned. Then we took to the forest.

When the Indian army arrived again, they called us out and said they would not burn our village, but asked for a number of coolies. They already had around 10 coolies from Buang village. When they picked out some coolies from our village, they let about 5 coolies from Buang village go home; must be the tired ones. I think the total of coolies picked from our village was about 12. Even my father was about to be picked but he knew beforehand that the MNF were going to ambush the patrolling army from our neighbour who had a high rank in the MNF. My father started making excuses and luckily he was left out.

I recall that there were also MNF undergrounds captured. I could see them as they led them with their hands tied. I've never supported the MNF, but seeing them with their hands tied and being beaten, as a Mizo that was hard for me to see. I felt sorry for them, you know. Then the Army left our village in the morning for Champhai with the coolies and captured MNFs. The story goes that when they reached the outskirts of Champhai, there was a single gunshot heard. This was fired by the MNF waiting for the ambush. The shot was to distract the Indian Army so that the MNF prisoners could escape. But none of this happened. The gunshot angered Major Nathan so much that he gave the order to execute all the prisoners and coolies there and then. This they did. I don't know how many escaped but most of the prisoners died, and as for the coolies, what I can recall is

⁷¹ Rangasamy (1978: 655)

that 6 coolies died from our village and one escaped and all the coolies from Buang village died.⁷²

Not everyone saw this period as one of economic desperation or gloom. Reverend Zairema told me that because people were forced to labour, rather than work on their jhum fields, they had more money in their hands. Church collections for North Mizoram went up from forty thousand rupees in 1968 to one million rupees after 3 years of grouping. He also claimed that the limited time people had on their jhum fields made them more industrious – earlier they would sleep the afternoon away. No-one else I spoke to, however, mentioned that adversity was useful for the soul.

Sexual Violence: ‘we could hear the wailing of women all night long’

Although sexual predation was comparatively low compared to other conflict theatres (see Wood 2006), and non-existent on the part of the Naga and Mizo armies, it forms an indelible part of the narratives. Pi Zamani recalled the stratagems women used to escape the harassment during search operations, when men and women would be separated:

The prettier you were, the higher the risk of being raped. So we messed our hair and rubbed charcoal dust on our face and tried to look as shabby as possible. They would come into the house and ask us where the men were. Even if they were hiding, we would say they were in the fields.... The MNF never harassed women, but the *vai* (outsider) army did. It is as if they were hungry for women.

Grouping reduced the rapes that search operations made possible, but allowed other kinds of exploitation. In the Warumong grouping centre (Nagaland) L. Ao recollected, the army would call young women to the army camp on the pretext that they were teaching them the national anthem. The instructions were that the gaonbura had to accompany the girls, but he would be sent back within the day, while the girls were kept on much longer. The gaonburas, he remarked sardonically, never learnt the national anthem.

⁷² Interview with Zamawii, by H. Lalthuamliaana.

Inevitably, some ‘relationships’ also developed between the army and local women, ‘which is why’, said Malsawmi Ralte, ‘the army thought all Mizo women were available.’ Such women were looked upon with suspicion by other villagers.⁷³ In some cases, the women left the village to marry their soldier husbands.

Pregnancy and child rearing under these conditions was traumatic, and particularly so, when an outcome of rape. Girls who got pregnant often gave birth in the forest; and stories circulated of women being forced to give birth in front of soldiers. 92 year old Maremla, (who still dyes her jet black and does all her own work in the fields), of Longkhum village (Mokokchung), described her own experience of childbearing, when the village was burnt. She had nine children, eight of whom were already born before grouping:

I left everything in the house and ran to save our lives. The eldest was about 17 then, and the youngest had to be led by the hand. I was about 6 or 7 months pregnant by then. Sometimes we were close to other families, sometimes we were on our own. There were fierce tigers and snakes in the forest, but we were even more scared of the Indian army. I was alone when I gave birth in the forest – I knew my time had come, and prepared for it.

Sometimes women were arrested if the army couldn’t find their husbands, like two women from Maite village, Lalrini and Maliani, both of whom had similar experiences. The Indian army came looking for Lalrini’s husband in 1967, a year after her husband had joined the underground. She was thirty years old then, with six children: ‘I pleaded with the army that I could not leave my children alone, so they allowed me to take them with me.’ But, she says, ‘Life in prison was good. Knowing there was a war going on back in our state, we were safe here.’

There were no women in the Naga or Mizo armies (though subsequently women have joined the NSCN army), ostensibly on the grounds that they could not take the long march to China for training. General Maken, a former General of the Naga Army said they helped through the Naga Women’s Society, and in some areas the local government may have kept women in the local police. Some women, however, were honoured for their roles in the conflict, like Medemakla (now 109 years old), who as a government nurse in Mokokchung administered to many in the

⁷³ For two fictional accounts of such relationships between soldiers and local women in Nagaland, see Ao (2006), and Bhattacharya (2005).

regrouped villages, traveling extensively to do so. Her village honoured her with 20 tins of rice, which meant far more to her than a government pension, which she refused to draw after the experience of grouping.

The disruption of schooling

In both Nagaland and Mizoram, teaching or studying in government schools was seen as a sign of collaboration. In 1953, the NNC beheaded three teachers. Lanu Longkumer, now a geography professor in Mokokchung university said that his seniors would scold him if he did well in Hindi, so he would purposely fail.

But normal studying was impossible in the regrouped camps as well, putting the lie to any claim that grouping was for the people's own benefit and development. In Lungdai, Thangliana remembered that a student who was studying at night was whipped by the army for defying blackout. But after he threatened as Village Council President to complain to Aizawl, the Army promised never to do it again.

School children who had to travel distances from their school to home were often caught up in the violence. JV Hluna, then a young boy in a village just outside Aizawl, would go to visit his relatives in Thingsulthiah grouping centre carrying a letter from the Army Commander to ensure safe passage. If they met MNF soldiers on the way, they faced another problem, since they controlled the jungles: 'We were sometimes diverted to carry their supplies.' Kapkungi was a girl of eleven at school in Lunglei when the MNF occupied it. Together with other students, she fled to her village, a three day walk. 'On the way', she said, 'we could hear sounds of thunder (jet fighters). They were bombing the villages of Sangau and Tlabung.'

But children were not passive victims either – many of them served as lookouts for the underground army. Laltanpuia, who was a child studying in class 3 during grouping described his youthful admiration, at the same time as he sought to distance his older self from it:

I was young at that time, so I don't know much about the MNF, though there were a few volunteers from our village. But my friends and I would pretend to be MNF volunteers and we would make wooden guns and pretend to ambush the army. I think we were lucky that the army didn't see us or else they would have beaten us. But maybe that was our way of supporting the MNF. But now, as a father, I don't support them.

Relations with the underground army

The whole premise of the counterinsurgency doctrine that grouping would serve to separate the general population from the insurgents, was sociologically mindless, if nothing else. The 'national workers' or underground army were the husbands, brothers, and sons of those in camp – how *could* they not have helped them? An old couple, Pamayongba and Imsengkala of Aliba village (Nagaland) recounted how they had just got married and as newly weds, were about to carve out their own jhum fields. Instead they found themselves running to the forest with their new pots and pans. Pamayongba joined the underground and Imsengkala went with the other villagers of Aliba to the grouping site at Chungtia. But they still managed to meet occasionally. Work in the paddy fields or in the forest was looked forward to as a time of meeting.

Even T. Sailo, who later became Chief Minister of Mizoram, had a son in the underground, Sangliana, a particularly piquant situation for a Brigadier of the Indian Army. Mrs. Sailo told me:

He didn't tell us when he left. We searched all over Shillong for him. Then we learn that a batch of young people had joined the MNF....He would send occasional letters through somebody, which we would receive after some months. I did try to send him letters but he did not get them. I would write in my diary the letters I wanted to send him.

Given the divided loyalties in almost every family, there is little doubt that a war on the 'hostiles' was in effect a war against the whole population. And in many ways, the entire population *was* at war. General A. Maken of the Naga Army said that the villagers provided everything – the money to buy the WW II rifles from Manipur, with which they began the struggle, and a steady stream of supplies, information, and the manpower.

The underground army was unable to prevent grouping, though it did tell people not to go to the grouping centres. What it could do was provide some protection to villagers in the jungles:

We never tried to liberate camps (grouping centres) or attack the army in camps because we knew it would have serious consequences for the public. Our main duty was to protect the villagers who had fled to the jungles, so that the army could not enter the jungle. The army would occupy the villages and the main routes, and we controlled the jungle. This is how we protected the villagers. Sometimes a camp would last for 2-3 years before it was moved. Sometimes the public would have their own camp, and sometimes they would be attached to a Naga army camp.

Wholehearted support for the national army seems to have been greater in Nagaland than in Mizoram. In Mizoram, support was divided between the Mizo Union, the Congress and the MNF,⁷⁴ and perceptions of the MNF were much more varied than views on the NNC. In part this may be due to the fact that the Naga struggle is ongoing and criticism of the UG would be politically incorrect, but it also does reflect a genuine difference in support.

Poorer people and people in interior villages, especially those who had suffered from the famine, were more likely to support the MNF as a party which had stood up for their rights: 'We supported the MNF because we were so poor from the famine. They were doing this for the cause.'⁷⁵ Some villages, from where there were a large number of volunteers were identified as 'MNF villages' and singled out for special attacks, but this did not diminish the support. Vanlalpari who came from such a village said:

'In the regrouped Reiek, communication was harder but it still took place in the farms ...MNF was fighting for us. We didn't get independence, but looking back on the pre-insurgency days, we are better off than before. So the insurgency was justified. The insurgency brought both suffering and development.'

Support took many forms. Nibedon writes that Mizo villages put to good use during the insurgency the Morse code they had all learnt in WWII. By this time, signaling with battery torches had become a regular mechanism for communication across the hills. A former guerilla

⁷⁴ In the elections to the Village Council held in 1963, the Mizo Union got 228 seats compared to the MNF's 145 (Hluna 1985, pg 89).

⁷⁵ Interview with Upa Thangthiawa, age 93 of Kelzam.

recalled another kind of signaling: ‘When the Indian army was present in the village, the MNV (Volunteers) would hang out black clothes, and when they left, they would put out white ones.’ A person could work their way up from passive support to more active engagement, and back again, like Lalzamlova who began as a messenger for the MNF in 1967, and then in 1968 marched with 300 other volunteers to China:

‘We marched through jungles and forest for months (starting April 1968). When we finally reached Chindwin in China, there were no boats to take us across the river and the river was big. So we just went back again and made our way through the same path in Mizoram. Then in August of the same year we finally arrived in Mizoram.

Lalzamlova surrendered to the army when he came back, but was let go fairly soon. A few months later, his village was regrouped. Like Lalzamlova, many people wanted independence then, but also recognized that the path was too hard, and reconciled themselves to something less.

Other accounts, like Pi Zamani’s were ambivalent, displaying both support and fear:

While we were in the jungle, we would send up some volunteers to spy if the army had gone and only then go up. We would see a lot of MNF volunteers in the forest, and we would tell them when the army had gone. Sometimes we would call them into the village and feed them and sometimes feed them in the forest. (Later she said about the MNF: We fed them because we were scared of them. I hated them because they took all our good food).

People may have been scared of both the MNF and the army, but as Reverend Lalsawma said, there was a crucial difference: Even if people were opposed to the MNF, ‘since our children, our blood, had taken up arms, we could not criticize them.’ The most equivocal were those who had been Congress or Mizo Union supporters. Thangliana, from Lungdai, a Congress supporter, said ironically, ‘There was no tension between the MNF and Congress supporters ... Even if you were a Congress supporter you had to act like an MNF supporter.’ Mizo Union members often fled to Aizawl, like Lalhluna, out of fear of the MNF:

It was tense. They would hunt us down as they did to the Indian army, traitors and others. They thought that the MU was in support of the central Government....The MU at that time even thought of fighting back against the MNF. There were recruits from the MU, who were ready to arm themselves, but not in alliance with the Indian army. But our president C.H. Chhunga didn't want that to happen and the pressure went down and it cooled off.

Former MNF guerillas, by contrast, painted a more rosy picture of the support they enjoyed, describing themselves, somewhat jokingly, as local heroes who could have had any girl they wanted. As far as they were concerned, they got 100% support from the villagers.

Relations with the Indian Army

It is harder to get at the texture of villagers' everyday relations with the army than with the underground, in part because of the greater distance between the two, both socially and politically. Apart from a few ex-army men many of whom served as translators because they had learnt Hindi while in the army, village council presidents and other elders, few ordinary villagers had any sustained interaction with the army.⁷⁶ Their dominant memories involve the burning, the forced marches, the random beatings, and the senseless deaths. Some named the army officers they hated the most.

But people also remembered the good army officers, with several expressing an individuated view of human character: 'In the Indian army, there were good and bad guys, and also in the MNF. We hated the bad guys on both sides. ...When grouping started, I had two or three friends

⁷⁶ Being an ex-army person, however, was no help when it came to grouping, just as it was no help to be against the MNF. Germanthanga, who I met with his wife, in their large well built stone house in Thingsultia, had served both the British Indian army and the Indian army from WW II onwards, fighting the Japanese on the banks of the Irawaddy river. In 1966, he had gone to Shillong for a medical checkup and heard on the radio that an army convoy had been ambushed on the Silchar road, and in retaliation, the army had burnt all the villages nearby. He came back to find his own village burnt, and his wife hiding in her brother's jhum field, with their seven children. His mother died the day after he reached home.

in the Punjab regiment. When we moved our house, they cried.⁷⁷ People also differentiated between regiments, preferring, for example, the Punjab regiment to the Mahar regiment.⁷⁸ Even those who had suffered terribly under grouping, were grateful for the few good acts done by the Army, like Tochungua whose baby got terribly sick enroute to Aizawl: ‘When we finally reached Aizawl, we went straight to the army camp and asked them for help. They were kind and gave us some medicines and luckily our baby survived.’

The army was also seen as better than the Mizo Armed Police which consisted of ex MNF and local Mizos who had been especially chosen to identify MNF soldiers and supporters,⁷⁹ or the Naga Village Guards set up in 1957, with ‘300 loyal Nagas’, who were also armed to help the government against the rebels.⁸⁰

However distant people felt about the army, it wrote itself into the landscape, and is now part of their intimate lives. Roads in both Mizoram and Nagaland are an outcome of counterinsurgency, punctuated by the cheery traffic safety slogans of the Border Roads Organisation, and the boards of the Assam Rifles declaring themselves ‘friends of the hill people’. Both in Nagaland and Mizoram, the best real estate is occupied by the army.⁸¹ On a curve of the hill outside Aizawl, the lights of the city appear like magic spread out over the hill. But the army cantonment at its centre remains opaque for security reasons, a dark blot at the heart of an illuminated landscape.

⁷⁷ Interview with Challiankhuma, Thingsultiah village.

⁷⁸ Iralu (2003), also adopts a ‘soldier’s approach’ to the Indian army, praising the Sikhs as fit martial foes for the martial Nagas.

⁷⁹ Nibedon (1980: 220).

⁸⁰ Manual for VG (Village Guards) Organisation, http://nlsic.gov.in/chapter/commissioner/VG_chap1.pdf, accessed 27 March 2009.

⁸¹ I owe this information to Kenneth and Lanu Longkumer.

Remembering

*'You can kill people, but you can not kill history. You can bury people but not bury history.'*⁸²

The most traumatic experiences can either serve for cathartic telling or be the most silencing, making the elisions as important as that which is said.⁸³ In the absence of a more detailed ethnographic practice, in this case I have relied on the wonderfully detailed accounts that people gave, even though, as one said: 'You just can't imagine how horrible life was. I can't even put it in words. You have to be there to know it all.'

Memories are inevitably subject to the political pressures of not just the past but the present.⁸⁴ They may be individual and autobiographical but also simultaneously filtered through the lens of institutionalized or recorded ways of remembering, especially when those memories concern national or collective events, what Kenny refers to as 'repatriated memories', and Stanley and Dampier call 'post/memory'.⁸⁵ In this account, while trying to show the way in which people's individual memories add up to and draw from a collective memory in which certain experiences were important (e.g. the surveillance, the starvation, the beatings), I have simultaneously tried to show how these memories are different from each other, inflected by the particular location of the actor. Thus while people's memories are consistent with respect to each other and to earlier accounts of the *process* of grouping,⁸⁶ showing that time had not dulled or transformed their memories of the pain, they vary with respect to *opinions* on its *meaning* for their lives.

In Mizoram, both those who saw grouping as an overwhelmingly negative experience and those who saw positive, if unintended spin offs for themselves, described grouping as the most significant experience of their lives. Some blamed the MNF for their suffering, but a much larger number blamed the Indian army. Some people recognized that were it not for grouping they

⁸² Interview with Mr. Sebi, age 82, Khonoma village, Nagaland, 23 May 2008.

⁸³ see Passerini (1998); Portelli (1991:2).

⁸⁴ See Murray (2008) on differing Japanese memories of internment during WWII; Olick and Robbins (1998).

⁸⁵ Kenny (1999: 422 – 426), Stanley and Dampier (2005); see also Sundar (2002).

⁸⁶ See Nunthara (1989) based on fieldwork in 1979-80, and Rangasamy (1978).

would still be poor farmers, rather than urban residents, but whether that excused the horror is debated. Upa Thangthiawa, age 93 of Kelzam said:

There is the good and the bad side. The bad side is that we are still nostalgic about our own village. We were forced to move out, we were tortured physically and mentally. But on the bright side, we came to Aizawl and here we are: we are in the modern world.

Nunthara argues that grouping fundamentally changed the social structure, leading to growing inequality and a loss of the earlier village solidarity.⁸⁷ Several people I spoke to claimed that grouping was responsible for a breakdown in morality - since people didn't know who the land belonged to any more in the new and expanded villages, they stole more easily from the gardens and fields. Perhaps it also led to what several commentators note as the schizophrenic character of Mizo society – the high incidence of Church going coupled with the high incidence of unwed pregnancies and drug abuse, but exploring these long terms effects is beyond the scope of this paper. What is easier to document is the lasting impact that grouping had on the landscape,⁸⁸ leading to Mizoram becoming the most urbanized state in India.⁸⁹

Inevitably, the memories of Village Council Presidents who had regular dealings with the administration or Mizo Union Supporters are likely to be different from those of ordinary villagers, deprived of their jhum fields; and those of children who found new friends in the regrouped centres are likely to be different from those of a newly married couple separated by war. Lanungsang Ao of Mokochung, after having recounted the loss of two brothers and the starvation also said that many people recalled grouping as an enjoyable time, e.g. when people from different villages jointly constructed a new church in the regrouping centre. An old couple in Aliba village (Mokokchung), however, reacted sharply to the very idea: 'Grouping was not a time to enjoy! We were worried all the time and the thought of making friends with people never came to our mind.'

The memories are in one sense, sharper in Nagaland because the struggle is ongoing, but they have less the status of memories that belong firmly in the past, as against a sedimented

⁸⁷ Nunthara (1989: 11)

⁸⁸ See Sioh (2004).

⁸⁹ The urban population increased from 5.36% in 1962 to 46.09% in 1991. See Verghese (1996: 160)

experience of the present. Peace has never fully replaced war in Nagaland, unlike in Mizoram. I heard no criticism of the NNC or NSCN in Nagaland, although the views of T. Sakhrie, who represented the early moderate phase of Naga Nationalism and was assassinated by Phizo's men, is enjoying a quiet revival, as an alternative, non-violent, path the Nagas should have followed.

Memories of former guerillas – both Nagas and MNF returnees - are very different from that of civilians. In contrast to the villagers who see their present as a huge improvement over the period of grouping, the guerillas are nostalgic about the past, which for them, was a time of youth and heroism. Many still hold to freedom as a desirable aim. I spoke to former MNF guerillas at the office of the PAMRA (Peace Accord MNF Returnees Association), on a floor of a building in central Aizawl up a rickety flight of steps. The association was formed in 2002 with the aim of rehabilitating the returnees and serves as a social space and refuge in a context where their experiences are alien to their family or neighbours. While ex-MNF leaders have done well for themselves – former MNF turned Chief Minister Zoramthanga built himself a huge house - the majority of returnees are still struggling.⁹⁰ The ex-guerillas could not, of necessity, express happiness with the accord for that would be to betray the cause they had spent their lives for, but portrayed themselves as doing it for the sake of the public: 'We agreed to peace only because the Church and NGOs and different political parties appealed to us.' Several returnees have become evangelicals.

To return to the relation between individual and collective memory that I raised at the beginning of this section: For the bulk of the population, memories lie outside any official narrative, since there is no official recognition of their pain, no hope of a truth commission. The Indian state has

⁹⁰ PAMRA was not the only ex-guerilla association, but it was the largest with 514 living members, and 77 members whose families were still part of the association. All the PAMRA members had returned in 1986 after the peace accords – till then, some of them had been in the Chittagong Hill tract jungles, some in the Arakan hills, and others on the Burma/China border. They consider the Mizo Underground Returnees Association as 'traitors' for having returned in response to the government's surrender policies, before the peace accords were signed. 'If we were not Christian', said one person, 'we would shoot them.' I was unable to conduct interviews with the different associations, and have no independent verification of the figures provided other than what PAMRA members told me, but they are: Ex-MNA (Mizo National Association), with some 20 members; Former Underground Welfare Society (Biakchhunga Group), with some 50 members; Mizoram Underground Returnees Association established in 2008, with 100 members and the most serious rival to PAMRA, and the Mizo Hnam Pasaaltha or Mizo Freedom Fighters Association, also established in 2008, consisting of people who had surrendered earlier.

only a triumphalist history of democracy as far as Mizoram goes, and a sour one as far as Nagaland is concerned. At an informal dinner one night, I proposed to a senior minister that an apology by the Indian Government might go some way in helping to bring peace to the North East. ‘Apology for what’?, he replied. Indeed. If all civilians are hostiles, why apologise?

The Solution?

*After the uprising of the 17th June
The Secretary of the Writers Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only
By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?*

Brecht, The Solution

What governments seldom stop to ponder, in the face of widespread civilian support for insurgency, is the failure of their own legitimacy. Instead, the ‘solution’ ironically proposed by Brecht becomes the standard way of dealing with insurgent populations. As Samaddar argues, ‘colonial constitutionalism’ oscillates between ‘a Rousseauistic consent-governed theme’ where the state represents the will of the people, and the spirit of ‘constitutional engineering’ (that meant constructing elaborate rules for domesticating disobedience of an unruly society and putting a hazardous polity in order).⁹¹ In India, he goes on to say, the demand that all groups recognize the total sovereignty of the Indian constitution despite its failures exacerbates conflict: ‘the situation has reached a stage where the political society no longer authors the basic text; the basic text now claims to have authored or constituted the political society.’⁹² Those who dispute the definition of this politics become eligible then, in Agamben’s terms, for ‘bare life’, residence in the camp.

⁹¹ Samaddar (2007: 25)

⁹² Samaddar (2007: 27)

Has the exclusion of the borders been constitutive of Indian democracy or incidental to it, an aberration in an otherwise democratic history? But where do the borders lie? Where the Jungle Warfare College in Vairangte, Mizoram, long enjoyed a lonely pre-eminence, 20 such jungle warfare colleges are being set up across the country to counter the growing insurgency.

In 2005, the Indian government sent a Naga ‘India Reserve Battalion’ to Chhattisgarh to counter Maoist guerilla insurgents (Naxalites).⁹³ Together with the local police and some surrendered insurgents, they went from village to village, burning houses, killing people, and forcing the population into camps. The Gonds of Chhattisgarh, like the Mizo villagers with whom I began this paper, were forced to declare that they had come of their own accord, out of fear of the Maoists or because they wanted ‘development.’ Once the Naga troops had left in 2007, they were replaced by Mizo paramilitaries. Was this just a coincidence, or was it deliberate policy that the Indian government should have chosen to send troops from precisely those two communities whose parents or grandparents had suffered similar trauma at the hands of the Indian army some decades earlier? If historical memories travel, through what genealogies, and with what effect, especially when it came to young soldiers facing unemployment at home and, having joined the paramilitary, orders from above? In 2008, I interviewed young Naga reservists who had come back from a posting in Chhattisgarh. How is support for the Naxalites different from Naga support for Phizo and the Naga National Council, I asked? Phizo’s was a freedom struggle, they replied, with evident pride. But, they said, ‘We are *Hindustan ka phauj* (soldiers of the Indian army) now.’

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⁹³ The India Reserve Battalions are paramilitary forces poised somewhere between the police and regular army.

Mizoram interviews on his own and much better than I could have done. As in Nagaland, many people in Mizoram generously shared their time and insights with me, for which I am truly very grateful. I would also like to thank Virginius Xaxa, Ravi Hemadri and Babloo Loithongbam, for various kinds of help, and Aparna Sundar and Siddharth Varadarajan for accompanying me on my visits and taking photographs.

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