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### Moral geographies

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## Moral Geographies: The problem of sovereignty and indigeneity amongst the Nagas<sup>1</sup>

‘Nagaland: A remote land of jungle, Jesus – and religious war’ reads a *Daily Herald* headline published in Illinois, America.<sup>2</sup> Growing up in a remote village of Nagaland in Northeast India during the early 1950s, David Jamir recounts to the *Daily Herald* how the sermons of Billy Graham, an American evangelist, wafted through the din of the monsoon rains beating the tin roof of his house. Graham’s voice was unassailable. From these sermons, David Jamir was able to imagine America – ‘a land where skyscrapers, not banana trees, ruled the skyline. A nation where Jesus was ever-present, just like in Nagaland’.<sup>3</sup> Not far from Jamir’s home, Thuingaleng Muivah, a future national leader, recounts how even before he could read, he ‘stared at a picture of Christ cradling a lamb in his father’s Bible and later saw in it a proverb for his people. “God has created all of creation. Nagaland is part of creation – and God has a purpose for it. Surely God means for us to be free”’.<sup>4</sup>

In order to understand this larger geopolitical situation, I will show how Naga sovereignty, and ‘place-making’ (Muehlebach 2001) are significant to the Nagas’ sense of belonging. This paper will suggest that territory is not an object or a place that can be fixed in time, but rather an act of narration and imagination with the power to shape where it belongs. In this regard, I will employ two registers. First, I will explore the importance of Christianity for the Nagas as they imagine their nation. Contrasted largely with what they

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this paper was presented in the conference *Looking beyond the State: Changing Forms of Inclusion and Exclusion in India* held in Kohima, Nagaland. My thanks to participants for engaging with the paper. Joe Doherty and Gordon Graham offered valuable comments on an earlier draft and Lindsay Graham has read, corrected, and offered critical insights throughout the writing process. My gratitude to all of them.

<sup>2</sup> ‘A remote land of jungle, Jesus - and religious war’, *Daily Herald*, May 5, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Like many messy nation-building projects, names are a complicated matter. When I refer to Nagaland, I mean the Indian state, and I also mean ‘land of the Nagas’ as in Naga-land or Nagalim (a recent construction). These are used interchangeably, but have more precise usage in certain contexts as will be shown.

<sup>4</sup> Nagaland is often viewed as the only Christian nation in Asia outside the Philippines. It could possibly be the only Baptist nation in the world (Freston 2001: 88; Eaton 2002).

perceive as 'Hindu-India', this register is pivotal in resisting the larger resonating force of the Indian nation-state. Second, the United Nations (UN) has become a transnational arbiter that provides universal recognition of human rights and gives 'moral' weight to the Nagas' claim for self-determination. This is not unique to the Nagas, but shared amongst many indigenous peoples (Jung 2008; Karlsson 2001; Moksnes 2007), who are now questioning the terms of their political exclusion.

While it is important to keep these two points in mind, this paper will make the case that we need to rethink traditional forms of sovereignty based on a strong national state that orders difference. Instead it would be more useful to think about sovereign territories as the organisation of space, or territoriality (Sack 1986) that can be viewed as a symbolic attachment to territory that constitutes identities, security and a sense of belonging (Robbins 2006: 62). Robert Sack argues that territoriality is 'intimately related to how people use the land', how they 'organize themselves in space and how they give meaning to place' (Sack 1986: 2). The 'political' aspect of Sack's notion of territoriality is helpful in this case because it can be viewed as a geographic strategy, because space and society are interlinked and territoriality is the process that connects them (Sack 1986: 20). This paper will also show the contradictions and tensions in these articulations due to the messy project of nation building, particularly when we consider Christianity and its integral relation to Naga identity. One way to consider this issue is to employ, what Ranger (1993) calls, the 're-imagining of tradition' that acknowledges the global force of indigenous politics, which destabilises the terrain of ethnic and Christian exclusivism.

The Nagas are an interesting case to discuss these issues because it is in an area of Northeast India that straddles four nation-states: Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Burma.<sup>5</sup> It is an area interspersed with a mosaic of ethnic, religious and linguistic constellations – a 'mountain Babel' – that has

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<sup>5</sup> It is connected to the rest of India by a 'chicken neck' corridor, around 40 km strip between Bangladesh and Nepal, dangling like a thread – some of its areas are closer to Rangoon and Bangkok than it is to New Delhi.

historically proved inimical to any centralised state authority (Myint-U 2011:79). This has resulted in concentrated military presence –not least due to the Indo-China war of 1962<sup>6</sup>, the porous international borders, and the demands for sovereignty by many of the indigenous populations in the area.<sup>7</sup> India is worried that any political and territorial compromise on Naga sovereignty will have a domino effect, with many states like Kashmir, Assam, Manipur, and the Maoist movements of central India, making similar demands. Importantly, it will expose India to the strength of China’s monopoly in the region, already a major power broker in Southeast Asia, and in particular Burma.

### ***Classify and Conquer: Nagas of India and Burma***

The Nagas live between the lower ranges of the Eastern Himalayas in the borderlands of Northeast India and Northwest Burma (Myanmar). The label ‘Naga’ includes a number of ethnic groups, speaking a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages. Approximately two million Nagas live in India, and a hundred thousand or so in Myanmar’s Sagaing Division and Kachin state. Ambiguity over the term ‘Naga’ has never been satisfactorily resolved as it was a name not used by the Nagas themselves (see Woodthorpe 1881), which continues to highlight the tension between taxonomy and belonging (see below).

There are those who argue that Naga collective identity is a modern political, cultural, or ‘invented’ category (Baruah 2003) shaped primarily by the forces of colonialism and post-colonialism. Alan Macfarlane (2005) suggests that the various Nagas after millennia of wandering ended up in the hills of the Eastern Himalayas and only recently coalesced in the patterns the British constructed. Others reject outside historical agents as the sole factor responsible for ‘creating’ a Naga identity. They argue that the Nagas have

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<sup>6</sup> The Indo-China war centred on border dispute over the Aksai Chin region (between Kashmir and Tibet) and Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India (the now Indian state). China wants India to recognise the Aksai Chin region as Chinese territory in return for Chinese recognition of Arunachal as Indian. India, however, is unwilling to compromise on both issues (see Maxwell 1970).

<sup>7</sup> Along with the Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, and Tripura have active nationalist movements.

shared some common ancestry underpinned by migration stories and creation myths (Iralu 2000; Pamei 2001). For example, Makhel in the Mao Naga region of Manipur state in India is recognised as the place of origin for many Southern and Western Nagas. Amongst the Northern and Eastern Nagas, the creation myth of Longtrok (in Chuliyimti, Northeast Nagaland), six stones shaped as male and female reproductive organs, is believed to be their place of origin (Saul 2005: 20-23).

If we are left to adopt a colonial classification or ‘invention’ as the only authentic enumeration of identity, then we deny the Nagas active historical agency. On the other hand, privileging Naga narratives *prima facie* uncritically will lead to a form of parochialism that precludes the influence of outside historical forces. Reflecting on South African identity formations, Terence Ranger (1993) comments that rather than focus solely on the ‘invention of tradition’ as colonialism’s legacy to enclose the previous dynamism of tradition, it is vital to historicise the ongoing ‘imagining and re-imagining of tradition’. This helpful pointer can be useful in the Naga case, particularly in understanding the dynamism of Naga identity without foreclosing the internal and external processes of identity iteration, a point I return to below.

### ***Modern political ‘Naga’ identity: assertion of difference***

Various Naga authors have remarked that the shared experience in the Labour Corps during World War I was responsible for a collective and broader sense of Naga belonging. Around 4, 000 Nagas were sent to France as part of the Labour Corps, and saw ‘civilised nations’ fight for their own honour while condemning Naga conflicts as barbarous, petty squabbles (Yonuo 1974). It provided a reason for political unification to represent their claim to the world (Alemchiba 1970; Horam 1988). Upon returning home in 1918, they formed the Naga Club in 1919 informally supported by the local British administrators and organised primarily by Naga Christian educated government officials and several headmen around the two principal villages – Mokokchung and Kohima. When the Simon Commission headed by Sir

John Simon came to Kohima in 1929, to seek opinions on the future of India, twenty Naga tribes signed and submitted a memorandum that stated:

‘...We pray that the British Government will continue to safeguard our rights against all encroachments...that we should not be thrust to the mercy of the people [i.e. India] who could never have conquered us themselves, and to whom we are never subjected; but to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times’ (Alemchiba 1970: 164).

A key aspect of British colonialism in the Naga Hills from the mid-19th century was its insistence on *difference* – the Nagas were allowed to control traditional customs and maintain their own identity (Franke 2006). This form of paternalism clearly marked the hierarchy between subjects and rulers. The Indian union, in contrast, argued for a negation of imperialism based on consent and self-determination – theoretically ‘a voluntary union of people’. Since the Nagas refused to give their consent to this union, the Government of India (GOI) deployed military force, which in turn only strengthened the cause for Naga independence (Franke 2006: 69-70). The irony of this situation, particularly the denial of self-determination to the Nagas (since India only recently gained independence), can only be explained as a continuation of the imperial conquest begun by the British. In a crucial departure, it was marked by the inability to assimilate a recalcitrant periphery who insisted on difference.

At the centre of this debate was Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, and the president of the Indian National Congress (INC). Sensing that something had to be done about the ‘tribal’ Naga areas of Northeast India, Nehru wrote to T. Sakhrie (the General Secretary of the Naga National Council [NNC] formed in February of 1946) on the 1st of August 1946. In his letter, Nehru explained his view that the Naga territory was too small to be politically and economically independent. Nehru evoked the language of paternalism – that the ‘backward’ Nagas needed help – and that autonomy would be assured to the Nagas with their own laws. In the same letter, Nehru

strongly insisted on the integration of the Nagas within the Indian union and Indian laws. This ambivalence not only highlighted the uncertainty of Nehru's position regarding the Naga Hills, but it departed from the clarity of Gandhi's stand who supported the Nagas in their bid for an independent 'Naga area': '...If you do not wish to join the Indian Union...The Congress Government will not do that' (quoted in Venuh 2005: 67). Things were uneven on the ground between the loosely articulated INC stand of no forced integration (maintained by its leader Gandhi) to those that were coming from other avenues. Canvassing the opinion of the then Assam Governor, who was in charge of the Naga Hills which would later go on to form Nagaland, Akbar Hydari, regarding a separate solution for the Nagas in 1947, the British administrator Mildred Archer writes:

They have got to come in. If they revolt; we shall shoot them up. It will be a pity but it will not be our fault; We couldn't give Nagas residual Powers...A Naga Government is out of the question...(quoted in Franke 2006: 73).

Although things were at a stalemate, the NNC entered into dialogue with the Governor of Assam, Hydari, and the '9-Point Agreement' was drawn up in June 1947 that recognised the right of the NNC to run the affairs of the Nagas. The main bone of contention was point 9 – that is with regard to the future of the Nagas. It was agreed that the Governor of Assam would act as a special agent between the GOI and the Nagas for a period of ten years, after which the NNC would take a decision regarding the future of the Nagas. The Nagas thought that this clause would enable them to opt out of the union in 10 years. This was denied by the GOI. As a symbolic protest to Indian hegemony, the Nagas declared independence on 14th August 1947 signed by 9 members of the NNC.

In many ways the year 1949 marked a crucial period for the GOI and the NNC. In 1949 the chief minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi, informed the NNC that the GOI had never accepted the 9-point agreement. This was seen by the NNC as a betrayal and it is at this juncture that the more moderate

NNC members lost ground and a clear majority now wanted total and complete independence. A plebiscite in 1950, conducted by the NNC, was meant to echo this sentiment whereby it was recorded that 99.9 percent of the Nagas in the Naga Hills supported independence. This move was summarily ignored by the GOI. Zaphizo met Nehru again in 1952 by which time the situation had worsened to the extent that the GOI was blaming the British for encouraging Naga independence (Franke 2006: 74; Jacobs 1998: 159).

The years 1950-56 saw armed escalation on both sides. This was marked by the formation of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) in 1956, the political wing of the NNC. Political strife started to emerge amongst the Nagas, with moderates arguing for negotiation and greater accommodation than the uncompromising status quo of complete independence. The result was the Naga People's Convention (NPC) under the pretext of Naga statehood. In 1963 the new state of Nagaland was inaugurated. The creation of statehood further legitimised the position of the GOI who refused to retreat from their idea of national integration, only causing further divisions with the NNC. Armed insurrection continued between the NNC and the Indian military that had periodic recesses but the military presence in Nagaland continued to build up, which remains a disturbing reality even today.

The Indian military has been accused of serious Human Rights violations, beginning with escalated armed conflict from around 1953. By 1956 a hundred thousand Indian soldiers were deployed in the Naga Hills to suppress an elusive and tiny guerrilla force with casualties on both sides. Between 1956-58 for example the Minority Rights Group estimated that there were 1400 Naga deaths, and 16 in the Indian military (Maxwell 1973). In such events, casualties extended to both combatants and non-combatants. Although, such military excursions were undertaken with the aim of winning 'hearts and minds' – and to help the Nagas feel that they belong to India – the pressure of the moment gave way to lapses of reason. The Indian military philosophy of 'softening up' the Nagas through sheer military might have failed, in part simply due to the length of the guerrilla conflict. The introduction of the 1958 Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) into



Nagaland, already classified a 'disturbed area' in 1956, introduced unprecedented powers to stop, search and shoot to kill as necessary. This only fuelled mistrust and disdain of the Indian military. Translate this scenario on the ground and this is what you have: a blatant disregard for the Nagas.

Kanwar Randip Singh, a former Indian officer, who served in the Naga Hills from 1953-57, says that none of the Indian officers bothered mixing with the Nagas nor learn their way of life. 'In fact, they considered these people as subhuman, filthy and not worth mixing...a big gap was created between the Nagas and the government after the British left' (quoted in Glancey 2011: 180). Another view from John Bosco Jasokie, a former Chief Minister of Nagaland, interprets what these attitudes have meant for the Nagas.

They [the plains people of Hindustan] believe that their way of life is the right way...[and] are not prepared to accept us as human beings and, therefore, it is easier for them to go out of all human decency in their dealings with us...they think that by harassing the people they have done a great service to India, but actually India lost the friendship of the people (quoted in Glancey 2011: 181).

The NNC were also not innocent in this war – bridges and roads were destroyed, kidnappings for extortion, targeted killing of fellow Naga moderates, forcible collection of 'taxes' and food grains for their forces were not uncommon. In fact, in 1968 in the famous battle of Jotsoma there were considerable casualties on the Indian military side. The exact number eludes historical account, but one of the veterans of that battle Brig. Vedayi enthusiastically told the journalist Bertil Lintner that: '...I'm a good Christian. I don't tell lies. We killed at least 1,000 Indians! And our soldiers shouted "Praise the Lord!" every time they fired their weapons' (Lintner 1990: 85). Following on from political dialogues, and military operations in the region, the Peace Council of Nagaland, comprising eminent Naga figures,

tried to bring the various parties to the peace table on different occasions initiated by the Council of the Baptist Churches of Nagaland in 1964.

Peace talks eventually collapsed in 1966 due to the uncompromising rival claims of territorial sovereignty and the NNC was banned by the GOI in 1972. With increased Indian military pressure and the uncertainty of Chinese influence on some of its cadres who went to China on a 'goodwill mission', the controversial 'Shillong Accord' was signed in Shillong on 11 November 1975 between the GOI and the FGN of Nagaland. This required the surrender and disarmament of the NNC and the de facto 'official' recognition of the constitution of India. When the Nagas who went on the 'goodwill mission' to China heard about these events, they immediately denounced the NNC as traitors to the Naga cause and formed their own group known as the NSCN (the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland) under the leadership of Isak Swu, T. Muivah, and S.S. Khaplang on 31 January 1980. Due to internal conflicts, and perhaps due to personality clashes, Khaplang, a Naga from Burma, split from the NSCN in 1988 to form his own group (NSCN-K). The remaining group came to be known as the NSCN-IM, after their leaders, Isak Swu and T. Muivah. The latter is the most powerful group in the region.

On 1st August 1997, fifty years since the conflict began, a ceasefire was signed between the GOI and the NSCN-IM, and political negotiation at the highest level was to be held in a third country. So far the talks have included the main – but contentious – point of Nagalim (or 'Greater Nagaland') that includes Naga inhabited areas of Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Burma. The aim of the NSCN-IM is that all Naga inhabited areas must be conjoined, if any viable settlement is to be reached through the talks. Ceasefire agreements have also been signed with the NSCN-K and other Naga factions. It is worth reiterating that the present Nagalim (or Greater Nagaland) is an attempt to bring all the Nagas living in India and Burma under one political reality which is sought by the NSCN-IM. The NNC on the other hand sought only independence of the Naga Hills (which eventually went on to become the Indian state of Nagaland).

### ***Territorialising Christianity***

The period marking the beginnings of intense military operations and the resistance to it from 1947 to the 1970s witnessed a substantial rise in the scale of conversions to Baptist Christianity among the Nagas of Nagaland. Although the numbers of Christian conversions were nothing revelatory until 1941 (17.9% from a population of around 189,641), a sharp rise in Christian numbers post-1941 has a story to tell. In 1951 there is an increase to around 52.9%, an additional 30% in ten years. The increase in the Christian population is steady from then on with 80.2% recorded in 1981 (Eaton 2000: 48), and in 2001 the number is almost 95%, mainly made up of Baptists, Presbyterians, Roman Catholics and Pentecostals. Part of my argument is that there is a correlation between Christian conversion and progress in Naga nationalism, which is demonstrated not only by the statistical data but also by the performance and narratives of Christianity. One of the main reasons is that it provided the majority of Nagas with some internal cohesion and gave them a 'moral authority' that superseded parochial 'tribal' loyalties. Both would play its part on the international stage.

### ***'Nagaland for Christ': Evangelical nationalism***

The idea that Christianity for the Nagas is an irreversible fact appears daily in the local press and even efforts to revive 'Nagaland for Christ' is a daily plebiscite. In 2009, the 'Restore Nagaland for Christ Crusade' was seen in one of Nagaland's main town Dimapur, organised by the United Christian Prayer Ministries (UCPM). Thuingaleng Muivah the General Secretary of NSCN-IM reiterates, in many instances, two central motifs: 'Nagaland for Christ' and 'the unique national rights of the Naga people' (often articulated as *Urra Uvie* [our land belongs to us]). Indeed, during his speech in Pughoboto in Zeneboto district of Nagaland in 24th June 2010 the tone of his speech almost takes a messianic undercurrent: 'We [referring to himself and the Chairman Isak Swu] are united on two key foundations: 1) The will of Jehovah 2) Our land and the National Rights of the Naga people' (NSCN publication 2010: 36). Evangelisation and nationalism go hand in hand here.

This is a point made assiduously by Paul Freston (2001). His focus is on the interaction between evangelicals and politics around the world that ties in specifically with the New Divinity theology of the 19th century American missions.<sup>8</sup> He mentions four general characteristics that make this link explicit: conversionism (emphasis on revival); activism (emphasis on evangelical and missionary activity); biblicism (emphasis on the Bible without inerrancy); and crucicentrism (emphasis on Christ's sacrifice on the cross) (2001: 2). His assessment clearly places the Naga national movements (NNC and the NSCN factions) within this camp (2001: 85-92).

In the early days of the NNC, gospel teams preached under armed guard and conducted many spiritual activities in their jungle camps. For example, the NNC refused to fight on Sundays, due to the large numbers of pastors in their ranks. The UK newspaper Observer's Gavin Young, in his book *The Nagas: An Unknown War*, offers us vignettes of his experience in the nationalist jungle camps in the 1960s. When the Naga platoon assigned to accompany him kneels down to pray, he remarks that it is akin to a 'Cromwellian ingredient in the Naga struggle'. In the camp, over the officer's mess were these words: 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise him all creatures here below' (quoted in Glancey 2011: 183). The NNC even created a Naga flag with a rainbow intersecting a blue sky, a reference to God's covenant with Noah in Genesis, symbolised here as God's covenant with the Nagas.<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, when the Swedish journalist Bertil Lintner meets the NSCN at their Headquarters in Burma, he recounts how every meeting would open with a prayer and Bible reading usually by Isak Swu (1990: 82). As a

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<sup>8</sup> Alongside this, New Divinity also emphasised the dawn of the millennium, influenced by Jonathan Edward's view that Christ's return would not be a cataclysmic event, but would be achieved through benevolent activities, social reform, and missionary outreach. In a way, Edward's millennialism conjoined 'revivalism and missions in a providential scheme'. This admixture proved to be extremely potent, especially when combined with American nationalism (as a beacon of gospel light to the world) (Kling 2004: 19-20).

<sup>9</sup> Daily Herald, May 5, 2003.

propaganda tool, the NSCN even claimed that the ‘Hindu government’ of India has adopted a policy of vegetarianism that will be enforced upon the Nagas. The NSCN preached a puritanical lifestyle that banned alcohol and drugs, and discouraged sexual promiscuity. Schools and clinics were established that went hand in hand with Christian teachings (Horam 1988: 76-77). Biblical names such as Zion, Canaan or the NSCN-IM headquarter Hebron, are used as camp names that signify the pervasiveness of Judeo-Christian symbols.

It is the NSCN, and later the NSCN-IM, who have made it their mission for a free Nagaland explicitly Christian, a powerful evangelical motif. Their 1980 Manifesto is perhaps the clearest sign of this.

1. Unquestionable rights of the Naga people over every inch of Nagaland.
2. Dictatorship of the people through the NSCN and practice of democracy as long as it is deemed necessary.
3. Faith in God and salvation of mankind through Jesus Christ.
4. Socialism and economic systems for the removal of exploitation and ensuring fair equality to all the people.
5. Rules out saving of Nagaland through peaceful means and pins its faith on arms to save the Nation and to ensure freedom to its people (quoted in Glancey 2011: 188).

The above represents an odd conflation of Maoist socialist ideology, Christian salvationism (‘Nagaland for Christ’) and armed insurrection followed by an appeal to democracy, but only as a stepping-stone to dictatorship of the people. However, it is that of Christian salvationism that has been the cornerstone for the NSCN-IM in their fight against the Indian state. They incorporate an almost prophetic vision of Nagalim that combines an evangelical and soteriological theology, and providence for the Naga nation through the Old Testament idea of ‘chosenness’. In the discussion so far I have demonstrated that Christianity enables a move from ‘tribal’ loyalties to ‘national’ solidarity through the deconstruction of internal boundaries. However, internal factional feuds (sometimes along ‘tribal

lines’) have erupted since the forming of the various nationalist groups, which has questioned the ‘universality’ of Naga nationhood: the Ao against the Angami; the Tangkul against the Konyak and so on (see Sashinungla 2005). Muivah in fact tells Lintner that tribalism is a ‘malignant bacteria’ affecting the solidarity of the Naga people (1986: 25). In this national, and modernist, vision, tribal loyalties are seen to disrupt the efficacy of one people, one nation. Is this attempt at a singular nation skewed with modernist (and socialist?) frames of reference? Does the existence of a nation always require ‘full consciousness’ of all its members (Duara 1995)?

Adrian Hastings suggests that it would be unreasonable to measure this participation from the vantage point of our contemporary mass-media society. For example, rightly or wrongly, black slaves in America were not included or offered to be part of the American nation in 1776, even though we acknowledge that date as axiomatic (Hastings 1997: 25-26). Nor did peasants in early modern Europe have any sense of being a part of it (Weber 1976). Does this mean that nations are any less real because the formation of identity is neither singular nor exclusive? Speaking about the Karen National Union’s (KNU) vision of a Karen nation in Burma, Michael Gravers (1996) argues that differing views coming from Karens due to place (village, region, country), status (Christian, Animist, Buddhist) and situation influence the configuration of identification. He suggests that the Karen nation still exists regardless of these differences.

In the Naga case, even nationalist and popular sentiments have splintered. Christianity as a common identity is also challenged by non-Christians like the Heraka movement, who deploy their resources against Naga Christianity but affirm Naga nationhood (Longkumer 2010). Outside historical forces have undoubtedly influenced the Nagas, but the Nagas have been active participants in the making of their own history regardless of these incongruities. Here we see the normalising project of nationalist modernity disrupted by the fragmented resistances to that project (Chatterjee 1993: 13). Nevertheless, the dominant ideology of Christianity, alongside its visualisation of nationhood, has informed much of the historical and

contemporary discussions on Naga nationalism. The indigenous peoples movement and the focus on self-determination provides another avenue to explore notions of Naga sovereignty that questions the ideology, and sole authority, of Christianity to mobilise identities.

***Recognition of difference: UN and Indigenous Peoples***

Another factor that decisively makes such a claim transnational – the ‘moral’ weight to Naga self-determination – are those propounded by UN ideas of human rights. It works in favour of the Nagas due to its universal resonances, particularly that of self-determination and sovereignty based on indigenous people’s rights. In her work amongst the Chiapas of Mexico, Heidi Moksnes highlights this very central point:

‘...discourse about local suffering has become transformed into one about global injustice... For many Catholic villagers, therefore, the regulations of international bodies are the secular versions of the universal justice that they regard God as having proclaimed. In this fusion of the sacred/secular, the United Nations has here acquired a central role, perceived by villagers in Chiapas as the main international ally in the political struggle for grassroots justice’ (2007: 603).

Similarly, a vital element to nationalist motivations is the ‘moral’ idea of the rights of peoples – particularly on the right to self-determination – which constitutes the terms of struggle for people who have been denied political presence. The right to self-determination occurred under various guises. First, calls for self-governance occurred with the demise of the various European empires after World War II and gradually many subject nations, once under colonial domination, gained independence. If the disintegration of the empires and the collective self-governance of independent nation-states marked the beginning of some sort of high point in international relations, the growing number of national movements within national states claiming independence only complicates and questions such a picture. As discussed, in India alone the numbers astound. Second, if the ‘moral’ right to national self-determination has been one of the cornerstones for self-governance, it is

also one of the most contentious issues facing many countries with a large indigenous population, including India. The current debate on self-determination implies a people's right to decide its political status freely, including the right to secede. Indigenous activists contend that the fact that they are treated unequally to other people is a blatant disregard of international law (Muehlebach 2001: 439).

In the light of this, are the worldviews and ambitions of the nation-state a helpful signifier to think about what it means to belong? What are some of the conceptual tools that enable people to reach beyond the territorial boundaries of national states and 'imagine' themselves as part and parcel of 'universal' ideas that are legitimate rights for claim? One way to think about these questions is centred on the notion of 'sovereignty' and what it means to be a people in a world system.

### ***Sovereignty and its discontents***

In textbook definitions, sovereignty usually means that the sovereign – a person, organisation, or institution – decides on all matters relating to lawful conduct and adjudicates on the legitimate use of coercion (Graham 2008: 13). Sovereignty as a political concept then is central to questions of authority. The state not only has the rightful authority but also the exercise of power. Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679), the English political philosopher, articulated this position most effectively in his magnum opus, *Leviathan*. Hobbes argued that the main effects of producing sovereignty are the ordering of difference that secures and safeguards a 'sovereign unit'. Through flattening and ordering time and space, sovereignty, for Hobbes, is a civic response to the divine authority of God. By bracketing religious authority, sovereignty as a political doctrine is made explicit (Shaw 2008: 37). For Hobbes all people are capable of commonwealth (sovereignty) exemplified by progress, order, culture, art and science. This Hobbesian notion is very much centred on "man" as a "knowing subject": 'the subject (who knows with authority) and the sovereign state (who embodies/ guarantees this authority)' (Shaw 2008: 36).



Whereas such Hobbesian conceptions can function within the confines of a national state (and perhaps only in Europe?), such an argument means that each nation is responsible for its sovereign actions. Internationalism on the other hand holds the view that ‘national actions are *rightly* subject to the wider international community, and thus that sovereignty does not ultimately lie with the nation-state’ (Graham 2008: 13; italics in original). It is this latter view that holds much currency to recent debates on sovereignty because, as I will show, the moral weight of indigenous politics means that various claims spill into international waters, making traditional views of sovereignty tenuous, at the very least.

I will argue that sovereignty is central to rethinking about the political status quo, particularly in relation to the state and its citizens. Part of my argument suggests that it is more fruitful to think beyond the state, not solely as a politico-territorial entity, but as a ‘moral’ force that can legitimise certain claims about belonging. Karena Shaw makes a similar point when she suggests that the territorial state no longer provides the boundary for people’s identities, but that these are now expressed in different non-territorial defined spaces (2008: 4). This is partly due to globalisation as a mobile force that continues to challenge the proliferation of claims beyond the cosy confines of regional or even national politics. The discourse surrounding indigenous people’s movements provides a glimpse to this phenomenon.

### ***Indigenous peoples: a universal language?***

Much ink has been spilled regarding the question of indigenous peoples in India (Béteille 1998; Baviskar 2006; Karlsson 2001, 2006; Xaxa 1999) and elsewhere (Barnard 2006; Kingsbury 1998). To sum up the sentiments of one of its most keen observers:

Over a very short period, the few decades since the early 1970s, ‘indigenous peoples’ has been transformed from a prosaic description without much significance in international law and politics, into a concept with considerable power as a basis for group mobilization, international standard setting, transnational networks

and programmatic activity of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations (Kingsbury 1998: 414).

Ironically, although the term ‘indigenous’ often assumes the power of locality to signify its importance, its origins were largely drawn up in global office blocks in Geneva and New York. In a unique way, the indigenous peoples’ movement is a transnational effort forged between local actors, international activists and organisations. It primarily involved the drafting of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, in partnership with the United Nations’ Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP), and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Populations, in the main UN hubs (Jung 2008: 10-11). In this sense, as Courtney Jung has argued, indigenous identity is both new and global, allowing millions of people to challenge the terms of their exclusion. It is not an accident of birth, but a political achievement (2008: 11). An achievement, in a sense that it not only challenges their exclusion, but also formulates a critique of the very institutions that propagate law, policies, and entitlements that are meant to include. Therefore, in some sense it might be more fruitful to view indigenous identity as political identities, which ‘arises to contest the exclusions through which it has been constituted and to try to transform the terms of its political presence’ (Jung 2008: 23).

However, in India there are those who argue against the term and question its validity. B.K. Roy Burman (1992), leading the charge, argues that the term ‘indigenous peoples’ is an imposition by Western interests such as the World Bank and the WGIP.<sup>10</sup> Andre Béteille, similarly, argues that its analytical vagueness over claims such as land, soil and territory must be understood in the context of ‘conquest, spoliation and usurpation’ throughout history

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<sup>10</sup> Representatives from India in these WGIP forums were generally from the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ICITP) formed in 1987, largely under the initiative of Jharkhand activists. Later, indigenous activists from all over India participated in these forums held in Geneva. It is affiliated with the World Council of Indigenous People (Karlsson 2001: 12). Although the ICITP has been active in these international forums, at least in the national arena the term indigenous peoples have been very contentious.

(Béteille 2006: 29). Therefore, sorting out who is ‘indigenous’ enters another difficult, and often dangerous, terrain with regard to the politics of place. Another sphere that is often muddled is the question of the interface between tribe/ādivāsī (or original settlers) and indigenous peoples (see Karlsson and Subba 2006). In India, for example, the term ‘tribe’ is being increasingly replaced with indigenous peoples, without any qualification. To be recognised as tribes – officially as Scheduled Tribes – is attractive as it continues to provide positive discrimination in the form of quotas for jobs and education at a national level. On the other hand, the rights promulgated by the UN provide recognition (and publicity) for the cultural and land abuses carried out by the Indian state. The ‘moral’ sanction in the form of human rights abuses brings about some accountability and responsibility for national states towards indigenous peoples. Therefore, due to the proliferation of these ideas indigenous peoples are a ‘social fact’ in India (Baviskar 2006). Tribes/indigenous peoples are both used strategically.

### *Complicating indigeneity*

In the case of the Nagas, the claims to indigeneity are different from other communities within India, and it must be stressed that there isn’t a singular ‘indigenous’ platform that all ascribe to. Indeed, indigeneity is a difficult notion to explain in the Naga context because of its asymmetrical articulations of belonging. As I have already discussed the historical development and crystallisation of the term ‘Naga’ was an outside imposition without a clear precedent. In some way, this taxonomy is still unclear when considering the politics of place. For example, during the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland, I was told by many Kachari, Garo, and Kuki people living in Nagaland that although they are recognised ‘officially’ by the Government of Nagaland as ‘Naga’, the other Naga tribes do not give such recognition.

For them [Kachari, Garo, Kuki] territorial indigeneity is the sole marker of Naga identity, not blood, language or customary practices. Although they have kin relations elsewhere: the Garo (in Meghalaya); the Kachari (in Assam); and the Kuki (in Assam/Manipur/Mizoram), they say they are Nagas and have

nothing to do with their kin (although cultural ties are strongly maintained through marriage). When one Kuki lady said that they are not ‘Naga’, she was quickly reprimanded for her foolishness. The politics of the moment necessitates their inclusion into the Naga fold (Longkumer 2013: 94).

This is a point reiterated by a human rights activist but with caution.<sup>11</sup> He said that ‘we can’t impose this “Naganess” on people who don’t want to be Naga, but for people who also want to be considered as Nagas, we are there to give them room. But the fact is, by blood and history, just anybody cannot be Nagas. So that is also a fact. Both you and I know that the Kachari and Garo are not really Naga, it was more of a concession by the Government of Nagaland’. This is a problem that remains unresolved primarily due to a certain perception of Naga identity related to common myths of origin and migration as discussed earlier. But what happens to those, such as Nepali immigrants, who have been in Nagaland since the time of the British? As a way forward to this impasse, a Naga informant said that ‘no identity is without boundaries. But boundaries need to be permeable in this global age and go beyond static identity formations’. In a way, this identity formation is a messy process, a paradox: it resists neat classification and resolution, while also policing its boundaries. However, such a possibility opens up space for the historicisation of identity, as it is re-imagined in current contexts. Only time will tell how Naga identity will evolve.

Naga delegates, primarily from the NSCN-IM, have been the most active ‘ethnic’ group in the WGIP since 1987 (Muehlebach 2001: 420). Although, they explicitly do not claim the indigenous people’s mantle, they assert that they are an independent nation fighting a war of resistance against the Indian and Burmese Governments (Karlsson 2006: 58). In the light of this, their claims are primarily that of self-determination and national sovereignty as ‘an inalienable birth right’ based on article 3 of the UN Declaration on the Rights

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<sup>11</sup> All informants are anonymous due to the sensitive nature of this topic.

of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Naga case brings up a thorny issue with regard to indigenous peoples and whether self-determination equals ‘secessionism’.

Isak Swu the President of the NSCN-IM in these WGIP sessions in the early 1990s argued for an ‘independent’ Naga nation, bringing about some anxiety within the WGIP, which explicitly promulgates the position that it is against the break-up of existing nation-states (Karlsson 2006: 58). A seasoned human rights activist and also a regular attendee to these UN meetings told me that although UN members are uncomfortable with the term ‘independence’, the facts have to be expressed: ‘we are not Indians and we have the right to self-determination’. Some of the anxiety has been mitigated by the change of focus for the Naga groups who now stress more on human rights violations and the on-going peace process with the GOI and the subsequent impact this would have on any future political settlement.<sup>13</sup> So what exactly is Naga sovereignty?

***Naga sovereignty: God, land, people***

According to the Yehzabo (constitution) of Nagaland:

We, the people of Nagaland, solemnly acknowledge that the Sovereignty over the earth and the entire universe belongs to Almighty God alone, and the authority of the people to be exercised on the territory is a sacred trust from God, who sustained our forefathers, the national workers and our people through the years...(Fellowship of Naga Reconciliation document 2012).

In a way the uniqueness of Naga sovereignty has to do with the two-fold understanding of Christianity and indigenous politics that is woven into the texture of Naga national identity. While Christianity provides much ‘moral’

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<sup>12</sup> Article 3 states that Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

<sup>13</sup> See reports generated by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and the archives maintained by doCip (documents of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues [PFII]). See for example archives from May 20, 2002, New York, USA; May 10-21, 2004; May 15, 2012.

cohesion as I have already discussed, indigenous peoples' rights connect with transnational systems bringing wider attention, participation, and responsibility. Both, though differently expressed, are concerned with the question of sovereignty and self-determination based on difference (Christianity) and recognition (UN). Above all, as my informants reminded me on several occasions, sovereignty in the Naga context is tied in with the ownership of land. 'One is often confused with the term sovereignty' one of my informants said, 'because we are still stuck with colonial and imperial notions of it'. Regardless of the different theories, he said, we need to acknowledge that sovereignty lies with the people. When I probed whether Christianity and sovereignty are intertwined as in the above constitution, he said:

You can talk about God granting sovereignty in a spiritual sense, but politically you cannot claim that. I'm not saying that there is a separation between Christianity and the political in our context: to say that Jesus Christ is our saviour is also a political statement. Sovereignty has to be rational – and we need to distinguish between the rational and the spiritual sphere. Some separation is required because once you co-opt Christianity for political ends – that is co-opting what is mystical for political gain – it is fanatical and irrational.

Perhaps he is thinking about the sort of brash evangelical nationalism that I discussed earlier, which, as he argues, 'has no particular place in our postmodern society'. He admonished the divinatory aspects of nationalism – from prayers, prophecies to dreams – that promise independence for a more reasoned, secular, and temporal approach. Instead of appealing to an overtly religious exclusivism, civic notions that appeal to human dignity, rights, and laws that can be documented, argued, and traced are proving to be more attractive for the Nagas. Without doubt Christianity has historically shaped and influenced Naga nationhood, but the question is: can Christianity continue to provide that universalising visualisation of nationhood? Instead of co-opting Christianity as a blunt instrument for ideology, informants suggest a more ground-up approach that integrates local custom and

sovereignty, without minimising the influence of Christianity. Therefore, secular institutions like the UN provide a more legitimate basis precisely because it is ‘universal’ and not sectarian: it represents ‘grassroots justice’ regardless of location (Moksnes 2007: 603). This secular version is more useful because it implies that sovereignty emerges from overlapping loyalties. First, it can reach to Nagas in different locations. Second, it allows Christians, non-Christians, and non-Nagas to be encompassed in the identity. Third, assertion of UN ideas of human rights gives it a transnational and ‘moral’ weight which questions traditional forms of sovereignty.

However, notions promulgated by the UN are actually not ‘secular’ in the strict sense because of the way indigenous peoples movements are utilising the rhetoric of spirituality, where even ceremonial prayers have been used to open WGIP meetings (Muehlebach 2001: 426). In the Naga case, it is likely that Christianity – in its more liberal guise – has given way to a more inclusive, neutral ‘spiritual’ articulation of a Naga political identity that could be approved by the UN. The ambiguous terrain of the ‘spiritual’ is then more attractive because, in a sense, most indigenous peoples have some ‘spiritual’ connection with land, culture and community, regardless of religious affiliation. This kind of appeal to reviving an indigenous identity is not uncommon among indigenous peoples around the world, often couched in the language of ‘a spiritual revolution, a culturally rooted *social* movement that transforms the whole of society and a *political* action that seeks to remake the entire landscape of power and relationship to reflect truly a liberated post-imperial vision’ (Alfred 2005: 27; emphasis in original). A human rights activist in Nagaland reiterated some of these points:

Indigenous peoples in Asia and in Nagaland are trying to maximise these rights [UN indigenous peoples rights] and trying to implement them in our local communities. Alongside this, we are also writing our stories, reviving our customary ways of life within the Asian fora. We are also running workshops amongst communities as we are trying to re-energise the indigenous way of life as we work with different local actors.

Various policy makers have acknowledged this revival, and Dalee Sambo Dorough from the Indian Law Resource Center has in fact addressed this point in one of the WGIP meetings. I quote it in full to highlight the important discussion:

Narrower conceptions of the term peoples (and self-determination) are flawed in their limited vision of a world divided into mutually exclusive 'sovereign' territorial communities. This limited conception of peoples largely ignores the multiple, overlapping spheres of community, authority and interdependency that actually exist in the human experience. This vision corresponds with the traditional Western theoretical perspective that limits humanity to two perceptual categories – the individual and the state – and which views states according to a model of mutually exclusive spheres of territory, community and centralized authority. This conception obscures the human rights character of self-determination and diminishes self-determination values in a world that is in fact evolving differently from one concerned only with statehood categories...

Properly understood, the principle of self-determination benefits groups, that is 'peoples', in the ordinary sense of the term throughout the spectrum of humanity's complex web of interrelationships and loyalties, and not just peoples defined by existing or perceived sovereign boundaries. In a world of increasingly overlapping and integrated political spheres, self-determination concerns the constitution and functioning of all levels and forms of governments (quoted in Muehlebach 2001: 440).

There are two issues with what Sambo Dorough proposes here with regard to the triangular notion of people, self-determination and sovereignty. First, it reframes the debate not in current forms of bounded groups, but calls for a more sophisticated rendering of people as mobile, relational, and 'their loyalties overlapping rather than defined by identities linked to bounded territories only' (Muehlebach 2001: 440). This view is particularly apt for the Nagas of India and Burma who have been historically divided into these two



countries and into various states within. What the Nagas have been asking for is some form of overlapping sovereignty or ‘Greater Nagaland/Nagalim’<sup>14</sup> that not only emotionally binds people across state and national borders, but also seeks some sort of mechanical solidarity that enables the people to have a common system of governance and polity. This brings about the second issue. What Sambo Dorough proposes can be viewed as a very diffused and unstable phenomenon. It leaves uncertain which government has the final authority, and indeed, the power to enforce that authority, in contrast to ‘true sovereignty’, a point highlighted by Hobbes. Otherwise, there is a danger of perpetual prospect of conflict. In this sense, ‘overlapping sovereignty’ between different political structures is hard to correspond with some sort of ‘mechanical solidarity’ at this current juncture. Some of the overtures made by the Indian state signal a move to address these two issues (see below), but the question of what kind of authority that will supervise Naga sovereignty remains to be seen.

### *Rethinking sovereign power*

What the above clarion call requires is a rethinking of sovereignty that allows the Nagas and indigenous peoples to negotiate their place in the world, without it being automatically assigned. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that one way out of this quagmire is ‘rhizomatic’ thought. They argue that Western thought has been obsessed with the ‘arboreal’ image – that of a tree: a single trunk supporting many branches. This kind of thought, they argue, produces less multiplicity because it always returns to the original unity, reminiscent of the Hobbesian model. Rhizomatic thought on the other hand is ‘any point [that] can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order’ (1987: 7).

This sort of disruption provided by rhizomatic thought is not something that can be severed from arboreal thought, however. Both coexist in crucial ways because ‘there exist tree or root structure in rhizomes’ (1987: 15). The point

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<sup>14</sup> Greater Nagaland or Nagalim includes the state of Nagaland and Naga inhabited areas of India (Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh) and Burma.

however for Deleuze and Guattari is to explore existing possibilities and to think differently, particularly when the arboreal structure of the state affects diverse actors. For Deleuze and Guattari, the recalcitrant peripheries of the state (such as the ‘primitive’ or non-state actors) always resist resonance, to produce sovereignty. If one were to apply this logic to the Nagas as non-state actors, they represent the disruption of the normalising project of the Indian state. Deflecting this state organising resonance brings about an identity marked by difference (Shaw 2008: 166). If one looks at it from another angle, these positions ironically cannot be absolved primarily because the risk of gaining recognition from the state for the Nagas means forgoing their political aspirations and to be subject to the authority of the state. On the other hand, recognition by the state is ‘dependent upon the exclusion and marginalization of those who mark its edges, its failures’ (Shaw 2008: 170). This is an important problem that Deleuze and Guattari are trying to highlight. The aim is not to attempt to find an inclusive, one size fits all, type of sovereignty but to ‘use its exclusions to demonstrate and reshape its very limits’ (Shaw 2008: 174). In a way, the power of resonance will always create resistance.

What this discussion points to, for our purposes, is to realise that the arboreal structure of the modern nation-states are constructed around the cumulative tradition of Western political theory, which requires that conflict be resolved through the framework of governance and the constitution. Although marked by these debates, we need to extend beyond to rethink sovereignty through indigenous frameworks that usher in the possibility of hope. Recently, it is alleged, the Indian state has offered to establish a ‘supra state body’ as the final political resolution to the protracted conflict with the Nagas.<sup>15</sup> Its proposal to incorporate all Naga inhabited areas of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, first of all recognises the ‘distinct identity’ of the Nagas and ensures the protection of the rights of Nagas who will oversee the ‘cultural, traditional and other aspects of Naga life’.

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<sup>15</sup> Some of the numerous Naga national groups, in negotiations with the GOI in the on-going peace process, have dismissed this as untrue. See The Sangai Express, 14 November 2011: <http://www.thesangaiexpress.com/sangai-expressnews.php?newsid=10650> (accessed 23rd November 2012).

Such a position has been advocated by scholars like N.K Das (2011). He suggests a non-territorial model of Naga sovereignty within the existing (and flexible) Indian constitution, akin to the Sami autonomy pact that gives them powers (in the form of parliaments) in three European states – Norway, Sweden, Finland – to determine their own traditional livelihoods, make decisions on development, teaching of the Sami language, and social and health services. Roy Burman, an Indian anthropologist, has called this process ‘internal self-determination’ (that provides non-territorial jurisdiction with legislative, administrative, judicial and developmental powers to the Nagas). Although this does not guarantee independence, it nevertheless has elements of ‘external self-determination’ (Das 2011: 76) that is similar to some sort of overlapping sovereignty that gives recognition and power to the Nagas across far flung places. This is the kind of sovereignty that I suspect will have more currency in the current political climate.

Such a view however has been mooted by the existing states; they see this as an attempt by the Indian state to break up its existing territories for some form of Naga irredentism that will erode centuries of common histories between different communities.<sup>16</sup> Others, like the NNC, recently stated that they do not share these ‘supra-state’ designs. Their position is more of a traditional form of sovereignty that demands complete territorial independence. The NNC secretary L. Kaiso said in a press release in November 2012: ‘Having brought various Naga regional units together into one federated union on March 22, 1956, the integration of Nagaland and the formation of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) was completed’.<sup>17</sup> Different views are articulated, which is why civic groups like the Fellowship of Naga Reconciliation (FNR) are attempting to shape a common platform for Naga sovereignty.

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<sup>16</sup> Naga Integration Movement: Redefining Irredentism: <http://www.thesangaexpress.com/tseitm-20931-naga-integration-movement-redefining-irredentism/> (accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2012).

<sup>17</sup> NNC poohs-poohs settlement process <http://www.thesangaexpress.com/tseitm-21015-nnc-poohspoohs-settlement-process/> (accessed 19/11/2013).

What I am suggesting in this paper is that there are possibilities to rework notions of sovereignty, such as the aforementioned points by Das and the indigenous peoples' movements. As I have discussed, ideas of sovereignty are complex, fluid and in the process of becoming – that also give rise to internal incongruities – rather than a final, given product that is borne out of history, culture, and religious belonging. It calls for specific local formations dependent on the time and place.

***Conclusion: Towards a 'moral geography'***

Nationalism historically has relied on the political and geographical territories marked by the nation-state (see also Chatterjee 1993). This paper has however emphasised how the moral idea of geography through Christian and indigenous peoples' rights has shaped the Nagas' understanding of belonging. To this effect, Christianity has provided an important narrative.

First, Christianity brought about a parallel nation-building project linking the Nagas with the forces of colonialism and modernity in a distinct fashion. Although they were incorporated into the Indian state upon Britain's departure, they nevertheless asserted their difference: that the making of a Naga nation did not share the consciousness of being an 'Indian'. Second, the representation of a territory which Sack argues must communicate a sign or marker of identity is articulated in the iconic representation of 'Nagaland for Christ'. It depicts a cartographic national space that is visualised as inherently Christian, as a beacon of gospel light. Third, the primordial right to a nation, which is resolutely eternal and natural is inseparable from land, national identity and sovereignty, is premised on the Bible. Quoting Acts 17: 26 from the New Testament, Kaka Iralu says 'And he (God) made from one (Adam) every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation'. For him, the Indo-Naga conflict is understood as a spiritual war that is 'a result of India's violation of these universal laws with respect to Nagaland' (2000:1-2). Therefore, it is important to note that spirituality can often lay claim to the material landscapes, and it is precisely this spirituality that makes such claims more powerful.

Through transnational links with organisations like the UN, the Nagas are involved in articulating a form of sovereignty that requires a rethink of the role of the nation-state as the sole arbiter of legitimacy and authority. Much of this understanding derives from the Hobbesian model of a strong national state that has the authority to shape a singular identity. However, this definition is unhelpful for a number of reasons but chief among them is the understanding of nations within nation-states prevalent in the global situation today. Indeed, with the emphasis being placed on indigenous peoples' sovereignty, we begin to consider how a nation might be defined, and this has more to do with a sense of belonging. Combining these two registers is useful in the Naga context but not without its own complications. It is still unclear how territorially indigenous Nagas can be fully recognised as 'Naga' if the criterion for belonging is still common migration stories, creation myths and questions over authenticity based on blood. Further still, the question over non-Christians is another problem that cannot be resolved if Christianity is viewed as axiomatic with ethnic identity. Part of this shift, as I have discussed, revolves around the notion of a secular Naga identity that is cautious about its evangelical and ideological strands of Christianity, while appealing more to reason and temporality based on human dignity and inclusion. If this is the manner in which Naga sovereignty were to progress it would automatically incorporate a plural constellation of people regardless of religious belonging. There is evidence to suggest that this is a possibility that is open to discussion amongst many of the informants that I interacted with.

Finally, not only is it the case that defining the Naga nation along physical territorial lines is insufficient but it is *only* by considering the 'moral geography' or their sense of belonging that we can understand properly the way in which this nation could be defined as territoriality, as the organisation of space. Seeking legitimation and recognition through different rights accorded by the UN provides an avenue for further thinking about the limits and disruptions of the nation-state, not only in India but elsewhere.

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