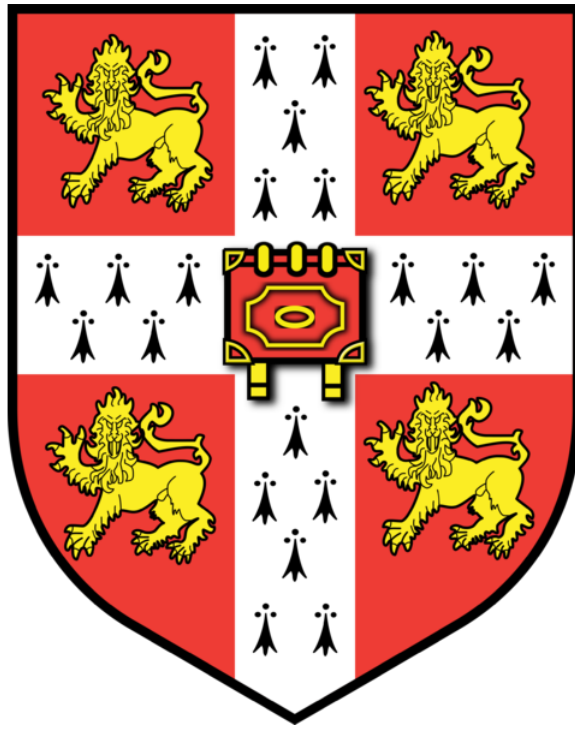


TERRITORIES OF BELONGING

Citizenship and everyday practices of the state in Bodoland



Saba Sharma

Department of Geography
University of Cambridge

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Hughes Hall

April 2019

Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution, except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 words of the Degree Committee for the Faculty of Earth Sciences & Geography.

Thesis Summary

My thesis looks at the construction of citizenship in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD, or Bodoland for short) in Western Assam, India. The BTAD is an autonomous sub-region within the state of Assam, which in turn is part of a cluster of states in Northeast India. I look primarily at the everyday practices of the state in an ethnically diverse region with a history of separatism, armed militant struggle, and violence between different ethnic groups. Two related strands of difference underlie the notion of citizenship here — the territorialised expression of ethnicity as manifested in the Indian context; and the idea of India's Northeast as being a space of exception vis-à-vis the rest of the country. As has been repeatedly emphasised by scholars of citizenship, creating citizens is a fundamentally exclusionary process contingent on the process of creating Others. There is no “us” without a “them”. Equally, these categories have always been nebulous and contested, never neatly fitting onto the reality they claim to represent. It is precisely this process of construction and negotiation in Bodoland to which I turn my attention.

My understanding of citizenship is developed in the backdrop of Assam's contemporary exercise of updating its own National Register of Citizens, a process designed to identify illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh. Building on the demands of Assam's sub-nationalist movement in the 1980s, the present-day NRC process has also acquired religious overtones, with the state's large Bengali-speaking Muslim community being singled out as “Bangladeshis” en masse. This has resonated across Bodoland, where the Muslim community has come into multiple conflicts with the state's autochthonous group, the Bodos. It is primarily among these two groups that my thesis explores the conflicting practices and ideas of citizenship. I attempt to unpack the role of the state in the shaping of this relationship, including its heavily militarised presence in the region. In doing so, I adopt approaches from the anthropology of the state, i.e., focussing on its everyday character, looking at routine practices, as well as the ways in which the state represents itself in ordinary settings.

I explore the tensions between conflicting notions of citizenship in four main ways. First, I look at the historical context of the region, and in particular its evolving relationship with the Indian state. Second, I look at the often-contentious and deeply important politics of land and territory, which have been central to the expression of political identities and politicised ethnicities in the region. Third, I examine electoral and everyday party politics, which provide a window into the many contradictions in the practices and representations of the state and corresponding ideas of citizenship. And finally, I explore the rise of a new politics in India and its impact in the region — the emboldening of right-wing Hindu fundamentalist groups in recent years, and how they challenge ideas of insiders and outsiders as they are understood today. In each of these themes, I look at citizenship not just as it is formalised and expressed in legal terms, but as it is enacted, practiced, resisted and re-appropriated for context. In addressing these issues, I am also exploring the question of how India's Northeast shapes the national imagination, and whether its confinement to the “periphery” of Indian identity reveals deeper insights into the shaping of India as a nation.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, a heartfelt thanks is due to Prof. Bhaskar Vira, for his unending patience, support and encouragement for the PhD and beyond. I could not have hoped for a better supervisor, who has probably read chapter drafts more times than I have, and never failed to provide support, whether intellectual or practical.

I would also like to thank the Gates Cambridge Trust, for enabling this PhD with their scholarship, as well as providing additional funding for conferences and academic activities. I also thank the Smuts Memorial Fund and University Fieldwork Fund for allowing me to conduct long, in-depth field research, and the Philip Lake Fund at the Department of Geography and Hughes Hall Travel Grant for enabling attendance at conferences.

The Department of Geography provided for an important intellectual and interactive space, both staff and fellow students provided a much needed sense of community. Special thanks to Philip Stickler for producing the maps in this thesis. Thanks also to the Northeast India reading group and its members, especially Prof. Arupjyoti Saikia, whose generosity during his stint at Cambridge was very valuable. I'm grateful for discussions and feedback at various conferences — the King's India Institute Graduate Workshop, BASAS Conference, RGS Annual Conference in Cardiff, Northeast India Conference in Tezpur, and the Ethnographic Perspectives on South Asian Politics Workshop at Manchester University, and the First and Third Year Conferences at the Department of Geography.

Much of what is in this thesis is owed the time I spent in Assam, and all the participants who spent so much of their time answering my naïve questions. A special and heartfelt thanks goes to Ajay and Khoshbub, for their help with research and translation, their willingness to engage in endless discussions of what they rightly called “our” project, and their friendship. A special thanks is also due to Jenny and Sunil and everyone at the ANT, for sharing space on their campus, and Bala and Rhon, and all the animals that lived with us for providing much needed company in what could have been a very lonely journey. I'm grateful to Joshua and the Central Institute of Technology in Kokrajhar, for allowing me to stay on their campus during parts of the fieldwork. Thanks also to Xonzoi, Parasmita, Jila, Abdul and Prof Monirul Hussain in Guwahati for being so generous with their time, and to Dr Melvil Pereira for letting me use the library at the NESRC. I'm grateful also to the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Archives, as well as the Assam State Archives, for granting me permission to

peruse their records. I'm thankful to the Centre for Equity Studies in New Delhi for the opportunity to work in Assam to begin with.

I'm grateful for the company of friends in Cambridge and London in the last three and a half years. Thanks also to Ligia aunty and Peter uncle, Gayatri and Roshni for being present and full of cheer through the process. I'm thankful for the support of Vasav, by ways of long breakfasts and Skype calls (among other things), and providing much-needed doses of humour and reality. I am grateful to Sarab (and his wonderfully comfortable couch) for preventing a housing crisis from derailing the writing process, and for being so generous with his space and time.

I am grateful to my parents for providing encouragement, support, food-on-demand during my trips home, for always reminding me not to take things too seriously (to no avail, of course), and to my mum especially for proofreading the thesis. I owe a special debt of gratitude for the patient ear, companionship, and conversation of Ambika, who never seems to tire of my long-winded rants. And last but not least, I could not have gotten through the process without the presence and support of Siddharth, who is simultaneously a reader of drafts, a sounding board for whacky ideas, and a crisis hotline.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my intrepid, trailblazing grandmother, who passed away just weeks before its completion. As a student, she never got to submit her own, nearly-finished PhD dissertation, and would have been thrilled to watch me hand in mine.

Glossary

AASU	All Assam Students Union
AAMSU	All Assam Minority Students Union
ABSU	All Bodo Students Union
ABMSU	All BTC Minority Students Union
AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Powers Act
AGP	Asom Gana Parishad
AIUDF	All India United Democratic Front
ALRR	Assam Land and Revenue Regulation (Act)
BJP	Bhartiya Janata Party
BLTF/BLT	Bodo Liberation Tigers Front/ Bodo Liberation Tigers
BPF	Bodoland Political Front
BSS	Bodo Sahitya Sabha
BTC	Bodoland Territorial Council
INC	Indian National Congress
MCLA	Member of Council Legislative Assembly
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
NDFB	National Democratic Front for Bodoland
NRC	National Register of Citizens
NSK	<i>Nagarik Seva Kendra</i> (Citizen Service Centre)
PTCA	Plains Tribal Council of Assam
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TLCC	Tertiary Level Coordination Committee
ULFA	United Liberation Front of Assam
UPP	United People's Party
VCDC	Village Council Development Committee
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	11
1.1 OVERVIEW	11
1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	13
1.3 A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY	15
1.4 THESIS STRUCTURE	18
CHAPTER 2. LOCATING THE POLITICAL IN BODOLAND: THEORETICAL EXPLORATIONS	22
2.1 INTRODUCTION	23
2.2 CITIZENSHIP AND ITS OTHERS	24
2.2.1 IDENTITY AND ALTERITY	26
2.2.2 SPACE, SCALE AND TERRITORY	28
2.3 BEYOND STATUS — CITIZENSHIP AS PRACTICE	31
2.3.1 CITIZENSHIP AND INFORMALITY	31
2.3.2 ACTS OF CITIZENSHIP	33
2.4 POSTCOLONIAL CITIZENSHIP	36
2.4.1 CONSTRUCTING THE INDIAN CITIZEN	37
2.4.2 REGIONAL PULLS, NATIONAL IDENTITIES	40
2.5 EVERYDAY PRACTICES OF THE STATE — AN APPROACH	44
2.6 CONCLUSION: APPROACHES AND THE WAY FORWARD	47
CHAPTER 3. ENGAGING THE FIELD: METHODOLOGY	49
3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	50
3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN	51
3.2.1 TIMELINE OF FIELDWORK	53
3.2.2 FIELD SITES	54
3.2.3 PARTICIPANTS	55
3.3 RESEARCH METHODS	57
3.3.1 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION	57
3.3.2 INTERVIEWS	59
3.3.3 ARCHIVAL WORK	60
3.4 POSITIONALITY	61
3.5 RISK FACTORS	63
3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	65
3.6.1 ACCESS AND INFORMED CONSENT	65
3.6.2 SENSITIVE INFORMATION, ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY	66
3.6.3 RESEARCH ASSISTANTS	67
3.7 DATA ANALYSIS	68
3.7.1 RECORDING DATA	68
3.7.2 ORGANISING AND ANALYSING DATA	69
3.8 REPRESENTING THE RESEARCH	69
CHAPTER 4. IMAGINING BODOLAND: PLACING NORTHEAST INDIA IN CONTEXT	72
4.1 INTRODUCTION	73
4.2 CONSTRUCTING THE REGION	75
4.2.1 ASSAM: THE FRONTIER AND ITS INHABITANTS	76
4.2.2 POLITICISING ETHNICITY	79
4.2.3 MIGRANTS AND MUSLIMS — OTHERING ASSAM	81
4.3 UNEASY FEDERALISM IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA	85

4.4 REIMAGINING THE NORTHEAST	88
4.5 THE MANY BETRAYALS OF BODOLAND: A BRIEF HISTORY	91
4.6 CONCLUSION: CONTEXTUALISING MY APPROACH	97
<u>CHAPTER 5. TERRITORIALISED BELONGING: PLACE AND IDENTITY IN BODOLAND</u>	<u>103</u>
5.1 INTRODUCTION	104
5.2 AUTONOMY, TERRITORY AND THE INDIAN STATE	105
5.2.1 SIXTH SCHEDULE	107
5.3 TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN BODOLAND	111
5.3.1 TERRITORIAL ANXIETIES	112
5.4 LAND AS A MARKER OF IDENTITY	117
5.4.1 LAWS TO GOVERN LAND	118
5.4.2 LAWS OF THE LAND	121
5.5 CONCLUSION: TERRITORY, AUTHORITY, AND CITIZENSHIP	123
<u>CHAPTER 6. THE POLITICAL CITIZEN: ELECTIONS AND EVERYDAY POLITICS IN BODOLAND</u>	<u>126</u>
6.1 VIGNETTE	126
6.2 SCALES OF POLITICS AND ADMINISTRATION IN THE BTAD	129
6.2.1 POLITICS AS GOVERNANCE: THE VILLAGE COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (VCDC)	132
6.2.2 “BRINGING SCHEMES”: THE WORKINGS OF THE VCDC	134
6.3 MULTI-SCALAR POLITICAL IDENTITIES	139
6.3.1 THE “DISENCHANTED” VOTER	140
6.4 PATRONS, CLIENTS AND CITIZENS	145
6.4.1 GAALI, DHAMKI AND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS	145
6.4.2 VOTES WITHOUT BALLOTS — PATRONAGE, ETHNICITY AND LOCAL POLITICS	151
6.5 CONCLUSION: CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICAL PRACTICE	156
<u>CHAPTER 7. OUTSIDERS AT HOME: NEW EXCLUSIONS AND THE HINDU RIGHT WING</u>	<u>160</u>
7.1 INTRODUCTION	160
7.2 HINDU NATIONALISM: ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF BEING INDIAN	160
7.2.1 HINDU NATIONALISM AND THE TRIBAL QUESTION	162
7.2.2 BODOLAND: A CASE STUDY IN TRANSFORMATION?	166
7.3 VIOLENCE AS A MOMENT OF OTHERING	169
7.4 EVERYDAY PROCESSES OF OTHERING — HINDUTVA IN DAILY LIFE	174
7.4.1 A NEW INDIGENEITY	176
7.4.2 “AUTHENTIC” RELIGIONS	179
7.4.3 CREATING NEW OTHERS FROM OLD	183
7.5 CONCLUSION: NEW EXCLUSIONS FOR CITIZENSHIP	189
<u>CHAPTER 8. BELONGING (AND NOT) IN BODOLAND: CITIZENSHIP AND EVERYDAY LIFE</u>	<u>191</u>
8.1 INTRODUCTION	191
8.2 ACTS OF CITIZENSHIP	192
8.3 TERRITORIALISING IDENTITY	199
8.4 NORTHEAST INDIAN MUSLIM CITIZENSHIP	202
8.5 CONCLUSION	207
<u>CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSIONS: REFLECTIONS ON CITIZENSHIP IN BODOLAND</u>	<u>210</u>
9.1 MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS	210
9.2 EPILOGUE	213
9.3 MOVING FORWARD	214

9.4 QUESTIONS OF BELONGING	216
BIBLIOGRAPHY	217
<hr/>	
APPENDICES	247
APPENDIX A: MEMORANDUM OF SETTLEMENT ON BODOLAND TERRITORIAL COUNCIL (BTC)	248
APPENDIX B: THE IMMIGRANTS (EXPULSION FROM ASSAM) ACT 1950	254
APPENDIX C: SECTION 3 OF THE SIXTH SCHEDULE [ARTICLES 244(2) AND 275(1)] OF THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA	256



1. INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The seeds for this research project were sown much before I enrolled in the PhD or embarked on fieldwork. The main impetus that shaped this study was the year I spent in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD, or Bodoland), an autonomous sub-region within the state of Assam between June 2013 and June 2014 (and several follow up visits in the year that followed). I worked on a rehabilitation project set up in the aftermath of riots in 2012 between two of the region's largest groups — indigenous Bodos and Muslims. The same groups are the focus of the study here.

In the post-conflict context, many issues were discussed and debated prominently in local and national media (one of the rare occasions that the region was in the national media at all): immigration from Bangladesh, demographic imbalance, ethnic cleansing of Muslims, the vast scale of displacement (nearly 500,000 people), and the inadequate compensation and rehabilitation that followed. For the national media in particular, the violence was reflective of an unruly, conflict-prone region where such instances were common, and which further reinforced its status as being “peripheral” to the Indian national imagination.

The role of the state with regard to the conflict was mentioned in specific ways: the government of Assam and the central Indian government were pulled up for not controlling the immigration of Bangladeshis (especially Muslims) from the border; chastised for failing to provide adequate military and paramilitary forces as a response to the initial violence, thus letting it spiral out of control; and criticised for not providing adequate relief and rehabilitation after the violence died down, leaving many people displaced for several months. Over the course of a year, as life slowly went back to normal (although the violence would have long lasting political repercussions), it became increasingly evident that the role of the state in shaping the conflict had deeper roots than the specific instances that became news. Its ubiquitous presence (and sometimes conspicuous absence) and the form of its institutions shaped the contours of this conflict from much before 2012. To see the context of the conflict required both a step back, to understand the character of the state over 150 years, as well as a step forward, towards looking at the state in the ordinary, the everyday, and in the minutiae.

As much as it was the violent events of 2012 and their aftermath that prompted the initial thinking about this project, it is not, ultimately, a study of conflict or violence in the BTAD. As the BTAD is situated in Northeast India, conflict is often the theme towards which research about it tends to gravitate, and not without reason. Over the last six decades, the region has seen multiple protests and agitations, separatist movements that spawned militant outfits, state-sponsored violence through increasing militarisation, and ethnic tensions that have escalated into violent events. Many important works of scholarship have examined the dynamics of this violence in Northeast India, highlighting its enduring tussle with the Indian state (for a non-representative sample, see Baruah 1999, 2005, Hazarika 2000, Barborá 2002, 2008, Bhaumik 2009, Kikon 2009, Vandekerckhove 2009, Goswami 2014). Such studies have been essential, given that the conflict is often invisible to India's "mainland" (a term coined from the Northeast), and ignored by its media.

Nonetheless, there have also increasingly been calls to move beyond understandings of violence and politicised ethnicities as the dominant framework to study Northeast India. An exclusive focus on conflict risks reinforcing stereotypes about the region as being inherently violence-prone, but it also makes invisible the other, underlying aspects of social and political life in the region, which deserve attention. By focussing on the everyday routines of politics and the state in the BTAD, this thesis attempts to shed light on these quotidian practices, and what they suggest about the unfolding politics of the region more generally. Nonetheless, violence recurs as a theme in conversations, slogans, election rallies and campaigns, political rhetoric of all hues, and is embedded in the landscape of daily life. Given the relatively recent riots of 2012 (as well as two major incidents of targeted violence that followed), it is impossible to be distanced from it entirely. Many people's lives are permanently shaped by the riots, like residents of Makrabari, a field site in my project, where displaced Muslims have been living in a de facto relief camp for almost six years now. Their daily life is constantly informed by violence, past and present, and many ordinary decisions must factor in past violent events. My attempt here has been to show the mundane practices of citizenship and state, and violence forms a part of these narratives, even when it is not occurring.

1.2 Research Questions

This is a thesis that centres around the constructions and contestations around citizenship in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. Going into fieldwork, the issues that I focussed on drew from the abovementioned questions about how the role of the state and conversations about the state were framed, in the context of violence, its aftermath, and everyday practices of the state. I began the first round of my fieldwork in March 2016 (during state-level elections), and the second, longer round from October 2016 onwards. This was also the period in which the National Register of Citizens (NRC) was in the process of being updated in the region. It predictably garnered much attention both in news media and in everyday conversations, being a long-standing political project designed to identify illegal immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh. This has been claimed by many residents of Assam as a perennial problem since the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. While the Assam movement, which picked up steam in the 1980s, focussed on illegal immigrants of all religious backgrounds, in the last couple of decades, this conversation has come to focus increasingly on Bangladeshi Muslims, and threatened to implicate the many legally resident Bengali-speaking Muslims in the region as well. The NRC process meant this conversation was at the forefront during my time in the field, almost everyday, and became part of the daily life of all those who were in Assam, as they scrambled to look for documents and evidence that proved they were legal residents of Assam, and citizens of India.

The NRC provided a topical backdrop against which to observe questions of citizenship in particular, as a lens to understand practices of the state. Citizenship gained new visibility in the context of the NRC updating exercise, but what has been most revealing has been looking at citizenship practices in the everyday, in ordinary interactions between citizens, and between citizens and the state. The overarching research question that forms a narrative thread through this thesis, then asks: *How do we understand the construction of citizenship as a process, and how do different forms of authority influence how it is experienced, practiced, imposed or resisted?* In responding to this question, I disaggregate the lines of enquiry into three specific areas.

Categories of citizenship, although shaped primarily by state practices, are never entirely congruent with them. While many ethnonationalist movements in Northeast India have gone on to appropriate territorialised identities as a means of challenging state boundaries and

demanding ethnic homelands, other, subtler practices also contest these ideas, and challenge them, resulting in contradictory constructions of citizenship — at different scales, times and places. The *first research question* then centres around *acts of citizenship and how they differ from routine practices of citizenship. I look at how such acts, employed through formal routes and informal tactics both reinforce and disrupt existing categories of citizenship.* As the empirical evidence from the fieldwork goes on to show, such acts of subversion are not just undertaken by ordinary citizens, but also powerful groups (such as right-wing nationalists), and can have an impact on how citizenship is experienced.

In attempting to understand the construction of citizen identities in the BTAD, the *second research question* must consider its *historically territorialised nature.* While there has been much work on how this has been enshrined in policy and law, I ask *how territorialised citizenship in Northeast India is normalised through practice, and how the idea is re-appropriated to create new ideas of territory by non-state actors.* I look here at territorial identities as they are reproduced through state instruments like autonomy, as well as through everyday practices, as in the ownership and transfer of land.

Notions of difference have always been at the heart of belonging at the Northeast, and as scholars have repeatedly documented, this has manifested in multiple ways — militarised spaces, asymmetrical federalism, autonomy arrangements (that are said to lack genuine autonomy), and the construction of the population as a racialised Other to the Indian “mainstream”. Even as greater out-migration and somewhat increased connectivity has rendered the region less isolated than it used to be, historical notions of difference persist in the way Indian nationalism continues to consider the Northeast as peripheral. The *third research question* considers this context of difference — Northeast India — and questions a category of Otherness within this already differentiated identity, that of Muslims from Northeast India. Given the historical significance of migration and ethnicity in the region, it is important to ask *how Northeast Indian Muslim citizenship is constructed, and in particular, how exclusions formed through this identity differ from the way Muslim identity has been constructed in opposition to Indian citizenship?* This last line of inquiry arose organically from doing fieldwork, and also through perusing the relatively narrow representations of Muslims in literature about Northeast India. Despite being an important category of “Other” in the construction of Northeast Indian identity (which, in common parlance, is often understood as exclusive of Muslims), territorialised representations of the region do not

capture the lived experience of Northeast Muslim identity, nor does the category exist in any significant way in scholarship. Through attempting to answer this question, I hope to make a contribution towards an understanding of this layered sense of differentiated identity.

1.3 A note on terminology

A few potentially contentious points of terminology arise in the reading of this thesis. The first is the use of the shorter “Bodoland” to refer to the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts, or BTAD. What appears to be a harmless shortening of a lengthy term also carries political connotations, however. As Chapter 4 will go on to detail, the term “Bodoland” emerged from the movement for separate statehood that began in 1987, a petition to carve out a separate state within the federal structure of India. The BTAD is a compromise agreement between the movement and the Indian state, while Bodoland continues to be an aspirational project of statehood, the movement for which, while being at varying levels intensity in different periods, has never entirely died down. Some Bodo political outfits — among them the influential All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), which initially spearheaded the movement in 1987, have continued to campaign for statehood. This leaves the term “Bodoland” with a dual meaning — it is often used as a shorthand for the longer BTAD acronym, to refer to the existing region (both in local parlance and in academic scholarship), as well as being a politically charged term, used to convey a possible future project. In the latter context, the term also has the potential to be divisive — one of the key impediments to the statehood project has been the objection of non-Bodo groups (who form the majority, as against 30 percent of Bodos) to an ethnic homeland for a dominant tribal group that nonetheless lacks demographic majority. Despite these contentious connotations, the term “Bodoland” is included in the BTAD acronym, and thus becomes convenient shorthand in ordinary discussion. In my usage of the term in this thesis, I use the term in this spirit (unless specifically speaking of the statehood project, which I have attempted to indicate clearly, when used in this way).

The second point of terminology considers the usage of “tribal” and “indigenous” in the Indian context. The term “indigenous”, while often signalling historical antecedents and ancient lineages, is in itself a modern construct, emerging from the discourse of international bodies like the United Nations and International Labour Organisation in the 1950s and 1960s

(Niezen 2000). It is understood as referring to populations that inhabited a geographical region before European colonisation (Xaxa 1999). The term “tribe”, often emerging from early ethnographic accounts in the 19th century, refers not just to particular types of society, but also to a particular stage of evolution, often associated with seemingly primitive characteristics (Béteille 1998).

In India, the term “tribe” was coined by colonial ethnographers, but relatively late — the first mention is in the 1901 census (Xaxa 1999, p. 3589). This is generally attributed to the fact that early colonial ethnographers could not distinguish between caste and tribe, often using the two social categories interchangeably (Béteille 1998, Xaxa 1999). As those who study indigenous/tribal groups in India are aware, the two are not entirely synonymous in India, in the way that they often have been in contexts of settler colonialism such as across Latin America, Australia, or North America. The multiple migrations of many groups, both tribal and non-tribal, have led to multiple understandings of what “tribal” means. Some argue that in the South Asian context, tribes refer to groups settled in the region before the arrival of the Aryans, in which case, the term “indigenous” finds greater resonance (Xaxa 1999). On the other hand, this becomes more complex when looking at some of tribes in Northeast India, whose settlement in what is today India occurred after many other, non-tribal groups, although their presence in Tibet dates back to as early as the first millennium BC (Ibid., p. 3591). Other than habitat, markers like language, race, and to a lesser extent, religion, have been used to attempt to clarify distinctions between tribals and non-tribals at different periods of time (Béteille 1998).

Of the two groups that my thesis focusses on, the Bodos are considered indigenous to the region, indeed the demand for an ethnic homeland is centred around this premise. The term “indigenous” however, is used unevenly in the Indian context, and “tribal” is in more frequent usage. Used in this way, the word tribal does not carry a pejorative connotation,¹ and is also a term of self-identification. This is perhaps fuelled to a large extent by the use of the term “Scheduled Tribe” in the Indian constitution as an administrative category that receives additional constitutional protections. Many of the group nomenclatures — the All Assam Tribal Sangha, or the Plains Tribal Council of Assam — also use the term tribal in the

¹ Except for the overarching paternalistic view taken towards tribal groups by the Indian state, but this is less to do with terminology and more to do with deeper-held beliefs about tribals as backward or less civilised.

context of advocacy. A term that originated as a means of facilitating colonial categorisation today is a form of articulation and assertion of identity (Xaxa 1999, p. 3594).

Despite its more recent positioning as an emancipatory term, “indigenous” has not been a term that has gained currency in Indian political or policy circles, although its Hindi equivalent, Adivasi, finds resonance, especially in reference to Central Indian tribes, in particular (Xaxa 1999). For Bodoland, the word “tribal” is in common usage to refer to Bodos and other Plains Tribes in the region, particularly as Adivasi has different connotations both historically and linguistically, and is used to refer to descendants of central Indian tribes who arrived to work on tea plantations from the late 19th century onwards. The administrative category of “Scheduled Tribe” also enables the use of the term tribal widely, and it is used often in a rights-based context in campaigning for statehood. The place-based nature of this administrative category further reifies the link between ethnicity and territory (Jayal 2013). The lack of applicability of this term to central Indian Adivasis in Assam, however, leads to a curious though largely unresolved question — “how widely can people move and still retain the entitlement of being “indigenous” for themselves and their descendants?” (Béteille 1998, p. 190)

As Karlsson (2001) has observed, the “sons of the soil” argument of the kind pursued by Bodos could be looked at within the broader framework of indigenous claims, and many tribal groups have adopted this approach in more recent times. During my fieldwork, a high profile Bodo activist, Anjali Daimary, attended the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York, and presented the case of Bodoland at the assembly (The Telegraph 2017a). While her attendance at the forum may not have had any direct consequences for domestic policy, the news spread within the Bodo community, with many taking pride in the fact that Daimary had presented the issue in an international context. In doing so, Daimary also aligned Bodos with other indigenous peoples across the world, and adopted similar strategies of using global means to pursue local agendas (Castree 2004, p. 152). Nonetheless, the debate is also fraught with uncertainty, as the Bodo/Adivasi question of indigeneity shows. In Assam, the term *khilonjiya* roughly translates to “indigenous”, but is used to refer not to tribal groups, but to what are considered the “original” inhabitants of Assam — both caste Hindus and Muslims. This identity is constructed in opposition to non-Assamese groups like Bengalis, Marwaris, and even Adivasis, who immigrated to Assam from the late 19th century onwards, at the beginning of the colonial encounter. As a result,

indigenous has multiple meanings in the contexts of Assam and Bodoland, and I largely use the term “tribal” to refer to indigenous claims made by Bodos.

A third, and final point concerns the nomenclature surrounding Muslims, the second major group of respondents in my fieldwork. During the 2012 riots, it was common to read and hear of violence as being between “Bengali Muslims” and Bodos. Yet, as my fieldwork showed, Bengali-speaking Muslims were not the only community affected — many Assamese speaking Muslims were also affected. Equally, many Bengali Muslims resented being singled out — either as perpetrators or victims — and felt the term akin to a kind of dog-whistle implying that because they were Bengali speaking, they were perhaps the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, constantly vilified and demonised by right-wing groups and Assamese nationalists alike. While many of the respondents in my fieldwork are Bengali-speaking Muslims, I refer to them simply as Muslims, which is how they refer to themselves. That is not to say distinctions between Assamese and Bengali speaking Muslims do not exist (the nuances of this are detailed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 7). In fact, Assamese-speaking Muslims refer to themselves as *khilonjiya* or “indigenous” Muslims. Nonetheless, specifically identifying Bengali Muslims, except where it is relevant to the argument, has discriminatory overtones, and thus I use the term only where the distinction is important to illustrate a point, but not, say, in describing an ordinary interaction from the field where this is irrelevant.

1.4 Thesis structure

The thesis is organised into nine chapters in total, including this introductory first chapter. The concepts that frame this thesis are organised in two main ways — Chapter 2, which lays out relevant theories and ideas from political geography, as well related social science interventions (especially political anthropology) that have also informed the development of the concepts central to this thesis; and Chapter 4, which functions both as a means of framing the context of Northeast India as a region, but also exploring the approaches to studying it, which have informed its production as a bounded space. In doing this, I locate this thesis in two ways — within the discipline and traditions of political geography, as well as within the study of Northeast India, even as the term itself is a contested one.

Chapter 2 begins by looking at the academic framework that underpins this project. I look at how political geography provides a fitting framework for the thesis, as well as the wider tradition in human geography to look towards cross-disciplinary perspectives within the social sciences. I highlight the anthropology of the everyday state perspective, from within the field of political anthropology, as being especially relevant to the methodology that guided the project. The chapter also examines the concept of citizenship in more depth, which form the building blocks of the analysis. Acts of citizenship, emerging from protest as well as informal practices, form a crucial part of this understanding, as do ideas of territoriality.

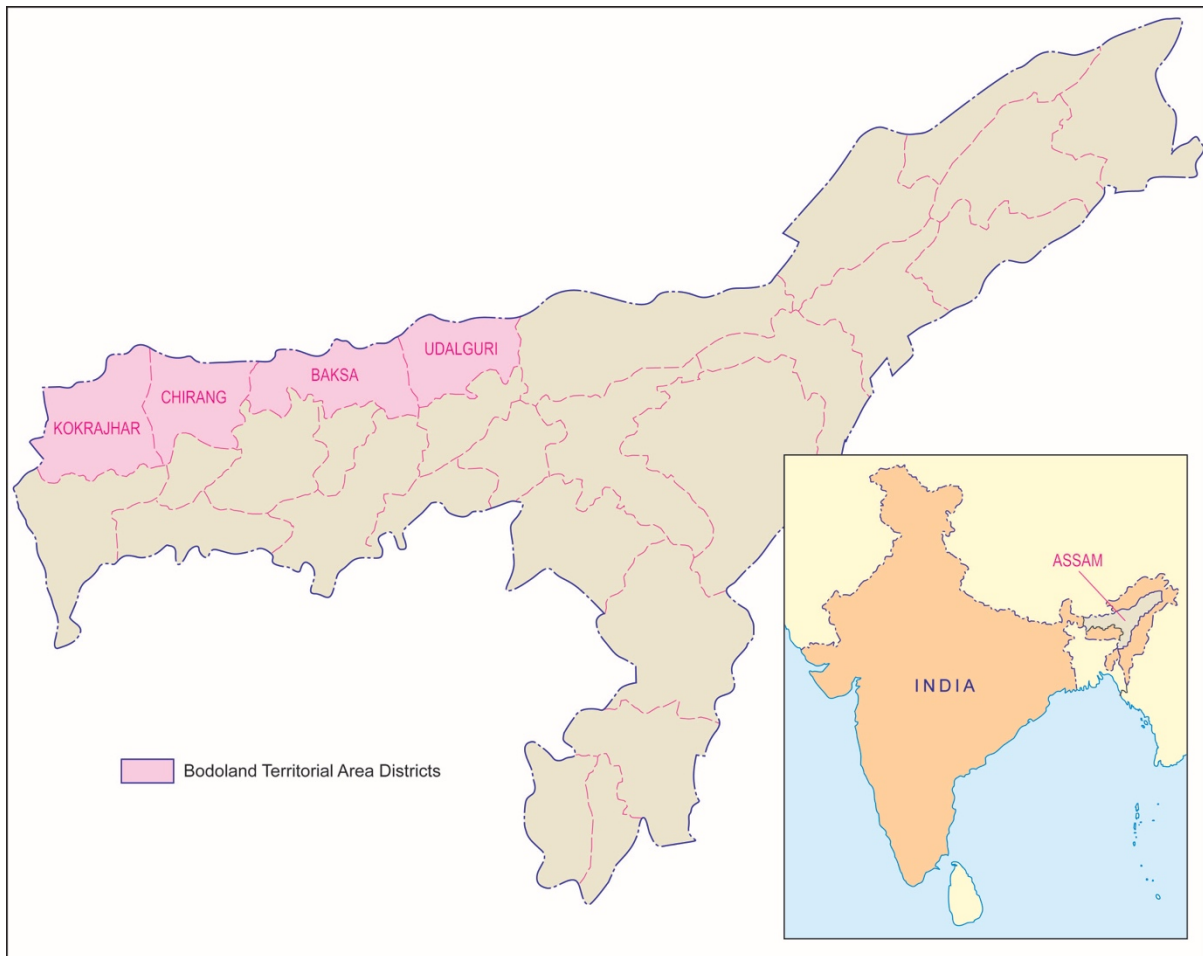
Building off the anthropology of the state and an emphasis on everyday practices of the state in political geography, Chapter 3 looks at methodology, with ordinary state practices, and the ways in which these are appropriated and redefined by citizens, forming the backbone of my research. A variety of qualitative methods — participant observation, interviews, and archival work — were employed, over a period of ten months. Chapter 4, as mentioned above, delves into the study and construction of the Northeast India region (of which Bodoland is a part), and how this framing has shaped the region's politics. In particular, I pay close attention to arrangements of federalism with the Indian state, and their use as tools of conflict management.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of autonomous councils, a specific federal arrangement unique to Northeast India, and one that has been applied in Bodoland since 2003. The groundwork for these arrangements was laid by the framers of the Indian Constitution in the mid 20th century, but as the debates in that period show, it has always been a contentious instrument. The suspicions around the possible implications of autonomy have led to patchy implementation of the ideals behind autonomous arrangements, and uneven recognition of their legitimacy. Chapter 5 also continues the discussion from the previous chapter in highlighting the highly territorial nature of autonomy arrangements and identity claims in the region, linking them back to colonial policies explored in Chapter 4. The politics of land ownership and transfer, in particular, emerge as powerful symbolic tools to guard the boundaries of ethnicised territories. Equally, they emerge as ways to contest received ideas, and present alternative scales at which citizenship is enacted.

Chapter 6 looks at everyday politics and elections as another means through which political ethnicity is reproduced and maintained. As with practices of land, showing greater attention to the performance of politics shows that just as these practices can be tools of reinforcement, they can also be spaces to challenge existing constructions, especially boundaries around ethnicity. This chapter engages with work from political anthropology and political science, which present differing ideas of patronage and clientelism. I examine how these can be interpreted within the framework of citizenship, by looking at vernacular expressions of *gaali* (curse/complaint) and *dhamki* (threat) in the interplay between politicians and voters.

Chapter 7 looks at a more recent trend in Assam and Bodoland politics — namely the rise of Hindu nationalism, following its upward trajectory in the rest of the country. The roots of Hindu nationalism are historical, originating in the early 20th century, but its recent emboldening and strengthening has been underway only since the 1980s, and it has seen a particular uptick since 2014. Hindu nationalism poses a different sort of challenge to the received categories of citizenship in Bodoland. I argue that it serves to realign these with its own categories of inclusion and exclusion, drawing on Assam’s history, but also, crucially, linking it more closely to India’s broader experience than its previous secessionist histories have allowed. This has the potential to impact many, but none more than Assam’s Muslims, especially Bengali-speaking Muslims, who present the ultimate “enemy” to the Hindu nation, as viewed from Assam (and from the majoritarian heartland). Traditionally oppressed and anti-state groups, like the Bodos, are pulled into this project of identification, definition and exclusion as well.

Next, in Chapter 8, I analyse the main findings of the thesis, linking back to the conceptual and methodological framework in which they were put forward. I consider the contests around the important ideas of citizenship in Bodoland as explored in this thesis — territorialised ethnic identities, how they are legitimised and the acts that contest these ideas, and the particular dynamics of Northeast Muslim citizenship, as being distinct both from Muslim citizenship in India, and Northeast Indian citizenship. A final concluding chapter, Chapter 9, highlights the main contributions from the thesis. It also looks at a few notable events that transpired in Bodoland after my own fieldwork ended, and how these might speak to the findings. The chapter also briefly outlines possible future directions for further research.



Map 1.1: The four districts of the BTAD: Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri and Baksa. Kokrajhar is the focus of this study.

Courtesy: Philip Stickler, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge.



2. LOCATING THE POLITICAL IN BODOLAND

CHAPTER 2. LOCATING THE POLITICAL IN BODOLAND: THEORETICAL EXPLORATIONS

“Divide Assam 50-50!”

- Slogan from the movement for separate statehood in Bodoland

2.1 Introduction

The succinct slogan of the Bodoland statehood movement above sums up many historical and political trajectories that have resulted in the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts, the focus of this study. This popular rallying cry, written in graffiti prominently across countless walls, and shouted heartily at rallies and meetings, contains within it the implicit *territorial* nature of the idea of Bodoland, centred around demands made of the *state*, and negotiations of forms of *power*. The movement’s symbolic currency is the bifurcation of an existing state — “50-50” — underlining the connections between identity, politics and place. The centrality of these themes are what make political geography a fitting framework to study the region and its politics. In particular, the relationship of these ideas to citizenship, within political geography and other social science disciplines, are central to this project.

The following chapter looks at the concepts relevant to both the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of the thesis, and help frame the contributions from the research. These include: debates around citizenship, particularly in the field of geography, and how the understanding of citizenship incorporates the formal and the enacted, and its essentially contested nature; ideas of statehood and territory that are especially relevant to ways in which such citizenship is conceptualised, especially in postcolonial contexts, and with special relevance to Northeast India and its challenge to India federalism; the question of citizenship beyond its formal definitions, through formal and informal acts and practices; and finally, the understanding of the everyday state as a means to uncover processes of citizenship as they are influenced by the state, and as they are contested and enacted by citizens themselves.

While the thesis is grounded in the core ideas of political geography, it borrows from across other social science disciplines — anthropology and political science — in attempting to locate the most important strands of thought in an interdisciplinary concept like citizenship. In particular, as the core methods of the thesis are grounded in an ethnographic analysis of

political and state actors, the sub-field of political anthropology, especially the anthropology of the state, is fundamental to frame these ideas. In doing so, I take into account Flint's call for political geography to go beyond the "big P" politics of international relations and geopolitics, and diversify to "small p" politics, looking at more than the traditional concerns of political geography into issues of identity and politics at multiple scales (Flint 2003). I also draw from feminist engagements in political geography, focussing on the everyday and how politics is enacted and embodied, and paying more attention to the materialities of everyday life (Dowler and Sharp 2001, Hyndman 2001, 2004, Staeheli *et al.* 2004, Dixon and Marston 2011).

This is a thesis in political geography that is written from within Western academia, but speaks of and to a distinctly non-Western form of politics. Within studies about the so-called Global South, and studies about India, the Northeast is further marginalised in the sense of rarely being seen as a site of knowledge production in itself, and often becomes a container where other theories from and about Indian politics and state practice are applied. As Chapter 4 will go on to show (as also the empirical chapters that follow), this is not always the case, and the idiom of caste politics or religious violence, for instance, cannot simply be transplanted into the Northeast Indian context. Instead, as van Schendel puts it, such transplantation can create "geographies of ignorance" as well as knowledge (van Schendel 2002a). In the rest of this chapter, however, I focus on the core ideas that have shaped this thesis, drawing from a range of Western and non-Western scholarship, reflecting the much debated and sometimes contradictory underpinnings not just of this project, but of the region it studies.

2.2 Citizenship and its others

I did the fieldwork for this project in the backdrop of Assam's ongoing National Register of Citizens (NRC) exercise, a venture that continues to be a defining issue in the politics of the region. Despite Bodoland's differences with Assam and its internal polarisations, it too became swept up in the state-wide exercise of according legitimacy to residents. As elsewhere in Assam, BTAD's Bengali Muslim residents, in particular, experienced deep insecurity at the prospect of being left out of this document, and being presented with an uncertain future. In the broadest sense, this overpowering event highlighted the constant,

everyday engagement with ideas of citizenship and belonging that the region's residents reckoned with. Citizenship emerged as the most important lens through which to understand the practices of the everyday state in the BTAD, particularly the ways in which different ethnic groups understood and participated in these practices. Since its very inception, the area governed by the Bodoland Territorial Council has been tied up in questions of who belongs and who doesn't. Much of its politics and governance plays out around these issues, as I go on to show in the following chapters. To properly unpack the contestations around citizenship, however, it is essential to delve deeper into this tricky, often highly contentious term, through examining how geographers and other social scientists have attempted to shed light on this nebulous concept.

In line with contemporary scholarship and debates, throughout this thesis, I view citizenship as a constructed and contested concept, constantly being negotiated. This preliminary chapter examines the lines along which existing frameworks of understanding citizenship have come to be. First, and of critical importance is the concept of alterity, and how the idea of exclusion is essential to create the ideal citizen. Simultaneously, it is important to focus on the spatial dimensions of citizenship, in particular the continuing importance of territory and nationalism in legitimising citizenship, despite increased global flows and mobility challenging ideas of fixed borders. These ideas take on particular relevance in Northeast India, where territory continues to be central to the construction of identity.

The next section deals with the acts and practices that constitute citizenship, beyond just a status, as a substantive and enacted identity. Citizenship is not merely what is implied in its formal status, but also acts and practices that exist in both the formal and informal spheres, often expanding the practice beyond the formal dimension, and sometimes reflecting a more diminished set of practices than what is promised by the status. Following this, I look at the specific context of citizenship in India and how it has been spatially framed. Strong regional identities and their challenge to established national citizenship identity has been a particularly persistent theme in its history, as has the precarious position of its minorities. In Northeast India, these identities have often been in contradiction with each other (as Chapter 4 goes on to explore in more detail). To conclude this theoretical exploration, I adopt an anthropology of state perspective to explore these questions of citizenship, and focus on ordinary, everyday acts to reveal deeper insights into how citizenship is understood and enacted.

2.2.1 Identity and alterity

Isin (2002) has argued that much like history, the story of citizenship is also written from the perspective of the victors — those who were able to “confer rights on and impose obligations on each other, institute rituals of belonging” (p.2). As he and other scholars of citizenship have pointed out repeatedly, citizenship has always been constructed in inherently exclusionary ways (Román 2010), identity and alterity have emerged simultaneously (Isin 2002). In other words, citizenship is as much defined by the “constitutive outside” (Mouffe 2000), as it is by what and who it serves to include.

Citizenship’s “outsiders” have been constructed in various ways and along multiple lines of identities. In the Greek city-state, often a starting point in citizenship studies, exclusions occurred around gendered and racial lines — categories like “woman” and “slave” were excluded to construct the figure of the male Greek citizen (Isin 2002). Contemporary constructions of the citizen too create categories of outsiders along such lines, some who may be formally outside the purview of citizenship, and others who might possess formal citizenship but still be denied certain substantive rights and privileges that are essential to the enactment of citizenship.

In the contemporary world, as definitions and laws surrounding citizenship have evolved, so too have the categories of inclusion and exclusion continued to shift alongside them. Citizenship continues to be a gendered idea, for instance, in the way that ideas of the nation and citizen are produced and reproduced (Walby 1994, Siim 2000, Yuval-Davis 2000). In Euro-American contexts, women have consistently been constructed being outside the membership of the nation, achieving formal citizenship status much later than men in most instances (Bussemaker and Voet 1998, Volpp 2017). Citizenship’s gendered nature is a historical relationship, where a public/private dichotomy has denied women full substantive citizenship, but also meant that until recently, mainstream theorising of citizenship has discounted the significance of the private sphere (Lister 1997, 2012).

Similarly, sexuality has been another basis from which exclusions from citizenship have been conceived. While women are often incorporated into idealised notions of nationhood,

homosexual citizens are left outside of its construct altogether (Richardson 1998). The exclusion of gay, lesbian and transgender citizens from crucial aspects of social and civil rights, even where they are not denied formal or legal citizenship rights, renders them only partial citizens, and creates the need to articulate sexual rights as a fundamental aspect of citizenship (Richardson 2000, Sabsay 2014). Additionally, sexual minorities face particularly spatial forms of exclusion from public space (Bell 1995, Bell and Binnie 2004, Kondakov 2017), while forms of reclamation also take on spatial strategies, particularly in urban contexts (Brown 2007). Lister (2003) argues that roots of the exclusions of women and sexual minorities, while different in form, arise from a similar place: their association with the body and sexuality. The body also emerges as a site of difference and exclusion for those who are disabled and have been excluded from the theorisation of citizenship (Meekosha and Dowse 1997, Carey 2009, Bezmez 2013), although a growing body of research in geography serves to fill this gap (Crooks *et al.* 2008, Imrie and Edwards 2007, Valentine and Skelton 2007).

Key to the construction of established ideas like Marshallian “civil citizenship” was its neglect of the assumed subjectivity of its citizen as white, male and working class, to the disregard of gender and race as key axes of inequality (Fraser and Gordon 1992). A feminist challenging of the neglected gendered ideas that underlie citizenship took into account not just the exclusion of women, however, but a broader invisibilisation of marginalised groups, where multiple exclusions of a variety of “differences” have shaped normative understandings of citizenship (Lister 1991, 1997). Moreover, particular kinds of exclusions faced by women must also draw from local contexts — a “universal” approach may prove counter-productive (Grewal 1999).

From its earliest inception, race and ethnicity have been fundamental to the conception of citizenship — both in ways that impact legal status through the granting and withdrawal of citizenship status, as well as in substantive terms (FitzGerald 2017). Thus, numerous studies have documented how fundamental racial and ethnic identification have been to the construction of citizens and aliens (Benhabib 2004), as well as insiders and outsiders in the nation state, both in Western (Collins 2001, Harder 2010, Topinka 2016, Barreto and Lozano 2017) and non-Western contexts (Levy 2005, Jamal 2007, Hosein 2012, Kashiwazaki 2013, Chee *et al.* 2014). Such influences have been especially crucial to the way postcolonial citizenship has been conceptualised and experienced (Mamdani 2005, Aminzade 2013).

2.2.2 Space, scale and territory

Geographers in particular have identified space as one of the key dimensions for the basis of citizenship construction and exclusion (Staehele 2010, Yarwood 2014). This connection would appear intuitive, given that territorial expressions of sovereignty have been central to the formation of the citizen. This territorialised form of sovereignty, peculiar to the modern state, is associated with the rise of the Westphalian state from the 17th century onwards (Hansen and Stepputat 2005a, Rudolph 2005). From subjecthood under the monarchic regimes that formed Westphalian states, citizenship is understood to have emerged with popular sovereignty, as conceived of in the nation state (Rudolph, 2005). In T.H. Marshall's classic formulation, the three key aspects of citizenship — civil, political and social — emerged in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries respectively, each facilitating the emergence of the next (Marshall 1950). This construct has been questioned since, prominently by feminist scholars (see above), as well as by scholars who critique the chronology of rights, arguing that the social construction of the citizen, and the entrenchment of spaces of inclusion and exclusion, precede the access to civic and political rights (Isin 2008a).

In spatial terms, the idea of (formal) citizenship continues to be inextricably linked to the nation state — identification with a cohesive political unit often forms the basis of how citizenship is conventionally understood, and evolved in tandem with the modern state (Painter and Jeffrey 2009, p. 79). The modern nation state, like citizenship, is also a construct, a process as opposed to a fixed entity (Abrams 1988). The nation state and its constitutive category of citizenship are produced through constant processes of reproduction and representation through banal acts (Billig 1995), like administrative categories and map-making that make the nation state “legible” (Scott 1998), and the spread of print capitalism (Anderson 2006) and education (Gellner 2008). Such processes of reproduction are undertaken by both “elite” (Brass 1991) and “ordinary” members of the nation (Jones 2008), slippery as those categories are in themselves. The nation as a construct implies that it is always an incomplete project (Shapiro 2003), never quite fully coming into being, or ever fully being achieved (Connor 1990). A persistent “state effect” (Mitchell 1991), drawing on representational practices, nonetheless presents it as a coherent, fixed entity.

Seeing the nation state as collectively imagined (Anderson 2006) challenges the “primordialist” view of nation states as “natural” formations (Smith 1986), and of the inherently territorial rights of some groups as citizens over others. Such ideas may now have been widely discredited in academic scholarship, but Penrose (2002, p. 287) rightly argues that they continue to be embedded in “‘common sense’ understandings of the world”. Notions of territorial belonging continue to underpin these “common sense” ideas of citizenship — many contemporary struggles and debates around identity, migration, belonging and difference have territorialised ideas of statehood and sovereignty at their core. Belonging in the world of nations is conceived of as distinct partitioning of territories (Malkki 1992). Through botanic metaphors such as “roots” and “soils”, the nation becomes inherently territorial, as does membership of it (Ibid.). Sovereignty assumes a pre-existing territorial state as its basis, but as Kuus and Agnew (2008) argue, both the concepts of territory and state are constituted through practices. Territory remains an enduring framework for the way sovereignty, statehood and citizenship are practiced and commonly understood.

Territoriality has the somewhat contradictory position of being both omnipresent and undertheorised in geography (see for instance Sack 1983, 1986, Penrose 2002, Paasi 2003, Elden 2005, Antonsich 2009). Its meaning is often assumed to be self-evident, such that the concept of territory is rarely investigated in itself (Elden 2010, p. 800). While Antonsich (2009) contends this is because of the use of the concept as a tool of control and containment by the state, Penrose (2002) suggests it is also to do with the discipline’s own complicity in allowing territory to be used as a justification for exclusionary projects such as imperialism and Nazism (Nayak and Jeffrey 2013).

The relationship between territoriality and statehood is only as old as the Westphalian state system. The practice of sovereignty under empires privileged less the control of boundaries than the control of people (Sack 1986, p. 114). Sack would argue that in the modern state system, controlling boundaries is itself a way of controlling people. Sovereign power is conventionally understood as having control over territory, but *effective sovereignty* need not necessarily be “defined by the strict and fixed territorial boundaries of individual states” (Agnew 2005, p. 438, emphasis added). Agnew contests the view of sovereignty being inherently territorial, and instead argues that political authority is neither explicitly tied to states, nor only territorial (Ibid., p. 441).

Territory is both a strategic tool in order to control and dominate in the hands of state (Ibid.), as well as a social process, primarily defined in relation to its boundaries (Paasi 2003a). If territory is a social process, the nation too is a “category of practice”, particularly established through border practices that reify its territoriality (Shapiro 2003). The rise of nationalism firmed up the link between nations, boundaries and territories (Ibid.). Not only did the post-Westphalian state adopt a territorialised idea of sovereignty, but national identity itself took on territorialised forms of representation (Billig 1995, Paasi 1998, Anderson 2006).

Since the late 20th century, increased global flows and mobility have called into question the authority of the nation state to define the boundaries of citizenship. Nonetheless, it remains central to the production of sovereignty and citizenship (Rudolph 2005), particularly by expanding the idea of borders from markers of physical territories to practices that include new forms of surveillance (Amoore 2006, Sparke 2006, Salter 2008), and locating national sovereignty in the bodies of citizens performing “borderwork” (Rumford 2008, Vaughan-Williams 2008). Global flows have, nonetheless, given rise to new and often “flexible” forms of citizenship (Ong 1999) for a section of mobile actors propelled to move for economic reasons. The global “cosmopolitanism” (Archibugi and Held 1995), however, only benefits a small global elite population, leaving other transnational subjects, such as migrants and refugees, out of its imagination (Kofman 2005). For these disempowered groups, full citizenship can often remain elusive, as they are confined instead to forms of “noncitizenship” (Tonkiss and Bloom 2015) and “bare life” (Agamben, 1998; Das and Poole, 2004). This reinforces the continuing importance of the state in granting and depriving citizenship status, and the continuing relevance of national sovereignty even as it is negotiated (Rudolph 2005) in “graduated sovereignty zones” (Ong 1999) in a transnational world.

Understanding citizenship as both a status and a set of relations (Staeheli 2010) exposes this multi-scalar nature. It is not just the conventionally understood membership of a nation state, or a set of transnational relationships, as above, but also distinctly regional and local in practice (Painter and Philo 1995, Painter and Jeffrey 2009). Without undermining the importance of national citizenship, there is a renewed understanding in political geography about a “rescaling downwards of the performance of citizenship” (Desforges et al., 2005, 440), and the need to take into account local expressions of citizenship as being just as crucial as national or transnational ones. Multiple scales, and especially a focus on grassroots

movements, can also expand the potential for emancipation and expansion of citizenship rights (Holston 2008). Local solidarities can expand the idea of citizenship beyond what is conceived at the national level, with rights for non-citizen residents and migrants being a key illustration of this (Spiro 2010, Villazor 2010). Nonetheless, “local” or “grassroots” citizenship may not necessarily only be emancipatory, and can also be reflective of local elitist tendencies (Smart and Lin 2007). A “multi-level” idea of citizenship (Yuval-Davis 1999) has been viewed also as having the potential to be disempowering, as the neoliberal state retreats and finds itself “supplemented” by privileged actors in civil society (Fyfe and Milligan 2003, Harriss 2006). Scale becomes especially relevant when discussing the construction of citizenship through actors who function as the “shadow state”, especially in a neoliberal context, where the state willingly outsources social regulation and control to non-state actors (Trudeau 2008, 2012).

2.3 Beyond status — Citizenship as practice

2.3.1 Citizenship and informality

An emphasis on formal rights and duties or categories of inclusion and exclusion does not account for the many variations and nuances that make up the substantive experience of citizenship. In non-Western contexts especially, citizen-state relationships have to be understood contextually, and not merely as derivatives of Western forms of democracy and statehood. Informal forms of politics, while not always transparent, are nonetheless alternative ways to channel political agency. Although much of the literature on informality emerges from studying non-Western contexts, informal tactics of negotiating with “formal” citizenship categories are as relevant in the Global North (Verloo 2017). As has been seen from research contexts in the Global South, informality is not an anomaly within or counter to formal citizenship regimes, but part of and integral to their functioning (Ibid., p. 170).

Instead of focussing solely on narrow definitions of rights and duties in understanding citizenship, it is useful to consider elements of informality, such as patronage or clientelism as forms of expression of political agency, rather than deviations from set norms (Berenschot and van Klinken 2018). Incorporating forms of informality in the scope of doing politics acknowledges different social relations that mediate interactions between citizens and the state, and shed light on the fragmentation of state authority (Ibid.). This is in contrast to other approaches, especially certain strands within political science, that have seen clientelism as

an inherently unequal relationship, a form of “negotiated authoritarianism” (Taylor 2004, p. 214) that contradicts citizenship, or as a purely transactional relationship where voters support patrons in exchange for material benefits (Chandra 2004; 2007).

Patron-client relations, instead, can reveal themselves as a form of accessing political agency, which Lazar (2004, p. 228) contends is the “crucial aspect of citizenship”, more so than the ideal of equality. Forms of patronage may contain within them inherently unequal structures of power, but focussing solely on their negative impacts obscures the ways in which they can be a means to access the state (in the form of benefits, for instance), especially in the absence of such provisions by the state through formal channels. In this scenario, accessing such provisions may be viewed as rights rather than favours (Baghdasaryan 2017, 1038), and become a form of empowerment. In addition to filling in for a missing state, informal practices also help facilitate access to it, through benefits or official recognition for particular groups (van der Muur 2018).

Often the “vacuum” created by the absence of the state is instead filled with other actors of the patronage system — just as important as patrons themselves are political fixers or brokers who “lubricate” democracy (Berenschot 2011b). Political fixers illustrate the blurred boundaries of the state by highlighting the ways in which state sovereignty is fragmented, and brokers are one representation of this porous interface between state and society (Berenschot 2011a). For poorer citizens, brokers are often indispensable in accessing state services (Ibid.), forming a key node in the network of “political society” that Partha Chatterjee (2004) argues is the means by which marginalised citizens hold the state accountable. Such fixers are not only necessary for citizens to access the state through politicians, but also for political actors to access citizens, as Berenschot demonstrates in the case of Hindu nationalist actors in the Indian state of Gujarat (Berenschot 2011b). Nonetheless, it is important not to disregard that such relationships can also take on exploitative forms, as Berenschot’s example of right-wing brokers demonstrates. Informal networks of patronage can also exacerbate existing inequalities and discrimination, making it harder for disadvantaged groups to access the protections and rights of formal citizenship (Soedirgo 2018).

Viewing informality as a set of practices and networks rather than as a form of organisation outside of the realm of law, specific to certain places or groups of people, illustrates the way in which informal practices fold into the sphere of formality (McFarlane 2012). Practices of

informality, such as those of the poor claiming space in the city, are enabled by formal policies that designate some activities and spaces as authorised and others as unauthorised (Roy 2009). Certain groups are pushed, through acts of policy and law, into informal, entrepreneurial acts of survival, and away from the “formal” sphere of law and planning (McFarlane 2012). Informality, rather than being the “habitus of the dispossessed” is instead a device which uncovers relationships between what is legitimate and illegitimate (Roy 2011). Roy shows, similar to Sundar (2011, below), that while the informal acts of the elite are legitimised, those of the poor are criminalised.

This raises an important aspect of informality that Ledeneva (2018) points out in the introduction of an exhaustive volume on the subject — its inherent ambivalence. Informality can both be a means of levelling playing fields and subverting the constraints of formality for those at the margins, as well as a way for the powerful to consolidate their influence through illicit means (Ibid., p. 7). Informal politics can be seen as deviations from formal institutions (as some political science approaches mentioned above do), but closer examination reveals informality has a more complex relationship with the state — weakening it, substituting for it, and sometimes working in parallel with it (Radnitz 2011, 352). Paying attention to the nuances helps unpack the idea of a unitary modern state, and shows that particularistic social bonds are very much part of the character of the modern state, rather than anomalies within it (Ibid., p. 367). Recognising both the ambivalence of informality, as well as the ways in which it is embedded in state practice is a critical element in examining the role between informality and citizenship. In this project, I do this through looking at certain practices of informality in everyday encounters with the state, and recognising within them acts of citizenship that are distinct from the routine practices of citizenship.

2.3.2 Acts of citizenship

A key tension in citizenship studies is the distinction between *de jure* and *de facto* citizenship — that of citizenship as a conferred status, versus substantive citizenship that represents the actual realisation of rights. Recent literature has focussed on “acts of citizenship” (Isin and Nielsen 2008) and new forms of claims to citizenship from below. What distinguishes an “act of citizenship” from ordinary actions, or routinised practices of citizenship? Isin (2008b) identifies rupture or disruption as a key element of acts of citizenship, that break a given order or habitus. In addition, he points out three identifying principles of such acts — first,

they are interpreted in the particular contexts that transform subjects into citizens (i.e., they produce the values of citizenship); second, they create activist citizens that become answerable to justice as against injustices; and third, they need not necessarily be founded in law or enacted in the name of law (Ibid.).

Acts of citizenship, then, do not just enact existing or recognised principles of formal citizenship, but have the capacity to expand the very definition of citizenship itself, often through the struggles and protests of those who are excluded from citizenship, or from certain rights entailed in citizenship (Barbero 2012). Building on this concept, Andrijasevic (2013, p. 56) argues that much as feminist epistemology argues for commencing research from the perspective of oppressed groups, so too must the study of citizenship begin from looking at these acts of citizenship, carried out by those outside the purview of formal citizenship. In doing so, the definition of citizenship is broadened from just membership of a nation state, or even seeing sites or scales (the national, transnational, or local) as containers within which citizenship is performed. Instead sites, scales and citizenship itself emerge as fluid and dynamic entities that are constituted through contests and struggles (Isin 2009). Among these are not only the routine practices and actions of citizenship, such as voting or paying taxes, but also the more disruptive, order-breaking acts of citizenship (Ibid., p. 379).

The experiences of migrants and refugees have been used particularly effectively to illustrate this argument (Barbero 2012a, Isin 2009). Those effectively stripped of citizenship evoke Foucauldian forms of “international citizenship” in humanitarian contexts (Isin 2012) and resist rigid notions of citizenship that deny rights to migrants (Ataç *et al.* 2016, Stierl 2016). In other, urban contexts, related concepts of “insurgent citizenship” (Holston 2008) and “active citizenship” (Miraftab and Wills 2005) speak of claims to citizenship that come from the margins of urban society, through using the language of rights, but in ways that are disruptive to the existing order. Holston (2009) distinguishes such forms of citizenship as being fundamentally a manifestation of peripheral spaces, even where they utilise or occupy the spaces of the “civic centre”.

Acts of citizenship are often realised in the form of protests (Butler 2011, Hardt and Negri 2011, Harvey 2012), where the disruption is made most visible. What is equally relevant, and of particular interest for this thesis, are also ways in which the disruptions to order come about subtly, flying under the radar, not always within the clear jurisdiction of “rights”, but

often in the more ambivalent sphere of informality. In the postcolonial world especially, questions of active or activist citizenship have been tied up with notions of political patronage, and the sometimes blurry lines between them. Chatterjee's (2004) distinction between political society and civil society argued that the most marginalised citizens find creative ways to articulate demands in the realm of political society. For most citizens in postcolonial societies, rights are only tenuously held. Instead they are forced to mobilise politically to be recognised, sometimes using corrupt or "irrational practices of unreformed popular culture" (Ibid., p. 47). Only a small, relatively empowered section is able to act as citizens, and able to access the state legitimately through rules and laws, claiming rights in the bourgeois sphere of civil society. In Holston's (2008, 2009) work on insurgent citizenship in Brazil, he argues against this understanding, as does Sundar (2011) in her work on Adivasis in India. Both contend that it is marginalised populations who take recourse to the law, and demand its just application using the language of rights, while private companies and middle class citizens attempt to subvert it for their own ends.

While Holston (2008, p. 229) contrasts the rights-based language of insurgent citizenship with *jeitinhos* — the practice of bending or circumventing the law using forms of clientelism — he distinguishes this form of insurgent citizenship from Chatterjee's ideas of political society (Chatterjee 2004). Similarly, Chatterjee sees political society as the site of emerging political modernity and also a space of negotiation and contestation, but distinct from that of civil society, which consists of citizens as opposed to populations, but is available only to the elite (Ibid.). Instead, in the thesis I adopt a more hybrid approach, similar to Veena Das's (2011) work on a squatter colony outside Delhi on articulations of citizenship within claims made to the state. In this instance, the concepts of civil society and political society blur into each other, "to produce the capacity to make claims on the state as a way of claiming citizenship" (Ibid., p. 320). Neither the understanding of a rights-based "insurgent citizenship" in Sao Paulo, nor confining informal acts to the messy sphere of "political society" can fully capture the exercise of political agency seen in Bodoland. Instead, I refer back to the inherent ambivalence of informal politics, and the potential for the expansion of citizenship in its practice.

These debates show that studying the complex interactions between informality and acts of citizenship must take context into account. Claiming rights enshrined in law may be one means to reclaim space in citizenship, yet in another context might prove ineffective, or even

impossible given the constraints. To properly consider the present-day locus of political agency, the historical context of citizenship in India as a postcolonial state is key, and its implications for the practice of citizenship in Bodoland.

2.4 Postcolonial citizenship

Imperialism has been fundamental to the creation of nation states, its effects felt profoundly both in the colonies as by the coloniser (Mitchell 1998). In the postcolony, however, the imagined nation did not necessarily follow the template of European nationalism, and instead created new political cultures of the state (Nandy 1989, Chatterjee 1993). Chatterjee separates postcolonial nationalism into two realms, the material and the spiritual, and argues that while the former may have been imitative, the latter aspect of national identity was fashioned in contrast to, and distinct from the Western model. Those in the postcolonial state were not merely “consumers of modernity” (Ibid., p. 5) that was imported from the West.

Given the intimate connections between Europe and its colonies, citizenship in the colonies was instrumental to the understanding of European citizenship. FitzGerald (2017) argues that while racialised citizenship was not invented by European colonialism, its use of race as a basis to justify military and economic conquests did generate many features of modern racism. The socio-cultural context of Victorian England, for instance, impacted the way the gendered and racialised exclusions were framed in the British Empire — both in the colonies and at “home” (McClintock 1995). Just as gender was one axis of neglect in the conceptualisation of Marshall’s influential theory of citizenship, race was another (Fraser and Gordon 1992). Moreover, Marshall’s theory neglected the importance of the project of citizenship being undertaken in the Empire, and the lasting impact this had both on citizenship as formed “at home”, and in the colonies (Kabeer 2006, Sadiq 2017). This created a dual form of citizenship — organised around differences of race, culture and civilisation (Hansen and Stepputat 2005a).

The reification of such differences have led to fixed categories of “native” and “settler” (Mamdani 2001) being instrumental in creating contested ideas of belonging, resource sharing, and power imbalances between different groups in the postcolony. Many of these categories, originating in the colonial experience, have persisted into the present day.

Powerful ideas and movements, such as of indigeneity, have found resonance across the world in claims for citizenship rights, especially in Latin America (Hooker 2005, Postero 2007, Latta 2009, Canessa 2012). In a different colonial context, parts of Africa too have seen a contest for citizenship between “indigenous” or “autochthonous” groups as opposed to more recent “settlers” (Mamdani 2001, Geschiere and Jackson 2006, Adebani 2009, Geschiere 2011). Wood (2010) argues in an introduction to a special issue of *Citizenship Studies* on indigenous citizenship (see also Cairns, 2010; Christie, 2010; Elbourne, 2010; Mercer, 2010; Ramos, 2010; Siddle, 2010; Wood, 2010 in this issue) that studying indigenous citizenship must necessarily raise issues of history (especially colonial history), and of relation to place.

Forms of “direct” and “indirect” rule (Mamdani 1996) impacted postcolonial states in Africa, Asia and Latin America that emerged after independence struggles. The bifurcation of the colonial state into an urban “civilised” sphere and an unruly rural space (Ibid.) has persisted into the practices of citizenship in postcolonial states today, exemplified, for instance in Partha Chatterjee’s influential distinction between “civil society” and “political society” (Chatterjee 2004). A key component of this colonial logic was the fixing of identity to territory (Mamdani 2001). The fixing of ethnicity to place is an important facet of what has led to an “ethnicization of citizenship laws” (Sadiq 2017, p. 7) in postcolonial states. Colonial logic of governing territorially defined groups was aimed at preventing the collective action of shared identity (Kabeer 2006), even as it has led to forms of “internal dual citizenship” (Sadiq 2017, p. 8), where religious and ethnic groups are given regional claims to autonomy, and economy. Despite the efforts of elite leaders of nationalist movements to create shared national identities that cut across these categories in postcolonial states, the notion of group-differentiated citizenship (Young 1989) has emerged in postcolonial states as a means of managing sub-national identities. It is within the context of these debates of managing religious, ethnic and territorial divisions that the concept of citizenship in the postcolonial Indian state must be understood.

2.4.1 Constructing the Indian citizen

The emergence of the term India is in itself a geographical expression (Bose and Jalal 1998, p. 3), a colonially produced space defined to create governable subjects and zones of rule (Cons and Sanyal 2013, p. 6). The politics of maintaining national borders has been

especially relevant in the context of South Asian states like India, and borderlands provide for a productive space in which to engage with the dynamics of citizenship, belonging and nationalism (Ibid.).

The contested nature of citizenship has always been evident in India. Roy (2010) has identified three key legislations as defining these shifts in formal citizenship status — the Citizenship Act of 1955 that established the basis of citizenship in India, the amendment in 1986 that pertained particularly to immigration in Assam (discussed below), and a further amendment in 2003 that created a new category of Overseas Indian Citizenship. Crucially, Roy identifies migration (in the context of Partition from Pakistan, migration from Bangladesh from Assam, and Indians migrating abroad) as the key to determining the political and territorial boundaries of citizenship in India (Ibid.).

The emergence of the postcolonial Indian state saw political authority shift from being vested in caste-based hierarchical communities (though not everywhere in India) to being located in a sovereign central state (Khilnani 2012), although the latter did not completely displace the former. Indian political identity was envisioned as being “layered” to accommodate this disjuncture — being Indian was mediated through regional and local identities that were reinforced by the strong federal character of the state and the Congress party² immediately after Independence (Ibid.). Increasing centralisation of both the Congress and the state machinery in the decades following Independence eventually caused a weakening of the central state apparatus, and growing conflict between the centre and various regional blocs (Kohli 1994 and others, discussed below in Section 2.4.2).

As with Western societies, the nation-building project in India was established on the marginalisation of some groups over others. The violence of Partition that accompanied the creation of the Indian (and Pakistani) nation state, far from being an aberration, was central to the creation of nationhood (Pandey 2001). The Indian state is not experienced evenly by all, especially at the margins, where it is experienced “most frequently and intimately” (Williams *et al.* 2011, p. 15), even if this is often in violent or oppressive ways. Mahasweta Devi has highlighted how the postcolonial Indian nation continued to exploit tribal women in

² At that point the most widespread political organisation in the country, spearheading the movement for independence.

particular, who were never part of the decolonisation of India (Devi cited in Shapiro 2003). The surfacing of the grievances of some of these neglected communities as forms of separatism has also constituted a further challenge to the idea of the Indian state, as we see later, in Chapter 4, with Bodoland, Assam, and many parts of Northeast India. A further challenge to idea of a plural Indian nationalism has been the resurgence of the idea of Hindu nationalism in the 1990s (Van der Veer 1994, Nandy 1998, Hansen 1999, Corbridge and Harriss 2000, Jaffrelot 2007), and again since 2014 with the election of a Hindu nationalist government.

Indian citizenship has been marked, above all, by fundamental disagreements — on its legal status, on the rights enshrined within it, and on the forms of identity that it confers (Jayal 2014). Following independence from the colonial empire and partition from Pakistan in 1947, citizenship in India was established on the principle of *jus soli* (by birth in a territory). While conceived of on the civic principle of birth within the territory of India regardless of religious or racial background, it has been argued that the way citizenship was practiced in the decades that followed nonetheless moved the concept towards the direction of *jus sanguinis* (by ancestry or “blood”) (Chatterji 2012, Jayal 2013). Post-partition migration movements across the India–Pakistan border challenged the Indian concept of equal citizenship for all, as Hindus migrating from across the border were considered “natural” citizens (van Schendel 2002b), whereas Muslims were required to prove their status through arbitrary processes such as courts determining their “state of mind” (Chatterji 2012, p. 1065). Drawing on colonial legacies of linking ethnicity to place, an important paradox of citizenship in the Indian context has been the notion of group-differentiated citizenship. Creating strategies of inclusion involved creating categories of exception as a means of tackling inequality (Jayal 2013), but with the qualifier that the group in question was only “backward” in a specific area.

Indian citizenship has not had a defining character or disposition. Instead, liberal, republican, ethno-nationalist and non-state-based ideas of belonging have co-existed alongside one another, with one gaining prominence over the other at different times, but none being the entirely dominant force (Shani 2010). Jayal notes that while Indian citizenship at independence guaranteed negative rights (protections against violations of civil and political liberties) as well as fundamental ones, positive rights, like socio-economic ones, could not be enshrined as fundamental, instead serving as directives for state policy (Jayal 2014). This has

also translated into an inability to guarantee group-based rights to protected classes, like indigenous groups, despite the provisions enshrined in the constitution (Xaxa 2005).

For Sundar, the essence of Indian citizenship is in understanding the rule of law, and how laws are made and enacted in service of these substantive or positive understandings of citizenship (Sundar 2011). In instances such as the acquisition of land (often belonging to marginalised groups, Scheduled Tribes like the Bodos), she upturns Partha Chatterjee's (2004) political/civil society distinction to show that it is often oppressed, subaltern subjects who try to uphold lawful practices (relating to protections on land), and powerful actors like private companies or upper middle class citizens who resort to extra-legal measures of political society. Veena Das's analysis of citizenship in a squatter colony outside Delhi also challenges binary understandings, instead arguing that as the concepts of legal/illegal, governed/government blend into each other, these hybrid forms of citizenship are brought to light by paying attention to everyday practices (Das 2011). For many citizens on India's margins, struggle and protest are the primary mode through which citizenship is claimed (Chopra *et al.* 2011), along with informal practices.

2.4.2 Regional pulls, national identities

At the time of Independence in 1947, the Congress party saw freedom from colonial rule as a triumph of nationalism and centrism, while the breaking away of Pakistan underlined the partial success of the forces of regionalism (Bose and Jalal 1998, p. 202). While the initial success of India in holding together diverse regional pulls was attributed to ideas of secular nationalism, increasing regional and local demands from the mid-1970s onwards, and subsequent pressure on the centre showed that it was not the case (Ibid.). The modern Indian state subsumed regional and cultural allegiances at the time of independence in ways that could coexist with national identity (Khilnani 2010). In later decades, the central government saw these identity-based impetuses as dangerous to national integration, and majoritarian ideas, such as Hindu nationalism, began to gain force (Jayal and Mehta 2010). Regional allegiances may have been enveloped in the larger discourse of nationalism, but they never completely disappeared. In later decades, regions that were marginalised (like Assam) began to question their membership in an Indian nation-state, and whose interests the state represented (Kaviraj 2010).

Regions, like nations, are territorial projects, and like nations, are constructed and contested, even where discourse would project them as being “natural” or apolitical (Baruah 2010a). A “state-nation” framework allows us to look beyond a unitary nation-state model at the co-existence and management of multiple political identities, believed to be implicit in the very idea of India forged at its inception (Stepan *et al.* 2011). State-nation practices are themselves subject to other conditions of diversity management — cases of separatist militancy in Kashmir, Punjab, and states in Northeast India are examples of a challenge to the Indian state-nation project (Ibid., pp. 89–115).

While caste and religion are more dispersed across India, tribe and language are two categories across which groups are concentrated territorially (Varshney 2014). In the period following Indian independence, in the 1950s, states were reorganised principally on the basis of language, which was meant to improve administrative efficiency, as well as maintain a semblance of cohesion in a country that was already ravaged by religious violence during partition from Pakistan (Mawdsley 2002). Over the course of time, the creation of the state of Punjab was a tacit acceptance of a religious demand (though ostensibly granted on the basis of language), while the creation of states in Northeastern India in the 1970s and later has been an acknowledgement of ethnicity as a legitimate basis for state creation (Ibid.), which has also been instrumental in fuelling the demand for Bodoland today. The demand for and constant creation of new states represent a “politics of compromise”, where state boundaries themselves act as institutions that shape which groups compete, and over what resources (Tillin 2013). Such an understanding, of administrative borders as devices of state power, is crucial to the understanding of federalism in Northeast India.

In the 1970s and 1980s, increasing centralisation of the Indian state was accompanied by its increasing powerlessness (Brass 1991, Kohli 1994). As the state became more oppressive, identities that coalesced around religion, caste and region asserted themselves more strongly (Hasan 2000), posing a challenge to the idea of a unified Indian citizenship. The Indian state reacted to different regional pulls with various degrees of accommodation and suppression. Secessionist demands, like those of Khalistan, or Tamil separatism were violently suppressed, while Kashmir remains an ongoing, continuous contestation (Chadda 1997).³

³ On 5 August 2019, the Indian government revoked Kashmir’s statehood and status as an autonomously governed region, in efforts to force it to more completely become part of the Indian state.

Other separatist struggles persist in Northeast India, particularly Nagaland, which while less at the receiving end of overt state violence today than Kashmir, nonetheless remain highly militarised environments (Baruah 2010b).

In the case of Assam (and Northeast India more generally), the state maintains a policy of “durable disorder”, where the response to insurgency and secessionism has been increasing militarisation (Baruah 2005). In this region, particularly, this is achieved through the continuous implementation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which gives military forces greater authority in the region, with far less accountability (Gaikwad 2009, Kikon 2009, McDuie-Ra 2009, Saikia 2014). Similar processes are seen in other parts of India that are heavily militarised, where the state, in the name of counter-insurgency, is able to evade legal accountability (Shah 2010). As Alpa Shah’s work in one such region, Jharkhand, shows, the insurgent and the state exist in a symbiotic relationship, allowing the existence of one to justify the existence of the other (Ibid.).

For Northeast India, increasing militarisation is accompanied by a developmentalist paradigm that aims to nationalise space through development projects and military presence. Thus, federalism in the Northeast is “cosmetic”, the primary driving factor is not constitutional or fiscal, but national security (Baruah 2005, pp. 33–41). While state-building in the region was undertaken swiftly after Independence in 1947, nation-building was not. The Northeast’s importance as a frontier region, as well as the threat of instability from internal turmoil resulted in the penetration of the state, but without the emphasis on its inclusion in the national sphere of India (Guyot-Récharde 2013).

Assam’s history has been particularly important to the discussion of citizenship in India. The Illegal Migrants (Determinations by Tribunals) (IMDT) Act passed in 1985, known as the “Assam exception” to India’s citizenship laws was formulated in response to growing unrest, particularly during the Assam movement in the 1980s, against the presence of Bangladeshi immigrants in Assam (Baruah 2009, Jayal 2013). The Act set up tribunals to identify illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, placing the burden of proof on accusers. It was ultimately deemed unconstitutional and scrapped by the Supreme Court of India in 2005. The Assam movement has also prompted the current exercise of the updating of the National Register of Citizens, aimed at identifying illegal immigrants based on identity documents proving long-term residence in Assam. Discourses of migration have also seeped into the debate around

citizenship in BTAD, in particular with regard to the legitimacy of Bengali Muslim inhabitants. The politics of ethnic homelands effectively create two categories of citizenship — what Baruah has termed “citizens and denizens” (Baruah 2005). Non-tribal populations in ethnic homelands like the BTAD are denied formal access to land ownership, as well as political representation, but these non-tribal groups are, nonetheless, part of the economy and networks of land ownership, and forced to participate in these relationships informally, through flouting legal norms (Baruah 2003a).

While much of the theorising about citizenship and belonging in Northeast India has focussed on the ways in which the region has pulled away from associations with India, particularly through focussing on cross-border allegiances (this is explored further in Chapter 4), McDuire-Ra (2013) uses studies of Northeast migration to show that there is a corresponding “inward pull” of citizenship towards the Indian state as well. This is exemplified especially through his examples of Northeastern migrants in Delhi.

In more recent times, the fault lines between Northeast India and the central government have been exposed through the introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Bill in 2016, which has raised issues of ethnicity, immigration, and a new Hindu right-wing politics in Northeast India. The Bill is in some ways a continuity of the move towards *jus sanguinis* in Indian citizenship — it seeks to allow select “persecuted minorities” (Hindus, Christians, Parsis, Sikhs, Buddhist and Jains) from the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan citizenship status in India after six years of residency. In the north-eastern states, the fear is that this amendment will legitimise migration of Hindus from neighbouring Bangladesh in particular (PRS 2016), an explicit agenda of India’s current government. The proposition has sparked much protest in Northeast India, in the form of rallies and strikes (Scroll.in 2019a), returned national awards (Scroll.in 2019b), renewed threats of secessionism (Scroll.in 2019c), and even rap videos (Scroll.in 2019d). It stands at the intersection of several contemporary currents in Indian (and particularly Northeast Indian) citizenship — the legitimisation of ethnicity or religion as a basis for citizenship (Sharma 2018a), the role of an increasingly strengthened politics of Hindu chauvinism in shaping Indian identity, and how Northeast India has responded to these changing currents.

2.5 Everyday practices of the state — an approach

Turning the focus to the everyday, mundane practices of the citizenship has been the central axis along which this thesis on citizenship, statehood and politics in Bodoland is framed, drawing on important work in the anthropology of the state tradition that adopts ethnographic approaches towards routine practices of bureaucracy and politics (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 2002, Hansen and Stepputat 2001, Das and Poole 2004b, Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005, Sharma and Gupta 2006a, Mathur 2015). In doing so, I follow the pluralist traditions of human and political geography, engaging with other social sciences in “intellectual trading zones” (Barnes and Sheppard 2010) that lead to exciting new forms of knowledge. In particular, I draw on ideas of the anthropology of the state, from within the sub-field of political anthropology. While the overall theoretical underpinnings of the anthropology of the state are important to the formulation of this project, they have been particularly relevant in the research design and methodology. In particular, focussing on everyday negotiations and practices is important to unpack the the idea of the state/citizen boundary as fixed, and instead focus on the less formal acts of citizenship that nonetheless represent claims to political agency.

The anthropology of the state is a vast and rich field, one which saw a revival from the 1990s onwards (Spencer 1997), with a view to understanding how modern forms of authority and sovereignty come to exist. Classical anthropological work on kingship as a form of sovereignty in “primitive” societies gave way to a more nuanced understanding of modern forms of power, influenced by Foucauldian discourses of the way power is dispersed in society (Hansen and Stepputat 2006). Hansen and Stepputat stress the importance of the ethnographic approach in understanding sovereignty and forms of statehood that account for the persisting idea of the state as a locus of power and authority, even with the ever-growing importance of the market forces as wielding “the most decisive form of citizenship within states” (Ibid., p. 309). Such ideas of dispersed power allow for broader understandings of the practices of citizenship, including through the lens of informality (as seen above), and through questioning the state/society boundary.

In observing the role of the state in effecting transformations, social scientists from across disciplines have drawn a great deal from the Weberian concept of a state as being fixed, autonomous, and with extraordinary power to dominate (Migdal 2001). In the Weberian

tradition, the state is one that successfully claims monopoly over the legitimate use of violence within a given territory, but Migdal has argued that while Weber himself qualified the idea of an authoritative entity with the use of the word “successfully”, subsequent authors who have used his ideas have focussed more on the concept of an entity that can legitimately use force (Ibid., pp.13–14), and thus exercise power.

Recent literature on theorising the state through everyday practice has questioned the notion of the state as a fixed, authoritative, well-defined entity. Instead, such scholarship focusses on looking at the state as constantly under construction, while emphasising the importance of studying how it is constructed (Mitchell 1990, Sharma and Gupta 2006a). In a related way, Billig has shown that nationalism and belonging (though he focusses on a Western context) are created through banal practices like the waving of flags, sports, and ways of representing national identity in the media (Billig 1995). Studying the state ethnographically at the “margins”, in particular, reveals how state practices do not merely reflect regional or cultural specificities of a universal state form, but transform the very nature of the state itself (Das and Poole 2004a).

Looking at the state through its construction prompts questions about the nature of its boundaries — where does the state begin or end? Mundane practices help create the idea of the state as a coherent entity, which is distinct from society. What is important is not to find the boundary between state and society or economy, but to study the processes that make these distinctions appear natural (Mitchell 2006). Questioning the state also means questioning state power, as Scott has done through his examination of why seemingly well-intended state-initiated schemes fail (Scott 1998). But where Scott looks at the modern state as an exercise in legibility and simplification, Mathur argues in her ethnography in the Indian state of Uttarakhand that state officials themselves are often befuddled, and find the state illegible and unreadable (Mathur 2016). The state’s representations of its intents may appear well-meaning and progressive at one level, but begin to lose coherence as these schemes approach implementation at another (Ibid.).

The image that the state presents of itself may be one of coherence and dominance, but in practice it not only has multiple (and sometimes conflicting) parts, but also pressure (and sometimes support) from groups outside the state, which may wield considerable influence over it (Migdal 2001). The state-society boundary, accepted as somewhat common sense, is

in fact broken down in encounters at the lowest level of the bureaucratic apparatus (Gupta 1995). State authority rests on ideas of verticality, or the idea of state as above family, community, and civil society; and encompassment, of the state as encompassing ever widening units such as localities, regions, and so on (Gupta and Ferguson 2002). These notions are embedded in the everyday practices and representations of the state, particularly through spatial practices that emphasise hierarchies within the governance structure. Rather than looking at space as fundamentally shaping national identities (Kaplan and Herb 2011), this formulation looks at the state itself as shaping and producing spatial hierarchies (Gupta and Ferguson 2002).

Studying the state ethnographically through ordinary practices and interactions is a vital tool in deconstructing states and state effect, especially to understand postcolonial states, and seeing them not just as an imitation of the Western form, but as emerging from their own contexts, and with their own features (Hansen and Stepputat 2001). The postcolonial state has been shaped through particular practices, such as the exercise of state power through the use of spatial techniques like cartography (Radcliffe 2001), or through surveillance, enacted through routine processes of inspection and enumeration (Gupta 2001). Each practice, studied in its unique context, sheds light on how the state is perceived, and its relationship with citizens.

Studying prosaic processes is an ideal method to understand stateness and state effect, and how they are reproduced in everyday life (Painter 2006). Many studies in political geography have also focussed on ethnography and the everyday as a lens from which to understand and critique practices like state violence (Megoran 2006) and state categorisation (Mountz 2003). Ethnographic approaches to the state have been especially crucial in understanding the interactions between culture and state (Marston 2004). Studying everyday practices reveals many nuances about state and nation, including the contradictions between what is sometimes envisioned by the state as a practice of citizenship, how it transpires on the ground, and how it is reinforced or challenged by non-state actors.

From within this field of the anthropology of the state, the most pertinent questions for this project emerge from works dealing with the intersection of state and citizenship, and how studying the everyday state can reveal ideologies of inclusion, exclusion and belonging. Recent work in political anthropology has also turned towards citizenship as an important

lens from which to frame the anthropology of politics, moving beyond understanding citizenship as a legal right, and considering political belonging more expansively (Lazar 2013, Lazar and Nuijten 2013). Much of the work from the tradition of political anthropology look at forms of insurgent and activist citizenship (Holston 2008, 2009, Das 2011), how forms of insurgency and activism question the very basis of citizenship, especially in heavily militarised contexts (Kikon 2009, Shah 2013), and meaning-making and construction of citizenship through political processes (Banerjee 2014, Mitchell 2014, Piliavsky 2014a). This focus, on informality and acts of citizenship as being key drivers through which spaces of citizenship are claimed, is an important focus of this project.

In this thesis I examine everyday practices of citizenship primarily through state actors who mediate access to the state for citizens, through ordinary acts of engaging with the state (for instance, transfers of land, voting, and welfare projects). In looking at encounters at the lowest levels of governance, where the state is often most viscerally felt, the focus in this study is on state actors at the village level. In Bodoland's case, this includes political actors that blur into the state apparatus. A growing focus on the everyday state, and the daily negotiations between citizens and the state has enabled the "messy yet vibrant sphere" (Berenschot and van Klinken 2018 p. 96) of the informal politics of citizenship, with its brokers, fixers, and informal networks to truly emerge in scholarship. In Bodoland, this informality is folded into the formal structure through these hybrid political/government appointments. Ad-hoc schedules, irregular meetings, and the lack of "official" government spaces or structures at this level give new meaning to the "everydayness" of local politics, while also providing rich opportunities to understand it in greater detail.

2.6 Conclusion: Approaches and the way forward

In focussing on citizenship in Bodoland, I consider its inherently exclusionary nature, and the ways in which alterity is essential to the construction of citizen identity. I emphasise the primarily constructed nature of citizenship, including both the ways in which it is reiterated through routine practices by and of the state, as well the more disruptive acts of citizenship that challenge the existing order. Questions of informality also become central to the context, as expressions of citizenship go beyond the obvious routine practices of votes and taxes, into the more ambivalent territory of informal practices. I look at the intersection of these

concepts throughout the thesis — how disruptive acts can be couched within seemingly routine practices like voting, or more informal strategies of patronage politics. Such strategies are not a guarantee for the granting of rights or equal citizenship status, but are nonetheless important practices through which the status quo is questioned. Equally, this must be studied against the backdrop of the enduring relevance of citizenship as a status. As the NRC process in Assam shows, identity documents and official categories have critical relevance for the continued practice of citizenship.

In examining the exclusionary nature of citizenship, I focus on its spatial character, questions of scale, but most importantly for Bodoland, the relationship of citizenship to territorialised sovereignty. The territorial construction of the nation state, as well as the territorialised identities in Northeast India more broadly both play important roles in the way citizenship is practised in Bodoland. Such practices are not just confined to those of the state, but also “acts of citizenship”, and “insurgent” ways of reclaiming citizenship by those at the margins. Moving forward, I look at the multiple contestations around defining and claiming citizenship — from those in power, and those without — using an ethnographic lens on state practices in Bodoland as my primary tool. In the following section, on methodology, I delve deeper into how I approach the concept of the “everyday” in the context of politics in Bodoland, and how the practice of politics shaped my methodological approach.



3. ENGAGING THE FIELD

CHAPTER 3. ENGAGING THE FIELD: METHODOLOGY

“In the second half of 1982 I was living in a sprawling rural settlement in central Sri Lanka, alternating between anxiety and boredom in a mood familiar to most fieldworkers.”

- Jonathan Spencer (2007), *Post-Colonialism and Political Imagination*

3.1 Research objectives

The Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD), comprising the four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, and Udalguri, are located in a sub-region of Assam referred to as Lower or Western Assam. In July 2012, two of the four districts — Kokrajhar and Chirang — witnessed an unprecedented scale of violence and displacement, when riots between two ethnic groups, the Bodos and the Muslims, displaced nearly 500,000 people, and saw enormous losses of homes and property. It was in this post-conflict context, as part of a team from an NGO involved in rehabilitation efforts, that I became familiar with the region and its politics. Everyone from illegal Bangladeshi immigrants (often conflated with the Bengali Muslim community, which was also affected by the violence), Bodo insurgents, cross-border terrorist outfits, were blamed for the violence. The only time the state made its way into popular discourse about the violence, however, was during the discussion of the distribution of relief materials to affected persons, and the provision of security, given the highly militarised context of Assam. What was rarely discussed was the impact the state may have had, historically, and in contemporary times, on shaping the conflict, and the politics of the region more broadly. It was this missing link in the narrative that gave rise to the research project I undertook for my PhD.

The main question to arise from this line of thinking, and with which I went into fieldwork, is of the nature of the everyday state in Bodoland, its practices and representations, and people’s experiences of these interactions with the state. How do everyday state practices affect relationships between communities, whether these are of conflict, cooperation, indifference, or a constantly adapting, dynamic combination?

A second — and eventually more central — question that emerged during the course of my fieldwork, was that of citizenship. This had both to do with the timing of political events, as

well as the daily concerns of the research participants. The first factor to influence this framing of the project was the updating of the National Register of Citizens in Assam, a long-standing political demand that was finally underway in the region, including the BTAD. My fieldwork occurred between the collection and verification of identity documents, and the publication of the draft report, a limbo that elicited many conversations about the possibilities of the NRC. This, in addition to the many everyday questions of belonging, inclusion and exclusion that dominated many conversations I had over this year, led to the framing of the project as looking more critically and closely at what citizenship meant in this region.

3.2 Research design

The people at the centre of this study belong largely to two major communities of the BTAD — Bodos and Muslims. While these are two of several groups present in the region (as also outlined in the introduction), for the present study on citizenship, focussing on these two groups was particularly relevant. Recent incidents of violence (such as in 2012, 2014), as well as the political consequences of the NRC exercise for Muslims in particular makes them an especially vulnerable group in Bodoland. This vulnerability is often pitted against that of the Bodos, the group that dominated political representation in the region. Focussing the study on Bodos and Muslims provided the most relevant lens to examine ideas of citizenship.

To undertake this research, I made use largely of ethnographic methods, deriving from an anthropology of the state approach that looks at the everyday functioning of the state as a starting point from which to understand its functioning. As Sharma and Gupta (2006b) argue in the introduction to their edited volume, what anthropology brings to the study of the state is a divergence from the idea that the state is a fixed, coherent unit. Instead daily practices and representations allow us to see how the idea of the state is constructed, negotiated, and contested. In addition, anthropology allows for an examination of the cultural ideas behind formation of states, allowing us to see state actors and institutions as part of their cultural contexts, and not separate from them (Ibid., p. 10).

Despite the origins of the idea in the discipline of anthropology, ethnographic methods are now widely used in human geography research. In a paper now almost two decades old, political geographer Steve Herbert called for a greater use of ethnography as a method in

human geography, arguing that it was a “uniquely useful method for uncovering the *processes* and *meanings* that undergird sociospatial life” (Herbert, 2000, p. 550, emphasis in the original). Nick Megoran reiterated this idea as especially useful for political geographers, who could employ the underused method of ethnography to bring forth people’s understandings of political phenomena, which are often neglected (Megoran 2006).

In light of this, I chose ethnographic fieldwork methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews (often repeated interviews with the same people), although I ultimately relied more on the latter for reasons I explain further in the methods section. Admittedly, this veers away from the conventional notion of an ethnography, as I not only rely on more than just participant observation, but also do so with a range of participants across two field sites, for varying lengths of time based on circumstances. However, the nature of ethnographic fieldwork is increasingly contested and no longer confines itself only to the practice of a lone researcher immersed in a cut-off, unfamiliar place for extended periods of time (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), and Vered Amit argues that the transgressions of this model are “as much an anthropological tradition as the model itself” (Amit, 2000, p. 6).

A key question of access to the field site and the forms of ethnographic fieldwork conducted is linked here to the particular context of preceding conflict and violence, and the need to balance risk with rigorous research. As a result of the potential for violence, I chose to stay not in either of my field sites, but in an NGO within the BTAD from which I could access both sites. This was as much to avoid being seen as taking “sides” with particular political or ethnic groups as for personal safety. Being seen as a spy or working undercover for political groups (or the state) is one of the greatest dangers in ethnography, particularly when the research covers political themes, as others have also documented (Jacobs 2006, Sluka 2007). Allegations of spying and intelligence gathering can be particularly rife in politically unstable or conflict-prone environments, and must be continuously managed (Sluka 1990). While such hazards must be taken into account, Hoffman (2003) argues for the need to continue working in zones of conflict and violence, and foster greater reliance on gatekeepers like NGOs or less conventional avenues of access, to enable research as well as to build trust.

In addition, the peculiarly ad-hoc nature of local village governance (discussed in detail in Chapter 6), made a classic state ethnography located in particular official or governance

spaces nearly impossible. Instead, I took to “chasing the state”,⁴ following local political and state operatives to various meetings and government engagements, which followed neither fixed timetables, nor occurred in specific “official” spaces. It is akin to what Carolyn Nordstrom termed “runway anthropology” while studying warzones in Mozambique (Nordstrom 2007, p. 252). Instead of studying the war in specific locales, she chose to follow “the ebb and flow of the war from urban centres to rural outposts” (Ibid.).

In addition to the interviews and participant observation, I looked at archives to get a better sense of the BTAD’s (and Assam’s) colonial and post-independence political trajectory. Many scholars of Northeast India argue that colonial policy, especially around tribal groups, land rights, and the encouragement of immigration, shaped independent India’s approach as well — it is important to the construction of citizenship in Assam and the BTAD today. To this end, I spent short periods in two archives — one national and one state-level. Given that my main focus was on the fieldwork, these stints were short, although they did enable me to collect material that helped strengthen my argument, particularly in building the historical context of the region I was studying, and its land policies, in particular.

3.2.1 Timeline of fieldwork

August 2016	March–April 2016	October 2016–July 2017	September 2017	October 2017 onwards
Archival research at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi	Pilot study and election fieldwork during the 2016 election campaign	Main round of fieldwork, involving participant observation and interviews with local government officials and political operatives	Archival research at the Assam State Archives, Guwahati	Data analysis and writing up

Table 3.1: Timeline of data collection and analysis

My fieldwork can roughly be categorised in three phases, a month-long intensive period of fieldwork centred around election campaigning, the main period of ethnographic fieldwork, and finally two short stints at the archives — one preceding and one after the main period of fieldwork.

⁴ Credit is due to Professor Bengt Karlsson for suggesting this term.

March–April 2016: In March–April 2016, I went for four weeks of fieldwork to Kokrajhar district in Assam. This served as an important component of my PhD — it was timed to coincide with the election campaigning in the run-up to state-level Assembly elections in Assam. It was an important glimpse into the politics of the region, and I made it a point to attend large electoral rallies attended by hundreds, as well as smaller, “pocket” meetings that were attended by 30 or 40 people, and served as more intimate spaces of connections. I also spent some time following and traveling with the two main campaigning parties — the Bodoland Political Front (BPF), and the United People’s Party (UPP). It also served the purpose of helping me finalise field sites for the longer stint of fieldwork, and identify potential informants.

October 2016–July 2017: During this period, I was conducting participant observation and interviews in the two field sites in Kokrajhar, barring a six week break in February-March 2017 when I returned to Cambridge to reflect on my existing data and approaches and attempt to re-focus them according to emerging themes. This period of fieldwork threw up many challenges, which are discussed in the methods section.

August 2016 & September 2017: In August 2016, I spent a month at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library archives, and in September 2017, I spent four weeks at the Assam State Archives in the capital of Dispur. While these phases were too short to base any analysis entirely on archival material, they elicited useful insights nonetheless.

3.2.2 Field sites

I planned my fieldwork to take place in two main sites, and some spaces and networks that served to connect them to the wider governmental and political structure that I was studying. Both the sites I chose were in Kokrajhar district, chosen partly for their proximity to the hub of state activity in Kokrajhar town (in its capacity as de facto capital of the BTAD), partly for the diversity of ethnic groups that they represented, and partly due to familiarity from my previous engagement through the NGO. In the course of the fieldwork, as I go on to elaborate, the “sites” expanded beyond just these two contained spaces, as people and networks proved themselves to be mobile.

The first site is a cluster of four small villages on the border of Kokrajhar and Dhubri districts, with a mixed population of Bodos and Muslims (here named Uzanpara). The second is a resettlement of a former displaced relief camp of Muslims who fled their original village after the 2012 riots, which I have called Makrabari. This is not a formal resettlement, but a makeshift (and in their minds, temporary) one, which continues to resemble a relief camp in many ways — the housing structures are temporary, and they are not formally integrated into the village on the edges of which this settlement has been constructed.

Some reflections in this thesis draw not only on fieldwork I conducted for my PhD, but also previous interviews conducted after the 2012 riots in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts, as part of my work in the rehabilitation project. While the interviews conducted in the post-riot period consist of many villages and camp sites across both districts, I focus here mostly on areas that eventually became part of my PhD research.

In the primary fieldwork conducted during this election, I draw on interviews and participant observation conducted across different campaigns and pocket meetings, all within the two constituencies of Kokrajhar East and Bilasipara East. Both constituencies have their own unique dynamics, and each contains one field site that I worked in for the PhD project. This is covered in greater detail in Chapter 6.

In addition to the field sites themselves, many offices at the block and district level, that had jurisdiction over these villages, were also part of my research. These were concentrated largely in Kokrajhar town, which contains the legislative assembly of the Bodoland Territorial Council, as well as the secretariat, where the highest administrative officers of the department have offices. District-level offices were usually in or near Kokrajhar town, block levels were either in Gossaigaon (another small town, near the Makrabari village), or Chapar (technically in the neighbouring district of Dhubri, but with jurisdiction over Uzanpara). Party-level offices, events and homes (largely from the ruling Bodoland Political Front, but also some from the main opposition, the United People's Party) spanned across the region, as did the meetings and hubs of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a Hindu right-wing organisation that eventually became part of my research.

3.2.3 Participants

Many of my participants were those who worked in the village-level governance structure

and the hierarchy that engaged with it in Uzanpara. In the Bodoland Territorial Council, unlike in most other parts of India, village level representatives are not elected. Instead, because of its unique status in the Indian constitution under the Sixth Schedule, the BTC can choose its own means of providing village level government. The BTC has chosen to nominate representatives across villages in what is known as the Village Council Development Committee or VCDC. One or two representatives are nominated from each village (depending on its size), and a cluster of about 8-10 villages forms one VCDC committee, with a chairperson (always called “chairman”, regardless of gender) at its head. Given the discretion in appointments, in the 15 years that the BTC has been in power, the ruling Bodoland Political Front (BPF) generally nominates its own party workers in these posts. Above the VCDC is also the TLC — the Tertiary Level Committee, which is also aligned with the party structure. The person who heads this generally is a powerful person and connected intimately with the dealings of the VCDC members. Above the TLC chairman is the MCLA — Member of Council Legislative Assembly in the BTC. In Uzanpara, this MCLA was not only extremely accessible from a research standpoint, but also, like the TLC chairman, extremely engaged with the VCDC.

In addition to this core network of operatives in the village, other administrative posts (not controlled by the party structure) occupied by bureaucrats were also connected to the everyday dealings of the state, and some of these were also participants in the research. Additionally, student leaders, who wield immense political influence, were also informants in the process.

Apart from officials, observing and following everyday state practices also involved respondents who were at the receiving end of these practices — voters in elections, persons in village level meetings called by politicians or administrators, and ordinary people in contact with law through daily processes like policing, buying and selling land, and so on. In the case of Makrabari, respondents were also displaced men and women who experienced many post-conflict bureaucratic processes, often at the receiving end of their negligence.

Leaders and newly joined members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and other right-wing organisations, and leaders from other political and cultural organisations that are intertwined with them, were also among the respondents. As the network of the RSS was still in its nascent stages when I conducted the fieldwork, the actors’ involvement in their activities was sometimes fuzzy and cross-cutting — a major leader from one district was

likely to be involved in activities all over the BTAD, while the organisation was growing. I did not restrict myself and followed them across district lines, and beyond my field sites as well, in an attempt to understand how the organisation functioned.

A major challenge of this research project was being able to adequately represent the gender dynamics that inform the politics of the region. Partly this is visible in the lack of gender balance in the respondents — while I actively looked out for women involved with the politics and governance of the region, they proved to be few and far between. This was not the case during the election portion of the fieldwork, where unusually, both candidates were women. In the course of everyday politics, however, women were usually marginalised, and this in itself has emerged as an important finding. Where I could identify women respondents, they often held very little power, and sometimes appeared to have been represented in a tokenistic fashion. Nonetheless, some of these women proved to be very interesting informants, and I explore this in the thesis. The shortage of women participants leaves me and the PhD project with a different sort of gendered analysis — that of masculinity and its many representations in the politics of the region, and of women as symbols of cultural purity.

In total, over the course of the election period, as well as the main fieldwork, I interacted with a total of 113 respondents. Among these were about 25-30 people that I interacted with more often, who were generally involved in the “hanging out” portion of the fieldwork, while the rest were all people that I interviewed either once or twice. In addition to interviews and casual conversations and meetings, I also attended election rallies, meetings, political “picnics”, party meetings, village meetings, as well the Budget session of the Bodoland Territorial Council assembly. There were, of course, many other people present at these events, with whom in some sense I shared the experience — the numbers mentioned above refer to the people I interacted with directly and for some length of time.

3.3 Research methods

3.3.1 Participant observation

Vered Amit points out that participant observation, perhaps more so than any other form of research, is unique in that the relationships formed by the researcher are the “primary vehicles for eliciting findings and insight” (Amit, 2000, p. 2). This was especially relevant to the phase of fieldwork before the elections, where the multiple meetings, rallies, politicians

on the election trail, and speculation about voting behaviour at every tea shop lent itself easily to this method. My intent was to conduct participant observation in a variety of different settings, shaped by the access I was able to get at local village-level committees and political parties. During the elections it was fairly straightforward to secure contacts, and through gatekeepers, gain access to the political parties in campaign mode. On multiple occasions, the gatekeepers in particular made it a point to take me around on the campaign trail, introduce me to candidates, and keep me posted about election-related events, thus enabling a series of spaces and events at which I was able to undertake participant observation.

During the main fieldwork, however, doing participant observation proved more challenging than I had anticipated, particularly as the traditional “spaces” to observe interactions between different street level bureaucrats and political operatives proved harder to pin down than I had thought. Most village level operatives, for instance, did not have formal office spaces in which they all congregated, functioning instead out of hybrid home-office spaces that were reserved for purposeful interactions such as one-on-one meetings. While many of my conversations did take place in these spaces, often the presence of others ended up combining interviews and participant observation in a hybrid form of conducting research, driven by the situation of the participants themselves. Amit is also right in pointing out the contradictions of participant observation as a method, in the way that it presumes the “field” as it already exists, whereas it is in fact constructed through the process of fieldwork itself. Challenging these notions of fieldwork also leads to a re-examination of what constitutes the method of participant observation in the first place, and whether it too must become more flexible as the notion of a localised, collective field dissipates (Amit 2000).

The main party office, in Kokrajhar, was the occasional site of some meetings, but never anything regular or predictable. Some constituency-level events were sometimes organised by the party and took place in external venues, such as in a park or by the lake in the form of picnics, and I attended many of these, where I was largely an observer, though I did participate in the informal conversations and networking. The fluidity of these structures meant that I relied more on direct interviews and conversations than on classical participant observation. However, while it led to me adapting my research methods, learning about these ever-shifting locales and roles also provided invaluable insight into the working of this

system on the ground, the spaces they chose to exist (or not) in, and the actors that drove these choices. These insights are explored in more detail in the empirical chapters that follow.

As Li observed during her covert and overt research with female gamblers, participant observation is fraught with ethical concerns, about how to represent oneself and one's work, and where to strike the balance between participating and observing (Li 2008). As she finally decided, however, being open about her identity as a researcher, while alienating some participants, nonetheless struck the right ethical balance, and also placed her in a position where she did not need to "participate" intensively (as a gambler) to be able to gain insight. Despite the potentially sensitive nature of material that could emerge in an exploration of the relationship between conflict and governance, I too chose to be candid about my status as a researcher at all times.

3.3.2 Interviews

The primary means of data collection that I employed were semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Especially as questions of governance and state practice were at stake, it was the best route to engaging key informants such as higher ranking officials in the Bodoland Territorial Council, administrative officials in the various departments, as well as politicians and members of the Territorial Council or Legislative Assembly. In addition, given the constraints to participant observation outlined above, purposeful conversations in the form of interviews served as an important source of data.

Unstructured interviews allow participants a greater degree of control over the narrative, especially where the topics discussed are sensitive in nature (Corbin and Morse 2003). This does not imply, however, that the researcher has no power in this situation. As Rapley has pointed out, interviews are inherently social encounters — they are produced as much by the interviewer as the interviewee (Rapley 2001). Even open-ended interviews, seemingly guided more by what participants reveal voluntarily, can also be prompted by the ways in which the interviewer appears to practise neutrality, or maintain silences, for instance, which prompt respondents to go into detail. My main objective in using unstructured and semi-structured interviews as a method was to allow issues like citizenship, state practice, and the access that different communities had to various aspects of governance to emerge as much as possible

from the context itself. Rapley is correct to argue that all knowledge produced during an interview is specific to the context of the interview, and that analysis of such data must consider the idea that what is available is only one version (Ibid.). Far from arguing that this is a reason to abandon the method, however, he argues that it is in fact a reason to make the analysis more transparent in its context, and produced by a specific interaction (Ibid., p. 319).

3.3.3 Archival work

I worked in two archives in India during my fieldwork — the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in Delhi, for one month in August 2016, and the Assam State Archives in Guwahati, for a month in September 2017. While Delhi is also home to the National Archives of India, conversations with other scholars of Assam seemed to suggest that Nehru Memorial is a better source of material for the Northeast. It hosts “one of the largest collections of private and institutional papers of leading Indian nationalists, industrialists, politicians, political parties, and associations in the country”, to quote a scholar on an archive review website (Dissertation Reviews 2013). On the Assam State Archives, scholars of Assam have noted that the archives have recently been revamped and are now extremely well-organised and easy to use. Scholars have “access to 266,000 government files reaching back all the way to the earliest phase of colonial rule in north-eastern India, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century” (Dissertation Reviews 2014). In both archives, I was looking at papers and collections from pre- and post-Independence India. Interesting material emerged particularly on aspects of immigrant labour from erstwhile East Bengal, policing of unrest in Assam, anxieties about Indian federalism, the status of Plains Tribes (like the Bodos) in the 1960s, and issues around the governance of tribal land.

The short periods I spent at these archives (with most of the time being dedicated to fieldwork) meant that these documents paint only a partial picture, and mostly add to supplement arguments I make otherwise. Francesca Moore has written about the partial nature of archives themselves, and how they represent only selective aspects of history, from which the researcher must be as attuned to silences and absences as to the material at hand (Moore 2009). In this way, the archive itself is representative of a certain power dynamic. I found this to be the case in my search in the archives. So for instance, while documents about immigration and the panic around refugee influx in the wake of India’s partition abound, very

few documents are available about the Plains Tribal Council of Assam, an organisation of tribal leaders campaigning for separate statehood in Assam. In some ways, their relative absence in the archives of this period (the 1950s and 1960s), goes on to mirror their complaints about being erased from the Assam movement of the 1980s, and the emergence of another rebellion, in the form of the Bodoland movement, in the late 1980s as a response to this, among other things.

3.4 Positionality

In Kokrajhar, I was a woman, a non-tribal with a Hindu name, and an outsider from Delhi, a place that itself has a complex and often antagonistic centre-periphery relationship with Northeastern India (Baruah 2005b, 2007). Each of these aspects of my identity had an impact on the fieldwork, often contradictory in nature. Being a woman and a researcher had the dual effect of closing off access to certain people and places, while opening up others (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007). While it added some additional uncertainty about safety in the field, it also made me less seem threatening, and thus more likely to access official spaces, as the anthropologist Nayanika Mathur also found in her ethnography of bureaucrats in the state of Uttarakhand, India (Mathur 2015). Being an outsider and a woman simultaneously sometimes placed me in odd situations with the women in the field. On some occasions, my “outsider”, and probably differential class status made me one of the “men”, I could sit and eat or drink tea with them, while very often women were the ones preparing the tea or food, a fact which made me deeply uncomfortable. On other occasions, it also gave me access to women in the community, the ability to sit down and have a discussion with just women members in a particular group (with a woman other than my research assistants serving as a translator, if needed). Sultana observes that other markers of class difference — watches, notebooks, one’s style of dressing, and so on can also set one apart from others in the field, and place oneself in specific categories of hierarchy (Sultana 2007).

There has been an increasing self-awareness among geographers about how the politics of research is affected by the institutional and geographical positionality of academics, particularly in instances of researchers based in the North studying the South (Sidaway 1992, 1993, Madge 1993, Potter 1993), and the knowledge production that results from these uneven power relations (Jazeel and McFarlane 2010, Jazeel 2014). My location as a scholar

studying abroad also added to my classification in the hierarchy of participants, and allowed me access to high-level officials and politicians with relative ease. An interesting spillover effect of this was also on my research assistant colleagues, who were pleased about being affiliated with foreign research (both still wear their Cambridge t-shirts, or so they tell me).

In addition to this, I was also returning to a region and a set of people whom I had previously encountered in a different role — that of a development worker. During fieldwork, it my previous, more engaged role in the NGO that I found myself referring back to as a way to justify my present role as a researcher.⁵ Both with respect to participants as well as colleagues, I was confronted with their changing (and unchanging) expectations, along with my own. Having been used to being perceived as fairly benign (given my previous development worker status), I often referenced this role when my intentions were being questioned by participants. I do not imply here that my role as a development worker was somehow less problematic or without its own complex power dynamics. Indeed, an exhaustive literature (too vast to be done any justice here) questions precisely this assumption of viewing NGOs uncritically (Bebbington and Thiele 1993, Edwards and Hulme 1996, Kamat 2004, Choudry and Kapoor 2013, Banks *et al.* 2015). Nonetheless, NGOs proliferate in fields like post-conflict reconstruction and humanitarian relief (Lewis and Opoku-Mensah 2006). Post-conflict Kokrajhar was also a place often weary of the many international and national NGOs that descended upon it to undertake humanitarian relief work following the violence in 2012. The inadequate response of government agencies to the displacement crisis precipitated by the riots nonetheless meant that NGOs became an important source of support for basic services needed in the aftermath of the conflict.

As the fieldwork showed me, and has also been observed by Mandiyanike (2009), being detached from a previous, work-related identity could be seen as threatening, as well as unproductive. Many researchers return to places they have previously experienced in other ways, to people that have known them in other roles, while being conscious of the fact that they will choose to represent themselves differently. Other geographers and anthropologists have also written about existing familiarity with a place that may be seen as “home”, which creates its own dilemmas of changing relationships and categories of understanding, and

⁵ A reflection on this in the form of a research paper is also published in the journal *Area* (Sharma 2018b).

being both an insider and outsider (Narayan 1993, Ite 1997, Sultana 2007, Mandiyanike 2009, Zhao 2017).

An important consideration for me while doing the research was how to deal with disagreeable characters and views. Researching certain kinds of groups means treading with extra caution, negotiating the balance between understanding how they represent themselves, as well as distancing oneself from ideas that might be disagreeable (Gallaher 2009). I was frequently faced with views of prejudice and bigotry, and faced with the choice of either disagreeing, or continuing to present as a “neutral” observer, even though the idea of objectivity in field research has long been challenged by anthropologists and geographers alike. In general, I adopted the latter approach despite recognising its contradictions — I was more interested in understanding why these views existed and how they emerged, rather than imposing a set of views (my own) which did not arise neutrally either. With some of the most abhorrent (again, classified as “most” by me) views — I was careful to never assent or agree, though I admit that silence may have occasionally made me complicit. During a conversation with the top Hindu right-wing operative in Kokrajhar towards the end of my stay, however, I was glad to have made this choice also from the standpoint of safety. His repeated questions about where I was from and to whom I was feeding the information (he had learnt that one of my hosts at the NGO was Christian, which made him suspicious) suggested a degree of hostility that made me uncomfortable, especially as I insisted on standing up for my host at that stage. As other field researchers have also observed, in the context of potentially dangerous or unpredictable fieldwork, silence or noncommittal answers can be useful strategies for a researcher to employ from the perspective of safety (Kovats-Bernat 2002, Naveed *et al.* 2017).

3.5 Risk factors

The BTAD has been and remains a conflict-prone region, which saw major violence break out in 2012 and 2014. Since December 2014, the major insurgent group active in the region, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), has been actively targeted, and thus lying low. The region had been relatively peaceful in this period, and the recent elections were also conducted without incident, despite being a time during which violence is usually anticipated. In comparison to when I worked there in June 2013–2014, just after the violence

of 2012, in recent years the BTAD remained relatively peaceful, as also acknowledged by most who live there. While insurgency can be a problem in BTAD, it was not a major factor in the field areas I visited, and its immediate impact is negligible in Kokrajhar town.

I prepared the risk assessment for this project with the understanding that the area had a history of conflict and violence, and took plenty of precaution to ensure safe living conditions on the campus of a trusted NGO in the region. In addition, I took safe modes of transport like public transport, known private taxis, and the vehicles of people that I trusted. The most important source of security for me was relying on the advice of people who lived there, and who understood the threat perceptions in a nuanced way. On some days, for instance, various political outfits would declare a *bandh*, a strike that shut down transport, shops, and movement in general. In this period, I did not venture out for fieldwork, in accordance with local practice. The trickiest part of maintaining this was keeping track of *bandh* announcements in advance — on many occasions I arrived at the bus stop only to walk back home with no luck!

Being accompanied by research assistants, both of whom were male, while sometimes challenging from a research point of view, was a boon from the point of view of safety. Traveling alone as a woman in India can often expose oneself to various kinds of harassment, and even assault, although I was careful to do most of my traveling in the day, unless I had prior arrangements. The somewhat unpredictable nature of the region also would have made me a bit more vulnerable had I only been on my own, and I credit the presence of my colleagues with allowing me to expand the research in almost any direction without worrying about safety.

Some time before I was due to arrive there, on 5 August 2016, after a period of relative calm (including during the elections), there was a gun attack at a local market in Kokrajhar district in the BTAD. While this did not directly affect my planned fieldwork with village level governance committees, it was important to take into account any potential increase in risk also in terms of transport, and the perceived nature of my research, as well as my role there. As the FCO travel guidelines for India recommended only vigilance, and did not ban travel, I

decided to proceed with my research as before, but with some updated safety protocols.⁶ This included greater vigilance in crowded places. I took care in terms of making contacts, and in the initial part of the fieldwork, went easy on asking very sensitive questions. It also involved staying in regular touch with and giving fortnightly updates to my PhD supervisor, Prof Bhaskar Vira. I also decided to stick with the people and field sites that I was somewhat familiar with, where I knew at least a few people from before. Inevitably, the precautions and actions I took affected my methodology, and have impacted the data I present here, and as in all research, the conditions in the field affect the final outcome (Kovats-Bernat 2002).

3.6 Ethical considerations

3.6.1 Access and informed consent

Having been in the region before, as a development worker, I was familiar with many of the actors that I interacted with, although given the constantly changing nature of India's civil service, many officials in the administration and the police were different from the ones I'd encountered previously. Given the interconnected nexus of political parties and village-level governance in the BTAD, party networks formed an important node of access, snowballing from one person to another, and also as a means to receive information about meetings, upcoming programmes, and general goings on in the party-cum-governance structure.

In general, I did not compensate for interviews and research time through direct payment of money. With some participants, this seemed the obvious choice, as many of my participants were in local government, and thus to some degree in a position of power, and not among the most marginalised. In many instances, where we met in a tea shop or something similar, I paid for refreshments, as a way of acknowledging the time they spent with me on my research. In some cases, it was the officials who hosted me, either in their homes or offices, especially those at senior levels.

As Hammett and Sporton point out, choosing to pay or not, and in what form (cash, kind, investing in a community project) is a context-specific choice, and no one model fits all

⁶ The FCO travel advisory following the incident was as follows: "On 5 August 2016, there was a gun attack by suspected militants on civilians in a local market in Kokrajhar, state of Assam. If you're travelling in or through Kokrajhar you should monitor local media, be vigilant, avoid protests or large gatherings and follow the advice of the local authorities and your travel company."

fieldwork situations (Hammett and Sporton 2012). This is especially the case with marginalised communities, where the power differential between the researcher and the participants is more stark (Ibid., p. 498). I was conscious of this while spending time with participants from the displaced community in Makrabari, many of whom had lost regular livelihood because of the displacement from their village. Each time I visited them I took something for their households, usually in the form of food or small gifts for children. A few times while traveling with them to another part of the district, I paid for their transport, and for any meals we ate outside. In some instances, there was embarrassment about this on their part, although I did insist that they take the compensation. It did, however, make clear to me that directly paying for each interview or day spent would have probably come off as patronising and overly transactional.

3.6.2 Sensitive information, anonymity and confidentiality

The element of violence as part of the narrative in the region, especially incidents in the recent past, also called for a need to be sensitive while probing these issues. Despite being nearly five years in the past, the violence of 2012 was a recurring theme that emerged in many conversations. It continued to have a lasting impact on the way people experienced governance and state protection, but also security and relations with their neighbours. On more than one occasion, someone speaking about the violence would become upset or angry while remembering a phone call to the police that went unanswered, or spending six months at a relief camp. In some instances, people also briefly cried remembering something distressing. These very personal revelations stemmed from otherwise seemingly mundane conversations about elections, votes, and political parties, hinting again at the intimate ways in which the state (or its absence) can make itself felt in the everyday lives of people. More importantly, it reinforced the need for sensitivity when speaking of violence and conflict. In instances where people became sad or distressed, I stopped asking questions about violence, and typically we would return to some more mundane or ordinary topic of discussion. If they were reluctant to speak after this, I would offer to terminate the interview. In the cases where people were most distressed, however, they usually chose to go on speaking, often returning to the theme of violence.

In some instances, a government official or political representative shared something privately with me, and then asked me not to write it down or use it. I have naturally honoured those requests and these insights do not appear in the thesis.

All participants were made fully aware of the purpose of my research. In addition, I also ensured that before I began interacting with them, they knew that their names would not be used, and to the best of my ability I would ensure that they would not be identifiable in other ways. In many cases, people seemed not to be bothered by this, and higher level officials particularly, were also happy to let me use their names.

Anonymity was also extended to the actual names of the villages and places, as I believe it would be easy to identify the actors if these were revealed (since the VCDC members, chairpersons, and MCLAs are fairly easy to track down). I have also anonymised even government officials and the MCLA in question, even where research ethics might have allowed me to use their names as associated with their official designations. This is to protect the anonymity of the people connected to them (lower level VCDC members, other village-level figures, residents of the relief camp), who could be identifiable if the officials themselves were, given the context.

3.6.3 Research assistants

During the fieldwork, I was able to ask two of my former colleagues, one Bodo and one Muslim, to help out, mostly at separate times, and occasionally together. They were important interlocutors and served also as gatekeepers in many instances, as well as translators in situations where language became a barrier. Part of the rationale for asking both, and not just one of them to help out was precisely because ethnicity often made a difference when asking questions, something I learned through previous experience, and has also been pointed out in other reflections on fieldwork (Anwar and Viqar 2016). For instance, after a particularly charged discussion about politics at among the Muslims in Makrabari, both my Muslim colleague and I agreed that had our Bodo colleague been present, people may have been more reluctant to open up. Bodos, given their perceived status as a relatively dominant group in the BTAD area, wield a certain power over other groups, for which they

are often resented. Equally, within the Bodos, there is often resentment against other non-Bodo groups, especially the Muslims.

Being “accompanied” affects the way researchers are perceived, and their positionality (Cupples and Kindon 2003), and the idea of the “lone researcher” has been challenged in literature reflecting on fieldwork (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Amit 2000, Middleton and Cons 2014). Research assistants have their own lenses and biases, whether with regard to class, ethnicity, and so on, which can play a role in interpretation and translation (Turner 2010). The additional lens of research assistants’ and translators’ subjectivities also make them active producers of knowledge in the research process (Temple and Edwards 2002, Scott *et al.* 2006, Caretta 2014, Anwar and Viqar 2016). This was also my experience, and I found that it enriched, rather than compromised the research process. Many research directions and themes emerged through conversations with them, and would not have been possible without their extensive local knowledge of the area’s politics. Occasionally these filters were causes of friction — most notably from the point of view of a gendered analysis, where both being male held certain pre-conceived ideas about women’s views and roles. Equally, the friction also allowed me to explore that dynamic amongst other participants, who often shared these views.

3.7 Data analysis

3.7.1 Recording data

On a more practical issue of methodology, I did not end up recording most interviews (except a few with key informants). Given the context, the use of a recorder could have signalled a degree of formality that would make easy flowing conversation trickier. Particularly with regard to government practice and corruption, which is fairly prevalent in the BTAD, or with regard to sensitive information about violent events, or militant activities, I didn’t want my role to seem at all investigative, or as that of a journalist. In line with other field researchers who have avoided audio and video recordings in dangerous or unstable contexts (Kovats-Bernat 2002), I chose not to use recordings as a way to build trust with my informants in a potentially volatile context. During the election campaigning, for instance, I was frequently asked if I was a reporter, but more worryingly, whether I was from one of the political parties and reporting back to them on voter preferences. I vehemently and meticulously denied this

everywhere, and tried to be as clear as possible about my role, but I believe the presence of a recorder would have amplified the degree of suspicion. I did, however, visibly take notes, so that people were aware that what they said was being recorded in some form, and there was no sense of deception. It was ultimately quicker, and perhaps more useful, to take detailed notes during interviews, and transcribe immediately afterwards (on the same day). I was able to do this, either on computer or by hand, for nearly every set of field notes that I have. While I might have missed out on some verbatim quotes, I do not regret not recording the data, as I believe it helped me build trust. On one occasion, for instance, someone with a last name similar to mine, a journalist going undercover, tried to catch a VCDC chairman giving a bribe on the record. For a few days, this created some panic about my role (the last name similarity didn't help — some of the participants thought it had been me going undercover), and I had to re-establish trust (some of it via research assistants). Not having a recorder made this case stronger. Over the course of ten months of fieldwork, I do not believe the data was severely compromised by the lack of recordings.

3.7.2 Organising and analysing data

Once I returned from fieldwork for good, I began the process of organising and analysing my data. I did this by first reading through my notes and extracting what I thought were some emerging themes, and then further categorising and re-organising the data into sections that I thought were relevant to the chapters I wanted to write. I did this without using any data analysis software, but by hand, using colour coded notes, highlighters, and pen and paper. Despite the volume of data, I found this method useful as it allowed me to thoroughly engage with all the data, and assured me that I had not left anything out.

In accordance with department and disciplinary research ethics, I was also careful to separate the actual names andonyms using two different word processing programmes, and have employed these throughout the thesis.

3.8 Representing the research

In geography, debates have arisen on the responsibility of academics to engage more actively with policy and politics (Massey 2000, 2002, Dorling and Shaw 2002, Martin 2002), and the

need for ethical and political engagement in research, fieldwork and teaching (Katz 1994, Valentine 2005). A strand of scholarship in anthropological fieldwork asserts that being politically engaged while doing fieldwork, taking an explicitly activist approach, and choosing to identify with marginalised groups makes for richer understanding of ethnographic material (Scheper-Hughes 1995, Speed 2001, Kunnath 2013). Adopting a neutral or disengaged stance may become ethically indefensible, but other fieldwork experiences show that engagement too can be fraught with dilemmas of how far to take that involvement, and whether one is “purchasing narratives” through acts of engagement (Smith and Kleinman 2010). Moreover, defining the nature of the most ethical engagement is not always an obvious choice, and privileging the researcher’s morality and decision on how to engage also casts ethics in terms of the researcher’s subjectivity alone.⁷ Katz problematises the notion of engaged academic research further, pointing out that academic projects that yield the most “tangible” benefits to participants are often seen as ambiguous in terms of their scholarly worth (Katz 1994). Moreover, she asserts, regardless of the possible benefits to participants, ultimately it is the researcher that gains the most from the encounter, raising further questions of just how much the power balance can ultimately be tipped.

Many of my informants said that while they were sceptical about the outcome of my research, it was important for them to have their story told in the outside world. This was especially true of the Makrabari residents, whose story was that of negligence and being made invisible, time and time again. For many of those who were representatives of the administration, the research served as a look into the governance of an area and administrative structure that was not much represented in academia. Whether they will feel the same on reading a synopsis of my thesis is another matter. An early experience in sharing these findings was at a conference of Northeast Indian scholars in Tezpur, Assam in January 2018. My presentation drew from insights in Chapter 7, where I highlighted the growing networks of Hindu nationalism, and their effects on both Bodo and Muslim respondents. The talk generated mixed reactions — while some feedback suggested that studying Hindu nationalists in the Northeast was an important, a Bodo student was upset at my focussing on Muslims, linking it to unchecked migration, which “tribals had accommodated for a long time”. Her feedback did make me more sensitive to how I myself framed the issues in my

⁷ See comments and responses to Nancy Scheper-Hughes, as well as Roy D’Andrade in the same volume against the moral model in anthropology (D’Andrade 1995, Scheper-Hughes 1995).

thesis, and the importance of being mindful of language. Ultimately, I've found it important to highlight that both Bodos and Muslims are communities that have been failed by the Indian state in Bodoland, and picking sides (or appearing to) is counterproductive to this analysis.

I believe my best contribution to the region is to write about it honestly and without the use of the tropes of violence and barbarism that are usually used to define it. In writing about Kokrajhar, and Bodoland, I am interested in the everyday precisely because it illustrates that there is more to it than gun violence, insurgent groups, or "illegal immigrants". Instead, it is a complex, vibrant region where both hardship and opportunity exist, and where people have found ways to resist and co-opt the contradictions of the Indian state, with the means available to them.



4. IMAGINING BODOLAND

CHAPTER 4. IMAGINING BODOLAND: PLACING NORTHEAST INDIA IN CONTEXT

“If you allow them to rule us or run the administration ... it will be something like anarchy.”

- Kuladhar Chaliha, Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949

4.1 Introduction

How does one study Northeast India? More specifically, where do we locate the study of this complex, often under or misrepresented region? How should we locate the understanding of its politics — in which we choose to understand the Northeast either as a place of difference, or as part of a broader Indian/South Asian political development. Scholars studying Northeast India have often (correctly) prefaced their studies with the observation that it has been neglected in academic studies, both within and about India. In the last couple of decades, there has been a slow reversal of this trend, especially with more scholars from the region writing insightful and critical narratives of how to understand the region’s politics, and moving away from a defence and security-driven perspective that has moulded much of Northeast India’s image in popular perception — as a place of violence and volatility. Today, it is routinely characterised as backward, remote, and “cut off”, but as Sanjib Baruah evocatively described in *India Against Itself*, it was, in the colonial period, at the forefront of modernity, a key hub of capitalist extraction in the British Raj (Baruah 1999, pp. xix–xx). A new book on archaeology in Northeast India argues that contrary to its current image as remote and backward, it was not an isolated backwater even in prehistoric times, connected to important trade routes, and an early model of state formation and novel agricultural practices (Hazarika 2017). The growing scholarship around the region, however, has not reversed its sense of otherness in “mainland” India, and raises the question of whether this difference persists in academic studies as well as popular perception. The introduction to a special issue on the Northeast in the journal *South Asia* (the result of the first in a series of international conferences that focussed on Northeast India) makes the point that (as late as 2007) this is still very much the case. The study of the Northeast remains as marginalised from South Asian studies as has the region from mainstream Indian politics and media (De Maaker and Joshi 2007).

For instance, a new addition to Oxford University Press's accessible *A Very Short Introduction* series is an introduction to Modern India (Jeffrey 2017). While such a volume, aiming for brevity and crispness, must necessarily omit some details, it leaves Northeast India out altogether, a puzzling choice for a place that is, as Saikia and Baishya put it in *A Place of Relations*, "the original locus of sovereign power... in the postcolonial Indian context" (Saikia and Baishya 2017a, p. 8). Similarly, while elections are now common practice throughout the region, rarely do they feature in "comparative" studies about Indian electoral studies. Most recently, *Why India Votes*, Mukulika Banerjee's important contribution to understanding meaning-making during elections, cites ethnographic research from nine different states, but none from Northeast India (Banerjee 2014), as also pointed out by others who study the region (Das 2016). While some of this could be attributed to a fundamental difference in meaning, and therefore lack of comparability (as with Nagaland, for instance), Northeastern states have similar electoral practices as elsewhere in India, as Cornelia Guenauer's (2017) study on Meghalaya shows. The point is not, of course, to call for tokenistic representations from the Northeast, but to examine its fundamental, often contradictory place in the construction of Indian nationalism. Even a volume on ethnicity and separatism in India, seemingly concerned with the issues that are most studied about Northeast India, fails to take a single case study from the Northeast as a reference point, a surprising outcome given the region's long history with separatism (Chadda 1997). Hausing also points to the relative absence of the Northeast in the tradition of Indian political science, where inter-state comparative studies have been prominent, but the states in the Northeast have not (Hausing 2015). Equally, no major central universities outside of Northeast India, with two exceptions in Delhi, offer specialised courses on Northeast India (Ibid.)

Much of the scholarly work that is influential about Northeast India, especially from scholars from the region or with long engagements with it, studies the Northeast as a category in itself. This has not only gone a long way in filling an important (though still wide) gap in the dearth of scholarship about Northeast India, but has also enabled a better understanding of what is different about Northeast Indian politics and political history, and why a simple comparative perspective with another Indian state is not necessarily straightforward, or honest analysis. In many ways, the application of the same categories to the Northeast have often resulted in the paternalistic, often security-oriented texts about the region (Bhaumik, 2009; Kotwal, 2000;

Singh, 2008; many Northeast-focussed contributions in defense-oriented journals like *Strategic Analysis*; see also Saikia and Baishya's introduction in *A Place of Relations*, p. 7).⁸

The study of India's Northeast being peripheral within the study of India in some ways reflects the peripheral status of the region itself — both in the spatial imagination (countless references to the “chicken's neck” corridor that connects India's Northeast to the rest of the country in many scholarly, journalistic, and other descriptions reinforce the point), and in the political process (Saikia and Baishya 2017b). The Northeast is seen as a zone of war, conflict, unrest, and in parallel, the mainland Indian tourist's exotic Other. This is at least partly owed to the colonial project of categorisation, fixing people (and ethnicity) to place, and seeing Northeast India's tribes as anthropological specimens. Post-Independence India continued this protectionist/paternalistic framing of the region's inhabitants, viewing with suspicion their challenges to the Indian national formation in the form of many separatist rebellions and movements for autonomy.

I begin this chapter by looking at the historical construction of this region and its inhabitants, particularly colonial administrative categories. The following section looks at the politicisation of some of these categories in the recent past, with special attention to Bodoland. More specifically, it looks at the construction of indigenous or tribal identity (the Bodos), and the figure of the outsider Muslim. Both these categories are important constructs affecting the politics of Bodoland today, and are also the categories through which most of this study's participants negotiate their ideas of belonging in Bodoland. Movements for autonomy have made specific uses of these politicised ethnicities, and equally, posed a challenge to Indian federalism. Finally, the last section of the chapter looks at the possible ways in which the study of the Northeast can be reimagined, and how my own project, and the empirical work that follows this context-setting piece, locates itself within these trends.

4.2 Constructing the region

The region that is Northeast India today comprises eight states — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. Four of these states, i.e., Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, were part of Assam as it stood in 1947 at India's

⁸ *Strategic Analysis*, available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rsan20/current> [Accessed 8 Feb 2019].

independence, but over the 1960s and 1970s, emerged as separate states. Administratively, the Indian government has reinforced the sense of difference of the Northeast from the rest of India by creating special governance and administrative structures specific to the region — the North Eastern Council has existed since 1971 (and also marks the beginning of the administrative usage of the term “Northeast”) (Hausing 2015), and a separate Ministry (Ministry for Development of North East Region) oversees the affairs of its region today. Since India’s “Look East” policy was adopted in the 1990s, and a deeper alliance with Southeast Asia was to be forged, the region has been of even greater geopolitical interest to India (Baruah 2004, Das 2010, Haokip 2015).

In understanding the origins of the region’s politics, it is important to see the links between the present category and its historical origins, particularly colonial ones. Colonial policy was to segregate the “savage” “hill tribes” (such as the Nagas and Mizos) from the “plains” people, through the introduction of the Inner Line System in 1873, which effectively cordoned off and restricted entry into the hill areas that these tribes inhabited. Ostensibly, this was done for the “protection” of the hill tribes, although it replaced a fluid system of exchange and interaction between inhabitants of the plains and the hills with rigid racial and territorial boundaries (Baruah 1999). “Plains tribes” like the Bodos were not seen as needing protection, as they were considered better integrated with plains people since they lived alongside them. With its earliest policies, therefore, the colonial administration emphasised a link between territory and ethnicity. This idea persisted post India’s independence in 1947, and drives much of how protection measures towards tribal groups, which today include the Bodos, are conceptualised. It has also been argued that this legacy of territorialising identities has contributed to the more recent disputes over ethnic homelands, including in the case of the Bodos (Vandekerckhove 2009).

4.2.1 Assam: The frontier and its inhabitants

Assam is characterised by the many diverse ethnic groups that inhabit it. “Ethnic” Assamese Hindus and Muslims, while not considering themselves “indigenous” or “tribal” nonetheless consider themselves Assam’s original inhabitants. Assamese Muslims in particular, are considered ethnically and culturally distinct from the Bengali-speaking “New Assamese” Muslims, and trace their lineage to various Islamic preachers and Persian elite warriors who

travelled in the Ahom kingdom.⁹ Assamese Hindus, meanwhile, trace their lineage to an Indo-Aryan heritage. Both of these claims, it has been argued, were means employed by these groups as a way of trying to distance themselves from autochthones (Sharma 2011). Both Assamese Hindus and Muslims identify themselves as Assamese speakers, while the speakers of other languages such as Bodo, Mising, Karbi, Garo and Rabha are considered “tribal”, and indigenous to the region.

Assam’s ethnic diversity is made up not only by its native groups, but also by the many communities that immigrated to the region at different periods of time, often driven by the colonial state’s need for labour. Baruah argues that the immigration of different communities at various points was driven by the colonial administration’s decision to develop it as a land frontier (Baruah 1999). Reacting sharply to an editorial in the *New Republic* in 1983 that characterised an episode of violence against Muslims in Assam as a result of a failure of modernity, he pointed out that Assam had in fact been “modernised” rather early, through its inclusion systems of global capitalism as it became part of the British Empire (Ibid.). After the Anglo-Burmese war of 1826, Assam, previously the Ahom kingdom,¹⁰ became a part of the British empire. Thus a formerly sparsely populated region became a frontier that was integrated into the colonial economy, and which needed to be populated. British notions about how densely populated the region of Assam should be as a land frontier played an important role in their designating certain areas as “wastelands” which could be leased out for tea plantations, or to peasant settlers (Ibid., p. 47). Tea plantations, in particular, formed a major component of the British doctrine for “agrarian improvement” (Sharma 2011) that encouraged immigration, but so also did the development of coal fields, as well as the felling of forests for timber and the building of roads and railways to transport these materials to the ports, and the “core” regions of the Empire (Baruah 1999).

The first wave of migrants encouraged by the colonial administration were the “coolies” of central India brought to work on tea plantations from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. As various attempts to recruit local peasants into the harsh working conditions of tea plantations failed, it was the dispossessed and displaced tribal peasants from central India who were

⁹ The Ahom Kingdom came into existence in the thirteenth century, and existed until Assam became part of the colonial empire in 1826, after the first Anglo-Burmese war (see Sharma 2011).

¹⁰ Although neither present-day Assam nor the British province of Assam are completely contiguous with the Ahom kingdom, it nonetheless represents what Baruah has called the “cultural heartland of modern Assam” (Baruah 1999).

brought over to Assam as indentured labourers, much as others from the same groups were shipped off to destinations like the Caribbean islands and Fiji (Sharma 2011). Today, the descendants of this group are known as the “tea tribes” or Adivasis, who have assimilated linguistically, but continue to have social, cultural and political groups that organise around this identity. These collective identities are drawn from links to their tribal identities from central India, and in recent times they have also campaigned to have the Scheduled Tribe status accorded to them in Assam.¹¹

Another major group is Bengali Muslim peasants from East Bengal, who began to migrate in the early 20th century after Assam became linked by the railways. Known as Na-Asomiya (New Assamese) or Charua Musalmans, they introduced permanent cultivation in the previously uncultivated riverine *char* areas, which are prone to seasonal flooding, and thus considered uninhabitable. While they played an important role in Assam’s agricultural economy, as they started to move away from the *char* areas in search of better lands, local residents began to resent their presence, a resentment that later went on to become a core issue in future political agitations (Sharma 2011). Also migrating from pre-Independence Bengal were Bengali Hindus, educated Bengalis who moved to Assam largely to work in the colonial administration from the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly as the colonial government doubted the ability of natives from Assam to carry out these roles (Weiner, 1978, 92). Further immigration, of both Bengali Muslims and Hindus, followed after the creation of East Pakistan in 1947, as well as the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Other major groups to migrate include Nepali Gorkha soldiers and cattle graziers, and Marwaris who were traders from Rajasthan that came to control much of the trading of goods and crops in the region, and also played the role of moneylenders. In the context of the BTAD, another important ethnic group is the Koch Rajbongshis, inhabitants of an earlier Koch kingdom, which, prior to Assam’s inclusion in the British Empire, had close ties with the Ahom kingdom, which it bordered (Baruah 1999).¹² While today this group speaks Assamese and largely practices Hinduism, ethnically and politically they identify as distinct

¹¹ As recently as 8 Feb 2019, the All Adivasi Students Association held a rally in Kokrajhar, reiterating this demand (The Sentinel 2019).

¹² In the 16th century the Koch kingdom covered parts of what is today eastern Assam, as well as parts of present-day West Bengal and Bangladesh. Following a split in the kingdom, the western part became a vassal of the Mughal Empire in 1609, followed by the eastern part in 1613, and some of what is the BTAD region today was also included (see Baruah 1999, p. 24).

from Assamese Hindus. They are also among the groups in Assam today campaigning for Scheduled Tribe status, as well as leading their own movement (though with far less clout than the movement for Bodoland) for separate statehood.

4.2.2 Politicising ethnicity

As the theoretical explorations of citizenship in Chapter 2 established, and as the following empirical chapters will go on to show, key to the process of defining citizenship is understanding the terms of inclusion and exclusion, and who is termed an insider, or an outsider. The notion of who “outsiders” were in Assam was fuzzy before the colonial project of categorisation began, deriving more from social practice than ethnicity or place (Sharma 2011). The term “Bangal”, for instance, is a term used to denote outsiders (today mostly in a pejorative sense), but in its pre-colonial usage, as observed by Sharma, it is not a fixed signifier. A person from the Naga hills, for instance, would stop being a “Bangal” once they settled down and became part of life in the plains, this status being conferred not by their fixed ethnicity or origin, but rather by practice (Ibid.). As Jayal (2013) shows, colonial ideas of fixing people to place meant that citizen identities from this period onwards became far more rooted in concepts of ethnicity and territory.

The work of scholars of the region in the early 20th century, such as anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, whose work is as contentious as it is cited, went a long way in establishing the fixed cultural identities we see today. Much as he reinforced cultural stereotypes of barbaric and uncivilised tribes in Northeast India, he also served as one of the earliest chroniclers of the region (Baruah 2017b). For the Bodos, this figure is represented by Sidney Endle, an English reverend who wrote “the Kacharis”, published in 1911, describing the lives and cultural practices of the Bodos in the classical anthropological style of the period — ascribing moral value to lived practices (Endle 1911). Driven largely by evangelist intent, the book is (not unlike Furer-Haimendorf’s work on the Nagas), both an intimate portrait, as well as a troubling read in the 21st century with its often derogatory characterisations and essentialist ideas. Nonetheless, my copy of his book was purchased from a bookstore in Kokrajhar town, in the heart of Bodoland, and is pitched as an important early monograph about the Bodos. From an academic point of view, the book is problematic,

but from the perspective of establishing Bodo identity (among other things, as a means to justify political mobilisation), it is, as the book jacket describes it, “a milestone”.

With the multiple waves of migration in the late 19th and early 20th century, however, ethnicity became a key axis along which political mobilisation occurred in Assam, and the Northeast more widely. In particular, the hostility was against Bengali Hindus and other non-Assamese groups in administrative positions and public employment (often favoured over the Assamese, even after Independence in 1947). Not surprisingly, “non-Assamese quit Assam” campaigns were launched by Assamese youth organisations protesting unemployment (Assam State Archives 1970). The continuing use of Bengali in higher education institutes in parts of Assam led to language riots from 1972 onwards, with the All Assam Students Union (AASU) campaigning for a state-wide recognition of Assamese as the medium of instruction (Weiner 1978, pp. 117–120). The announcement of this policy made many non-Assamese groups, Plains Tribals like the Bodos, for instance, nervous about the “Assamization policy” of the government, leading them to warn that they too, would launch a movement (Ibid., p. 120). Weiner contends that in the two decades following Independence, the increasing assertion of Assamese as the primary language in Assam as it existed in 1947, alienated not just the Bodos, but also other tribal communities like the Nagas, Mizos, Khasis and Garos, who pressed for separate political structures in the form of new states (Ibid., p. 122).

The Assam Movement, as it came to be known, was launched primarily in opposition to the hegemony of Bengali Hindu dominance in educational institutions and jobs, and the relative neglect of Assamese language and culture, and intensified in 1979. While the movement initially targeted the Indian state, it evolved over time to be centred around an “anti-foreigner” agitation, with one of its primary demands being the removal of “illegal immigrants”, particularly those who had arrived after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, which, the movement’s leaders pointed out, represented a burden borne disproportionately by Assam in contrast to the rest of India. Notwithstanding what Weiner wrote in 1978 (shortly before the movement picked up), Bengali Muslims, despite their assimilation and adoption of Assamese language, did not remain unthreatening to the Assamese majority (Ibid., p. 110). Instead, the issue of rising migration from neighbouring Bangladesh altered the dynamics of the Assamese agitation.

The agitation was finally quelled after many years of unrest, marked by the signing of the

Assam Accord in 1985 between the Assam movement's leaders and the Government of India. The main points of the Accord promised to deal with foreigners who had entered Assam in the preceding few decades, deporting those who had entered the country after the cut-off date of March 24, 1971. Important to note here is that the "anti-foreigner" movement in Assam in the 1980s never made a distinction between Hindu and Muslim immigrants from Bangladesh — it was equally opposed to both. If anything, the movement arose in response to the tacit acceptance in India that it was morally bound to accept Hindu refugees as "natural" citizens of India (Chatterji 2012), while placing an unequal burden on Assam to accommodate them (Baruah 1999, pp. 12–16). Cons and Sanyal's (2013) observation about the relevance of borders in South Asia takes on a particularly visceral quality in the Assam Accord — an important clause in the agreement is the creation of a border fence between India and Bangladesh, along with increased border patrolling and security (Government of Assam 2012).

4.2.3 Migrants and Muslims — Othering Assam

Colonial and postcolonial legacies have, over time, served to marginalise and draw boundaries around the Northeast's most vilified inhabitants — its Muslims. Yasmin Saikia (2017) describes Muslim history in Assam rightly as present/absent history. It is virtually obliterated in school textbooks, save for the presence of Muslims either as invaders and producers of violence, or as a humbled, defeated group. In each case, war and violence are sites of the production of this identity, and any other histories of cooperation, friendship, or *xanmiholi* (Saikia describes this as a form of tolerant coexistence) are lost (Ibid.). Their reduction to a political category, and the obliteration of Muslim contribution to Assamese architecture, agricultural practice, warfare or local cultural norms shape their representation in present-day Assam. Assam's subsequent recognition as a Hindu-majority state has also paved the way for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and similar Hindu fundamentalist organisations in gaining influence in the region today. This is emerging as a new dimension of politics in the Northeast, and is now beginning to be studied in its own right (Longkumer 2017). It exposes yet again the contradictory nature of the inclusion of the Northeast in Indian nationalism. On the one hand, the spread of the RSS brings forth a (far more chauvinistic) dimension of "inclusion" in India's politics, through the spread of right-wing Hindu fundamentalism. And yet, as Longkumer's study in Nagaland and empirical evidence from Chapter 7 show, the means of this propaganda is different in Northeastern India.

Muslims in Assam are not, of course, a homogenous category. As seen above, they are primarily divided along lines of language and the time at which they immigrated into Assam (Hussain 1987, Sharma 2011). What separates them as a minority in Assam (in comparison to Muslims in other parts of India), Hussain argues, is that they are better integrated into Assamese society, and do not have the issues of language politics, as with Muslims in North India, for instance (Hussain 1987, p. 400). While classically-oriented anthropological scholarship on kinship, religious practices and folk customs considers the socio-cultural dimensions of their assimilation (Ahmed 2010), their framing in political discourse tends to focus on their status as perpetual migrants.

Muslims have been represented in parliamentary politics in Assam from before Independence, with Muhammad Saadulla, then head of the Muslim League in Assam, even acquiring premiership of Assam between 1937 and 1938 (Kar 1997, p. xii). Other Muslim leaders, such as Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and Abdul Matin Choudhury also commanded much popular support in different parts of Assam (Ibid., p. xi). Where ordinary Muslims appear in the political narrative, they often appear as villains (in the form of “illegal immigrants”) or as victims of violent massacres or ethnic conflict (which are also, ultimately, linked back to being an effect of migration). Their pre- and post-Independence political formations are understood largely from the perspective of their migration and its impact on Assam (Dev and Lahiri 1985), and their growing population as a threat to Assamese politics (Kar 1997). From the Partition of India onwards, anxiety about the influx of refugees was high, particularly Muslim immigrants, whose loyalty was suspect. From the perspective of the Indian state, enumeration was the key variable around which this population was understood and to be dealt with. Complex calculations were done in confidential Home Department files in order to determine the number of illegal Muslim immigrants, and how they could be distinguished from the local population (Assam State Archives 1962).

Around the time that Bangladesh was created, in 1971, this panic was especially heightened in Assam, and in the decade that led up to and during the Assam movement, many editorials were written on the subject in Assamese newspapers. Figures like “15,000 Bangladeshis

settled on the Aie river” did the rounds,¹³ while the government investigated whether new settlers were from across the border or neighbouring districts of Assam. A Superintendent of Police expressed his frustration that the government order of not evicting settlers “encroaching” on government land from before a specific cut-off date made it harder to identify “illegal settlers”, as they blended in with local Muslims (Assam State Archives 1980). The vilification of the “Miyan”, and the crude labelling of Bengali-speaking Muslims as illegal continues, more so with the ascent of the anti-Muslim Bhartiya Janata Party (Hazarika, 2018). The passage of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (discussed in Chapter 2) through the lower house of the Indian parliament in 2019, also serves to reinforce the inherent “outsider” quality of the Muslim citizen, and the “natural” citizenship of Hindus in India (Sharma 2018a).

While discourses from the Assam movement and present-day Hindu nationalism have served to sideline Muslims from politics, in parallel, political and social organisations continue to represent their interests. The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), led by Baddruddin Ajmal, is widely seen as a party responsive to the political aspirations of Muslims in Assam, while student outfits, like the All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU), and in Bodoland, the All BTC Minority Students Union (ABMSU) serve important roles in a region where student outfits (rarely comprised only of students) are crucial to politics.

The more recent process of the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) — a long-standing exercise of identifying and deporting illegal entrants from Bangladesh — is also increasingly enmeshed with a xenophobic rhetoric that threatens to undermine the process entirely. This is the second such exercise to be undertaken in Assam — the first NRC was conducted in 1951. Following the partition of India and Pakistan, the Government of India passed the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act in 1950,¹⁴ in an effort to curb the numbers of refugees and migrants entering from East Pakistan. This was followed up by a census and the creation of a National Register of Citizens in 1951, an effort to document residents of all the villages in Assam (Government of Assam 2012). Subsequently, foreigners’ tribunals were set up in the aftermath of the Assam Accord (what political scientist Sanjib Baruah termed the “Assam exception” to citizenship (Baruah 2009),

¹³ Editorial in the newspaper *Dainik Asom*, 18 July 1980 (Assam State Archives 1980). The Aie river lies in what is today Chirang district in the BTAD.

¹⁴ See Appendix B for the full text of the Act.

producing a class of “Doubtful” or “D” voters (mostly of Bengali Hindu or Bengali Muslim origin) in the electoral rolls, who were forbidden from voting until their citizenship was proved. Such “D” voters continue to be marked out today, with a few, who have the resources, being able to bribe their way out of the limbo (Begum 2011). Finally, the undertaking of a new National Register of Citizens, as promised in the Assam Accord, and monitored by the Supreme Court of India, began in 2015 (The Telegraph 2018a). The “cut-off” date for inclusion in the new NRC is 24 March, 1971 — proving residence in Assam before this date is essential to being included in the document.

The current exercise is enabled by the presence of *Nagarik Seva Kendras* (NSKs or Citizen Service Centres) across Assam — in Kokrajhar alone there are 97 NSKs, collecting and digitising documents.¹⁵ Applicants must first provide identity documents from a list of acceptable documents — evidence of ancestors in the first NRC of 1951, land deeds, certificates from local village headmen or village councils certifying residence or migration to another village, school certificates, voter lists up to the cut-off date, among others. The NRC then verifies these documents as genuine — many poorer residents who don’t have documents have been known to forge them in desperation, and land themselves in jail if caught, as a project officer of the NRC in Kokrajhar told me.¹⁶ After verification, the documents are digitised and digital family trees constructed, which are then counter-checked against family lineages provided in applications, again, to eliminate forgeries. At the NSK that handles paperwork from Uzanpara, one of my field sites, the officer in charge told me that he received many forged certificates from the Uzanpara area, although he is sympathetic to the reasons that people resort to this. He also mentioned the term “shadow villages”, used to refer to hamlets with people who have settled from outside, usually around 30–40 years ago, where finding lineage documents proves the hardest. Many of Uzanpara’s Muslim residents have settled there only within the last 40 years.

At the time that I left Kokrajhar in mid-2017, NRC officers were verifying family trees, and the draft NRC had been delayed for publication multiple times. A court order finally forced the state government to publish a partial draft on 31 December 2017, which caused much controversy as it left out the names of 4 million residents (with 19 million on the list), while a

¹⁵ Interview with the District Project Supervisor of the NRC in Kokrajhar, 19 October 2016.

¹⁶ Interviewed 18 November 2016.

second draft published in July 2018 had more names added to the list (a total of 29 million) although the government insisted this was not a final draft and no action would follow (The Economic Times 2018). One scholar of Assam has called the NRC a “truth machine”, reminiscent of 19th century “handprint” techniques used by the East India Company in colonial Bengal; another form of bordering, on par with the barbed wire fences between India and Bangladesh (Ahmed 2018).

4.3 Uneasy federalism in post-independence India

One seminal text that often frames the study of this region is the aforementioned *India Against Itself*, a landmark book that, while dealing largely with the recent political history of Assam, nonetheless helped illustrate what plagued India’s Northeast (and its scholarly representations, among others), illuminating the link its present status as a “troubled periphery” had to its colonial past (Baruah 1999). The text emphasises the Northeast’s sense of difference about itself, and its ambivalence about being a part of the Indian national formation. Many of the region’s communities rose up in rebellious, separatist agitations, most (though not all) of which have been quelled in the seven decades following India’s independence. Most often, these insurgencies were managed through a style of militarised governance in the region, often with former army Generals at the helm, creating a form of “cosmetic federalism” that undermines the civilian government (Baruah 2005). The link between the state and the present condition of Northeast India is reinforced by the Indian state’s developmentalist approach in the Northeast as a form of conflict resolution (Baruah 2017c). The role of the state is crucial not just in promoting a development agenda, but also in constructing “natural” disasters like the floods that ravage the Brahmaputra valley in Assam each year. State-led projects, like the construction of embankments, and the determination of what goes inside or outside the embankment, alter the conditions of flooding and their effects (Baruah 2017a). In persisting with colonial ideas of boundaries, the postcolonial state arbitrarily creates insiders and outsiders, and new geographies through hydraulic infrastructure.

Fears of secessionist and separatist tendencies in the Northeast post-independence were rampant, and came to guide the way federal agreements were carved out in these areas. During the Constituent Assembly Debates that took place at the time of the drafting of the

Indian Constitution (from 1947–1949), for instance, the provision for autonomy arrangements in this region was framed a means to secure “willing cooperation” where people were “already fully suffused with ideas of isolation and separation” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.32). Colonial era ideas of “primitive” and “savage” tribal groups nevertheless led some members, like Kuladhar Chaliha, to wonder what would happen in these zones of autonomy:

“The Nagas are a very primitive and simple people and they have not forgotten their old ways of doing summary justice when they have a grievance against anyone. If you allow them to rule us or run the administration it will be a negation of justice or administration and it will be something like anarchy.” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.9)

Two decades later, a Member of Parliament from Assam delivered a speech in the Lok Sabha stressing the importance of good centre-state relations in the country, arguing that Assam, “a frontier state”, felt neglected, and needed to be attended to, or matters might escalate (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library 1969a, p. 4). The carving out of new states in India continued even after the major organisation of states along linguistic lines in the 1960s, and the re-drawing of boundaries in Northeast India in the later half of the decade. This was not without its detractors, with a group of tribal Members of Parliament warning that the separation of the hills (largely tribal populations) and plains in Assam would brew and “strengthen anti-national forces” (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library 1967, p. 6).

The 1970s and 1980s saw many crises of federalism across India, and Assam was an important marker of separatist rebellion in this period. Many scholars of the Indian state also see this as correlated with the increasing centralisation of the Indian state in the 1970s and 80s, accompanied by an increasing powerlessness (Brass 1991). As the state became more oppressive, identities that coalesced around religion, caste and region asserted themselves more strongly (Hasan 2000). Karlsson argues that while some scholars saw federal arrangements as a way of successfully processing ethnic demands, more critical voices from the region saw the central government’s strategy of creating new states in response to these demands as instigating yet more insurgency (Karlsson 2001, p. 20). Tillin has argued that India has no genuinely asymmetrical federalism arrangements *except* for tribal communities the Northeast, where group rights have been recognised along ethno-territorial lines, and

statehood has been granted (Tillin, 2007). As Corbridge noted in the case of Jharkhand's tribals, this has often been due to lingering misconceptions about "tribalness", a perception that is often used to advantage by tribal elites (Corbridge 2000).

In this way, asymmetrical federalism became a tool of internal conflict management (Puri 1998). It has been argued that while such asymmetrical arrangements fulfil diversity claims, they fall short on addressing inequality and poverty, as the majority of people in these "mini ethnocracies" do not benefit, while a few tribal elites do (Bhattacharyya 2015, p. 219). Still other scholars of the region, like Sanjib Baruah and Myron Weiner, have argued that the constitutional asymmetry in Assam, for instance, has not gone far enough, and had it been granted more authority, it may have been able to negotiate a subnational identity in less exclusivist ways (paraphrased in Tillin 2007, p. 57). While different states in the Northeast were granted different forms of federalism, Nagaland got by far the most autonomous deal after rejecting the Sixth Schedule, which has been used to devolve autonomy to other tribal groups in the Northeast, as an operating framework. Under Article 371A of the Indian constitution, Nagaland was granted a form of negotiated sovereignty in order to quell an armed secessionist movement, and continues to see itself as separate from the Indian union. Even so, in practice such agreements remain contested, as Nagaland's attempt to take control of its own oil resources in 2010 led to a power struggle with India's central government (Hausing 2014). Even as Nagaland continues to hold a degree of autonomy under constitutional arrangements, the incident showed that the central government could intervene to erode this autonomy, as has also happened in the case of Kashmir (Ibid., p. 106).

Most recently in India, the state of Telengana was created in 2013, after a long agitation, and at least partly in response to electoral pressures. Such developments continue to fuel the movement for separate statehood in places like Bodoland. The leaders of this movement are, however, pragmatic about this solution, recognising that it will only arrive when the electoral math makes sense to one of the two major national parties (both have promised full statehood at different points). The borders of states are more "sticky" in India than they might appear, and new state boundaries, while beginning as challenges to existing power structures, often are finally a result of compromise between the many interest groups that compete for power (Tillin, 2013). In this, Tillin's argument goes, state borders are a form of institution, which shape access to resources and power. In addition, the Indian state has always been less

responsive to statehood demands at the “periphery”, anxious about their separatist intent (Ibid., p. 16).

4.4 Reimagining the Northeast

Among the scholarly responses questioning the construction of the Northeast as a frontier region have been those that attempt to re-imagine its geography. In recent years, a text that has been finding increasing relevance in many Northeast Indian studies is *The Art of Not Being Governed* by James Scott (2009). This anarchist treatise of people in upland Southeast Asia (what Scott calls “Zomia”, which includes large parts of Northeastern India), who seemingly find ways to escape oppressive state control, has at its core a new geographical imaginary (Scott 2009). Many scholars of the Northeast, drawing on this, are questioning the model of studying the Northeast as a frontier of India, as a borderland or periphery of the Indian nation state. Instead, it is suggested, it could be more fruitful to look at the more contiguous histories of these regions and the areas they border in Myanmar and Bangladesh, even as borderland markets and insurgent training camps across borders prove the enduring nature of these cross-border links (van Schendel, 2017). Sanjib Baruah also suggests that the idea that South Asia is a discrete geographical region separate from Southeast Asia is a fiction. Instead, there are multiple historical links between the Northeast and its neighbouring countries towards the east, including a historical connection to the Silk Road, a point conceded even by Indian defence analysts (Baruah 2004). Baruah suggests that India must go beyond its security anxieties to develop deeper connections with Southeast Asia, even suggesting a form of multi-level citizenship for its Northeastern citizens, that would enable them to reclaim their transnational identities (Ibid., p. 18).

Drawing on James Scott’s ideas, Willem van Schendel (2017) has called for a “de-partitioning” of Northeast India studies. As a region, the Northeast did not exist before the end of the British Raj in 1947 — he refers to it as a “freak child of Partition” (Ibid., p. 273). Its existence at one corner of the Indian political formation now renders it territorially and politically isolated, its former connections and networks with neighbouring areas lost to the solidification of international (and sometimes hostile) borders. Not all these spatial imaginations are lost, of course — calls for a greater Nagalim, greater Mizoram and Kamatapur all feature spatial formations that transcend national borders, though as other

authors (like Hazarika 2018) point out, there is ambiguity about whether these political projects can be realised. Nonetheless, they challenge the idea of the Northeast as a fixed space, and it is here that van Schendel underlines the importance of scholars rejecting the idea of the Northeast as a self-enclosed geographical unit, and instead placing greater importance on the connections across borders and between regions. Efforts towards this approach have already been undertaken — for instance, by the Asian Borderlands Research Network, of which many scholars of the Northeast, including van Schendel, are a part. In a somewhat different vein, historian Indrani Chatterjee has also examined a historiography of monastic traditions, in particular, that goes beyond what she sees as the work of both colonial and postcolonial historians and interlocutors in erasing a contiguous history, and instead conforming to the categories we see in the region till date (Chatterjee 2013; Chatterjee 2018). Scott’s approach is not without its critics, however, who argue that his framing of plains/hills reinforces a colonial binary that poses these two as distinct categories, whereas reality is (and has historically been) less fixed (Jilangamba 2015).

Part of the challenge in Northeast studies has been to deconstruct the idea of the Northeast as a single entity in itself. Thus, for instance, inter-state boundaries in the region remind us of the role of lived experiences in constructing boundaries around a place. In a place like the foothills of the Assam-Nagaland border, these interactions remind us that despite the historiography that has constructed it as such, the Northeast is not a monolithic entity (Kikon 2017a, 2017b). Equally, there has also been an emphasis through questioning the category of the Northeast not only in its spatial imagination, but through re-examining how it is studied, and the importance of focussing on Northeast India *because* it remains, in many ways, a periphery, backwater, and frontier (Karlsson 2017a). With ethnicity and territorial nationalism being the main themes around which Northeast India is studied, Karlsson urges a move towards more diverse themes — mobility, class, ambition, aspiration, and themes around nature and environment, to name a few. Some of the work that has emerged about Northeast India, especially in the last decade, already investigates questions of ecology, for instance, on the central role of forest and land regulations in the history of the region (Saikia 2008, 2011), and Karlsson’s own work on environment and politics in Meghalaya (Karlsson, 2011). More and more of the recent work on Northeast India looks to delve deeper into the region’s more “fluid” attachments, moving beyond the received ideas of the region as a frontier, and a zone of difference, instead looking at the way multiple identities are a way of life in the region, and even every village in the region has its own identity (Vandenhelsken

and Karlsson 2016). As Vandenhelsken and Karlsson caution, however, fluidity does not equal a “smooth and seamless movement between different subject positions” (Ibid., p. 332), and having multiple subjectivities can be a fraught, and even violent process.

Many of the more recent contributions in Northeastern research have stepped outside of the traditional study of conflict, militarisation, and ethnicity to study other dynamics that reveal lesser known facets of what makes the Northeast. One important lens has been a scrutiny of the migration of a generation of educated, aspirational young people from Northeast India who are migrating out of the region into different parts of the country, in search of education, jobs, opportunities, and crucially, recognition. Even as an older generation of “rebels” in Northeast India still see themselves as outside of India, their children fight for space as Indians, within the nation state instead (Karlsson 2017b). As the furore around the death of a young man from Arunachal Pradesh, Nido Tania, in Delhi and the ensuing protests made clear, young Northeasterners were not just furious about being treated differently (this has been the fate of the region’s inhabitants this the British Empire). Indeed, it is the *terms* of the protest that mark a new narrative — it is *as Indians* that they claim the right to equal treatment, and freedom from discrimination. Hazarika (2018) terms them the “new Indians”, well versed in the functioning of the law and constitution, and staking a claim from within, rather than outside of that framework. Such journeys complicate the idea of what “the Northeast” really represents, and whether it holds any value to those who are categorised as such.

McDuie-Ra asserts that migration demonstrates the capacity of the “Northeast” category not just to be one of oppression, but also of solidarity (McDuie-Ra 2017). Much as the category is problematic and homogenizing of a diverse set of cultural and social practice, its persistence can be attributed to the lack of alternative categories. In particular, in continuation with his previous detailed ethnography of young Northeastern migrants in Delhi (McDuie-Ra 2012), he notes that experiences of racism especially serve as catalysts in binding together migrants from different regions, even in a “Northeastern” city like Guwahati. In contrast to Hazarika’s optimistic framing of Northeastern migrants as the “new Indians” following Nido Tania’s death, McDuie-Ra notes that the media coverage framed “Indian” and “Northeastern” as oppositional categories. The coverage around the safety of Delhi took precedence, the protests in the Northeast itself went largely ignored, reinforcing an ignorance of the politics of the Northeast.

Another more recent focus has been on a closer examination of gender dynamics in the Northeastern landscape. The gendering of politics in Northeast India has often occurred in paradoxical ways in which women are cast as agents or victims (Bora 2017). For instance, their victimhood, especially with regard to sexual violations, is seen as a proxy for the violation of cultural nationalism. It is on their bodies, through ideas of honour and defilement, that culture is inscribed (Ibid.). While women's groups have been central in resisting militarisation in Northeast India, their symbolic power has often come from being cast as mothers. The legitimacy of rebellion is grounded in the identity of the protestors as mothers, where motherhood marks the safe containment a woman's sexuality — as with the famous nude protest in 2004, following the rape and murder of a young Manipuri woman by the Indian army (Haripriya 2017). When not framed as victims, ideas abound of Northeastern women (especially from tribal communities) as having more equal status, in comparison with the rest of India. Bora notes that for Naga nationalism, in particular, this is a means of distinguishing the Northeast from the rest of India — Naga civilisation emerges as better because of its superior treatment of women (Bora 2017). Yet, as Kikon (2017c) argues, this nationalism remains patriarchal at its core, willing to accept Naga women as administrators, entrepreneurs or doctors, but not as political representatives with decision-making power.

4.5 The Many betrayals of Bodoland: A brief history

Politicised ethnicities have been at the centre of debates about movements for autonomy and ethnic violence in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. Bodo identity, in particular, has been politically mobilised, primarily to demand a separate state of Bodoland, but also to demand, at various stages, greater autonomy from Assam, linguistic rights, rights to control resources, and greater access to development for the Bodos. Most of these these movements have been oriented towards the Indian state, though the nature of the state's response to the conflict has also led to the involvement and politicisation of other ethnicities — Muslims, *Adivasis*, Bengalis and Rajbongshis.

The Bodos are considered part of a wider group of the Bodo-Kachari ethnic groups, who speak Tibeto-Burman languages. In defining the boundaries of their group, to demand an ethnic homeland, the Bodos use 19th century colonial texts that draw definitive inks between

“language families” and race (Baruah 1999, p. 178), while other linguists contend that the relationship between current day Bodos and Bengalis or Assamese is far more fluid (Ibid., p. 179). At the end of the 19th century, Assamese historian Edward Gait noted that Bodos were gradually being assimilated into the Assamese fold, with fewer and fewer Bodo speakers remaining (Ibid., p. 181). This dire prediction of extinction, however, was reversed in post-Independence India, where a renewed push to identify Bodos as distinct from the Assamese led to a revival of the use of the Bodo language, with it now being the official language of the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts, and one of 22 officially recognised languages in India.

Bodos themselves are not a homogenous group, and do not have a common religion, with many having converted to Christianity during the colonial period, some joining the “Brahma” Hindu sect from the early 20th century, and yet others practicing the traditional animist “Bathou” faith, often alongside Hinduism. Despite the potential for cleavages however, politically the group has aligned around a “Bodo” identity, which is not itself without factions that compete to represent the group. Despite language being a key marker (and also how they are officially counted in the Census of India), other colloquial understandings of who is “Bodo” relate to particular forms of dressing (especially for women), certain kinds of food or drink (pork in particular), and seasonal festivals and celebrations which are drawn from Bathou faith, but are celebrated culturally by Hindus, Christians, and those who practice Bathou alike.

Bodo demands for community rights existed as far back as the early 20th century, when these were submitted to the Simon Commission by the All Assam Tribal League in 1933 (Dasgupta 1998, p. 199). The failure of the Commission to take cognisance of these demands for the protection of Bodos is what former Member of Parliament from Kokrajhar S. K. Basumatary terms as the first of several “betrayals” Bodos have suffered at the hands of the Indian state and its actors.¹⁷ The first betrayal was, in his view, Bodos (and Plains Tribals) being left out of the ambit of the Sixth Schedule by Gopinath Bordoloi, the man whose contributions to the Constituent Assembly debates led to the crafting of the Sixth Schedule. As the consequent history would go on to show, Bodo assertion of difference and autonomy from the Assamese would mirror Assamese agitation against Bengali hegemony, centring around issues of language, territory, and resources.

¹⁷ Interviewed at his house on 15 May 2017.

In the period immediately after Indian independence, Bodo demands centred around linguistic recognition, led initially by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS, the Bodo Literary Society), which was formed in 1952. The BSS successfully campaigned for the use of the Bodo language as a medium of instruction in schools first at the primary level, in 1963, and then at the secondary level, in 1968, against the hegemony of Assamese (Choudhury 2007). In the 1970s, the BSS took up the issue of the script in which the Bodo language was to be written. In an effort to separate it from Assamese, the BSS rejected the use of the Assamese script, opting instead for the Roman script (though this was not unanimous or without controversy) (Ibid.). The tussle between Bodo and Assamese groups led to the intervention of the central government, which finally pushed for the adoption of the Devnagari script, which was adopted by the BSS in 1975 (Ibid., p. 132).

In parallel, building on the momentum of the language issue, as well as of land insecurity, Bodo groups joined with other Plains Tribal communities (comprising the tribes of Bodo, Deori, Hejai, Kachari, Lelung, Medh, Miri and Rabha) (Assam State Archives 1952a, p. 6), to form the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) in 1967 (Choudhury 2007, p. 113). The PTCA consolidated its demands towards the autonomous region of Udayachal, a demand that was then updated to separate statehood in 1973 (Ibid., p. 134). In S.K. Basumatary's recollection, a delegation of Bodos submitted a memorandum for autonomy to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi when she visited Shillong (then capital of Assam) in 1967, towards which she expressed some sympathy, but which ultimately did not lead to any concrete action, thus betraying the community yet again. While the PTCA experienced some success in terms of participation and visibility, organising election boycotts (Assam State Archives 1968a, 1968b), *bandhs* and other protests, their decision not to challenge the Indian state directly meant that from 1975–1977, when a state of Emergency was declared throughout India, and all political activity was banned, they too decided to pause their movement (Ibid., p. 135). At the end of 1977, the leaders of the PTCA announced that they were formally withdrawing the demand for Udayachal, sowing the seeds of resentment among Bodos (Ibid., p. 136)

On 14 April 1977, according to Basumatary, the youth wing of the PTCA was dissolved, and over the next few years, resentment began to build among the Bodos in the PTCA, who increasingly saw it as an ineffective organisation to address the demands of Plains Tribals.

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU, which like the PTCA, was also formed in 1967), which had thus far supported the PTCA, decided in its annual conference of 1986 to agitate under its own umbrella, beginning a movement for autonomy for the Bodos in 1987. This coincided with the disaffection of Bodo leadership with its role in the Assam movement, the second major factor to affect a new form of Bodo politics. It has been argued that the movement represented the thwarting of potential plural political identities in the region, as a pan-tribal formation (the PTCA) was replaced with the demand for an ethnic homeland for the Bodos (Barbora 2015), although others have pointed out that the movement for Udayachal, while occasionally incorporating other tribal groups, still did so largely under a Bodo middle-class leadership (Misra 1989).

Though the Assam movement of the 1980s was successful in getting the Indian state's attention, it was not without its internal disputes. While the Assam movement emphasised a distinct Assamese identity, it perhaps failed to take into account the diverse ethnic groups that comprised this composite identity. The perceived dominance of ethnic Assamese Hindu identity became a contributing factor in the rise of the Bodoland movement of the late 1980s, an agitation that mirrored many of the tactics and symbolic gestures of the Assam movement, but sought to assert Bodo identity (Baruah 1999). The indigenous Bodos wanted autonomy from an Assamese Hindu hegemony which they alleged had subsumed tribal identity in the Assam movement, as well as denied them access to resources such as land, educational opportunities and political representation. Led by the All Bodo Students Union, the movement for separate statehood of Bodoland built both on the previous demands for Plains Tribal recognition and autonomy, and a growing distance from the Assam movement. Yet, the presence of other ethnic groups in the Bodoland area, such as Bengali and Assamese Muslims, Adivasis or tea tribes, Koch Rajbongshis, Nepalis and Bengali Hindus, complicates the notion of Bodo identity being defined territorially, through Bodoland.

In 1993, the central government struck an interim agreement with the All Bodo Students Union, and the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was created. The agreement fell through, however, and gave rise, in the 1990s, to insurgent groups like the Bodoland Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF), the Bodoland Army, and later the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), all of which violently campaigned for a separate state, Bodoland (Misra 2012). This led to violence and chaos in the form of bomb blasts, general strikes, extortion, but also civil disobedience from by then more moderate groups like the All Bodo

Students Union. Insurgent outfits also targeted ethnic groups like the Adivasis in 1996, and Bengali Muslims in 1993, 1994, 1998, and 2008, episodes that are remembered by these groups as significant markers in their history in the BTAD (Misra 2012, Goswami 2014).

Finally, in 2003, the central government signed the Bodo Accord with the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT).¹⁸ This led to the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), which does not provide statehood, but a degree of autonomy to the Bodos to govern the BTAD, comprised of the four districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Udalguri and Baksa (the latter three having been newly carved out). The Council consists of 46 seats in total, 40 members of which are elected, and 6 are nominated by the ruling party. Of the 40 elected seats, 30 are reserved for Scheduled Tribes, which in the BTAD effectively means Bodos. The Territorial Council model is not without its critics, who see it as a way for the state to diffuse tribal dissent without granting real autonomy (Barbora 2008, 2015), and for minority groups within these structures to become “entrapped” by its ethno-centric policies (Vandekerckhove and Suykens 2008). Tensions have always existed between Bodos, who constitute only about 30 percent of the population, and other groups like the Muslims (20 percent) and Adivasis (not disaggregated in the Census) (Census of India 2011, Table C-01, Table A-11), who are also present in large numbers. The question of who belongs in the BTAD is persistent, particularly as non-Bodo groups resent the inadequate political representation the BTC provides them, while Bodos continue to feel outnumbered and unable to protect the resources and development opportunities they have struggled for over many decades.

Since the signing of the Accord, the transition has been anything but smooth. The first elections for the Bodoland Territorial Council, held in 2005, were marked by violent clashes, as Bodo political leadership was split between the Bodoland Political Front (BPF, led by ex-militants from the BLT), and the Bodoland Progressive Political Front (BPPF) led by a former student leader (Saikia 2015). As Mainao Basumatary, a former movement leader who now lives locally near Uzanpara says, the split occurred just before the first election, as the BLT leader, Hagrama Mohilary, took the decision fearing the BLT would be sidelined by the more intellectual and established ABSU leaders. Those first elections, he concedes, were held largely at gunpoint, with the BLT using its sizeable leftover ammunition from the movement. So far, each subsequent Council election has returned the BPF to power, though in 2015 this

¹⁸ Full text of the Accord in Appendix A.

was with an extremely narrow majority. Elections, whether at the Council, state or national level, have also proved a source of tension and conflict, as well as represented an arena where inter- and intra-ethnic cleavages were played out.

Despite the creation of the the BTAD, the movement for a separate state of Bodoland continues, still led primarily by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), reflecting the continuing disaffection of many Bodos with the solution. The demand experiences ebbs and flows but remains persistent, with ABSU leadership occasionally meeting with state and central governments on the issue, and organising protests and strikes on a regular basis in the BTAD. The movement adds another layer of uncertainty to BTAD's non-Bodo inhabitants, who question their place and rights they would have in a prospective Bodoland. According to Mainao's account, the agreement signed between the BLT and the central government in 2003 was underwritten by the support of many non-Bodo organisations, all of whom submitted written pledges confirming they had no objection the creation of an autonomous council. As many Muslim respondents in interviews and informal conversations repeated, they too felt betrayed by the BTC solution, which many supported during the Bodoland agitation, although they resent that their support was made invisible by the ethno-political character of the movement. Despite their support to the movement, in which they were assured of their place in a future Bodoland, many feel inadequately represented in the new formation.

Such questions are answered in ambiguous terms by the movement's leadership. For instance, the president of the ABSU, Pramod Boro simply says, "we want them to be part of a future Bodoland, we have reached out to other community leaders", but does not specifically address the concerns.¹⁹ Other, local-level leaders are also savvy about the geopolitical importance of the Northeast, and in one Kokrajhar rally, local leader Hemon threatened a renewal of violent measures, the blowing up of bridges, and occupation of the strip of land that connects the Northeast to the rest of India.²⁰ Instead, he said, the Bodos will support the Chinese (even though he later acknowledged in private that this was more rhetoric than policy).

¹⁹ Interviewed in January 2014, in Chirang district, BTAD.

²⁰ Kokrajhar is geographically located at the most strategic point of this strip, literally forming a "gateway" to the region.

It is important to emphasise the enduring role of the state in shaping ethnic conflict in what is seen as one of the most volatile areas of the region. Administrative practices and laws themselves emerged as tools of conflict management on the part of the state, with poor results (Deka 2017). The Sixth Schedule, in particular, is a problematic framework within which conflicts such as Bodoland have been managed (this is explored further in the next chapter). It has also been argued that while these factors cannot be underplayed, other issues, such as agrarian change, rural impoverishment, and the impact of large-scale engineering projects in flood-prone areas have also contributed, with many of these tensions being factors in ethnic conflict (Barbora 2017).

4.6 Conclusion: Contextualising my approach

These multiple framings of the Northeast in general, and Bodoland in particular, are important in my own contextualising of the PhD project. Like many others studying the region, I also begin with looking at how colonial era administrative categories defined communities, and how these categories have strong links to the politicised ethnicities of today. Much of this is well documented, and I scrutinise the literature most closely connected with the Bodoland area. In this, I look at the inhabitants of the frontier in Assam and the Northeast, and groups that were included and left out of this imagination. Following that, I examine the historical trajectory that brought Bodoland to the point it is at today — the political developments that frame its current context. In doing so, I also explore the more fluid nature of identity, especially in the interactions of local politics.

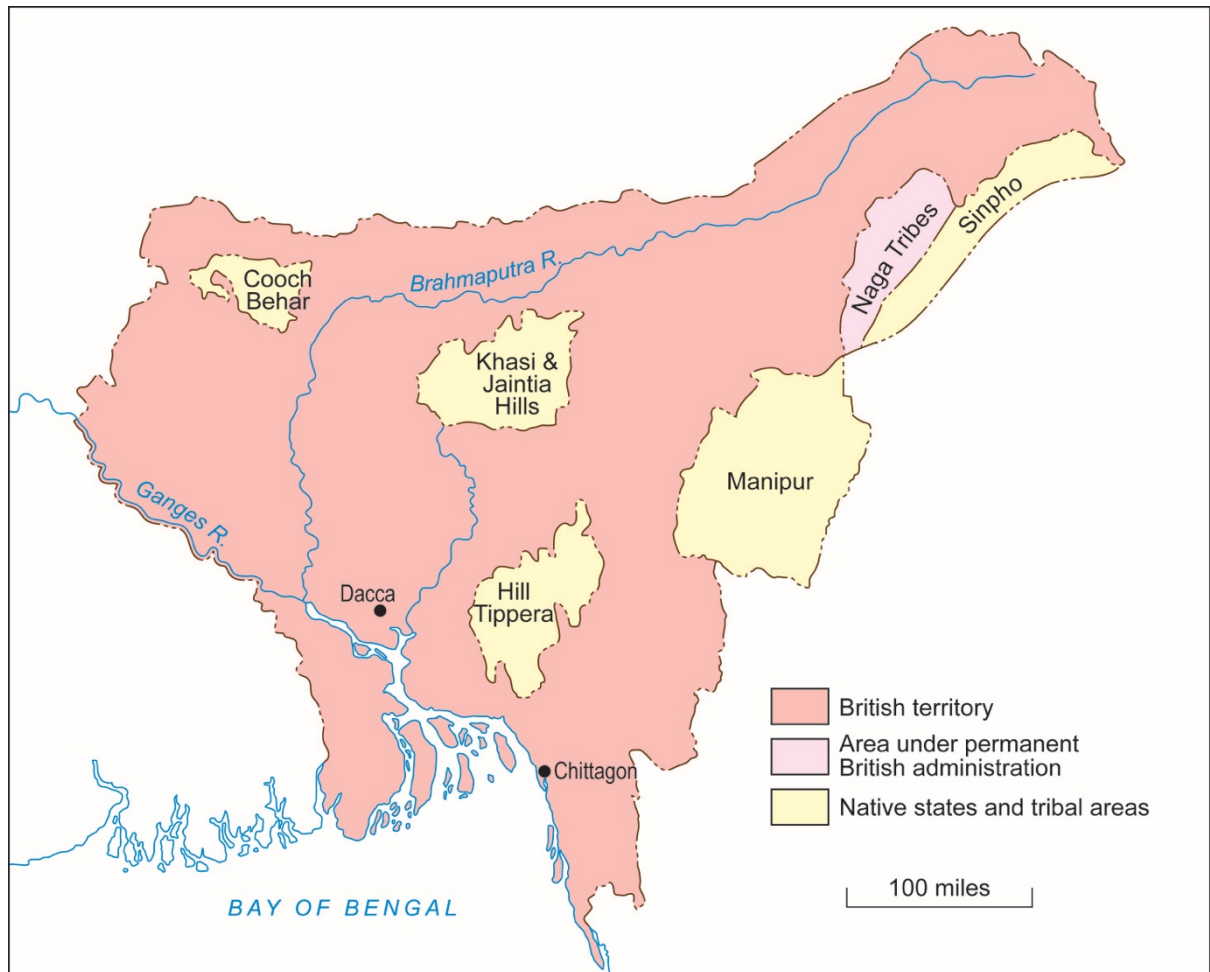
Violence and conflict in Bodoland are well documented and commented upon. Instead, in this thesis, I shift the gaze to everyday politics, and the daily negotiations of political identities, laws and regulations, election campaigns, all of which speak to broader ideas of belonging and citizenship. These draw both from recent feminist and postcolonial turns in political geography, and equally, from new approaches in the study of Northeast India, with closer attention being paid to the minutiae of everyday life. I attempt to step away from the meta-narrative about causes of violence and genesis of conflict (which are important in themselves), instead looking at local politics which are sometimes divorced from these narratives, and sometimes co-opt or are co-opted by them. The themes in Northeast Indian studies explored here engage the nature of Northeast Indian citizenship, and the status of

Northeast Indian Muslims, in particular. I explore some of the newer themes alluded to above; the place of the “Northeastern” subject in the wider field of Indian politics (and how political actors locate themselves in the project of Indian nationalism); the tensions between autonomy and representative politics; the persistent paradoxical position of Muslims in the imaginary of a tribal homeland; and the many contradictions that play out in everyday politics when the political rhetoric is stripped away.

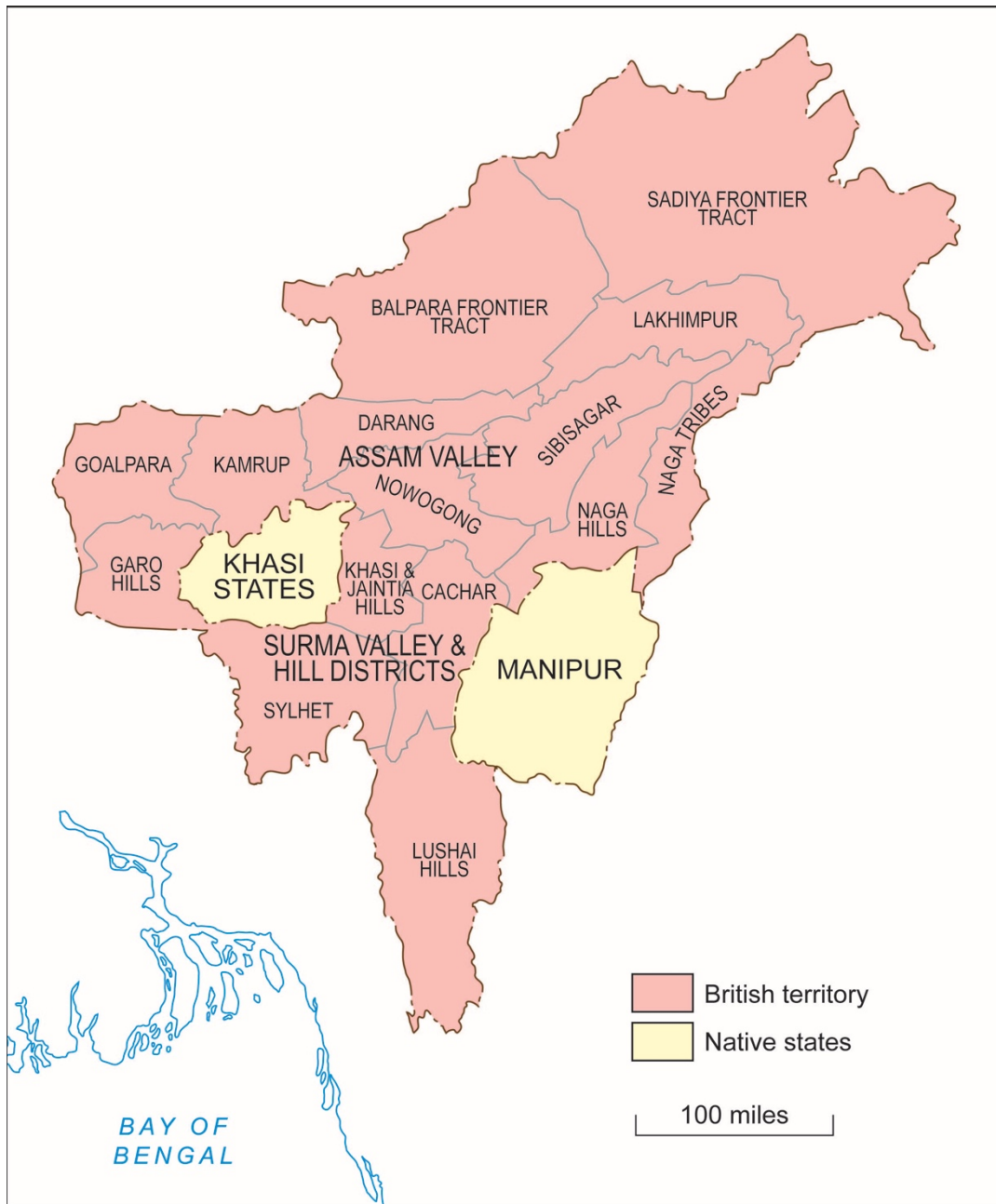


Map 4.1: The Indian Empire, 1892. Assam, Bengal and Manipur are highlighted. Until 1873, Assam was governed under the Bengal Presidency, but became a separate province from 1874–1906.

Courtesy: Philip Stickler, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge.



Map 4.2: Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1908. Between 1906–1912, Assam and Eastern Bengal were administered together as a single province.
 Courtesy: Philip Stickler, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge.



Map 4.3: Assam provinces in 1936. The new administrative unit separated Assam from Bengal, retaining the Bengali-dominated district of Sylhet.
 Courtesy: Philip Stickler, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge.



Map 4.4: Current state boundaries in Northeast India. The state of Assam as in 1947 contained the present states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Courtesy: Philip Stickler, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge.



5. TERRITORIALISED BELONGING

CHAPTER 5. TERRITORIALISED BELONGING: PLACE AND IDENTITY IN BODOLAND

“To say that these tribesmen will be inimical ... if this Sixth Schedule is introduced in these areas is rather surprising.”

- Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy, Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949

5.1 Introduction

Both in the early agitation of the Plains Tribals post India’s independence, and through the Bodoland movement in the 1980s and 1990s, territory has formed the moral and material basis on which autonomy and justice for Bodos has been sought, with land rights emerging as an important variable on which ideas of the movement are articulated. In parallel, land has also been the foremost tool of exclusion — by the state against tribal groups like the Bodos, and by both against non-tribal “outsiders” like Bengali Muslims. Territorial claims have been claims to power, and also rallying cries for more equal access to resources.

Across the world, indigenous claims have been framed and understood through the lens of territorial and place-based claims (Castree 2004, Erazo 2013), often with claims of indigenous sovereignty being in opposition to the sovereignty of the nation state (Rifkin 2009, Mountz 2013), though in other instances, such as Bolivia, becoming synonymous with it (Postero 2007, 2013). Other terms, like autochthonous, have also been used to describe territorialised identities (Geschiere 2011). In recent years, a greater understanding of the term indigeneity as de-linked from historic territories, and dispersed across urban centres and diasporas has also emerged in scholarship (Radcliffe 2017, Harris 2018).

While notions of autochthonous, “born from the soil” identities are traced as far back as to Athens in the 5th century BC, historians have expressed doubts about the static nature of Athenians, arguing that history has always implied movement (Geschiere 2011). Instead, it is likely that the term autochthonous emerged in response to Athens’ success in attracting immigrants in large numbers, and the need for existing Athenians to deny the newcomers citizenship (Ibid., p. 328). Geschiere argues that increasing globalisation has seen renewed claims of autochthony in different parts of the world, although it is important to view this not just as a manipulative political tactic, but also drawing on deep emotional involvement (Ibid.,

p. 335). Later in this chapter, a similar argument by Vandekerckhove (2009) regarding powerfully territorialised identities in Bodoland is examined. The historicity of indigenous tribes is also one of layered tales of migration — many of the so-called “Mongoloid” ancestors of the tribes of Northeast India are said to have migrated anywhere between 1000 BC (making them as “native” as Aryan migrants in the west of the country) and the first century BC (Choudhury 2007, p. 10), to as recently as the 16th century in some parts of the Northeast (Xaxa 1999, p. 3592). Movement and migration have been constants in the history of Northeast India. As historians of the region have documented, over time, and following the colonial encounter in particular, fluidity and exchange gave way to more rigidly territorialised ethnic identities (Baruah 1999, Sharma 2011).

In the following chapter, I look first at the historical trajectory of territoriality as central to the imagination of an ethnic homeland for indigenous Bodos — from its earliest iterations to its present form. This section looks at particular administrative arrangements, like the Sixth Schedule, which fused the idea of territory with justice for ethnic groups, building on older systems of territorial management. I also examine how these ideas are instrumentalised in the case of Bodoland in particular. In the next section, I consider how these ideas are operationalised through land regulations in particular, and how local practices respond to them, creating their own ideas of territory and authority.

5.2 Autonomy, territory and the Indian state

A sense of territory has been integral to Northeast Indian identity — Sanjib Baruah describes it as being primarily “landlocked” (Baruah 2004, p. 4), and being caught in a “territorial trap” because of its status as a border region (Ibid., p. 3). This has been attributed at least partially to territorial strategies of containment and management of its tribal citizens, who form a large section of its inhabitants, and in many areas, are in a majority. The roots of these territorial strategies are in colonial practices of drawing boundaries between previously integrated regions, creating areas of exclusion and inclusion. Regions with large populations, particularly “hill tribes” (present day Nagaland and Mizoram, for instance) were cordoned off, and allowed to govern themselves. Regions in the plains, including the areas inhabited by plains tribes were integrated into the system of colonial governance. Such measures were achieved with the help of multiple regulations designed to carve out territories of inclusion

and exclusion — the Inner Line Regulations of 1873, Backward Tracts Act of 1919, and the Partially Excluded and Excluded Areas Act of 1936 (Hausing 2007, Barbora 2008).

The asymmetrical federalism (Tillin 2007) that characterises autonomy arrangements in Northeast India serves as a tool of internal conflict management, but also serves another important function — as a means of securing territorial integrity (Puri 1998, p. 20).

Territorial management of ethnic claims in the Northeast, and in particular in areas of tribal majority, has served to make territory an important variable of politics in the region. As discussed in Chapter 4, many federal arrangements in this region, particularly the creation of new states in the Northeast in the late 1960s and early 1970s, were part of this strategy of territorial containment. In addition, autonomy arrangements, organised under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, also created a system of granting a degree of autonomy to the dominant tribal group within a specific area.

Such laws and regulations serve to reify the “natural” or “instinctive” nature of territory, which often forms the unwritten basis for many conceptualisations of society and space, as even some scientific disciplines like biology might have us believe (Sack 1986, p. 1).

Territory emerges as a spatial strategy, a way of controlling resources and people, by controlling physical space (Ibid.). Strategies that reinforce ideas of territory include practices like cartography, the enforcement of land rights, and references to cultural and social norms, among others. The most familiar forms of territoriality, according to Sack, are political territory and private ownership of land, both of which I explore in this chapter.

As Paasi (2003a) and others have theorised, territory is a social process rather than a fixed entity, and is actively contested and negotiated. Creating and maintaining territory requires effort, and boundaries or demarcation have emerged as the most effective means of achieving this (Sack 1983). Boundaries allow for control of access — to people, things and resources. Moreover, the communication of these boundaries, that constitute an effective demarcation of territory, involves everyday interactions with actors like politicians, the police, etc., who communicate these boundaries at different spatial scales, as well as through symbols (like flags, or coats of arms), and social practices (Paasi 2003a). Territories may be social constructs but are often conventionally understood as “natural”, and as a result, also evoke emotional responses and a sense of attachment for people. This emotional power is then

reinforced through symbols, but also memories and myths about the territory itself (Penrose 2002).

Complicating the notions of territory and political authority are important in helping us understand how they have formed the basis of Bodoland's ideas of belonging and citizenship. Territorialised notions of identity, and their links to the state's own interpretation of territory, have been at the core of many political developments in the region. Land, as the most affective dimension of this territorial expression of and demand for recognition, has formed the narrative thread across decades of political contest.

5.2.1 Sixth Schedule

Autonomy arrangements in Bodoland are administered under the Sixth Schedule of India's constitution, which applies specifically to autonomous arrangements in India's Northeast and its various indigenous groups.²¹ The genesis of this lies in the Constituent Assembly Debates' "North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee",²² informally known as the "Bordoloi Sub-Committee" after its chairman, Gopinath Bordoloi, then Premier of Assam. The goal of the sub-committee was ostensibly to determine the administration of colonial-era tribal and excluded areas, and reconcile their demands for autonomy with the new Indian union. The report of this sub-committee and the provisions to be enacted under the Sixth Schedule were much debated in the Constituent Assembly, with the dominant perspectives in the debate being development (and whether demands for autonomy could be satisfied by economic development instead) and security (the overarching importance of the impacts of autonomy in "frontier" regions on national security) (Hausing 2007, p. 6).

Vehement opposition to the Sixth Schedule when it was first drafted came from several quarters, including Assam's Kuladhar Chaliha, who opposed the provision as being "been framed from a wrong background, that the Tribes think that we are their enemies. The British gave them this idea" (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949b, 159.22) and further went on to say the Schedule was an "old separatist tendency and you want to keep them away from us. You will thus be creating a Tribalstan just as you have created a Pakistan" (Constituent

²¹ See Appendix C.

²² At the time of these debates, "Assam" included most of the now tribal-majority states of Northeast India.

Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.11). Another member, Rohini Kumar Choudhury, worried that autonomous districts were a way to prevent the assimilation of tribals, and keep them “perpetually away from non-tribals” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.53). Among his worries, however, was the threat that autonomous districts posed to the privileges of non-tribals in Assam

“I living in Shillong cannot purchase property from any Khasi [the tribal group that forms a majority in Shillong] except with the permission of the Chief of the State or with the permission of the Deputy Commissioner. I have no right to purchase any property in the tribal areas. ... If this Constitution is adopted, those disabilities still continue.” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.50)

Others who were sympathetic to tribal communities, like Rev. J. J. M. Nichols-Roy (who also served on the Bordoloi sub-committee) strongly supported the provision, stating it would be “charming if these autonomous districts are nurtured to develop themselves in their own way” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1948, 51.134). He objected that

“To say that these tribesmen will be inimical or they would raid Assam or go over to Tibet if this Sixth Schedule is introduced in these areas is rather surprising. This idea is based on wrong understanding of facts ... the laws and regulations to be made by the District Councils are subject to the control and assent of the Governor of Assam. What is more unifying than that?” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.82)

Similar optimism was expressed by the others like Jaipal Singh, who appealed to other members to be “generous in what they say about the tribal people ... They seem to think that they are going to get out of India and join Burma or join the communists or something like that.” Instead he saw in the Sixth Schedule an opportunity to “unite Assam, which has in the past been kept in water-tight compartments.” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.62)

Some approaches, like Bordoloi’s, were more pragmatic in their reasoning, stressing that during the rule of the British government,

“the then rulers and officers developed in the minds of these tribal people a sense of separation and isolation and gave them assurances that at the end of the war they will

be independent States managing their affairs in their own way. ... You might possibly have read in the papers that plans were hatched in England in which the ex-Governors of Assam evidently took part, to create a sort of a Kingdom over there.” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.31)

Given these circumstances, Bordoloi stressed that ideas of isolation had been long built in to the administration of excluded areas, and so the question was simple:

“... whether for the purpose of integration the methods of force, the methods of the use of the Assam Rifles and the military forces, should be used, or a method should be used in which the willing co-operation of these people could be obtained for the purpose of governing these areas.” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.32)

For Bordoloi, the question of integration became the primary lens from which autonomy (which he saw as already entrenched through colonial systems of territorial management) needed to be approached. He was joined in this view by the Constitution’s chief architect, Dr B. R. Ambedkar, who contrasted the position of tribals in Assam with those in other parts of India, stressing they have “not adopted, mainly or in a large part, either the modes or the manners of the Hindus who surround them” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.105). He compared their situation to those of Native Americans in the USA instead

“the position of the tribals of Assam ... is somewhat analogous to the position of the Red Indians [sic] in the United States as against the white emigrants there. Now, what did the United States do with regard to the Red Indians? So far as I am aware, what they did was to create what are called Reservations of Boundaries within which the Red Indians lived. They are a republic by themselves. No doubt, by the law of the United States they are citizens of the United States. But that is only a nominal allegiance to the Constitution of the United States. Factually they are a separate, independent people.” (Ibid.)

Ambedkar stressed to the more sceptical members of the Constituent Assembly that while the situations were analogous, the solutions proposed in the Indian Constitution were different, retaining overall control of the Indian state

“we have provided that the executive authority of the Government of Assam shall extend not merely to non-tribal areas in Assam but also to the tribal areas, that is to say, the executive authority of the Assam Government will be exercised even in those areas which are covered by the autonomous districts. ... They are not immune from the authority of Parliament in the matter of law-making, nor are they immune ... from the jurisdiction of the High Court or the Supreme Court. This, I submit, is one binding influence.” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.107)

In Ambedkar’s reassurances, as well as Bordoloi’s propositions, the key to the continuing territorial strategies of management in the Sixth Schedule was the territorial *outcome*: the territorial integrity of the Indian union. Chaliha’s panic about Tribalstan betrays a distinctly territorial anxiety, evident in his comparison of the Sixth Schedule to the breaking away of Pakistan, and thus the disintegration of Indian territory at the moment of independence, which also became the moment of the partitioning of territory.

The Sixth Schedule was originally designed to accommodate the autonomy arrangements of hill tribes, meanwhile Plains Tribes like the Bodos were considered, in the words of the committee’s chairman, to have been “gradually absorbed into the folds and the culture of other plains people, to put more appropriately the Aryan culture” (Constituent Assembly Debates 1949a, 133.28). Nonetheless, Bodo demands for autonomy were accommodated under the same constitutional provision that had once deemed them too assimilated to need further protection. The Sixth Schedule was amended in 2003 to include the Bodoland Territorial Council as the newest autonomous arrangement to be regulated by the provision, complete with a total of 39 subject areas in which the Council would have the power to make laws, including land.

In the decades since the Sixth Schedule was officially made part of the Constitution, and various tribal areas were brought under its remit, several flaws of its design and implementation have been pointed out. It is seen as perpetuating an “entrenched tradition of isolation”, as well as privileging paternalistic solutions where tribals emerge as Others who must be governed in a hierarchical manner by the state (Hausing 2007). The degrees of autonomy under the Sixth Schedule have also often been critiqued — many see these arrangements as lacking teeth and failing to provide genuine autonomy (Barbora 2008), especially as the passage of laws at the autonomous council level still requires the approval of

Governor of the state, or the state government, to be implemented. The many bills in the Bodoland Council Assembly that have yet to be approved by the Governor, and therefore yet to take effect, are a testament to this point. It has also been argued that such arrangements eventually lead to the “entrapment” of the non-indigenous groups that inhabit these areas (Vandekerckhove and Suykens 2008). In the case of Bodoland, a group that is demographically in a minority was empowered, creating tensions with other, non-tribal groups, with territorial solutions exacerbating ethnic tensions instead of containing them (Bhattacharyya *et al.* 2017).

Citing Bodoland specifically, Deka (2017) sees the autonomous council as a means of “political management”, suppressing dissent through distributing power and financial resources to some political leaders, and minimising the threat to the nation state (p. 186). Financial management in Autonomous District Councils remains “opaque”, with no clear system of fund distribution from the system, little external scrutiny, as well as the presence of state governments as an intermediary, which often disrupts the flow of money (Hausing, 2007). While autonomous bodies are empowered to generate their own resources under the Sixth Schedule, they have largely failed to do so (Ibid.)

5.3 Territorial claims in Bodoland

In a vein similar to geographers writing about the discipline, Benbabaali (2018) contends that territoriality is under-theorised in studies about South Asian power (in her case, with reference to caste), where it is referred to in simplistic terms to contextualise a study, but not an analytical concept. The conceptual link between territory and India’s tribal communities, however, has been made far more explicit in government language. Keeping “primitives” bound to their “botanical space” and separating the “ungovernable” (tribal) hills separate from the plains was colonial state policy since the British began administering Assam in the 1870s (Vandekerckhove 2009). This practice was carried over into post-independence India, where the creation of Scheduled Areas, and the policy of protectionism towards tribal groups continued to be understood along place-based lines. In 1952, a report written by an Assam Civil Services Officer from the North Cachar Hills places “geographical position” as the first “cause of backwardness” for tribal communities in Northeast India (Assam State Archives 1952b). That they lived in “high hills amidst dark forests” prevented them from having

contact with “the more advanced people of the plains”. Even though the document cites the British policy of segregation between hills and plains as the cause of this backwardness, it nonetheless reinforces this causal link between geography and progress.

A strand of literature about the “deterritorialisation” of the world suggests that the acceleration of global flows towards the end of the 20th century has meant that identity is increasingly less linked to territory in the era of globalisation. Appadurai cites the increasing influence of imagination, and decreasing relevance of territory in the formation of social and cultural identities, such as those of the diaspora (Appadurai 1990, 1996). These lead to new forms of fundamentalism, with identities becoming reified along dimensions like religion and ethnicity. Elden (2005) suggests that this falsely underplays the importance of territory in the contemporary world. Instead, it is important to think anew about what territory means as it is reshaped by globalisation, instead of taking it as a given. Vandekerckhove (2009) has specifically questioned the relevance of this approach in understanding the emergence and persistence of Bodo identity, arguing that it arises not from deterritorialisation, but from “too powerfully territorialised (ethnic) identities.” These identities coalesce around affirmation of “natural, geo-cultural links” (Ibid.) between ethnic groups (like the Bodos) and territory, drawing from aforementioned colonial notions of tying ethnicity to place.

5.3.1 Territorial anxieties

If identities are symbolically representative of territories, as Vandekerckhove asserts in Bodoland’s case, then land is the material element that furthers the social construct of territory (Paasi 2003). Soon after Indian independence in 1947, Plains Tribal groups (with Bodos being the largest group comprising this coalition) began to express worry, in both official correspondences, as well as through protest moves such as election boycotts (see Chapter 4), about their control over their own lands and resources. This was at least partially motivated by being left out of the remit of the Sixth Schedule, what former MP S.K. Basumatary terms “the first betrayal”. These protests were geared towards the ultimate goal of an ethnic homeland — first in the form of Udayachal, a separate territory for Plains Tribal groups, and after a political split in the 1980s, in the form of the demand for Bodoland.

From as early as 1952, even before they had coalesced into any formal organisations, Plains Tribal groups were writing memorandums to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru about giving first preference to Scheduled Tribes for land settlement, particularly given “the influx of refugees in our state” (Assam State Archives 1952c, p. 2). The Tribal Sangha, a pan-tribal organisation in Assam wrote to the Chief Minister of Assam in 1957 to “protect the tribal peoples of plains Assam” (Assam State Archives 1958, p. 1). The creation of Tribal Belts and Blocks, said the letter, contained many loopholes, allowing non-tribals to obtain land settlements in these areas, while “land hungry people coming from outside the state” were buying up land before the “ignorant tribal people could learn” (Ibid., p. 3). In 1965, the Tribal Sangha’s district unit in Kokrajhar expressed alarm at the government’s decision to “alienate” 4,037 bighas²³ of cultivable land from a Tribal Block, and use it to accommodate refugees from East Pakistan (Choudhury 2007, p. 106).

Alarm over incoming refugees was stated in no uncertain terms — a response to a question in the Lok Sabha²⁴ in 1961 on conducting a census of Muslim immigrants in Assam states

“The Bengali immigrants censused [sic] for the first time on the *char* lands of Goalpara in 1911 were merely the advance guard — or rather the scouts — of a huge army following closely at their heels.” (Assam State Archives 1962, p. 13)

The same document goes on to make clear that land encroachment was the primary threat posed by the immigrants

“While the annual *patta* [title] lands in Assam are non-transferable... the Muslim immigrants used to buy such lands irrespective of the fact whether the title is valid or not. But once they are in possession, I have never seen them being dispossessed of what they have and hold. ... even the lands of the indigenous people are slowly passing into their hands.” (Ibid., pp. 14–15)

A little over a decade later, the Plains Tribal Council of Assam wrote to the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee consolidating these grievances into a demand for a “fully autonomous

²³ In Assam, 1 bigha = 1,340 square metres.

²⁴ Lower house of the Indian parliament.

plains tribal region” under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library 1969b, p. 17). This territorial framing of a resolution for Plains Tribal issues, in the form of a demand for an autonomous region of Udayachal, drew from the region’s ethno-territorial colonial legacy, and formed a pre-cursor to the Bodoland movement, which would go on to do the same. Opposition to the idea from non-tribal groups also originated in the same period,²⁵ and continues until today.

For the Plains Tribal groups and subsequent Bodoland movement, the injustice was not the existence of the Sixth Schedule and the rigid connections of protectionism and place — it was that the plains tribals and Bodos were not included under its remit. S.K. Basumatary lists this as another “betrayal” suffered by the Bodos. The most unjust move, according to him, was the failure of the Simon Commission in 1930 when it came to Assam. The Plains Tribals, led by Kalicharan Brahma, submitted a memorandum requesting a separate administrative unit outside Assam for the administration of Plains Tribals, but this was not to be. The next betrayal, says Basumatary, was at the Constituent Assembly Debates, when the Sixth Schedule was being framed, and Assamese leader Gopinath Bordoloi left the Bodos outside of its jurisdiction. He does not mince words in describing this,

“With a single sentence, Plains Tribals were merged with Assamese society, and told there was no need for a special status. It was diabolical, brutal and deadly. Just because some tribals, maybe Bodos in Upper Assam, had given up Bodo language and dress because they were in a minority.”

In choosing to recognise some groups as connected to place, the British administration chose to de-root, or de-legitimise the presence of others (Vandekerckhove 2009). Much of how the Bodoland movement expressed Bodo identity drew from these territorial ideas about identity. “Divide Assam 50-50” is among the most popular slogans employed by the statehood movement until today, graffitied across public walls across the region, accompanied with an imagined territory represented through a proposed map of Bodoland state. Lund (2006) sees graffiti itself as a territorial marker of identity, while scholars of territoriality cite cartography as one of the earliest and most effective practices in delimiting territories.

²⁵ A letter written by a Koch Rajbongshi organisation in 1968 opposed the idea of an autonomous Plains Tribal area, and instead suggested abolishing all protections for plains tribals, claiming they were “no longer backward and capable of taking care of themselves” (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library 1969b, p. 13).

Territorialised expressions of identity among Bodos (also reflected in many narratives of tribal identities across India), and the emphasis on ethno-botanical links create ideas of belonging that also create simultaneous categories of exclusion. As Bodos become “natural” inhabitants of the land, non-tribals — and among them especially Muslims — are excluded from this imagination. For many Bodo representatives, like politicians and leaders of the continuing movement for statehood, the historical injustice done to the Bodos continues to be expressed in territorial terms, and importantly, in terms of being separated from land as a resource and as a tether of identity. While the movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s conceptualised this as agitation against Assamese domination, it has increasingly also joined chorus with Assam’s wider “anti-foreigner” agitation.

The final resolution to the “Bodo problem” came with the creation of the curiously (and uniquely) named Bodoland Territorial Council. It is unclear why the term “territorial” council was chosen over autonomous council. This could either have been to separate it from its failed 1993 counterpart, or in fact to signal its uniqueness within the Sixth Schedule and set it apart from other autonomy arrangements. The resolution in 2003 did contain the insurgency to a great extent, but questions lingered about the impact of migration on land alienation among the Bodos.

A top leader of the Bodoland Liberation Tigers, and now Deputy Chief of the Bodoland Council, Kampa Borgoyary, claims Bangladeshis were

“imported” to the region in 1950 and 1971 [when Bangladesh was created], and our people were driven off the land. In fact, as far back as 1905, when Bengal was partitioned, the British wanted to make Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon [neighbouring district] all part of East Bengal, but because of Bodo leaders who fought back, it remained part of India. But to weaken us, we were divided and our land given to Bengal”.

This process continues in what he sees as a constant flow of migrants from Bangladesh, who take shelter in Bodo villages. Shivram, who heads the local BJP unit in Kokrajhar, also echoes this sentiment, and gives it a further, divisive twist

“The Uzanpara area is beautiful, but there are too many Muslim migrants. Only 10 or 12 of them have *pattas* [titles]. Environment NGOs should look at this, they are destroying forests. They are all on *khas*²⁶ land there — maybe a few Bodos are encroachers as well, but it’s mainly the Muslims. They all have land in the *char* areas, why don’t they go back there?”

The history of Muslim migration into Uzanpara is thus intimately tied up with questions of land and territory. Noorul, an elderly resident in Uzanpara, arrived with his family in 1979, and remembers only 5 or 6 Muslim houses in Uzanpara at the time. Like many others in the village, he migrated from the *char* areas adjoining the Brahmaputra river, which frequently get flooded in the monsoon as the river swells. He is descended from the early *Charua Musalmans*, Muslims from East Bengal who were settled in the low-lying *char* areas by the British administration in the early 1900s, to cultivate lands that local populations were reluctant to settle on. These settlers provided a source of cheap labour, engaging primarily in jute cultivation. They did not come into conflict with other Assamese groups until they started to move away from *char* areas in search of better lands, from the 1920s onwards (Sharma 2011, pp. 99–104).

Many of these settlers from the Brahmaputra valley, like Noorul, travelled towards the forested areas of Uzanpara in the 1970s and 1980s, where they began to settle down and practice agriculture. This movement preceded the Bodoland agitation and creation of the BTC, and stories abound in the villages of district officials helping to find plots of land for the families, and clearing forested area to accommodate them. Before 1985, according to Noorul, you could buy land from local Bodos and register it and possess a land title, but after that date (likely coinciding with the creation of the tribal block in this area), this was no longer possible.

Following the Assam movement and the Bodoland agitation, official hostility towards Muslims (especially Bengali-speaking ones) particularly expressed itself in terms of appropriation of territorial resources — such as land and forests. Milan Boro, a senior forest official in Kokrajhar district, while admiring Bengali Muslim cultivation skills (“they are very good agriculturalists”), nonetheless points to their immigration (although he specifies

²⁶ Government-owned public land.

this means from the *char* areas, not Bangladesh) and subsequent encroaching of forest land for paddy as being responsible for the destruction of the forest and surrounding water bodies in Uzanpara. During assembly hearings in the Bodoland Council, he admits that when the department is questioned about its annual survey detailing how much forest land has been encroached, they are also asked what language the encroachers speak, and what religion they belong to.

This mistrust of Muslims also percolates into everyday relationships between Bodos and Muslims in Uzanpara, although they are more complex and cannot be categorised as simple reproductions of the official narrative (as the next two chapters will go on to show in more depth). During a government drive to appoint new *gaon boora* (headman) in the BTAD, Nerswn, an existing *gaon boora* in a hamlet of Uzanpara claimed that in a mixed village of Bodos and Muslims, the government would never nominate a Muslim *gaon boora*, “because part of the *gaon boora*’s responsibility is to assist the Circle Officer and *mandal* with issues of land settlements, I don’t think they would trust a Muslim with handling land *pattas*”.

For postcolonial societies in particular, land rights and citizenship are connected. Belonging is defined through social identity, which is partly determined by land rights, and in turn, claims to land are also dependent on social identity (Lund 2011). Rules about land ownership, which are elaborated in the following section, also go a long way in firming up the link between these categories, emphasising Vandekerckhove’s “ethno-botanical” link. While the original set of land regulations in Assam were meant to further commercial interests in tea estates and extraction of forest resources by the colonial administration, leading to an “entrapment” of the tribal communities that relied on the land, the current set of regulations in the Bodoland Territorial Council has an “entrapment” effect on the non-tribal communities living there (Vandekerckhove and Suykens 2008).

5.4 Land as a marker of identity

In 1953, writing about the difficulties of Assamese Muslims in securing Indo-Pakistan passports²⁷ to facilitate visits across the border to East Pakistan, Assam Pradesh Congress

²⁷ These passports, issued for a brief period after the partition of India and Pakistan, were meant to facilitate travel for residents who lived in borderlands, and had family and/or property claims on the other side of the border (Ministry of External Affairs 2019).

Committee Member Alaur Rahman wrote to the organisation's president, complaining about too much insistence being placed on ownership of landed property, which should not form the basis of citizenship (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library 1955, p. 83). Nonetheless, land has emerged as a crucial determinant of belonging, as well as the sometimes violent conflicts that have occurred between different ethnic groups in the region (Vandekerckhove 2010). In this process, tensions exist between a complex network of laws that seek to regulate land ownership and transfer, and the everyday practices that interpret these regulations in accordance with local realities, and subtler power dynamics not captured in the law.

5.4.1 Laws to govern land

As Vandenhelsken and Karlsson (2016, p. 332) observe, in Northeast India the key resource struggle relates to land, and ethnic membership determines whether a person is eligible to own it. The overarching law that governs land transfers in Assam is the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act (ALRR) of 1886. Like many other laws, post-independence India chose to retain the pre-independence acts in name and principle, adding amendments along the way to accommodate different interests. The amendment most relevant to the regulation of tribal land came in 1947, with the addition of Chapter X, concerning the protection of Backward Classes, such as the Scheduled Tribes. This notified the creation of tribal belts and blocks, to facilitate settlement of land in favour of Scheduled Tribes. The notification of various areas as falling within a tribal belt or block continued, with many being notified in 1948, but some being notified later on, in the 1980s, for instance. An amendment to the act in 1981 forbade anyone not a Scheduled Tribe from purchasing land in tribal belts and blocks (except with the permission of the Deputy Commissioner), unless they could prove (by means of a land title), that they were permanent residents of the block before its creation. In more recent times, the discretionary powers of the Deputy Commissioner have also been withdrawn, making this ban absolute.

The creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council in 2003 introduced further restrictions on these principles. Although it is not explicitly specified in the Memorandum of Settlement how these are to be achieved, "preservation of land rights" is mentioned in the Memorandum of 2003. The amendment in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution that facilitated the creation of the Council gives power to the Bodoland Territorial Council to frame laws around land

settlement, and the eligibility criteria for these. For the BTC, the restriction has been further applied, in Chapter X, that no persons living outside the Bodoland Territorial Council are eligible to purchase land there. For non-tribals, land sale and purchase is limited to non-tribal areas (i.e., outside of tribal belts and blocks) within the BTC, but this too can only be achieved by proving residency in the BTC area prior to 2003. It is difficult to find a written copy of these laws and principles, although officials in charge of dealing with them are aware of them. Nonetheless, different officials also apply different interpretations of the laws and principles in everyday settings, leading to a complex web of regulations.

The implementation of these laws on the ground depends on the multiple interpretations made by officials. For instance, Schedule X of the Indian constitution, prioritises many categories of protected classes, like Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, and so on, regarding settlement of land. A further rule, explained by a Circle Officer (in charge of dealing with matters of land) in Kokrajhar district, prioritises vulnerable groups, who may be deemed more in need of land than others. One such category is of displaced persons — whether from man-made or natural disasters, such as floods, or riots. For the Circle Officer of the revenue circle²⁸ that comprises Uzanpara, Rajeshwar Islary, however, this excludes Muslims displaced during the 2012 riots, because they are all “strictly treated as encroachers” and are “all migrants living on *khas* [government] land”. He refuses to comment on where they might be migrants from, but the subtext alludes to their suspected illegality as Bangladeshi Muslims. Indeed, land settlement policies in *practice* favoured Scheduled Tribe inhabitants, because they were, as Rajeshwar put it, “sons of the soil and masters of the land”. In theory, the residency principle applied to Scheduled Tribes within BTC too, but in practice, Bodos from outside of the Council area are not prevented from buying land in the BTAD.

Being able to show titles of land ownership was crucial for Bengali Muslims such as those from Makrabari, to obtain compensation for destroyed homes post the 2012 riots. For many, who lived on *khas* land, this proved impossible. In October 2013, a controversial circular from the Deputy Commissioner’s office proposed that all families (even on *khas* land), would be eligible to 50,000 rupees in compensation, but could not afterwards return to the same *khas* land. This led to much panic in Makrabari (and other villages with displaced Muslim

²⁸ Typically, a district (like Kokrajhar) will have four or five revenue circles who deal with matters of land ownership, records, mapping for villages in their jurisdiction.

families), who refused to take the compensation for fear that it was a way to drive them out from the BTC. The circular was later withdrawn, after much protest from Muslim student groups like the AAMSU and ABMSU, and the compensation provided unconditionally. Even though the circular did not mention any religious or ethnic group by name, being Muslim “encroachers” proved a far greater challenge to basic rights like post-conflict compensation.

Rwmwi Brahma is a *mandal* for Makrabari residents’ former revenue circle (from when they were in Dewalgaon). A *mandal* is an official lower down the hierarchy from a Circle Officer, but has more day-to-day contact with the field, and is in charge of measuring and recording land settlements and titles, how much government land is occupied by people, and making up-to-date maps that reflect these holdings. It is a job that requires much of the *mandal*’s time to be spent in the field, and Rwmwi is full of complaints about being overworked and grossly underpaid (he earns 5,200 rupees per month). He is aware of former Dewalgaon residents now in Makrabari, and says that since they are a “non-protected” class in a tribal belt or block, they cannot stay on *khas* land. This makes them, “non-eligible people” as far as their return is concerned. Contrary to what Makrabari residents say (that they have been present in Dewalgaon since 1931), Rwmwi believes that they were not present in 1947, when Tribal Belts and Blocks were notified (although the block under which Dewalgaon falls was only notified as a tribal block in 1983), and thus do not have the right to stay there. This again, sits alongside the BTC regulation that residents from before the creation of BTAD have the legitimate right to stay there. If occupying *khas* land is what bars them, it would be a rule evenly applied across villages and communities. Instead, it is almost only ever used in instances like with Makrabari residents, which prevents their return. Unsurprisingly, many Makrabari residents, like Jamal, believe that the 2012 riots were primarily intended to drive them out of their lands, particularly in Bodo-majority areas like Dewalgaon. “Why else” asks Jamal, “would there be so much destruction of property and displacement, and comparatively little loss of life?”

For Makrabari residents who owned some land in Dewalgaon, retaining possession of these parcels proved a critical element in engaging with the bureaucracy of the National Register of Citizens. As Bengali-speaking Muslims, they were already vulnerable in the scrutiny of citizenship, but being displaced from a village they had inhabited since the 1930s made their position ever more precarious in proving their legitimacy. Buying land in Makrabari, or elsewhere in the BTAD (in the pockets where non-Bodos are eligible) might arouse suspicion

of their identities, even if the sale were legal. Instead, just as they continued to stay on the electoral rolls of Dewalgaon to be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the state (see Chapter 6), the connection to land ownership also helped establish their credentials in the eyes of the state. Other such practices of dual membership existed as well, for instance in a community policing initiative in the state of Assam, which requires representatives to report to their local police station once a month at a meeting, and update the police on disputes and issues in their village. Makrabari's representative often went to both meetings — both as a member in Dewalgaon for official representation, as well as to the one from Makrabari to provide actual reports of what went on in the makeshift village. These strategic moves around bureaucratic practices of registration, enumeration, and paperwork were tools of absolute survival against a state that at best systematically ignored or in the worst case actively encouraged their disenfranchisement.²⁹

5.4.2 Laws of the land

As the network of laws and regulations make clear, selling land belonging to members of Scheduled Tribes in Tribal Belts and Blocks is illegal, except to other Scheduled Tribes. Additionally, in the BTAD, the law dictates that such land sales cannot be to persons living outside the BTAD. But formal land laws are only one framework that apply to land transfers, and as Vandekerckhove (2010, p. 8) has pointed out in the case of the BTAD, social practices are also important, whether the actors involved fall in the right administrative categories or not. Some of these practices channelise the agency of the rural powerless, who can subvert this powerlessness not just through overt rebellion, but also subtle “off-stage” and “on-stage” acts (Ibid., 14–15).

Munthu (who is Bodo), is a former resident of Uzanpara, who has since moved away following the 2012 riots. While he now lives in a village further away, his two younger brothers and mother still live in Uzanpara. He still owns a total of 15 bigha of land, and sold 3 bigha to his neighbour in Uzanpara, Shamshul (a Muslim) in July 2016. He acknowledges that this is against the rules, but he needed the money after his older brother died. He was acquainted with Shamshul, who needed the land, and could find no Bodos to sell the land to.

²⁹ Post-fieldwork enquiries I made revealed the residents of Makrabari did make it on to the first draft of the National Register of Citizens published in July 2018.

This was also what he told local representatives of the All Bodo Students Union, who are often alert to such sales, and try and discourage sellers from giving away Bodo land. While he and his mother faced some harassment at the hands of the ABSU, eventually Munthu persuaded them that he had no choice. Gwjwn, president of the local ABSU unit admitted that the organisation tries to discourage Bodos from selling their land to non-tribals, especially Muslims, and encourages them to look for tribal buyers, “if not Bodos, then Garos and Rabhas”. But he also admits that this can be a pointless endeavour from the point of view of practicality. “In a place like Uzanpara, and areas around it, where Bodos are not in a majority, what can we say to people? Sometimes the only buyers available are non-tribal, and people are in need of money”.

Shamshul, on the other hand, did not face similar harassment from ABSU, although he remembers Munthu’s arguments with them. He revealed that Munthu borrowed 80,000 rupees from him when his father was sick, and, unable to pay it back, sold Shamshul the land instead. Both Munthu and Shamshul admit that many such transactions have taken place between Bodos and Muslims, and none have ever been caught by officials yet. Others in the village are divided in their opinion of whether state officials are aware of these sales at all. While Munthu and Shamshul are convinced that the authorities do not know, Abbas, another resident of the village whose father bought land from a Bodo family, is convinced that the *mandal*, in particular, must know about these transactions, since the revenue or annual tax on the land is paid by the buyer, not the person whose name is on the original title. And yet, he claims, they have never had trouble from the Circle Officer about such transactions.

While both are aware that the transaction is illegal, both seem relatively assured by the validity of the sale. This is largely due to the deed that was drawn up in the village, that legitimises the sale, and gives both parties a sense of security. While the land transfer is not formally registered in the Circle Office, as a “legal” one might be, it is conferred legitimacy by being written on 50-rupee non-judicial stamp paper (often used to endorse the authenticity of agreements). It details which plot of land is being sold (the direction and placement of the plot), for how much, and crucially, is witnessed by two Bodo and two Muslim (male) members of the village, symbolising the agreement of both communities in recognising the validity of the sale. In this case, it was dated and signed by the school teacher who drew it up. The sale is technically illegal, but both Munthu and Shamshul believe that if there is dispute

about the land, they can use this piece of paper in a court of law to resolve it. This is a belief held by others in the village who have participated in such transactions.

Local conceptions of public authority that channel the “idea of the state” can be as effective (often more) as state institutions themselves. Vandekerckhove (2013) refers to continuing practices of “tax collection” by militant groups in the BTC as forms of “twilight institutions”, Christian Lund’s (2006) concept of institutions that are neither clearly formal or informal. Part of what gives these forms of authority legitimacy is the appropriation of “symbolic languages of governance” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001b, p. 8), where practical elements of governance like contracts, deeds and attestations are incorporated into non-state manifestations of public authority (Lund 2006, p. 690).

In Fiona McConnell’s study of the Tibetan Government in Exile, the “mimicry” of state practices is employed by an entity that is essentially a non-state actor, which nonetheless performs “state-like” geopolitical functions (McConnell 2012). McConnell raises the important question — to what extent is governmentality exclusively a practice of the state, and can it also be exercised by non-state entities? These local practices in Uzanpara, legitimising land transactions that are neither recognised nor sanctioned by the state, suggest that legitimacy can be drawn through state-like practices, by non-state actors. It further lends credence to the idea of the state as an “effect” (Mitchell 1991) and creates a more nuanced portrayal of citizenship in looking towards relationships between citizens and state-like institutions (McConnell 2011).

5.5 Conclusion: Territory, authority, and citizenship

Questions of territory help understand the entrenched, place-centric notion of identity that is pervasive throughout Northeast India, and finds parallels with other colonial, ethnically divided societies such as Rwanda, where similar, place-centric notions of outsiders and insiders created new categories of belonging from relatively fluid ones (Mamdani 2001). It highlights the central importance of the state in the creation and maintenance of these identities. The language of state policy, the recognition of some groups as “tied” to particular places through codification in law, and establishing political representation in autonomous regions on this basis, are all state practices that are important in creating insider-outsider categories that appear fixed. With land as an important practical and symbolic resource in

channelling this identity, a complex network of laws and rules further reify these categories. In evoking a discourse on “foreigners”, land regulation practices act as techniques of displaced border management, where the idea of the border is performed away from the physical border itself (Amoore 2006).

On the other hand, as the land transfer practices in Uzanpara show, these are not the only terms on which citizenship is understood. Political legitimacy is drawn from different sources in everyday life — the All Bodo Students Union, for instance, and the formalised practice of drawing up deeds and witnessing documents. Political authority in the village is not a simple hierarchical network of state actors — the boundaries are blurred between state and society (Migdal 2001) in actual practice. In these transactions, residents are redefining their citizenship not by flouting the law, but by re-interpreting its meaning for local context. Law itself is an iterative process, and can take on new meaning in local processes, and in the process create new citizen subjectivities (Eckert et al., 2012).

As the next chapters will go on to show, this complicates the idea of citizenship — is it imposed by laws and recognition from the state, or enacted (often through subversive practices) by people and communities themselves? The idea of indigeneity as linked to territorial questions also re-emerges in Chapter 7, where Hindu nationalist outfits attempt to redefine indigeneity from a religious perspective, building on colonial traditions that did the same (Xaxa 2005).



6. THE POLITICAL CITIZEN

CHAPTER 6. THE POLITICAL CITIZEN: ELECTIONS AND EVERYDAY POLITICS IN BODOLAND

“Even though we had never seen him before, and even though he hasn’t ... ever given us anything, I’m glad we voted for him.”

- Anwar, voting in the 2014 parliamentary elections

6.1 Vignette

On a rainy morning in mid-March 2016, a group of party workers and members of the Bodoland Political Front (BPF) arrived in Makrabari village. With the help of some of the village’s male residents, they set up plastic tables and chairs to hold a meeting in one of the village’s two communal space structures (the other being a mosque) — a large tin shed that functions as the school building, the *anganwadi* centre,³⁰ and community centre. The BPF workers were here to canvass for the vote for Pramila Rani Brahma, who was the Member of the Legislative Assembly from the constituency of Kokrajhar East, where Makrabari residents’ former home, Dewalgaon, is located.

While the residents are no longer physically present in Dewalgaon, they remain on the electoral rolls in their former village. They are relatively new to Makrabari, having lived in a relief camp near Makrabari for about four years before this. They had fled to the site of this relief camp after their homes were burnt down during riots between Bodos and Muslims in 2012. It is only in the last few months that they had moved and built temporary housing on a plot of agricultural land belonging to one of Makrabari’s permanent residents, having finally started to give up hope of ever returning to Dewalgaon. The decision to stay on Dewalgaon’s electoral rolls, though, was strategic. Having an established “official” status in a village is essential as a Bengali Muslim in Assam. While it is still easy to be classified a “doubtful voter”,³¹ it is more dangerous still to try and register oneself in a new place, like Makrabari, for fear of being seen as recently arrived Bangladeshi illegal immigrants, one of Assam’s hot

³⁰ Where early childhood care is provided through government programmes.

³¹ ‘Doubtful voters’ or D-voters are a category of voter that emerged from the political history of Assam. During the Assam movement it was alleged that many voters on Assam’s rolls were illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, instead of legitimate Indian citizens. Government tribunals were set up in an attempt to identify such voters, and certain (usually Bengali Hindu or Bengali Muslim) and pending proof of citizenship, such voters were disenfranchised by the Election Commission, labelled ‘doubtful voters’, and unable to cast votes during subsequent elections until the matter was decided by the tribunal (The Hindu 2014).

button political issues, both electoral and otherwise. Indeed, it was an issue that came up during the meeting that took place here. The residents of the camp were also uncertain about making Makrabari a permanent home, with some still harbouring hope of going back to Dewalgaon, while others were not completely sure of feeling accepted by the community of permanent residents of Makrabari, where they often felt like unwelcome guests. The fact of the campaign meeting being held there at all was a rare public acceptance of the existence of the resettled homes in Makrabari. The official policy has been to turn a blind eye to their precarious living situation, based on the fact that they are “on paper” in Dewalgaon, even if they actually inhabit Makrabari. By coming to Makrabari and holding a campaign meeting, the BPF had, in effect, legitimised this dual existence, by acknowledging their continued identity as voters of Kokrajhar East, despite the campaign meeting being outside the constituency.

The meeting functioned as a conversation — the party workers presented an initial, standard pitch followed by the men and women present making demands of their own, as well as castigating the workers for failing on earlier promises. The women, particularly, were vocal in their demand for a proper, state-sponsored *anganwadi* centre, as well as a proper source of clean drinking water. The main BPF worker, a middle-aged Bodo man, agreed that this was important and needed to be seen to. While saying this, he simultaneously explained the reasons for the impossibility of it being carried out — they were “officially” from Dewalgaon, how could they demand *anganwadis* and drinking water here? They would have to submit an application, and the BPF would try to do what they could. An older man, Jamal, stood up and explained the facts of their displacement, and how they came to be situated here, although these facts were well known to all present.

Following this, Jamal brought up an important issue: an organisation called the Tribal Sangha (which translates as “Tribal Forum”³²) filed a case against the resettled village in Makrabari, alleging that they were illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, and needed to be deported. Using their precarious position as temporary residents who did not have formal status in Makrabari (and disregarding their much longer history in Dewalgaon), this case, lodged in Guwahati High Court two months before this meeting, caused much distress to the residents.

³² In various parts of Assam, the Tribal Sangha represents different indigenous groups in the area — in the BTAD this is primarily the Bodos, who are the largest indigenous group in the region.

Despite the case being brought forward by an organisation that has a presence across Assam, it was seen as a direct attack by Bodos, or at least an organisation that represented Bodo interests in the BTAD. What was more upsetting than the case itself, Jamal continued, was that their MLA, the BPF's Pramila Rani Brahma, refused to speak out in their defence. At this point another man, Rafiqul, also stood up, angry and repeating these claims, asking why they were being called Bangladeshis, despite living here since much before the Bodoland Territorial Council was created? The BPF worker, a Bodo man himself, was quick to be sympathetic, and reaffirm that

“We know you are local people. You are our brothers, we don't discriminate between Hindus, Christians or Muslims. The Tribal Sangha is an independent organisation, the BPF is not involved with this claim. And Hagrama Mohilary [chief of the Bodoland Territorial Council and leader of the BPF] said clearly in a statement that there are no Bangladeshis in the BTC. It's in a press release. You can see. Obviously the word of Hagrama Mohilary is the final word of the BPF.”

This temporarily placated the palpable anger in the meeting, although the issue did not go away, as further conversation with Jamal and Rafiqul showed. The meeting moved on to discuss more grievances from the residents, in particular a scam relating to ration cards that misrepresented the amount of food grains each family was entitled to. The BPF worker dismissed this as being outside his remit, and asked them to take it up with the supply officer. His colleague looked in my direction, aware of my presence, and leaned over to say, “oh it's an anomaly, must be an anomaly”. As the meeting wrapped up, people rushed towards the workers, re-stating their grievances, many asking for money to undertake small expenses such as paying fees, buying medicine, and so on.

This vignette is one illustration of the dynamics of local politics in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts, in this case during a state-level election campaign. It covers many of the themes in this chapter examining how political practice informs ideas of citizenship — the multiple political identities ascribed to and held by citizens, political practice itself as a means of establishing citizenship, and the performances of politics that speak to these political identities.

The following sections examine local politics in the two field sites, and the bearing that campaigning, voting, and everyday political decision-making have on ideas of belonging and non-belonging. The first section looks at how structures of governance and politics in the BTAD are constituted. In particular, I look at the Village Council Development Committees, a feature of government unique to BTAD administratively, but with blurred lines between political party and administrative structures. Here, I use primarily the West Amguri VCDC, to which the Uzanpara village cluster belongs, as illustrative of its functioning. While the Makrabari residents too are formally part of a VCDC via their former village of Dewalgaon, they are unable to participate in its functioning, which in itself affects their political agency in constituting themselves as citizens.

The next section, on multi-scalar political identities, looks at how ordinary citizens constitute their own political agency — through decision-making processes that express multiple aspects of their political being. When it comes to making political decisions, citizens often express identities that contradict conventional interpretations of their behaviour, instead showing a preference for their own mode of politics. The third section, drawing on ideas of patronage, looks to understand this equation from the point of view of those seeking power, and how power itself is constituted through interactions with the multi-faceted voter/citizen. The manner in which politicians campaign and position themselves reveals how they understand their role in the process of citizen-making, and what they make of the voters and citizens they address. Citizens' responses to these acts further help understand how their own agency in constructing themselves as citizens is realised during political processes. While during elections, this is apprehended through conversation and rhetoric in campaigning, at other times, the manoeuvrings of local politicians and members of the VCDC, within the party system, are representative of their understandings of politics. Finally, in a concluding section I tie the insights from these different perspectives together, to examine what they mean for citizenship and everyday political life.

6.2 Scales of politics and administration in the BTAD

The BTAD has a three-tier governance system — the autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council, the state of Assam, and the Indian state. It usually sees three consecutive years of election campaigns — for the national, state and council levels — followed by two non-

election years. Elections for different levels of government in the BTAD often churn out distinct, though interrelated responses. The different scales of elections and governance give rise to expressions of multiple political identities, and this is part of what I explore in this chapter, by looking at two consecutive elections in 2014 and 2015 — the national and the council, before turning to the third scale (which is the focus of much of this chapter), the state-level elections in 2016. Elections illustrate a particular, performative element of local politics, and highlight some of the dynamics that guide politics at an everyday level. In this chapter, such performances of politics are examined alongside other, everyday understandings of politics, in order to grasp how citizenship is constructed through political processes — both ordinary and extraordinary.

While the state and national level governance structures follow a pattern similar to other parts of India, the Bodoland Territorial Council — a body specially created to facilitate the provision of autonomy to the region — contains unique structural and procedural mechanisms, giving it a semi-state character, while in other ways leaving it reliant on the state and central governments. The Council itself has 40 seats, 30 of which are reserved for Scheduled Tribes (effectively Bodos in this area), 5 are open for any group to contest, and 5 are nominated. Apart from the nominated seats, the rest of the Members of Council Legislative Assembly (MCLAs) are elected every five years, as with other elections. Similar to other assemblies, the BTC has a secretariat that handles its administrative functioning. As with other states in India, the secretariat consists of various departments handling different aspects of governance — rural development, education, health, and so on. Civil servants are recruited in top official positions in these departments on deputation from the state-level Assam Civil Service, as well as the central-level Indian Administrative Service (though there are very few of these, generally one or two). The BTC has 4 districts. The departments at the BTC secretariat level co-exist alongside district-level offices, which report to the secretariat, and further down the ladder, Block-level administrative offices, which deal more directly with the implementation of schemes at the village level.

The BTC has most departments that exist at the state level (39 in total), with two crucial absences that have made all the difference between statehood and non-statehood — law and order, and finance. A third department, relief and rehabilitation, has in theory been allowed to function under the BTC from 2012 onwards, but the actual transfer from the Assam government is yet to take place. The two missing departments represent the continuing tussle

for autonomy from the Assam state government. Law and order remains in the hands of the Assam governments, so that police personnel, as well as decisions about military and paramilitary personnel and their deployment, remains out of reach for the BTC, though it is a crucial part of governance in Northeast India (see for instance, “Generals as Governors” in Baruah 2005).

Even more controversial is the lack of control over finances. While one of the conditions of the creation of the BTC was that it would get special funds from the central government to spend as it sees fit, the distribution of this fund is routed through the Assam government, and the withholding of money seems a crucial tactic to leveraging control and power. As part of the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2003, the Council received an initial 500 crore (5 billion) rupees, and an additional package of 250 crore (2.5 billion) rupees in 2008.³³ The initial starting grant, says Harish Sarma, a bureaucrat in the Planning and Development department of the Council secretariat, “is what enabled all *this*”, pointing to the secretariat building in which we are sitting, and the adjoining Council Assembly building. He claims that the BTC is entitled to a further portion of Assam’s state budget — 12.19 percent, based on BTC’s population share in Assam. This money, however, is never given in its entirety.

In the Budget Assembly Session of the Bodoland Territorial Council, held over 21 and 22 March 2017, the theme of Assam withholding funds as a way to control the BTC came up repeatedly.³⁴ In response to questions by opposition MCLAs, Executive Members (the equivalent of Cabinet Members in the state) took the line that funds were delayed, sometimes up to a year, preventing them from implementing promised schemes. While some of these might be answers to deflect from personal responsibility, officials in the secretariat also confirmed that funds from the Assam government were often delayed. The flip side to this is accountability — the BTC is not obliged to spend the funds in any particular manner, and according to Harish, has submitted one utilisation certificate, i.e., a certificate for how the money has been spent so far, for the first instalment of 500 crore rupees. He admits that without submitting such a certificate, new grants are unlikely to be released by the central government.

³³ Figures from the Ministry of Development of North-East Region website (MDoNER 2019).

³⁴ I was able to attend the second day of this session as a visitor in the gallery.

6.2.1 Politics as governance: The Village Council Development Committee (VCDC)

The one aspect of BTAD politics that remains formally untouched by electoral politics is village level governance, conducted through Village Council Development Committees (VCDCs). One VCDC is supposed to cover a population of roughly 4,000. These committees mimic, to some extent, the panchayat structure for village governance found across the rest of the India,³⁵ with one key difference — representatives of these committees are not elected (as they are in other panchayats), but nominated by the ruling party in the Bodoland Territorial Council. Since the Council's inception in 2005, only one party — the Bodoland Political Front or BPF — has been in power, resulting in the VCDC structure effectively becoming a network of party workers in different villages.

One VCDC is typically constituted across 10-12 villages (varying according to the population in the villages), with there being one or two members in each village, and a chairman³⁶, who heads the committee. Above the VCDC structure is the Tertiary Level Co-ordination Committee (TLCC), which corresponds with the electoral constituency (in the case of Uzanpara, that would be the part of East Bilasipara that falls within the BTAD). The TLCC leadership is also determined by the party, and the chairman of the TLCC is often a fairly powerful figure in the party structure, at least at the constituency level. The VCDC and its members are not just accountable to their party leadership, however, but also, simultaneously to the administrative block³⁷ to which they belong, whose officials are non-political. In this sense, the VCDC mimics the panchayat (which is also answerable to block officials, and then further to district-level officials), but ultimately straddles the political-administrative divide. The terms governing its separate roles are not especially clear, largely due to the discretion granted to bodies like the Bodoland Territorial Council under the Sixth Schedule, and the exemption from having elected panchayats.

Having elections in the VCDC is one of the major points of contention in the BTAD, with the ruling BPF, that has benefitted from the existing system, being largely against it. The main

³⁵ Panchayats are village level governance structures, where representatives are elected. This is operational across India, except in areas under the Sixth Schedule, which, under the provisions of autonomy, are free to devise their own methods of governance

³⁶ This term is used regardless of whether it is a man or a woman.

³⁷ Local governance works at multiple levels – from the state level (in this case Assam), governance is divided into district level (like Kokrajhar), and then further to a sub-district level which is known as a Block Development Office, which then liaises with village governance structures.

opposition party in the Council, the United People's Party (UPP) backed by the All Bodo Students Union, repeatedly raises this issue. In an interview, leader of the opposition in the Bodoland Assembly, Rangra Narzary, is quick to criticise what he terms a "politics of dominance", where the absence of an election at the grassroots prevents a genuine representation of the welfare concerns of people at the village. Ramesh Kumar, officer at the BTC secretariat in charge of rural development informs me that a new VCDC bill passed in the assembly aims to significantly reform this appointment structure and have elections for VCDC members as well. At present, he admits, the system is arbitrary, "If there is a complaint about a VCDC chairman, then overnight Hagrama [chief of the Council] signs the order and a new chairman is appointed. This is not a good system." The new bill, like many other bills and resolutions in the BTC, is held up at the final stage, where it must be approved and ratified by the Assam state government.

Despite not having elections, however, the architects of the BTC have chosen to retain the structure of the panchayat system, and also on occasion introduced other provisions found in panchayat structures. For instance, soon after the 2015 Council elections, the BPF introduced the policy of 30 percent reservation for women in VCDC bodies,³⁸ leading to most VCDCs needing to have at least 2 or 3 women members. This is especially interesting in an area where women are not especially active in politics (although the election studied below is an anomaly). In some instances, this can become tokenistic, as in the case of a village neighbouring Uzanpara, whose woman VCDC member deferred to her husband to engage us in conversation about the functioning of the VCDC. When I asked her how she came to be appointed, it was her her husband who chimed in with a shrug "they needed a woman, and the villagers suggested her". She often goes to VCDC-related meetings with her husband. This does not mean, however, that all women VCDC members are there as tokens — Damanti, a member of West Amguri VCDC (to which Uzanpara also belongs) has been a VCDC member for 10 years, and is widely regarded with respect in her position. Damanti recalls that until 2015, she was the only woman member in the West Amguri VCDC.

Other studies around local governance in India, primarily in the panchayat context, have also found that while some women may end up functioning as "proxies" for male family

³⁸ The 73rd Amendment of the Indian constitution lays out the provisions for panchayat structures, including 33 percent reservation for women.

members, their presence in local governance bodies can also potentially widen the range of issues to include more gendered ones (Banerjee 1998, Chhibber 2002). For instance, women from a hamlet that was split away from Damanti's jurisdiction complained at a meeting that once she left, they ceased to receive the spinning yarn they earlier did under her "distribution" of materials. Spinning yarn, like sewing machines, are gendered items of distribution in the VCDC scheme. Equally, the presence of women in political structures alone does not automatically lead to more progressive, pro-women policies (Batliwala and Dhanraj 2004), as also reflected in Chapter 7, with the participation of women in anti-women right-wing activities. Other affiliations, of caste, religion, ethnicity, and so on, continue to have relevance for the political process. As most of the women VCDC members interviewed confirmed, apart from distribution of items like yarn or sewing machines, no women-specific projects are taken up by these members.

While the VCDC has no formal rules regarding proportional ethnic representation (unlike, for instance the Council, where fixed numbers of seats are reserved for Bodos and other groups), political realities generally mean that members from the largest communities resident in the village are likely to be represented, if not proportionally, then substantially, on the committees. In West Amguri, this means that of 18 members, 13 are non-Bodos (Muslims and Rajbongshis) and only 5 are Bodos, reflecting the mixed nature of the area. Indeed, the chairman of the committee is a Muslim resident from Uzanpara, Moinuddin, whose appointment in 2015 followed a 10-year stint by a Bodo resident. Diganta, the TLCC chairman, however, is Bodo, as are most of the influential leaders in the BPF party. In the election campaign studied below, however, having proportional representation from non-Bodo communities was one of Diganta's key pledges during meetings and rallies. As such, he is seen as treating both Bodo and non-Bodo members equally, as the case study below will also go on to reveal.

6.2.2 "Bringing schemes": the workings of the VCDC

Like its structure, the functioning of VCDCs is nebulous, and not always transparent. Thus for instance, while the 18 members of West Amguri form a single VCDC, there is no schedule of meetings for the members to come together on a regular basis. Usually, if any member has a point of business, they go directly to Moinuddin and meet with him one-on-

one, or in other cases, to Diganta, the TLCC chairman, or Amarjit, the Member of Council who represents their constituency. Both Diganta and Amarjit play a very hands-on role in the functioning of village-level politics. In the few instances where all the VCDC members do come together, it is through specially arranged meetings, which are often held in the form of picnics, near a lake, at an outdoor event, or in other open spaces. These are called by either Diganta or Amarjit, and attendance is organised by the chairman mobilising members to attend.³⁹ At many of these meetings (often held for members from the entire constituency), it is not only VCDC members who are present, but also members from the village-level committee of the BPF, which exists as a separate structure in every village (called the primary committee). This further blurs the lines between politics and administration, as roles are not always clearly demarcated between the two. The co-existence is not always peaceful — at one joint “picnic” of the West Amguri and its neighbouring VCDC, VCDC members and primary committee members sparred in front of senior party workers (including Diganta and Amarjit), about whose prerogative it was to undertake welfare schemes.

Further adding to the seemingly ad hoc nature of the appointment of VCDC members is the lack of a common or official space which members can claim as an office, or where meetings are held, official business conducted, or related paperwork stored. Instead, most of the VCDC members I met usually invited me to their homes to talk to them, and afterwards we would also meet at meetings, or tea stalls, or in Kokrajhar town while they were on business. As Akhil Gupta (1995) observed in his ethnography of bureaucracy in a North Indian village, local officials often converted a room in their house into “offices”, where they dealt with colleagues or those who came to meet them for official reasons. Uzanpara VCDC members also functioned out of such office-home hybrids, where one room functioned partially as an office, and often due to paucity of space also as a bedroom or living space in the house. Official documents pertaining to government business, ledgers and papers related to contracts, meetings, and deals, were also stored in these rooms.

These irregular spaces and schedules of functioning complicate the idea of following the “everyday” state, and observing ordinary practices and interactions. On the other hand, observing the hybrid and ad-hoc nature of spaces and practices at the grassroots level shed

³⁹ “Mobilise” is a term used often by political operatives, referring to rounding up other members and urging them to attend a meeting, event, rally, etc.

light on the nature of the state in the village. Its sporadic and less-than-regular presence in rural life indicated that the state was not a reliable presence, and opened up spaces for improvisation on the part of citizens, as I show with land transactions in Chapter 5, and as the workings of the VCDC below also reveal. In a sense, “chasing the state” in Bodoland, while an improvisation in methodological terms, also helped better understand the meaning of the ordinary, everyday practices of the state in this region.

If the operational mechanisms of the VCDC are not completely clear, its actual tasks are similarly opaque. During my initial meetings with Uzanpara’s VCDC members, I often began with asking them what they did, and was repeatedly told things like “undertake NREGA [sic] work”, “plantations [of trees]”, “constructing roads”, “distribution [of items like umbrellas or bicycles or yarn]”, covered under the broader concept of “schemes”, which seemed to drive such work in the villages. To undertake some work in one’s capacity as a VCDC member was to “bring a scheme”, which meant getting a project or work under an existing central or state government scheme. These projects are not necessarily planned in ways that follow a predictable structure or timeline, but rather are implemented as and when funds become available at the Council. As seen above, funds themselves are not predictable or tied to a schedule, leading to a cascading effect of ad-hoc decisions of governance. In theory, Rural Development official Ramesh Kumar suggests that welfare projects or schemes undertaken in villages should go through the process of being suggested in a *gram sabha* (a village-level meeting of residents, which in regular panchayats are generally scheduled to occur), then approved by VCDC members and chairmen, with inputs from the TLCC chairman. The resolutions should then be passed on to the Block Development Officer (BDO) (the administrative wing of government with which the VCDC is expected to work), who would then pass the files upwards through the layers of bureaucracy the BTC secretariat, for approval by the relevant departments. Once these are approved, they are again sent down to the blocks and BDO to implement.

In reality, however, this is rarely how these schemes come to be, proving again that while the theory of the state as having regular mechanisms was in place, in practice it was far more sporadic. *Gram sabhas* are rare occurrences, and by no means regular (in my ten-month continuous stint there, none took place, bar a series of meetings towards the end which were the product of a new initiative of the Assam government, and not part of regular VCDC business). Instead, schemes are generally proposed by VCDC members, chairmen, and TLCC

chairmen unilaterally. In the Budget Assembly session of the Bodoland Territorial Council in March 2017, opposition leader Rangra Narzary repeatedly raised the issue of the process by which such schemes are allocated, arguing that the VCDC does not consult village members about work to undertake — even where there are *gram sabhas*, the resolutions agreed upon in these meetings are meaningless as members undertake whatever work they see as suitable. He reiterated this point in an interview, “even as an elected MCLA from Kajalgaon, I have no idea what schemes there are for the development of my constituency”. In Rangra’s case, as is also true with many of the constituencies in the BTC now (with almost half being represented by non-BPF parties), VCDC members, chairmen, and TLCC chairmen continue to be BPF party members, and having more power and funds at their disposal than the elected members of Council. In contrast, MCLAs have only 2,500,000 rupees at their disposal each year, a pittance compared to the amounts available to the BTC and its politicians.

VCDC members, while expected to function like government officials, are nonetheless not paid for their work in these positions. Thus, it is commonly accepted and acknowledged that when they apply for funds to undertake “schemes” in the village, they take a portion of this money for their own expenditure. How much, is left to the discretion of VCDC members, the VCDC chairman, and the TLCC chairman, each of whom, in turn receive their own share of money from these projects. There is a moral blurriness to this mode of functioning, as practices mirror what is in other discourses of Indian politics termed “corruption” — that of politicians siphoning off money from welfare schemes. Diganta, however, shrugs and is matter of fact about the realities of the situation, “there are no salaries for VCDC or TLCC members, so how else are they supposed to make money? This is how they get by.” Other VCDC members in Uzanpara echoed this sentiment, claiming that their cuts from the funds were the only forms of compensation they received.

Others in the BTAD are not so convinced by this hardship argument, as with Rangra Narzary and his “politics of dominance” statement. “Schemes in the BTAD operate through the channels of a contractor lobby — contractors petition departments in the secretariat to have certain funds released to undertake road building, tree plantation, and so on, and this is how schemes are sanctioned”. Rangra’s observation is largely corroborated by the functioning of the Uzanpara VCDC — members are effectively expected to function like contractors, and compete not just with each other, but also with other contractors in and around the village (many of whom are also BPF party workers). Noren, from Uzanpara, is one such contractor

(and also BPF party worker), and shows me an “engagement letter” that he received for the purposes of a contract he undertook to fill potholes in a road. The project is assigned to Noren, a VCDC member from Uzanpara named Mofidul, and their MCLA Amarjit. The contract is worth 300,000 rupees. When it is submitted to the Block-level office, the office will release this money to Amarjit. Of this, 50,000 rupees went to Amarjit, 125,000 rupees to Noren, 6,000 rupees to Mofidul, and the rest is for the actual work undertaken to repair the road. Mofidul’s presence on the document is strategic — it is easier to have money released when there is more than one person purportedly undertaking the work, and it also explains why his share is so paltry, as he is there in name alone. Noren says that the money allocated to MCLAs is the easiest to have released from the secretariat, while funds from central government schemes like those under the MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) are harder. The best time to apply for contracts under funds like this, Noren advises, is about a year before the elections for the BTC are due, and the MCLAs are worrying about their prospects. Otherwise, the purse is tight.

Noren is correct to point out that welfare schemes whose funds are managed by the central government from Delhi are harder to get a hold of. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, for instance, a public works programme intended to generate work and income in rural areas, has over the years built in several safeguards to prevent its mishandling. So for instance, workers who undertake employment under this scheme have their wages paid directly into their own bank accounts, electronically. Similarly, only registered vendors can be used to provide materials related to the public works, and they are also paid directly in their bank accounts. Such public work can no longer be undertaken by contractors, and must be managed by the Block and District level offices of the Rural Development departments.

Nonetheless, workarounds to these processes exist. Noren is a registered vendor, as is TLCC chairman Diganta, even though neither actually sells sand, gravel, or other material. Thus, they can benefit from public works programmes. Engineers at the block and district levels as well as block-level officers, all of whom are involved with the implementation of the programme, also receive their share of public works money. One area in which some discretion remains is in the handing out of job cards — documents that enable participation in the MGNREGA to begin with. These are supposed to be distributed to the poorest and most vulnerable people, most in need of public assistance. But often, these were distributed to

party supporters of the BPF. When a public works programme would be applied for, wages would be transferred to these job card holders, often without any work being undertaken, in league with with engineers, block-level officials, and VCDC members. The job holders then agree to transfer a portion of these wages to the VCDC members, chairman, and TLCC chairman, in return for being allowed to keep a portion of the money for themselves, without having undertaken any work. Others in the village who object to these practices, or are not BPF supporters, were simply excluded from the NREGA and obtained no benefits, their objections labelled as “anti-party” (supporters of the opposition parties) grumblings.

6.3 Multi-scalar political identities

As mentioned in Chapter 3, fieldwork during elections was conducted in the two electoral constituencies of Kokrajhar East (where the resettled village of Makrabari votes, but not where they currently reside) and Bilasipara East (where the cluster of villages in Uzanpara vote, and are also located). Kokrajhar East is the constituency that is at the very heart of the BTAD itself — consisting of the unofficial “capital”, Kokrajhar town, as well as being a visible contest between two of the main contenders in the election, the BPF and the UPP. It had the additional unique perspective of being the only constituency where two prominent women candidates engaged in a visible contest, in an area where women are rarely at the forefront in political life. Bilasipara East is unique in another sense — being on the border between Kokrajhar and Dhubri (i.e., the BTAD and the rest of Assam), it encompasses villages that are both inside and outside the BTAD. Thus, while the residents of Uzanpara are formally within the BTAD, in this Assembly constituency, they form a minority, and therefore can rarely independently impact a vote that finally falls largely in Dhubri, a Muslim majority district. In comparison to the other voters in the constituency, who are in Dhubri district, those within the BTAD form only a small proportion (about 30 percent) of the total voters in East Bilasipara.

It is worth drawing attention to the candidacy of two women in an area where very few women are visible in local politics. Both the women in this constituency, however — Pramila Rani Brahma of the BPF, and Pratibha Narzary of the UPP, are well established, powerful women in their own right. Pramila was twice elected (and a third time, in this election as well) as MLA from the constituency, and is known as being close to the BPF leadership,

especially Hagrama. Meanwhile, Pratibha is well known in the NGO and Bodoland statehood movement circuits — most of her campaigning was done with ABSU leadership (and with ground support from cadres), including their well loved president, Pramod Boro. The contest represented a South Asian paradox, where there is overall very low participation of women in parliamentary democracy, and yet a few very powerful and popular women politicians (Omvedt 2005). Both women are also proof that barriers to politics are much higher for women in India — where there is no family support or background (in terms of belonging to political families), participation in social movements becomes an important factor in accessing political life (Rai 2012).

While Pramila and Pratibha have both risen to prominence in their respective organisations (the BPF and the ABSU leadership), other women, at lower rungs of this party structure, have not had a similar experience with power. Rita Basumatary, a senior member of the Kokrajhar district BPF women’s wing, for instance, complained that the women’s wing did not get the same sort of access to schemes and contracts as the male members. The party structure is divided along gender lines, so that the women’s committee is entirely separate from the main leadership, where, save for Pramila, no other women feature. The UPP/ABSU structure is similarly divided, although women are arguably more vocal within the Bodoland movement. At a rally in Kokrajhar town,⁴⁰ ABSU women campaigned for separate statehood, acknowledging the contribution of women in the movement, and the need for more women to come out of their homes and participate than in 1990s, during the militancy phase. There are more radical proposals too — such as appointing women as *gaon booras* (traditional village headmen). During Pratibha’s nomination and campaigns, similar gatherings of women were seen, and she herself addressed women’s issues specifically (more so than Pramila). But this election aside, the political representation of women remains low in Bodoland.

6.3.1 The “disenchanted” voter

The framing of the ideal voter has often emphasised the role of European liberal philosophy in facilitating the spread of electoral democracy throughout the world. And yet, this theory of diffusion is partial at best, as examples from India and other postcolonial contexts show (Gilmartin 2012). The practice of electoral democracy corresponds to the forms of popular

⁴⁰ On 24 March 2017, outside the Deputy Commissioner’s office in Kokrajhar town.

sovereignty embedded in specific political contexts. Using the example of the “secret ballot” as the now widely accepted norm for voting, Gilmartin illustrates how it rests on the idea of the “enchanted individual” at the core of democratic practice — an autonomous being that is both embedded within society and social structures, as well as capable of distancing herself or himself from this context, and making autonomous choices. Using the context of India, Gilmartin shows that this theoretical construct quickly dissolves in the face of patronage politics, along with caste, religion and ethnicity-based loyalties that are central to Indian politics (Ibid., p. 418). Abandoning certain strictures of Euro-centric liberal democracy, some of the examples from BTAD show that such deviations do not necessarily lead to an illegitimate form of politics, as work from Piliavsky (2014a) and others also show. Nonetheless, such politics is also fraught with its own complicated power struggles, often in ways that prove oppressive for voters, while in other instances offering them creative solutions.

Wouters has further argued that much as vernacular ideas of democracy in the context of India are being gradually understood (see again Piliavsky’s work, discussed later in this chapter), this has been to the exclusion of India’s Northeast, reflecting an existing trend in academic studies about the Northeast (Wouters 2015, p. 127). In his research context of Nagaland, voting and elections are especially complex, given that contesting the legitimacy of the Indian state is a vital part of Naga politics (Ibid.). Separatism from the Indian state is not a major factor in the BTAD’s electoral politics, nonetheless, like other parts of the Northeast, it has a complicated relationship with India’s central government, which give local expressions of democracy different emphases from other parts of India

National elections in 2014 marked a turning point in much of India — the Prime Minister’s eponymously titled “Modi” wave coursed through much of the country, to the jubilation of many and the disappointment of many others. It brought in a legitimisation of right-wing majoritarian politics in the country, and changed the course of many institutions in the country — its universities, academic bodies and bureaucratic structures like the Planning Commission, and the character of the national and state governments in many states. The wave reached Assam’s shores as well — 7 of its 14 seats in the national assembly, the Lok Sabha, were won by the BJP, and proved a turning point that culminated in its winning the state assembly two years later, despite having had minimal presence in the state’s politics

until that point. In the BTAD, however, an entirely different, distinctly local dynamic was at play, resulting in a unique election campaign and result.

The Lok Sabha election of 2014 was the first time the Kokrajhar constituency (which covered most of the BTAD in this election) elected a non-Bodo Member of Parliament. A group of 18 non-Bodo organisations, from across a range of ethnic communities, came together under a political party called the “Ekya Mancha” (which translates as “one platform”), to nominate and elect a former ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) militant, Hira Sarania.⁴¹ The constituency is a reserved Scheduled Tribe seat, i.e., only a Scheduled Tribe nominee may stand from this particular constituency, and the authenticity of the nominee Hira Sarania’s ST status was much debated both during and after his campaign, especially by prominent Bodo groups (The Telegraph 2014a). Further speculation existed, given his links with ULFA, about the role of the Assamese intellectual elite, threatened by rising Bodo political power, in mobilising this anti-Bodo sentiment. Sujit, one of Sarania’s aides, and also one of the key organisers of the Ekya Mancha, all but confirmed this, when in my interview with him, he revealed that the idea to form the Ekya Mancha and nominate Sarania germinated at a conference of other ULFA members, leaders and intellectuals of the Assam movement.

Nonetheless, regardless of the external machinations that may have led to the new political formation, it clearly touched a chord, and was able to mobilise a strong undercurrent of insecurity and resentment among non-Bodo communities. It came up repeatedly during interviews and conversations with Muslim voters, in particular, who viewed the vote as a way of asserting themselves in the BTAD. One Muslim voter from Kokrajhar district admitted, “Sarania has never come back to our village since we voted for him, and he hasn’t done anything for us. But it was important for us to vote for him then, we needed to have our voices heard”. Undoubtedly, the violent conflict of 2012 played a part in heightening the insecurity of non-Bodo groups, particularly Muslims. The massacre of a village of Bengali Muslims soon after the 2014 vote served to confirm this fear, that they were being “punished” for protesting through their votes (The Telegraph 2014b).

⁴¹ In the 1990s, ULFA was the militant wing of the Assam movement, to carve out a separate country of Assam, away from the Union of India. In the last decade it has been largely dormant in that almost no violent attacks are carried out, but its cadres and leadership structure remain.

Observers have linked the result to a referendum on the politics of ethnic homelands, pointing out that the election shows that politics in the region is designed to be a zero-sum game, where one ethnic group must lose for others to win (Saikia 2015). For others, the election represented the potential for dynamic expressions of ethnic identities among non-Bodo groups (Dutta 2016). The election was also unique in that it showed the split among various Bodo factions that struggled to outbid one another in an attempt to claim true political representation for the Bodos (Saikia 2015). Five different Bodo candidates, some independent and some with political backing, stood for the Kokrajhar constituency seat, ultimately dividing the Bodo vote, even as non-Bodo groups consolidated theirs towards Hira Sarania. Two main groups emerged within the Bodos — those supporting the current ruling Bodoland Political Front (formed of the former militants who signed the BTC agreement with the Indian government), who support the status quo of the Council structure, and second, supporters of a range of independent candidates and changing local parties backed by the All Bodo Students Union. As a result, electorally, Bodo loyalties became divided, with dramatic results.

As a former militant, Sarania represents a certain strong-man, protector identity, which he is aware of, and embodies in his political persona. Given the former militant character of the ruling party in the Council, this militarised image provided an important counter-point to the aggressive politics of the region (Baruah 2014). On a trip he made to Kokrajhar district in early 2017, I conducted an interview with him, where it became evident that the protector image is one he emphasises and uses effectively in his own political discourse. For instance, this is what he says about why he in particular was chosen to represent the constituency:

“It’s because they [leaders in ULFA] knew that I work for the public. And ULFA is very popular in the BTAD, all the enemies [sic] are afraid of me. People see me as a symbol, a messenger, they chose me because they wanted security.”

It is clear that he sees his role as that of providing security. In addition, while he qualifies technically as a Scheduled Tribe, he had specific views on what it meant to be tribal:

“Of course I’m also tribal, so I was chosen. But I’m also different, I’m more like men [sic]. The Bodos are mentally different, tribals have different brains. I’m not like them; I don’t believe in killing or extremism”.

He does not identify with what he sees as tribal “mentality”, in fact he uses crude stereotypes about tribal communities as savage and prone to violence to justify his own ascent to power and legitimacy in representing non-tribal communities. This aversion to violence sits alongside his somewhat contradictory desire to be seen as threatening, as also his background as one of the leaders of a militant outfit that was involved in violence. Even though he is able to represent the constituency because of legally being classified as tribal, he does not identify with the group as such.

The 2015 elections in the Bodoland Territorial Council bore the after-effects of this electoral victory as well. The Bodoland Political Front, a party of former Bodo militants which has won comfortably in both previous elections, barely scraped through with just the one seat they needed to form a majority. The Ekya Mancha, fresh from its victory, secured 8 of 40 seats, as did some independents, the AIUDF (a “Muslim” party in Assam), an ABSU-backed party (what eventually became the United People’s Party, or UPP, after many name changes) and a lone member from the BJP (not significant for the outcome, but interesting in itself, as this had never happened before). All in all, the increasing allegations of corruption against the BPF, as well as the newly empowered Ekya Mancha, changed the electoral composition of the Council dramatically for the first time since its creation. The United People’s Party, with the support of the ABSU, had always commanded a degree of popular support in their movement for Bodoland — in this instance, playing the electoral field also seemed to pay off partially. Their leader in the Bodoland Territorial Council, Rangra, was chosen as leader of the opposition, and the Council assembly allowed for a space where he could vocalise his discord with the BPF. Strategically, though, Rangra noted, they had deliberately chosen the UPP as an entity separate from ABSU, despite the vast overlap in membership. In the Council assembly, Rangra and his colleagues raised issues specific to governance and corruption, and did not explicitly bring up the issue of Bodoland and separate statehood.

When the 2016 election campaign kicked off, the electoral calculus changed again. The local ruling party, the Bodoland Political Front (BPF), tied up with the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), which was in power at the centre, and had never before won an election in Assam, although its growing presence was being felt in recent elections. India’s other major party, the Indian National Congress (INC or the Congress), which was in power in Assam at the time (and had been the incumbent party for 15 years), tied up with the ABSU-backed United People’s

Party. A third major player was the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), a party that claims to represent the interests of Assam's marginalised Muslims, and in particular is associated with the Bengali Muslim demographic. A last, though more marginal player in this election (following their success in the previous two elections, the coalition split), was the Ekya Mancha, the collective of non-Bodo organisations that voted into Hira Sarania into power, but had few candidates in this election, though with less vigorous campaigning. Eventually, the BJP secured 60 of the total 126 assembly seats in Assam, and along with its allies, the AGP and the BPF, comfortably staked a claim to forming the state government (Election Commission of India 2016). The 12 constituencies that fall within the BTAD were all won by the BPF. The election seemed to serve both as a vindication for the BPF (after its very close win in the Council election the year before), and on a state and national level, a seeming vindication for the right-wing politics of the BJP (more on this in Chapter 7). It seemed to show the multiple, and sometimes contrary calculus at play in these different elections — the same party (BPF) had been roundly defeated in one election, barely scraped through in a second, and swept all the seats to a grand victory in a third.

While the results themselves are fascinating and lend themselves to many analyses about why certain candidates and parties won or lost, what I look at here is the campaign itself, and the performances that constitute it. Banerjee's (2014) work on Indian politics turns away from the issue of what drives people towards certain parties or candidates, and looks instead at the question of *why* people vote at all, and what it represents for political identity. Here I take a similar approach, looking at certain performative elements in the campaigns, both from candidates and voters, to try and understand what these performances mean to them. Choosing particular candidates and parties, while not the central focus, nonetheless shows us how people think about politics, elections, and their role as voters and citizens. Looking at these performances and the responses to them also shed some light on how the different political identities are channelled at various levels.

6.4 Patrons, clients and citizens

6.4.1 Gaali, dhamki and election campaigns

After the meeting in Makrabari, Rafiqul was clear about where the real issues were talked about — not at the meeting, but after it, away from it, separately. The meeting was part

performance, but this did not mean it was a farce. On the contrary, it represented to some extent the surface of the problems, it allowed a platform for people to express frustration about the lack of government action but equally, it allowed for politicians to respond with platitudes, and for this to be seemingly resolved within the structure of the meeting. This performance was only part of the electoral transaction taking place.

This act of complaining exemplified one of two performance tropes in particular that repeated themselves in different campaign meetings across constituencies — the *dhamki* (threat) and the *gaali* (curse/complaint). They act in relation with each other, and especially animated many of the less structured “pocket” election campaign meetings. The *dhamki* was frequently employed by politicians, especially at smaller, pocket-level meetings, as a means to coerce votes out of people. At a BPF pocket meeting in the Muslim neighbourhood of Anthaiguri village, Nazim, the head of the BPF block committee, warned voters:

“It is very sad that Adaram [former MCLA from the BPF who lost the 2015 Council election to an Ekya Mancha candidate] lost. We [the party] can tell how many votes come from what area, we will feel very bad if we don’t get many votes from this area. If we get more votes, we will do more work. We know how many votes we got from this area in the MCLA election.”

Similarly, Pramila Rani, the current MLA also did not mince words at a pocket meeting in a mixed village of Bodos and Adivasis:

“If you don’t vote for us, we won’t give you anything — no cycles, no umbrellas. Those who are from the ‘anti party’ [supporting opposition parties] won’t get a single rupee.”

Such threats were a routine part of the campaign trail in the BTAD, and marked both a continuity and rupture from the past. Voters were often quick to remember the early elections after the creation of the BTC, where areas were rigidly divided as being under the control of one militant group or another, and even attending the meeting of a rival party meant violence. The BPF, newly formed with former cadres of the Bodo Liberation Tigers, held elections at gunpoint, capturing booths and forcing people to vote and threatening violent consequences if they were found voting otherwise. The *dhamki* in 2016 represented to some degree a

continuity of this process — being threatened with withdrawal of services and support — and to some extent, also saw the consequences change dramatically. For many Muslims, however, the elections following the 2012 riots also represented a return to violent consequences, given the attack on Bengali Muslims after Sarania’s election.

The underlying relationship of the *dhamki* with the election campaign also represents what has been studied as patronage politics — the idea of a politician promising to deliver something to a specific group of people in return for votes cast. Indeed, many prominent works on patronage politics emphasise that the relationship is instrumental — citizens cast votes in exchange for promised goods, schemes, employment, and even cash transactions (Chandra 2004, Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). In this formulation, the patron-client relationship is a purely transactional one. It is not a view unheard of in the villages themselves either. Noren, a Bodo respondent from Uzanpara, shakes his head after my many questions about how people vote and why, and says,

“Look, in the end it boils down to the night before the election. Everyone sits together, in the village, to decide who we will vote for. And then, workers from different parties come and give the villagers sums of money, and whoever gives the largest amount will win the election. In the past, only the BPF has really been able to do this.”

In his formulation, the election is literally understood as an auction — the highest bidder wins the votes. More recent scholarship has contested this instrumentalist view, and talked about exchanges of money in particular, being representative not of mere transactional value, but as reproducing and creating social relationships between different actors in the election (Bjorkman 2014). The links of contemporary patronage to the land-owning patron-centred *jajmani* system also highlights its function not just as a pure economic relationship, but also a social one (Piliavsky 2014b). It is a moral form, where relationships of patronage also express what clients (in this case voters) expect from a patron, an expression of what a relationship with a political leader should be like, and what they represent (Ibid.).

The value of what a leader symbolises is something Noren also acknowledges, when talking about Sarania’s win in the 2014 election. “Ekya Mancha didn’t have money to give, but still Hira Sarania won the election. People must have felt very strongly about him.” Anwar, from

a nearby Muslim village, who also voted for Sarania, confirms that the reasons to vote transcended the calculations of give and take, “Even though we had never seen Sarania before, and even though he hasn’t once come to our village after he won, or ever given us anything, I’m glad we voted for him. We needed to send a message to the Bodos”. A similar sentiment is echoed in Makrabari, where it is acknowledged that it’s not Sarania’s ability to provide goods, cash, or even actual security, but what he represents symbolically for non-Bodos in an unfair political system.

If Gilmartin’s analysis of the ideal, “enchanted individual” voter falls short of explaining the multiplicity of decision-making processes in democracy, related literature has explored other political actions that deviate from liberal democratic ideas, but are not necessarily seen as illegitimate. While the idea of political representation is a ubiquitous one, the particular form that it takes, and what terms like “people” or “representation” may ultimately mean varies across different context, even when the language of statehood and politics might appear the same (Spencer 2007, p. 12).

Kanchan Chandra’s work on patronage posits a link between patronage and ethnicity: in the absence of information, voters choose leaders and parties on the basis of ethnic “head counts”, being most likely to choose leaders from their own ethnic backgrounds, with the idea that they would be the most likely to deliver goods and services to their own groups (Chandra 2004, 2007). Studies on Northeast Indian electoral politics have often observed that ethnicity and ethnic cleavages are influential in determining electoral outcomes, unlike other parts of India where caste has emerged as an important factor (Baruah and Dev 2006). Even as patterns of clientelism similar to other parts of India emerge in the Northeast, a key difference is the way in which tribal and ethnic identities are employed in election campaigns (Guenauer 2017).

This strategy is used by many politicians in BTAD as well, who appeal to voters on the grounds of ethnicity. The UPP, for instance, campaigned in Bodo villages on the platform of their support for Bodoland, and the need for separate statehood to advance the situation of Bodos. In Muslim villages, this was underplayed, and instead it was their alliance with the “secular” Indian National Congress party that was emphasised. The Bodoland Political Front also employed this strategy, not by talking explicitly about the creation of Bodoland in Bodo villages, but by stressing the need for increased emphasis on Bodo educational advancement,

housing allowances, and so on. In non-Bodo villages, some of the same talking points were employed regarding housing and welfare schemes, but an increased emphasis was placed on non-Bodo representation in the VCDC structure.

Ethnicity as a reason to court votes was emphasised in unusual, roundabout ways. Chandan, a Bodo candidate of the AIUDF party, positioned his own ethnic affiliation to AIUDF's Muslim base by way of association. With Kokrajhar East being a constituency reserved for candidates of Scheduled Tribe status, a party like the AIUDF, which is seen to cater to Muslim interests, has to field a non-Muslim, ST candidate. Wearing a *kurta-pajama*, a dress that in the BTAD, at least, is associated with Muslims, Chandan remained silent for much of the meeting in Durabari village, letting other (Muslim) representatives of the meeting talk for him instead. He stood up and only spoke briefly: "I'm Bodo, but I will work for everyone. Vote for me because I am with *huzoor* [AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal]. Trust him because you are Muslim, trust me because of him." Other party workers from the AIUDF also repeat this point: vote for Chandan *despite* his ethnicity, *because of huzoor* (and his ties to Muslims). Even in seemingly circumventing the ethnic argument for casting a vote, it was ultimately the ethnic argument that he returned to. For some voters, the events of 2012 also provided a valid reason to vote along ethnic lines. In Besalguri, another Muslim village in Kokrajhar East that suffered a lot of damage during the 2012 riots, Mehrunissa, an elderly Muslim voter assured us (only after ensuring that neither I nor my research assistant had any ties to Bodos) that everyone in the village would vote for AIUDF, very few would vote for either Bodo party. For them, she asserted, voting along religious lines was important, it was the Islamic organisation Jamaat-e-Islami that gave them houses and relief rations when their village burnt down during the riots.

In other situations, however the relationship of *gaali* and *dhamki* to actual voting strategy is complex. In the vignette above, Rafiqul made a clear distinction between what happens in public campaign meetings (even small, village-specific ones), and where, as he says, "real demands are made", in this case, separate from the performance of the public meeting. Despite Rafiqul's excoriating remarks (*gaali*) against Pramila Rani and the BPF, however, both he and Jamal, another resident of Makrabari, see the BPF as the only viable choice in this election. This is primarily, in their view, to keep out the UPP, a party associated with Bodos, Bodoland, and in their mind, Bodo militants. "They are all the same", Rafiqul says, shaking his head when I ask if there aren't distinctions between ABSU, the student group that

now leads the Bodoland movement, and militant groups like the NDFB, who seek the overthrow of the Indian state itself, and are responsible for violence, kidnappings, shootings and so on. For Rafiqul, Jamal, and others in Makrabari who have experienced violence by Bodo militants first hand, the prospect of Bodoland, or the UPP in power as a party sympathetic to the cause, is far worse than the silence of their MLA while they were labelled Bangladeshi. As Rafiqul puts it:

“At least with the BPF we know we will get something, at least they will speak to us with respect. Pramila Rani didn’t say anything in public, this is true, but she couldn’t. Behind closed doors she really supported us though. It’s not as if Ekya Mancha came out to support us either.”

In private, then, quite different from their public anger against the BPF workers on the issue of Pramila Rani’s silence, they are more sympathetic of the political calculations she must make, and her need to stay loyal to the Bodo community as well as keep her Muslim voters happy. Nonetheless, they do not mistake this pragmatism for genuine concern, and are aware that just as she represents the least bad option for them, for her they too represent a necessity, given their numbers. The BPF also has a reputation for being corrupt, so much so that, Rafiqul admits, even many poor Bodos have not benefitted from their being in power. Nonetheless, Makrabari residents claim to vote for the BPF despite the presence of the AIUDF, a party that openly represents the interests of Muslims. In the BTAD, though, this calculus does not work:

“To keep the UPP out, we would vote for the BPF even over the AIUDF. If we voted for the AIUDF, we would take a vote away from the BPF, which would make the UPP more likely to win. So even though it is ironic that Muslims are voting for a BJP ally, it is the safest option in the BTAD.”

The group of 10 or 12 men who are sitting around us, with Rafiqul and Jamal, all nod their heads in agreement with this strategy. There is no question that the rise of the right-wing, minority-loathing BJP nationally has posed a threat for them, but they are also clear that whatever the level of the election — national, state or council-level — in the BTAD, it is local politics that primarily determines voting strategy. As also borne out by other studies focussing on the links between ethnicity and voting — voters do not simply choose the

candidate that is of their own ethnicity, their choices are also informed by the likelihood of the candidate winning (Choi 2009, Heath *et al.* 2015).

In Anthaiguri, another Muslim respondent, Abdul, outlines a different strategic reason to vote for the BPF, and one more closely related to the *dhamki* — fear. Abdul is a BPF worker at the time of this election, although he is openly critical of the party, and a few months after the election, he leaves, citing a lack of real opportunity for Muslims in the party leadership. Were the Muslims of a constituency to come together and vote for Muslim interests outright, say, by voting for the AIUDF, the ruling BPF, by analysing booth level data, would be able to tell how many votes they got from where, and in turn “punish” the concerned village. He is vague about the form of this punishment, unclear whether it refers to retaliatory violence or absence of spending. Given the attack on Bengali Muslims immediately after the 2014 election, however, it is not an unfounded fear. This links back to the multiple meanings of patronage, the ability of voters to see the distinction between “good” and “bad” patronage, and ability of patronage to become, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, a coercive relationship instead of a mutually constitutive one (Piliavsky 2014b, pp. 25-26). As Berenschot (2011c) observes, poorer or more marginalised citizens are more susceptible to being dependent on patronage relationships because of their dependence on political networks to provide access to state institutions; access that they cannot always gain independently. As the structure and functioning of the VCDC also shows, in the BTAD this has all but been institutionalised in the form of politics-as-governance.

6.4.2 *Votes without ballots — patronage, ethnicity and local politics*

If elections at national, state and council levels represent decision-making at electoral levels of governance, the VCDC structure shows how decision-making at the village level adds another dimension to understanding political identities. As with elections, and perhaps more so, Gilmartin’s deconstruction of idealised notions of secret ballot and individual voting as the basis of democratic functioning are challenged, as consensus-building often emerges as an alternative method of making decisions.

In May 2017, The Assam government launched a programme called *Amar Gaon Amar Achoni* (AGAA, which translates to our village, our scheme). The basic principle is of

participatory citizen governance. Over the course of a month, between May and June 2017, village level meetings were to be held in villages across Assam, where village residents would specify what their welfare needs were in the areas of housing, food rations, infrastructure, livelihood generation, social security and so on. Monitoring committees would be formed at the VCDC level (in the case of the BTAD), to ensure that the four-year programmes that were devised were carried through.

At the beginning of the month-long campaign to launch the programme, there was an initial meeting to explain the functioning of the programme, followed by another meeting to decide on which programmes were most appropriate to undertake for the village or hamlet concerned. Based on this, the committee would devise an action plan to operationalise these schemes. A junior engineer from the Block level would be involved in chairing and conducting the meetings, and would also document them (via pictures), which would then be shared on a WhatsApp group, monitored by the Rural Development department at the state level in Assam, to ensure that the meetings were being conducted in each village and with different VCDC members.

In Uzanpara, the junior engineer assigned to accompany the meeting (and also one who often dealt with VCDC members with respect to other projects) was Sushanta, whose presence was essential to every meeting. Meetings were run by him and VCDC chairman Moinuddin, with the two first jointly explaining the purpose of the programme, usually at the first meeting. In this, as well as the follow-up meeting conducted a few weeks later, village residents would then collectively spell out their demands for the villages — some at an individual level (to do with pensions, or housing allotments), or a collective level (infrastructure such as roads, canals, wells, or boundary walls).

Many of these meetings contained some of the performative elements of politics that Banerjee (2007) discusses with regard to elections. In a similar vein, many of the participants were sceptical about its outcomes, including Sushanta. For him, the AGAA was just a new iteration of previous similar government programmes.⁴² “People have been fooled many times, that’s why they don’t participate as enthusiastically”, he says. “But this is a way to end the contractor raj, now if any department gets new funds, it must consider these schemes

⁴² For instance, the Rajjor Padulit Rajjor Sarkar (RPRS) programme (Government of Assam 2014).

[decided during the AGAA meetings] first.” Ironically, a few weeks after the AGAA meetings were completed, Sushanta was arrested in connection with corruption charges relating to his participation in exactly the kind of contractor raj that he was critiquing.

While many at the meetings were also cynical, and expressed this cynicism in the form of complaints for previous failures (similar in some ways to *gaalis* in election campaigns), in other instances, the discussions and decision-making proceeded in earnest, and revealed underlying networks and tensions. One of Mukulika Banerjee’s central questions in her 2014 book *Why India Votes* expands on the titular question — despite the corruption, inefficiencies and multiple failures of governance, why do Indians continue to come out and vote in droves in local, state or national elections (Banerjee 2014)? One might extend this question to political participation in general — as Sushanta says, people have been failed again and again, and yet, even at the AGAA meetings, an effort was made to come together, make demands, and attempt to claim one’s rights in whatever public forum was made available.

When the second decision-making meeting for the AGAA came around, where residents had to select a few schemes or programmes on a priority basis (which, as Sushanta would explain to the assembled crowd in each meeting, would be implemented first), decisions were once again not parallel to the ethnic lines along which politicians often expressed political citizenship. Instead, concerns were framed around distinctively local understandings, reflecting an intuitive grasp of what the AGAA had the capacity to deliver, if anything.

In one Uzanpara hamlet, one of the priorities was to build a new community hall, but in an area that was convenient, but also comfortable, to both Bodos and Muslims, with VCDC member Mofidul observing that the previous proposed venue was closer to the Muslim side, and since the 2012 riots, some Bodos were afraid of venturing there. In two separate hamlets, the issue of boundary walls emerged as critical — many buildings, such as schools, mosques or temples were able to raise money for the construction of the building itself, but constructing a boundary wall around them (often as much to prevent cattle from getting in as for safety) remained elusive for years afterwards. Thus, in AGAA meetings, boundary walls were a priority. This led to two interesting decisions involving boundary walls — in one case, the boundary wall between a mosque and the local primary school were to be shared, and in another, the Muslim graveyard and prayer ground (*idgah*) and the Bodo temple were given equal priority. In a subversive act of symbolism, walls, which often represent separation and

expulsion, became sites of compromise, consensus, and shared spaces. Similarly, when deciding which were the poorest who still needed to be included in the list to receive subsidised food, two Muslim and two Bodo names were put forward in each hamlet, with Muslim members often supporting the inclusion of a Bodo name, especially in the case of those who were elderly and disabled, and vice versa for Bodos with Muslim names. This became a routine practice in each meeting.

Just as both elections and the AGAA programme showed contrasting ideas of how political decision-making is seen, even ideas of political patronage emerged as more complex than just falling strictly along the lines of ethnicity, as Abdul's experience with the BPF showed. The appointment of VCDC members too depends on acts of patronage, but once again, these networks prove more complex than it would appear.

Before Moinuddin was appointed chairman of the West Amguri VCDC in 2015, the chairman's post had been occupied for the last ten years by Moniram Musahary, a Bodo BPF party worker. According to stories told by Uzanpara BPF workers and VCDC members, Moniram was not re-nominated in 2015, at least partly because cuts from different welfare schemes and contractor projects were overly ostentatious, perhaps also posing a threat to other party leadership in the region, such as Diganta and Amarjit. In light of this, and in line with promises made during the election, Moinuddin was the first Muslim VCDC chairman appointed in Uzanpara. But other Muslim VCDC members, such as Kader Ali and Mofidul, were not happy with this outcome. I bumped into Kader, along with BPF workers Abdul and Noren in Kokrajhar town, doing the rounds of the secretariat on "member business", which usually meant trying to be reimbursed for projects they had already undertaken, and money they had already spent. Standing there, however, they began to express their dissatisfaction with Moinuddin as a chairman, "I don't want a Muslim chairman next time!", said Kader angrily, "He never gives anyone any schemes, keeps them all to himself. I'm going to complain to Diganta and Amarjit — I have already mentioned it to Diganta but he dismissed me".

A few days later, in his hybrid home-office space, Kader had calmed down, but continued to object to Moinuddin's appointment. "He never gives us any schemes unless he feels like it. There was a housing project for which he chose a beneficiary who was not even poor, and not even a BPF supporter! Instead, he went and gave it to a BJP supporter. He should be helping

out BPF supporters first”. He mused whether he could have done something about it, “The VCDC chairman is selected with some consultation of the members, at the time I supported him, though others like Mofidul were already opposed to him, I should have listened to them, I’m a fool. If Moniram had been nominated again I would definitely have supported him instead.”

Different aspects of patronage are at play here. Kader regrets the appointment of a Muslim chairman who is not favouring Muslims — while there is an expectation that ethnicity might play a role in how he conducts himself as chairman, Moinuddin has subverted the expectation, causing Kader to wish he could have sided with a different, non-Muslim candidate. Ethnicity is a factor (Moinuddin’s appointment is also to do with the BPF’s political calculations in continuing to be perceived as the “least harmful” Bodo party to Muslims), but is also not the only driving factor when it comes to distributing power in patronage systems. Having faced disappointment, Kader was now ready to re-calculate his strategy and team up with others like Noren (who, like many other Bodos in the Uzanpara BPF, also supported Moinuddin initially) to oust Moinuddin, to regain his own place in the patronage network. Others like Mofidul did not factor ethnicity in to begin with, instead petitioning for Moniram to get yet another term.

Such findings could of course be romanticised to paint a picture of inter-ethnic relations that defy polarising efforts. This would neither be completely true, nor completely false. In the Uzanpara hamlet community centre, one of the concerns voiced at the meeting is of Bodos’ continuing fear of going over to “the Muslim side” of the village, painting a less-than-rosy picture of inter-group harmony. On the other hand, it is also clear that day-to-day politics is about getting along with your neighbours because this is the pragmatic thing to do, especially when there is economic interdependence. Everyday acts of decision-making are inherently political, even if they might appear purely technical (Anand 2017), and in making these choices, residents display a particular worldview of politics that does rely solely on simple categories of ethnic cleavage, even if they may at other times fit into these macro narratives. Along with the strategic decisions made about voting for candidates of one’s own ethnicity (by the likes of Rafiqul, Abdul and Jamal, for instance), this is in line with Piliavsky’s contention that patronage is essentially a flexible relationship, and not fixed by one criteria, or a singular political identity (Piliavsky 2014b).

In Makrabari, by contrast, everyday decision making at a collective, political level is all but absent, given the extraordinary circumstances of the residents. In being removed from what they consider their home in Dewalgaon, residents are unable to participate in local Makrabari politics, given the constant sense of living on borrowed land. In Dewalgaon, their involvement with their former VCDC is restricted only to receiving “distribution” materials from time to time — blankets, umbrellas, and so on, which are few in number and sporadically received. The other, more important function fulfilled by their VCDC is to provide certificates confirming that they are officially from Dewalgaon, a crucial document, like electoral rolls, that enables them to prove their legality in the BTAD. It forms yet another aspect of their survival strategy.

Elections represent one of the few instances (as also seen in the opening vignette) where Makrabari residents are given an opportunity to express a political identity, make demands that are (at least performatively) legitimate in the eyes of the state, and counter the everyday invisibilisation that renders them to the very margins of political life in Bodoland. That is of course, not to say that Makrabari residents do not exercise agency or make choices on an everyday basis, but that the opportunity to make *political* choices of the everyday variety is often denied to them. Indeed, an important political act from their perspective has been to retain this dual, contradictory political voter identity of being physically resident in one place (Makrabari), and politically relevant in another by staying on the electoral rolls of Dewalgaon.

6.5 Conclusion: Citizenship and political practice

The performances and the decision-making that surrounded political acts — both by politicians and citizens — shed light on the ideas of citizenship that are held and practised in everyday political life. Both in moments of rupture and exception, political processes represent underlying, everyday political practices and the ongoing relationship between citizens and the state. Politics provides multiple lenses through which to approach the question of citizenship in the BTAD.

For Muslims, for instance, as the opening vignette showed, the first and most visceral connection is through being considered a legal citizen in the first place. Makrabari’s residents

have experienced first hand the threat of being excluded from voting and exercising this citizenship right altogether, through being classified “Doubtful voters”. Their religious and linguistic profiles render them more vulnerable to bureaucratic expulsion by the state, although as the campaign meeting showed, this relationship is not without complexity, as agents of the state also legitimise their presence by campaigning there in the first place.

Using ethnicity as a means of constructing a citizen is echoed in campaign speeches and addresses to different communities by multiple politicians and party workers at rallies and meetings of various sizes. Along with *dhamki*, their appeals to vote often fell into classic patronage-based ideas of how citizens respond to politics — through choosing members from their own ethnic groups, and through promises of material benefits. To some extent, these ideas also found resonance, as with Abdul, who took the threat literally, especially because of his own ethnic identity. For him, physical violence was not an unlikely outcome of being “punished” for voting along ethnic lines, along with material deprivation.

Nonetheless, this passive construction of citizens provided only a one-dimensional picture of how votes were cast, and what performances citizens themselves undertook during the election. The *gaali*, frequently vocalised at smaller pocket meetings, represented a reclaiming of the space of the threat with vocal disgruntlement. In James Holston’s (2008, 2009) work on Brazil, urban citizens on the peripheries reclaim their sense of citizenship, despite being marginalised and excluded from Brazil’s citizenship regime. From their position of relative disempowerment, they nonetheless appropriate the language of rights, and reclaim spaces based on existing discourses seen as legitimate in the eyes of the state. In this vein, residents of the BTAD also exercise the citizenship rights that often exist as abstract concepts, by standing up at meetings and expressing their displeasure. Politicians listen to a range of grievances — wells that remain undug, bridges that remain unbuilt, fear that goes unchecked as insecurity continues (especially in the wake of the riots). Elections then become a rare moment of order being restored to the functioning of the Indian state (Banerjee 2014), in which it is possible for citizens to complain and politicians to listen. Ahuja and Chhibber (2012) make a similar observation when looking at why the poorest groups vote. Their study concludes that while partly motivated by patronage or material benefits, voting for the most marginalised groups is the primary mode of expressing citizenship. Since membership in civic and other associations is low among these groups, “political parties emerge as the most plausible agent responsible for transmitting the language of rights” (Ibid. p .408).

It is not just that the *gaali* represents a cathartic moment of venting one's frustration, it is an important element of the election spectacle. If elections are like festivals and rituals (Banerjee 2007, 2014), giving *gaalis* is an important and meaningful performance of that ritual. It is not simply delivered in the heat of the moment, it is planned, and anticipated. At a pocket meeting in Kokrajhar East, Amarjit, the current MCLA campaigning for his party said, "Now that I'm here, feel free to give me as many *gaalis* as you want. Tell me what's working, and what is not." Whether his intent is to respond genuinely to the grievances aired or not, he is nonetheless prepared for it to happen. One elderly Bodo man in Amarjit's constituency said, much before he even attended any meetings, "even though I think the politicians are useless, I will go, and I will give *gaalis* about what they have not done for us." Like a ritual, it is a form of performance that is anticipated before it has begun, despite also being and appearing spontaneous — in that the politician themselves may not always know exactly the form or content the *gaali* will take.

The multiple scales at which political identities are expressed also make for a dynamic expression of one's citizenship. By electing Hira Sarania, for instance, non-Bodo voters chose to use a national platform to express a more grounded and local need for the state to protect all its citizens, regardless of ethnicity. The same voters, however, at the Assembly elections, understood the value of sticking with one "Bodo party" over the other, because of greater perceived room to negotiate their rights to citizenship. The village level, particularly the hamlets within the larger village emerged as the primary site for the most theatrical performances of politics in the BTAD — the *gaali*, the *dhamki*, and the decision-making practices that surrounded the AGAA programme. This scale also proved useful for enacting different kinds of patronage politics — threats, promises, and offers of allegiance. Reigning political wisdom would suggest that the smaller the scale of governance, the greater the accountability, but equally, decentralisation of power also led to greater instances and opportunities for the exercise of patronage politics (Sadanandan 2012). While an instrumental view of patronage would mean this is detrimental for local politics, a more complex picture is painted when elements of accountability are seen as being built into patronage networks themselves, and both rights and patronage politics emerge as means of carving out spaces of citizenship.



7. OUTSIDERS AT HOME

CHAPTER 7. OUTSIDERS AT HOME: NEW EXCLUSIONS AND THE HINDU RIGHT WING

“Now they’re telling people what to wear. We don’t need their priests from Uttar Pradesh.”

- Kampa Borgoyary, Deputy Chief of the BTC

7.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the process of creating Others in the construction of citizens in the BTAD and Assam, and examines how contemporary Indian politics may have an effect on the manner in which these categories are shaped, much as erstwhile political processes and structures have affected the way these categories were constructed.

In Assam’s politics specifically, outsiders and their exclusion have been an explicit part of the vocabulary of citizenship, as reinforced by the Assam movement of the 1980s against immigration from Bangladesh. In the last two decades or so, this discourse has sharpened further, with the outsider being located now as both Bangladeshi and Muslim, thus turning every Bengali-speaking Muslim resident of Assam into a possible threat.

In contemporary India, after the election of the Bhartiya Janata Party in 2014 to the national government, right-wing Hindu nationalism has seen a definite ascent across the country. The election of the BJP to Assam’s state government, for the first time in 2016, poses the question: will Assam (and the rest of Northeast India), with its mix of ethnicities and religions, follow the path of many other regions in the country? Are the notions of outsiders and exclusions to citizenship changing as Hindu nationalist groups, both political and societal, assert their presence in the region? Moreover, if that is so, what new sense of citizenship or belonging is being constructed in the process? In this chapter, I look at how ideas of inclusion and exclusion have been expressed at various moments, and how the growing Hindu fundamentalist movement could alter these, while also building on them.

7.2 Hindu nationalism: Alternative ways of being Indian

While present-day Hindu nationalism rose to mainstream prominence in the 1990s, its

historical origins go back further, to reformist movements within Hindu religion. In the first instance, Hindu mobilisation occurred in the form of resistance to European dominance in the 19th century, through reformist movements within Hinduism such as the Brahma Samaj (originating in Bengal, and also the movement that initially converted many Bodos to Hinduism), and the Arya Samaj, first active in Punjab. These movements, along with others such as the Sanatan Dharma, coalesced to form the Hindu Mahasabha in 1915, although it gained proper momentum only in the 1920s, largely in response to insecurity over Muslim mobilisation in colonial India (Jaffrelot 2007, p. 12). While resisting British imperialism was one motive, these movements, led mainly by upper-caste (Brahmin) elites, were also mobilised against growing lower caste actions that were rejecting Hindu hierarchy — instead, Hindu consolidation was to serve as a force that brought these oppressed classes into their fold (Corbridge and Harriss 2000, pp. 181–82).

While the Mahasabha initially worked as a movement within the Congress party, it became its own political party, under the leadership of V. D. Savarkar, in the late 1930s (Ibid., p. 14). According to Jaffrelot, Savarkar is credited with turning the mobilisation towards the idea of “Hindutva” — a Hindu nationalism, distinct from the secular nationalism promoted by Congress leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru — where Hindus were the original autochthonous people of India, with a distinct territorial, racial, and linguistic identity. As the literature from other parts of India and my own fieldwork below goes on to show, these ideas become crucial for tribal regions. The All India Hindu Mahasabha established an Assam chapter, which protested vehemently against the settlement of land to Muslims, berating the government of Assam for not taking note of “the interests of the indigenous people of all communities of Assam Valley” (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library 1944, p. 7). In addition, in the period immediately following Partition, it regularly campaigned on behalf of Hindu refugees from East Pakistan (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library n.d., p. 37).⁴³

Critical to the rise of Hindu nationalism was the formation of different social and political organisations, which eventually replaced the Mahasabha. Chief among them is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, set up in the mid-1920s in Nagpur, Maharashtra, with the aim of disciplining and training a Hindu nation from small village and neighbourhood level *shakhas* (branches) (Jaffrelot 2007, p. 16). Another important organisation in the present day is the

⁴³ Although the document is undated it indicates it is from the 1950s.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad, founded in Bombay in 1964, which focussed both on working in tribal areas, as well as the important consolidation of the Hindu diaspora abroad (Van der Veer 1994). These organisations reinforced ideas of the Hindu nation, and of the Hindu race as being especially “tolerant” and “weak”, and therefore susceptible to attacks by “foreign” religions, specifically Islam and Christianity (Van der Veer 1994). Such conceptions drew on orientalist ideas of Hindu civilisation, drawing on neatly partitioned “Hindu” and “Muslim” communities, categories that were reinforced in the colonial period through practices like separate electorates, for instance (Corbridge and Harriss 2000, p. 180). These were, ultimately, not different from categorisation practices in the Northeast, discussed in earlier chapters.

The political wing of the Hindu nationalist movement has also played an important role in the spread of these ideas — beginning with the creation of the Jan Sangh, the political wing of the movement, in 1951, its allying with the Janata Party in 1971, and finally the break-up of this party, and the creation of the present-day Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1980 (Jaffrelot 2007). While there have been significant diversions at different periods of time, the BJP has allied itself closely with the VHP and RSS, and in contemporary India, particularly, there is an overlap of membership in the BJP and one or more of its allied outfits in the Hindu nationalist movements, even at the highest levels (including India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Assam’s Chief Minister, Sarbananda Sonowal).

7.2.1 Hindu nationalism and the tribal question

For the Hindu right wing, tribes were viewed as being “backward Hindus” (Xaxa 2005, p. 1364), imperfectly integrated members of Hindu society. The introduction of separate electorates in colonial India in 1909 brought about a need to consolidate Hindu numbers, and thus tribes were mobilised by Hindu nationalist groups to enumerate themselves as “Hindu”, rather than practitioners of tribal religions, in the Indian census (Ibid., p. 1367). Post Independence census-taking made this absorption nearly complete. Bringing tribal and lower caste groups within the realm of Hindutva has been an explicit aim of the Hindu nationalist movement since the 1970s (Van der Veer 1994). For tribal areas, this was undertaken by the VHP in the form of Vanvasi Kalyan Ashrams set up to provide social welfare (such as scholarships and medical centres) to tribal communities, along with influencing religious

practices in line with mainstream Hindu practices (Hansen 1999). Education has always been a key method for the inculcation of Hindu nationalist identities in tribal areas, through the setting up of schools and training camps, and even the creation of new textbooks that emphasise the “foreign-ness” of Muslims and Christians. In addition, education is a way to inculcate masculine ideas of discipline and morality (Sundar 2004, Froerer 2007). The Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram hostels are sites for right-wing groups to reclaim the politics of indigeneity (Sundar 2002).

Baviskar notes in her study of encounters between Hindu nationalism and a tribal community in central India that for Hindu nationalist groups, the inclusion of tribal communities within the Hindu fold is considered to be by default, aided by the Indian census listing them as Hindu unless they explicitly state affiliation with indigenous religions or Christianity (Baviskar 2005). Discourses that fold tribal societies within a wider Hindu society often allude to these indigenous communities’ inherent rights to the natural resources they inhabit and are surrounded by — *jal, jungle, zameen* — water, forests, and land. Ideas of autochthonous virtue (Ibid, p. 5109) frame indigenous culture as inherently spatial, and linked to a fixed place, an idea that resonates with the way the colonial administration saw these communities, and finds continuity in the framework of Hindu nationalism. Baviskar further points out an inherent contradiction in this view — while there is a tendency to romanticise tribal connections to natural resources, at the same time, these very resources are constantly under threat of destruction by a developmental state.

While Baviskar is referring to the larger discourse of the Indian state and its construction of indigeneity, the argument finds resonance within Hindu nationalism as well — it romanticises and essentialises tribal culture, while also supporting a neoliberal, market-oriented developmentalist agenda that threatens those very links. Mawdsley (2006) has pointed out the susceptibility of certain environmental discourses to being appropriated by a neo-traditionalist Hindutva agenda, for political gain. The terms on which claims to indigeneity and right to resources are made by the Hindu right are different from the basis on which Adivasi struggles are fought, for example, on the issue of displacement because of large development projects. The idea of Hindu indigeneity is built on the exclusion, often violently, of other religious minorities (Baviskar 2005).

The construction and vilification of an Other is central to the process of creating a sense of a Hindu community and a Hindu self. Depending on the context, either Christians or Muslims

(and in some cases, both) are the threatening Other to blame for a tribal community's backwardness and poverty. In a study of the pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002, Lobo notes that the communalisation of an Adivasi community that participated in the riots was partially brought about through right-wing groups painting Muslims as an exploitative group (Lobo 2002). Among other things, this helped break political alliances between Adivasi, Dalit and Muslim groups against upper-caste Hindu hegemony in the state. In Froerer's study of another central Indian tribal community in Chhattisgarh, it was a Christian Other that was invoked by Hindu right-wing groups (Froerer 2006). Here, the rise and persistence of right-wing Hindu groups was also a response to the strong presence of the church in the area, an institution that is perceived to threaten the Hindutva agenda on a national scale.

In accounts of both Chhattisgarh and Gujarat, there is great emphasis on the *involvement of Hindutva groups in local affairs*, and the role that this plays in the process of communalisation. This allows for a reframing of local practices or conflicts into confrontations between Hindus and Others. In Froerer's study, a dispute about too much liquor being sold to, and bought by, Hindu men quickly descends into a tirade against "Christians" (not Oraons, the local indigenous group) corrupting Hindu society through liquor sales when a right-wing Hindu group gets involved. Thus a village level conflict, which had arisen in the past and been dealt with on local terms, between Oraons and Hindus, was re-appropriated by the Hindu group as a religious clash, and gained legitimacy as this interpretation was supported by the village headman. It is the conflation of "Oraon" and "Christian" in a public context (the meeting) that marks an important moment in the communalisation of relations in the village (Froerer 2006).

The process of inclusion within the Hindutva fold through the creation of Muslim and Christian Others is accompanied by a process of influencing local religious and cultural practices. In Froerer's case, this is through organised meetings and "trainings" conducted in the villages by Hindutva groups, introducing "proper" ways of Hindu worship, and inculcating the right "cultural ethos" in young people and children (Froerer 2006, p. 45). Similarly, Lobo details the propagation of Hindutva ideals through existing Hindu sects, building on existing religious networks, but using them to different ends. Enrolling villagers and young men in these revamped organisations, holding "anti-Christian" meetings (Lobo 2002, p. 4846), and constructing new Hindu shrines are just some of the methods Hindutva

groups use in tribal societies. Baviskar's piece also highlights the fluidity between Hinduisation and engagement with a more urban, affluent, "*bazaaria*" culture, so that becoming part of the Hindu fold also becomes synonymous with modernity and access to greater cultural and social capital (Baviskar 2005).

Even as issues such as the influx of Bangladeshi immigrants in Assam have been instrumentalised by Hindu nationalist groups in their campaigns (Corbridge and Harriss 2000, p. 187), Hindu nationalist groups had not wielded much influence in Northeast India until recently. Even so, organisations like the RSS and VHP have been present in the region since the 1960s (Longkumer 2011, p. 134). Key among the strategies used by Hindu nationalist groups in the region is that of allying themselves with ongoing indigenous religious movements or groups, especially those that are in opposition to other dominant religions in the region, such as Christianity. This is the case among Hindutva groups in Arunachal Pradesh, who allied themselves with the Donyi Polo movement among the Adi tribe, and used this as a vehicle to promote Hindutva ideology (Dawar 2008, Kanungo 2011). Among the Heraka (an indigenous religious movement in the North Cachar Hills of Assam, and parts of Nagaland), Hindu religious symbols and imagery have been used to appropriate Heraka within the umbrella of Hinduism (Dangmei 2013). In doing this, Hindu groups accord to the Heraka a romanticised indigenous identity under the term *vanvasi* (literally "forest dweller"), where tribal groups are patronised, and seen as needing guidance in the ways of civilisation by their more advanced Hindu brethren (Longkumer 2011, pp. 134-39). Such stereotypical ideas of indigeneity are also employed in viewing the Northeast as a region rich for resource extraction — pristine and covered in forests, representing ancient Hindu connections between humans and nature, which had been otherwise "lost" by modern Hindus (Longkumer 2018). These views are expressed in the context of Patanjali— a company set up by a Hindu god-man (Baba Ramdev) that promotes natural health products and lifestyle choices like yoga, but also serves as a vehicle of "neo-Hindutva" in the Northeast, where land has been allotted to Patanjali in BJP-controlled states especially (Ibid.).

Longkumer's study of Hindutva groups in Nagaland shows how the state provides a particularly difficult context in which to propagate Hindu religious majoritarianism, as 88 percent of Nagaland's population identifies as Christian (Census of India 2011, Table C1), and the church has always been resistant to such attempts (Longkumer 2017). Because of this, Longkumer argues, Hindutva groups have taken a different approach in Northeastern

India, working first through forming alliances with indigenous religions,⁴⁴ and second, through adapting the discourse of what it means to be Hindu — culturally, religiously, and nationally. Hindutva groups in Nagaland use post-Enlightenment ideas of separating religion and culture to allow Nagas to be Christian and Hindu/Indian simultaneously. Being Christian is relegated to the realm of faith alone — it is only a spiritual belief — while being Hindu is a way of life and culture, its material reality is what defines the terms on which one is Hindu. In Hindutva ideology, to be Hindu is to inhabit Indian territory, a “way of life originated from the son of the soil” (Longkumer 2017, p. 213). To be Hindu in the Hindutva sense, then, is inherently territorial, even if one’s spiritual beliefs vary. As Longkumer rightly points out, however, this strategy may prove challenging in Nagaland, which has never seen itself as part of Indian territory, and whose very identity has been built upon emphasizing exactly such a separation. The task of Hindutva here is then twofold — to convince largely Christian Nagaland that they are also Hindu, as well as rooted in India (Ibid, p. 224).

These strategies, particularly those of appropriating local level conflicts into a Hindutva discourse, are relevant to the discussion that follows about the spread of Hindutva in the BTAD. From the perspective of Hindu nationalist groups such as the RSS, these are tried and tested strategies applied to a new context. For the BTAD, however, it is a potential re-framing of a decades-long conflict, and potentially a new understanding of how exclusion is constituted.

Many of the issues mentioned here, such as those of illegal migration from Bangladesh, are reflected in the politics of the region, along with the demands for separate statehood, antagonism towards Assamese hegemony, and a multi-ethnic society that often pits the claims of one group against another. It is in this specific context that I look at the growth of the RSS and other right-wing organisations in the region, and how they can affect the way inclusion and exclusion are conceptualised.

7.2.2 Bodoland: A case study in transformation?

Until recently, the RSS has had a nominal presence in Assam and the Northeast. It has seen a greater expansion of influence across the country after the BJP won the national elections in

⁴⁴ In another piece, Longkumer explains how these efforts are supported by the state, when the Prime Minister, himself a member of the RSS, on a visit to Nagaland chose only to interact with state BJP leaders and an indigenous religious group with strong links to the RSS (Longkumer 2015).

2014, and in Assam particularly, after it formed the state government in 2016. For Bodoland, the BJP has never been a significant force politically, having failed to win any seats at all in the Bodoland Territorial Council until the most recent elections in 2015, where it won only one seat out of a possible 40. That it made an alliance with the ruling Bodoland Political Front, in the state elections of 2016, however, has led to an increase in the numbers of its cadres on the ground (which still do not match the numbers of the BPF, or its main Bodo opposition, the United People's Party), and the cross-over of some resentful BPF leaders (especially those denied candidacy tickets during elections) opportunistically to the BJP. The RSS, the right-wing organisation that has also, among other Hindu nationalist groups, seen a growing presence country-wide, has had a similar increase in membership in the BTAD. While their presence in the region is not as ubiquitous as in parts of northern and central India, and indeed even other parts of Assam, there is a marked shift in their presence and activities. The victory of the BJP in 2016 elections in the state is acknowledged as an important moment in accelerating this advance, both by its leaders and members, as well as by other informants.

One of the first and most widely-known illustrations of the growing presence of the RSS in the BTAD was a long piece of investigative journalism by Neha Dixit (2016), who exposed the trafficking of 31 young girls by the RSS to RSS-affiliated schools in Gujarat and Punjab. The girls, belonging to Bodo and Adivasi communities, were taken from poor families from five districts of Assam on the pretext of being given an education, after which their families heard nothing from them for four years. It was only investigation and action on the part of child rights authorities in Assam that exposed the trafficking, although at the time of the article being written, they had still not returned to their parents. The article, apart from exposing the trafficking, also pointed out other significant trends about the RSS in the region — the presence of their operatives for up to 20 years before this incident, the reliance of vulnerable families, especially those affected by violence, on the RSS for support, and the role of women RSS operatives.

Dixit's report looked at two Bodo women RSS members who were crucial to the process of sending the girls away, and whose own sense of threatened Bodo identity ("Bodo people are being fooled by Christians, killed by Muslims", said one) found refuge in the security of a powerful Hindu identity. Dixit alleged that their dual status as Bodo insiders and women made access into the community easier, and their own experiences of RSS training camps

painted not just a trustworthy, but aspirational picture for the young girls being sent. Meanwhile, the trafficked girls, in their hostels in Gujarat and Assam, repeated instructions about protecting a “woman’s honour” from “outsiders” by committing acts like *jauhar*,⁴⁵ and protecting Hindus from Bangladeshis and Christian missionaries in Assam. The young girls also internalised ideas about Hindu girls not eating meat (despite all belonging to families and communities where eating meat and fish are a part of life). Nonetheless, for all the RSS operatives involved in the process of identifying and sending the girls away, a “return” to Bodo identity meant the abandonment of these cultural and social practices, and the adoption of “mainstream” Hindu concepts of the role of women and daughters, mothers and wives. Dixit’s findings resonate with other parts of India as well, where women voluntarily participate in Hindu nationalist organisations, even where they are involved in the oppression of other women, but in ways that allow them to re-fashion themselves as leaders and activists (Corbridge and Harriss 2007, p. 191).

In addition to the growing number of RSS operatives and members in Bodoland, the emergence of Patanjali in the region also has the potential to affect the socio-political landscape. In 2016, close to 4,000 bighas of land was allotted to Patanjali in Chirang district, although the All Bodo Students Union alleged that ordinary Bodos were not consulted before this decision was taken by the Bodoland Territorial Council (The Tribune 2016). This has been developed into a large complex, with a school, a dairy farm, and a small office which so far has only a few employees, mostly from outside of Assam. During my fieldwork, it was rumoured that the Council leadership had promised a plot of land to Patanjali in every district of the BTAD, and at the time, a plot in Uzanpara was also being considered. Being near a forest, it was said to be resource-rich and ideal for Patanjali’s herbal products, although the Muslims in Uzanpara were nervous about what this meant for them, whether it was a base for the RSS, or a means to edge them out. Forest officials like Milan Boro were uncertain as to how land that was in theory designated under forest area could be allotted to a private company (this was against forest land regulations). Eventually, near the end of my fieldwork, the deal fell through, as confirmed at the Circle Office in Kokrajhar. When asked for the reason why, a revenue official said only this, “Patanjali decided to withdraw, saying there were too many Muslims in the area”. What this meant was never explained, either to him, or to me on follow-up questioning at the Chirang district Patanjali complex (where the comment

⁴⁵ A custom of mass suicide among women to prevent capture during war, said to have occurred between the 14th and 16th century in present day Rajasthan.

was denied entirely).

In the following sections, I look at how Hindutva groups propound these narratives, in both extraordinary and ordinary circumstances. I examine two kinds of contexts: first, the 2012 Bodo-Muslim riots, and how violent events can provide the kind of environment for such groups to grow; and second, the everyday practices, narratives and activities of Hindutva groups and those affiliated with them, especially in the wake of the 2016 elections. In each of these, they employ strategies similar to those seen in the literature above, especially with regard to tribal communities, and tribal communities in the Northeast in particular. Simultaneously, I scrutinise how other actors, especially Muslims, make sense of these processes, and what it could mean for citizenship and belonging in the BTAD.

7.3 Violence as a moment of othering

The 2012 riots between Bodos and Muslims in the BTAD represent a watershed moment in ethnic relations between the two communities, as well as in shaping the perception of Muslims in BTAD and Assam. Such violent events present a moment of rupture, in which identifying the Other becomes important, and an opportunity to mould and re-shape these categories can emerge. This process is seen, for instance, in the reinforcing of neo-oriental categories of Otherness in the continuing crisis of migration and asylum-seeking in contemporary Europe (Barbero 2012b), and the transformation of ordinary Muslims into members of a “suspect community” after violent acts of terrorism (Hickman *et al.* 2011, Jarvis and Lister 2013).

The dynamics of Bodo-Muslim violence in the BTAD are not the same as the dynamics of Hindu-Muslim violence in India (although there are efforts to subsume it within this discourse, which are discussed later). In Assam, for instance, the discourse of illegal immigration from Bangladesh, which became especially prominent during the Assam movement of the 1970s, plays a far greater role in defining the relationship between Muslims (especially Bengali-speaking ones) and other communities in the state, than do the themes of Hindu-Muslim communal discourse that are prevalent in other parts of India. Paul Brass (Brass 2003) identifies three major defining themes from Indian history — the Mughals, the British, and the partition of India and Pakistan — as central to the perpetuation of this

discourse in India. In the BTAD, the Bodo agitation of the 1990s, and the creation of the Council in 2003 are significant markers of ethnic violence locally, until the riots of 2012.

There are many versions and narratives of what precipitated the riots in the BTAD in July 2012. In one version, the violence began to escalate when two Muslim men were shot dead in Anghihara on 6th July 2012, in the jurisdiction of the Dotma police station in Kokrajhar district. On 20th July, four Bodo men, members of the ruling Bodoland Political Front, were killed in retaliation. According to other commentators, it was this act of violence that sparked off the riots, and by the 21st, further retaliation by unidentified persons on a Muslim-inhabited village led to a total death toll of 9 (The Sentinel 2012a). This cycle of violence took on a life of its own and for the next two months, nearly 500,000 people became displaced in the process of fleeing their homes (Mahanta 2013, p. 52). In many affected villages, people did not return for six months, and some displaced communities never returned at all.

In interviews with the survivors of the violence, while attempting to understand what precipitated the violence, both temporal and local factors become relevant. Almost all of those affected reported a build up of tensions between the two groups several months before the two incidents mentioned above, precipitated by a spate of killings of non-Bodo residents by the militant outfit, the NDFB.

Given the electoral incentives and gains to be made in post-riot situations, it is perhaps unremarkable that various political parties as well as social and political groups, including right-wing Hindu nationalist outfits, constructed their own narratives of the situation. India's national-level Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, for instance, decided to send its own fact finding team to the BTAD, only three days after the violence began (Indian Express 2012). At this time, the BJP had a very small presence in Assam's electoral politics, but as a party gaining ground politically at the national level, was still able to influence the discourse of violence in Assam. As the riots progressed, the BJP was able to capitalise on the growing distrust of Bengali Muslims, who are often labelled illegal Bangladeshi immigrants because of their religious and linguistic profile. Thus, on several occasions, senior members of the BJP alluded to the role of the central and state government in failing to check illegal immigration (Seven Sisters Post 2012a, 2012b, The Sentinel 2012b), and went as far as to call the BTAD "Bangladesh occupied Assam" (The Sentinel 2012c). Other right-wing groups, such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, similarly chimed into the immigration debate, demanding the deportation of Bangladeshi Muslims from the

country, alleging links to terrorist outfits, or demanding a ban on Muslim groups in the state (Assam Tribune 2012, The Sentinel 2012d), thus conflating local antagonism against illegal immigration with antagonism against Muslims more broadly. As RSS operatives in the BTAD confirmed, the emergence of relief camps and services also facilitated the entry of the RSS, which has historically conducted relief work in many areas of India after major disasters. As Dixit's (2016) piece confirms, RSS operatives have been present in other parts of the BTAD since 2008, in particular, during riots in Udalguri district. This emphasis on "seva" (service) continues into their ongoing presence in the region, where they run medical camps, sewing training for young women, etc.

The riots also saw the arrival of other groups in the region — international NGOs like Oxfam and MercyCorps, other NGOs from India assisting with the relief effort,⁴⁶ and other religious and charitable organisations, such as Caritas, and pan-Indian groups like the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind and the Jamiat-e-Ulema Hind. The Jamaat-e-Islami Hind and the Jamiat-e-Ulema Hind conducted relief work (primarily in relief camps housing Muslims), but also issued public statements urging Muslims to lodge reports with the police, and offered legal assistance (Seven Sisters Post 2012c, The Telegraph 2012). Many of these groups stayed on in the relief camps and rehabilitated villages, establishing themselves as a presence in these areas, and also, according to several interview participants, affecting the practice of Islam locally. Hijabs and veils for women, for instance, virtually unknown among Muslim communities in Western Assam, began to make an appearance where they had not previously existed. One interviewee made the connection between the funding that these groups received from organisations like OPEC, and the particular, more standardised version of Islam that they seemed to propagate. The riots also served to coalesce Bengali Muslim identity around a political party, the AIUDF, which already had a presence in other parts of Assam, and consolidated a presence in the BTAD by setting up massive relief efforts and resettlement colonies for displaced Muslims who did not want to return to their villages. These "model villages", named after their contentious but popular leader Badruddin Ajmal, served as examples among many field respondents that of all the political actors in Assam, he alone spoke up for Muslims.

In different ways, right-wing Hindu groups as well as charitable Islamic organisations tried to subsume the specific lived experience of being a Muslim in Assam and the BTAD — or

⁴⁶ Including the NGO that I was a part of during my first visit to the region.

indeed even the events that led up to violence of the scale that the region saw in 2012 — within the wider experience of being Muslim in India. Right-wing groups like the VHP immediately invoked Assam’s favourite bogeyman — the Bangladeshi Muslim — by alleging that they were sneaking into India by way of refugee camps. The demonization of all Bengali-speaking Muslim victims in this fashion, allowed these pro-Hindutva groups to reposition the conflict as one where the Muslim outsider (in this case, literally from outside Indian territory) was the threat. In contrast to this, many Assamese-speaking Muslims in the villages immediately surrounding my field area confirmed that they too were affected by violence, their houses burnt and families displaced, but these instances were ignored by media narratives. Such a framing allowed for all Muslim victims to be portrayed as outsiders and non-citizens, based on their religious and linguistic profiles.

The idea of “outsiders” in the context of the 2012 violence appeared repeatedly through invocations of Bangladeshis and immigrants. These became a convenient way for those interested in appropriating this conflict in a Hindu-Muslim context to make Others out of Muslims, and for those in power, became a way to externalise blame. Local narratives of the violence employed the notion of “outsiders” too, but in different and much more locally grounded ways. In interviews, narratives of how the violence unfolded depended, above other things, on the dynamics between communities in the villages in question. Soon after the riots ended, political and insurgent groups representing the Bodos imposed an “economic boycott” of Muslims, who work as agricultural labourers on Bodo land. This meant that in many villages, for as many as two consecutive agricultural seasons, Muslims were not “allowed” to work on Bodo farms. This arrangement, initially imposed by the aforementioned groups, took on a validity of its own, as those living in more polarised villages continued the ban for a second consecutive year, despite economic losses to both.

In the cluster of villages in Uzanpara, which have mixed populations of Bodos and Muslims, social and economic relations returned to normal to a certain extent by the end of the first year. In these villages, relations between the two communities have been more cordial and inter-dependent from the outset, perhaps as much of necessity than anything else. In these villages, when violence is discussed in public forums, the emphasis is always on the figure of the “outsider”, literally a resident of another place. “Outsiders from another village came and torched our homes, we were already in relief camps and have no idea who it was”, was a refrain echoed in multiple settings. In Uzanpara, where all the Bodo houses were burnt during

the violence, speaking to Bodo residents individually revealed a different story: “how could they have known which houses were Bodo, if they were from outside? It must have been the Muslims from the village”. Many Bodo residents even claimed to know who burnt down houses or looted property, but held back from filing police reports because “ultimately we have to stay together”. In a nearby village, it was the fear of these “outsiders” that prevented the Muslim families from returning to their homes. While their Bodo neighbours assured them that they have nothing to fear from them, they could not offer guarantees of protection should “others” from neighbouring villages attack.

For both Bodos and Muslims, the spectre of the outsider also includes the figure of the militant, another unpredictable figure whose role in the violence is unclear, but a factor nonetheless. Militants from insurgent outfits such as the NDFB are also responsible for much of the regular, targeted violence against non-Bodo groups, as well as violent assertions of power when collecting “taxes”.⁴⁷ In one village of Chirang district, local Muslims wondered whether it was their failure to pay tax in the previous year to the NDFB that precipitated the violence, thus linking a specific, local phenomenon to a larger-scale incident. Here the notion of “outsiders” is much more context-specific to the local. Unlike the grand narratives of Bangladeshi infiltrators, these narratives configure outsiders literally as those not from within the village — within this discourse are subsumed both ordinary residents of other villages, and militants.

In other villages, both in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts, where the Bodo neighbourhoods were distinctly separate from the Muslims, relations have been much more distant from the outset. In Anthaiguri village in Kokrajhar, where all 37 Muslim houses in the Muslim basti were burnt down, Muslim residents were bitter and openly accused their Bodo neighbours of complicity. Similarly, another nearby village also saw its Bodo basti burnt to the ground, and residents were certain that their Muslim neighbours were responsible. In these cases, people were able to flee before the mobs reached their villages, either due to a tip-off (often from a member of the other community), or out of fear from having seen violence erupt in neighbouring villages. Thus, while they were not physically present to verify who was part of the mob, perceptions about the guilt of neighbours, sometimes corroborated by accounts from

⁴⁷ This group also has several factions within, some of which, like the NDFB (Songbijit), are active, and others, like the NDFB(Progressive) and the NDFB(Ranjan) have currently negotiated a ceasefire with the government. Much like other insurgent groups in Assam and the Northeast, insurgent groups like the National Democratic Front for Bodoland collect “taxes” from residents and owners of businesses, in return for protection and permission to operate in the area.

surrounding villages, were common. In contrast, after another riot scare in May 2014 following an attack on Muslims in the neighbouring district of Baksa, Bodo and Muslim residents of Uzanpara were able to form a joint patrol group, that also played the role of keeping the flow of information open between the two groups, thus preventing a repeat of a 2012-like situation.

Seen in these local narratives about the riots and violence, is the idea of the outsider as a figure that is very much rooted in the local context. Even where the complicity of neighbours is suspected, it is hidden in the public narrative for the sake of preserving inter-ethnic relations in a village, the “outsider” that is invoked is still a relatively “local” one — *someone from another village or a mob of people from surrounding villages, or Bodo militants that hide out in the jungle*. These are not de-contextualised, threatening Muslims who pose a threat on a more abstract level — their “outsiderness” is still rooted within the context of Bodoland and its politics, and thus they are not from very far away, still from one of the villages nearby. The point here is not to point out that having a “local” outsider enemy is somehow better or worse, but that the construction of this figure, especially with regard to violent threats, is important to understanding the how the conflict itself is perceived by people. Bodo inhabitants are not at war with all of India’s Muslims or Islam as a whole, their understanding of the violence is framed in terms of their local context. This is where it becomes important to analyse the impact of the sort of narrative being propagated by the RSS in the region, which I go on to do in the next section.

7.4 Everyday processes of Othering — Hindutva in daily life

The alliance of the ruling Bodo party, the Bodoland Political Front, with the national-level BJP in the assembly elections of 2016 brought a new political dynamic— namely, the emergence and growing presence of a national-level party in Bodoland’s local constituency and village-level politics. While it was too early, during the fieldwork, to say what effect this might have on local political outcomes, the point of importance here is the recruiting of new cadres into the BJP’s grassroots structures, and the parallel growth of the RSS, which has long been the BJP’s key mobiliser of political bases.

Of the many Hindutva groups that are present throughout the country (apart from the BJP, which is a formal political outfit) — the RSS, the VHP, Bajrang Dal, and so on — the one

that is most ubiquitously known, and is often the first such organisation to enter a new region, is the RSS. In this regard, BTAD is no different. One of my key informants was one of the RSS's oldest and most senior operatives in BTAD, Dinanath, based in Chirang district, but in charge of many of the RSS's activities across all four districts. When we first met, it was at a local office of the RSS, a modest house in the bylanes of a small town. He only properly joined the RSS in 1999, when his son was sent to study in an RSS-run school in Uttar Pradesh, although he claims to have been acquainted with some of its members in Kokrajhar since 1967. At present, he estimates there are between 15,000–16,000 RSS members in all four districts of the BTAD, though there is no formal count, with the oldest branch being in Kokrajhar district, and active since 1975.

Membership of the RSS and the BJP is still a blurry concept in the BTAD. Interestingly, many in the villages who are now signed up as BJP members claim also to be members of the RSS. In some instances, this seems to arise from a confusion about the lack of distinction between the two (which is telling in itself), or a lack of awareness about what the RSS does, though the BJP's anti-minority agenda is not unknown. (In a few cases, Muslims are knowingly and willingly members of the RSS, this is discussed below). Shivram, perhaps the most important BJP operative in the electoral constituency where my field site Uzanpara was located, is a telling example of this dual membership, and the close links between the two organisations. While he is the public face of the BJP (he ran as an Independent but with BJP backing for the state legislature), he also considers himself a member of the RSS, and a devout Hindu. His political journey involved leaving the BPF in favour of the BJP, largely because he wasn't given a candidacy ticket during the state elections. However, opportunism alone does not drive his current political status. So, for instance, while he details a series of personal grievances with the BPF that led him to leave and join the BJP, he also adds

“In our constituency, in the last 5 years Muslim population has increased by 3000, Hindus only 300. Within 10 years we'll be a minority here. That's why I left BPF — otherwise how will we have the next generation of proud Hindus?”.

Strikingly, he talks not in terms of the decreasing population of Bodos, which has been and remains a constant theme with leaders of the Bodo political movement, but of *Hindus*, a group which encompasses many Bodos, but also various other ethnic groups, with whom Bodos are also often in conflict over resources and political power.

Blurry affiliations among the likes of Shivram and others point to the nexus between the state, and organisations like the RSS, which operate like elements of the “shadow state” (Trudeau 2008, 2012), relying on tacit or overt support from those in political power. It is hardly coincidental that many across the BTAD reported an increase in membership and RSS activities from the 2016 election onwards, even as the grassroots elements that expand these networks may have been in place for some time. In this way, such organisations slowly become part of the everyday practice of politics, inserting themselves in state and political discourses. Their dispersed grassroots networks often make them more present and accessible than official agents of the state, again telling of their ability to make an impact on the discourse of citizenship.

7.4.1 A new indigeneity

Between 1966 and 1993, Dinanath was a member of the All Bodo Students Union, and was an active participant in the struggle for a Bodo homeland. He is as vague about his reasons for leaving the movement as he is for joining the RSS (chalking it all up to “fate”). From his present position within the RSS, he now believes that the movement for a separate Bodoland is unnecessary, and that the problems have arisen because of a British legacy of divide and rule.

“They divided us into Hindustan and Pakistan, and we need to reunite. We need Akhand Bharat... generate awareness about lifestyle, values. All these things were fine until they were ruined by the British and the Muslims”.

This view would still be considered a minority one among the Bodos, nonetheless, among the growing numbers of the RSS cadres, it is something that is consistently repeated. In urging people to join the organisation, Dinanath talks about sacrifice, and the need to fix *local* problems. One of the examples he mentions is the need for a return to tribal customary law to resolve disputes in villages. But in this instance, he conflates tribal and Hindu law, and says explicitly that the RSS should be explaining how customary law should be followed. For him, the cultural and social differences that exist between different communities that are Hindu — for instance, Bodos and Adivasis — are immaterial so long as everyone is Hindu.

Rajesh, another senior leader, from Kokrajhar district, is a former officer of the paramilitary force CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force), who now runs a general store in Kokrajhar town. We met him at this store, along with another government employee who is also in the RSS,

but not as senior in the ranks. Rajesh has travelled around the country as part of his paramilitary training (including being posted in Nagpur, the national headquarters of the RSS). Like Dinanath he is sceptical of the movement for Bodoland, taking the view that it will divide tribal society, while Hinduism will unite. For him, nationalism and patriotism are more important virtues, ones that he finds to be synonymous with Hinduism, and sees as his primary goal in the RSS. But while these overarching values must be common, different cultures too could be respected within it. “In the Sangh [he switches easily between this word and the RSS], there is no discrimination between communities. Every culture is respected — whether Bodo, Rabha, Adivasi. We will protect them all.” There is even, under some conditions, space for Christians and Muslims. “Christians and Muslims today, their forefathers were all Hindus. In Mughal and British rule, people were forcibly converted. They must be brought back to the mainstream”. In his construction, Kokrajhar town was “like a metro earlier”,⁴⁸ in a Hinduised cosmopolitan existence where Adivasis, Bodos would all join together to celebrate Hindu festivals. The conversion of some of these communities to Christianity represents a rupture in this imaginary of unity to him, even though it is anachronistic in its imagination of when Christianity arrived in BTAD, with reference to the presence of different groups in the area.

The rhetoric of exclusion (of Christians and Muslims) from Hinduism is accompanied by one of tolerance and cosmopolitanism with regard to other Hindu ethnic communities. These seemingly contradictory ideas — expulsion and peaceful cooperation — seem to co-exist in the narrative. Dwimalu, another RSS operative who accompanies Rajesh on one occasion says without irony, “there is no discrimination within the RSS — Bodo, Adivasi, Rajbongshi, Hindi-bhashi [Hindi speaking] and Marwari, are all welcome”. The RSS, he insists, does not recruit, but spreads information through social media — WhatsApp and Facebook primarily. Soon after we encounter the RSS operatives, a Bodo colleague who is helping me with my research, starts to receive messages on WhatsApp from an RSS member who takes his number (my own local number is not connected to WhatsApp). They are long texts, primarily in Hindi, sometimes in English, with many emojis of flags, swords, hands folded in a Namaste, plants and flowers. The content does not seem specifically tailored for a Bodo audience, but features some of the RSS’s standard tropes against Muslims. For instance, the translation of a part of a message read

⁴⁸ “Metro” is a term used to refer to a large, cosmopolitan city.

“If you want to attack Muslims, don’t use guns or swords, annihilate them economically. Buy fruits, vegetables, clothes and necessities only from Hindus, only go to Hindu doctors, stay in Hindu-owned hotels, sit in Hindus’ rickshaws, have your car repaired by Hindus, get your mobile credit topped up by Hindus, only get Hindu plumbers and carpenters. Explain this everyday to at least 10 Hindus, and soon this message will reach hundreds of Hindus.”

Many of the ideas mentioned here are relevant only to a better-off and somewhat more urban audience — plumbers and car mechanics are few and far between in the BTAD, with most rural houses relying on wells or public transport to travel. A few may own motorbikes, but it would be very rare for someone to own a car. It would seem that generic messages about boycotting Muslims are being transposed into a new context, by focussing especially on the trades and occupations that are often common among Muslims (being carpenters, plumbers, and owning small businesses, for instance). The fact that they are usually in Hindi also shows that they are meant for a wider, more general audience, though the Devnagari script being common to both Hindi and Bodo languages perhaps contributes to a greater understanding and relatability of the messages.

Many leaders of the Bodoland movement, and BTAD’s politicians, are sceptical that the RSS can completely rupture Bodo solidarity with its Hindu unity narrative. The deputy chief of the Council, a former leader of the insurgent outfit Bodo Liberation Tigers, while staunch on issues of Muslim encroachment of tribal and forest land, nonetheless does not conflate these with the RSS’s agenda

“The RSS is doing nothing to uplift local culture. They only want to impose Hinduism. We write Hindu [on forms], but why do they need to interfere? Now they’re telling people what to wear. We don’t need their priests from Uttar Pradesh [a state in North India] and Rishikesh [a city in Uttar Pradesh]. They’re going to face a lot of resistance to this agenda in the Northeast.”

Similarly, a Bodo elected representative of the BTC contends that while the RSS has formed committees in their area, the dent on politics is likely to be minimal, “Council politics is very different, the RSS doesn’t understand that”. Such opinions are often repeated, and forms of resistance exist as well. Bodo political identity remains strong and thus far not fractured by religion, despite occasional tensions in personal narratives. As Hemon, a district-level leader

in the Bodoland movement from the PJACBM (People’s Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement) says, “We tell Bodos — if you’re close to Ramdev of the RSS, use them to promote the idea of Bodoland. If you’re Christian, try and persuade Christian leaders. But in the end, unite.”

Nonetheless, being part of the Hindutva narrative allows for an assertion of one’s indigeneity, with a sense of power that other expressions of indigeneity lack. As a tool of asserting political power, the strength of the RSS may well seem appealing. Indigeneity often builds upon exclusionary narratives, and such narratives may find troubling parallels with those of Hindu right-wing groups (Baviskar 2005). In the Bodoland movement, excluding Muslims and questioning their legitimacy, at least as inhabitants of Bodoland, has been built into the idea of BTAD, and the way its policies are structured (for instance, land, or political representation). Hemon may abhor the RSS, but nonetheless thinks

“How have Bodos become only 20–25 percent of the population here? It’s because of illegal immigration. In Assam, 43 percent of the voters are Muslim. The largest mosque in the Northeast is in Shillong. If they capture [sic] Bodoland, then Bangladeshis will swallow a part of Northeast India. No RSS or BJP will be able to save us then.”

Ideas of a new indigeneity built on allegiance to a Hindu religion draw on two other key ideas of the RSS movement in Bodoland. The first is the idea of an “authentic” religion to claim Bodo identity (and subsequent indigenous status). This notion rests on the concept of rejecting Bodos who are Christian by faith, as well as subsuming the indigenous Bodo practice of Bathou within the “umbrella” of Hinduism. Second is the idea of creating an outsider, the Muslim, whose exclusion also defines the “us”, the new autochthons. Drawing on my fieldwork, I argue that this “new” Othering draws on older forms of Othering Muslims in the BTAD, but gives it a distinctly new dimension, one that correlates with the new sense of indigeneity. In the following two sections, I elaborate on each of these themes.

7.4.2 “Authentic” religions

Rajesh is adamant about the threat that Christianity poses for Bodo unity, and adds the suffix “Christian” to the names of prominent Bodos who are Christians (such as a state minister, or an officer in the Council’s secretariat office), almost as an epithet. For instance, “Since

Pramila Rani (Christian) has been minister, there are now more than 20 churches in Kokrajhar town, earlier there were only two. But there are no new Bathou or Brahma temples”. Bathou is an indigenous animist practice specific to the Bodos, though many who practice Bathou identify officially (in the census and on various forms) as Hindu. Brahma is another sect of Hinduism followed by a significant number of Bodos — in Rajesh’s mind, it is equal to and interchangeable with Bathou, as he sees both as sects of Hinduism.

In line with RSS ideology on this issue, both Rajesh and Dinanath are of the opinion that Bodos who practice Christianity aren’t true Bodos. Both emphasise the need for Bodo Christians to re-convert and return to their roots to the traditional Bodo religion Bathou. Shivram, similarly, defends the attempts at “reconversion” by the RSS, and particularly the BTC chief Hagrama’s condemnation of them. “Why does Hagrama have a problem if people want to reconnect to their roots? Those Christians were Hindus before. Why does he say the RSS has no business here?”.

In this discourse, the true identity of a Bodo is when they practice Bathou, which essentially means, as Dinanath puts it neatly “Bathou is automatic [sic] Hindu”. In common parlance, Bathou and Hindu are sometimes used interchangeably — though the extent and the contexts in which this is done are varied, and hard to generalise or pin down. For instance, “Bathou puja” is a religious ritual that occurs at various points in the year, and conducted according to local customs, but often these days also coincide with Hindu festivals, such as Shivratri or Laxmi puja.

This tension is visible in other Bodo leaders as well, who do not accept the “Hindu umbrella” theory easily. Gwjwn, president of the All Bodo Students Union unit that covers Uzanpara village (often involved in handling disputes and organizing events for Bodos in the area), disagrees with the interpretation of Bathou and Hindu being interchangeable. In speaking of a friend of his, who has joined the RSS, he says,

“I asked him, what will happen to Bathou, or to the traditions of other ethnic groups? That he doesn’t know. He just carries out their [the RSS’s] orders. From Narabari village to Bansbari [Gwjwn’s jurisdiction], Bathou is strong. We may write Hindu in the census, or when we fill up a form, but our thinking is different.”

When talking of religious practices and rituals, Bodos are more likely to identify these as Bathou, and to identify Bathou as their religion. However, socially and politically, they are

more likely to call themselves Hindu (where they do not identify as Christian). On the other hand, Bodo identity itself, certainly the more explicitly political Bodo identity that has emerged over the last three decades, is overarching and does not limit itself to Hinduism, Bathou, or Christianity, and has encompassed all three.

Rajesh urges me to visit a member of the Bathou Samaj in Kokrajhar, asking me to “learn first hand what people are suffering through living with Christians”. The Bathou Samaj is a civil society organisation that sees itself as a protector of the Bathou religious traditions. Charan is the president of a small unit level committee of the organisation, and a member of the district-level committee. Soon after the 2012 violence, Charan met Rajesh at a BJP rally in Kokrajhar district. Later, he also travelled with him to the RSS headquarters in Nagpur in the same year, where he met several RSS members. This fact is striking enough in itself — the representative of an indigenous religious organisation traveling to the headquarters of the most influential Hindu right-wing organisation in the country. Charan’s reasons for traveling there are not clear, “because we’re all in the same country” he says vaguely, but perhaps he is being guarded about the links between the two organisations for pragmatic reasons. The extent of his connections with the RSS become clearer later on, however, when he relaxes and talks to me more freely, and shows me the many contacts in his phone of local RSS operatives. In Nagpur, he talked about how backward the BTAD is, to which the RSS operatives responded by promising to set up industries in Kokrajhar and improve the lives of Bodos, though he admits this hasn’t happened yet. While the links at the organisational level become clearer over time, he reveals that there are no formal RSS cadres in his area yet.

In talking to him, this tension between Bathou and Hinduism comes to light — none of these boundaries are set or clearly interpreted in one way or another. For instance, while he repeatedly says Hinduism is an umbrella, under which Bathou also falls, he also emphasises that Bathou is older, and is unable to say when or how exactly it falls under the Hinduism umbrella. Practices in the Bathou faith worship nature, and not idols as in Hinduism, through the worship of different gods. “Our mantras invoke the river, the mountains, and the earth. We worship nature — so we are under Hinduism but we don’t pray to gods and goddesses”. Like Rajesh, he identifies Bathou as a distinct religion most clearly when talking about the practice — the different prayer rituals, the sacrifice of animals, like chickens (which is unusual for the sorts of standardised Hindu practices promoted by the RSS), and the seasonal festivals that occur throughout the year. Like Rajesh and Dinanath, however, he also believes

strongly in the need for Bodo Christians to re-convert

“Almost half the Bodos have become Christian, they will eventually have to come back. How can they call themselves Bodo if they show no respect to Bathou? Just wearing a *dokhona*,⁴⁹ and speaking the Bodo language doesn't make you Bodo if you have an American or British [sic] first name.”

Charan's feelings about Christianity among Bodos are conflicted. On the one hand, he is angry about their conversion, and refers to practices akin to untouchability in Hinduism, where he claims houses are cleaned thoroughly if Christians (or Muslims) visit, a fact also confirmed by Rajesh, and respondents in the village. At the same time, he is concerned about their loss of identity as Bodos, and is eager for them to re-convert because “they are all our children finally”. For Charan, the discourse of indigeneity, or what it means to be Bodo, is tied up with being Bathou, and by extension, Hindu, a discourse similar to that seen elsewhere with tribal communities and Hindu right-wing groups.

At a formal level, there is no connection between the Bathou Samaj and the RSS, but as Charan's experience shows, informally there is already an alliance of these networks in some places. Dinanath is also quick to point this out. Apart from the Bathou Samaj, he claims that pan-tribal organisations like the Tribal Sangha are allied with the RSS, though representatives of the Tribal Sangha themselves do not confirm this, implying that the alliance is either very informal and localised, or perhaps is aspirational thinking on the part of Dinanath. He is dismissive of Bodos who see Bathou as distinct, and not part of Hinduism. Central to this approach trying to link different communities under a pan-Hindu organisation, is the setting up of sub-organisations of the RSS — one for Bodos, another for Adivasis, and so on. It is through these organisations that initial contact between the RSS and different ethnic groups is made. For Rajesh, coming together with other tribal groups under a pan-Hindu umbrella is a step towards tribal unity, something a movement like the one for Udayachal could never provide in the 1960s. Like Charan, for him the discourse of indigeneity is tied to being Hindu, while being allied to Hindu groups is also a means to power and influence for tribal groups.

These sort of tactics link back to what the literature also reveals about right-wing groups involving themselves on local terms, and the narrative about the perceptions of the events

⁴⁹ Garment worn by Bodo women.

themselves changing as a result. An important part of this process is allying with village heads, such as Ganesh, the village head (*gaon boora*) of the Bodo village in Uzanpara. While he does not claim to be a member himself, an RSS meeting involving 10-15 men from the Bodo village was held at his house, led by Dinanath. The meeting primarily discussed the violence of 2012, in which RSS leaders promised to help rebuild the Bodo village and repair the damage. Most tellingly, they were told explicitly to keep the meeting secret, and not inform Muslims in Uzanpara of these plans. Other elders (or as they say, “intellectuals”) of the village also attended, lending an air of legitimacy and seriousness to the meeting.

7.4.3 Creating new Others from old

The discourse of Othering by the RSS and affiliated groups is perhaps most pronounced with regard to Muslims. In Assam, being Muslim, particularly a Bengali-speaking Muslim, is already charged with allegations of illegality and illegitimacy. As the case with the 2012 riots showed, such conflicts provide for an opportunity for Hindutva groups to become part of this discourse, by re-invoking and reinforcing prevailing notions of the illegitimacy of Bengali Muslims. In doing so, these groups align themselves with these existing ideas, while also appropriating them within the Hindutva narrative. This taps into an existing grievance against Muslims in particular for being encroachers of agricultural land and forests, but viewing this from the lens of Hindutva’s anti-Muslim rhetoric, as opposed to ideas of encroachment and resource scarcity among Bodos. Shivram, for instance, correlates the increasing population of Muslims and scarcity of land in his constituency.

“The wildlife sanctuary there is only a sanctuary in name, there is no wildlife there. This is because 2,500 Muslims [sic] migrated there and all on forest khas land [common land]. There are too many Muslims, but now the BTC also supports them, for their votes. They all have land in Dhubri [a neighbouring, Muslim-majority district]. I know they vote in both areas.”

Interestingly, he, like many others from his constituency and Uzanpara, also identifies Muslims as outsiders from within Assam — not, for instance, Bangladeshis. However, this observation is soon followed by

“Now these Muslims are 30 percent of the population in Assam, highest population after Kashmir, that’s why we have all these problems. There’s a photograph on

Facebook of Hagrama [chief of the BTC, and leader of the BPF] and Rajib Brahma [another representative] wearing a skullcap and sitting down to prayers on Eid with Muslims. Why does he have to pray, sit for *namaz*? Even a Bodo farmer wouldn't do it. Poor people have more sense of *dharma*.”

Here, the generalised discontent about Muslims encroaching on land and forests also gives way to wider discontent about their religious practices, being “appeased” by politicians, and the conflation of the “Muslim problem” in Assam with that of Kashmir. His use of “*dharma*” also places the problem in a spiritual realm, beyond just the material deprivations of land use and forests, and closer to the faith-based narratives of the RSS.

The post-violence use of these narratives in everyday life is as important, and perhaps more pervasive. Raju, a young Bodo man in Uzanpara is a recent member of the RSS, having attended a training of the outfit in Chirang the previous year. He became involved after a meeting held in their village by Dinanath drew him to the ideas of the RSS, and, post training, he repeats these with vigour. Being in the RSS is a form of protection from their Muslim neighbours — a safety net that seems important with the effects of 2012 still fresh for most.

“Muslims, they earn a lot, then take money from us, or we have to sell them our land. They talk behind our backs, and they are always after our women. If there's violence, if these Bangladeshis [sic] make trouble, we'll be able to protect ourselves.”

The RSS training fresh in his mind, his perspective on his long-term Muslim neighbours has taken the form of fear and resentment, enmeshing, like many other Bodos involved with the RSS, themes of land alienation and resource losses with anger towards Muslims. While he acknowledges that he has Muslim friends in the village, he claims he is now more cautious around them, always vigilant. For him, RSS ideology means Muslims are to be targeted, and Christians to be re-converted and brought back. He uses the word “Bangladeshi” to describe his neighbours, although it is widely understood and acknowledged in the village that Muslims here settled there from the 1970s onwards, largely from the nearby *char* areas in Dhubri and Barpeta districts, not Bangladesh. Their status and access to entitlements in the BTAD may be in question, but their legitimacy as Indian nationals has not been, in local discourse, thus far.

Just as Raju's feelings towards his Muslim friends are ambivalent, so also is membership of

the RSS along with other identities. A few days after we met, I was surprised to see him at a rally of the local All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), for their campaign for Bodoland. When I asked him how he was able to be members of both organisations, he simply shrugged “ABSU is political, the RSS is for a Hindu education, they are different things”. I asked further about the ideological tensions between the two — the ABSU emphasises a strong Bodo identity (regardless of religion), while the RSS emphasises unity among Hindus, including other communities and tribal groups. He insisted again that the RSS was not political, and pivoted back to the point of Muslims being the main enemy, the criminal element in society, and that as long as the number of Hindus increase, “no police or army will be able to stop us, we are social workers”. In this, he sees no difference between tribals and non-tribals, Bodos and non-Bodos.

Going to the RSS training instilled a sense of discipline in Raju, according to him, and gave him a sense of society and purpose. He is dismissive of what he sees as the Bodo tendency to drink and waste away. The trainings themselves focus on physical discipline, lectures from RSS *swayamsevaks* on Hindu culture, and enforced vegetarianism, which is not common among Bodos, who traditionally rear and eat pork. But, as Raju says, “in the training they tell you eating meat makes your head hot”. When I ask him if he is willing to give up meat and alcohol under direction from the RSS, he starts to laugh and says, “a Bodo will never leave *gahori* (pork) and *jou* (rice beer)”.

Raju’s commitment to the RSS means he helps organise and conduct trainings for adolescent boys and girls in the village. One such student, who attended this training last year in summer, describes a regime of prayer, yoga, physical exercise, lectures on discipline, cleanliness, respecting your elders, and ideal behaviour for young people. While the training for younger people does not have the fiery communal overtones that Raju’s training did, subtle ideas persist. For instance, the student recalls being told that they could “go to a Muslim’s house, but never to a mosque”. More overt statements are made about being Hindu, through eating vegetarian food and saying Hindu prayers.

The vilification of Bengali Muslims has also caused Assamese-speaking Muslims of Assam to distance themselves from this group, and assert their own indigeneity in Assam. The differences between *khilonjiya* or *desi* (indigenous) Muslims and “Bhatia” (a derogatory term for Bengali-speaking Muslims) is often made, and one the RSS also appears to have perceived. In Raju’s understanding, this hierarchy is valid — *khilonjiya* Muslims are better

than Bangladeshi ones, and the RSS knows this too, he asserts.

Such a distinction is vehemently supported by Alamuddin, a *khilonjiya* Muslim *gaon boora* in a Muslim village neighbouring Uzanpara. He too, is a member of the RSS, a fact he has to repeat a few times when I naively ask him if he's sure. The RSS has conducted "secret" meetings for *khilonjiya* Muslims, which he has attended, and which are only advertised by word of mouth so as to be exclusive. In these meetings, they discuss the problems posed by "Bhatia" Muslims, and Alamuddin repeats many times what he has heard at these meetings — that *khilonjiya* Muslims like himself have more in common with Chakravorty and Rajbongshi communities (Hindu communities in the region), than with "Bhatia" Muslims. "The Bhatias will overtake us. They have economic power so they will file cases against us, and then pay lawyers and to win the case. We have to fight." While he alludes to a historical connection (also referred to earlier in this paper) between different Assamese-speaking communities regardless of religion, its inclusion in the RSS narrative is significant.

Such an idea of a threatening sub-community of Muslims does two things — first, it moves along existing fault lines of tensions between different ethnic communities, and second, it still creates a sense of a threatening Other, both culturally and economically. According to census data, Muslims (Bengali Muslims included), are the least educated and well-off group in the region (Motiram and Sarma 2014). The perception of their dominance, however, is reinforced in Alamuddin's mind by the sense that "his" community is that of Chakravorty and Rajbongshi, a sense of local affiliation that he feels based on their shared enmity of Bengali Muslims. For the RSS leaders however, this distinction is invalid on an ideological scale. Their concern is with Hindu unity as a means to tribal unity. In this formulation, neither Christianity nor Islam are included, no matter the local associations formed between Assamese Hindu and Assamese Muslim groups. To state it plainly, including Assamese Muslims in "secret" meetings seems only a temporary, possibly instrumental strategy, to prevent a consolidation in the Muslim community between different linguistic groups.

Such narratives have not yet seeped into everyday conversation in Uzanpara, whether in perceptions about land or politics, or even the most recent elections. On the contrary, while the 2014 election saw a big win for Hindutva nationally, BTAD, via the Kokrajhar constituency, saw a coming together of non-Bodo groups electing a non-Bodo candidate as a way of sending a message to Bodo leaders, an election fought and won entirely on issues relevant to the Bodoland context. Similarly, for state-level elections in 2016, the campaigning

featured issues that were local and often quite specific to the context of the BTAD. Particularly at smaller, village-level campaign meetings, which were more intimate settings, the issues discussed became specific down to the village level. Thus, the promise of a particular road, bridge or well would be a key campaign pledge, or providing security in times of conflict (with the 2012 riots still fresh in voters' minds). With the growing presence of the BJP in Bodoland, there is less certainty about the extent to which this will remain the case in future elections, but thus far, for Bodoland, even national and state level elections are framed through local issues.

However, there is a perceptible shift in the sense of being excluded, and the terms of exclusion, in the displaced community of Bengali Muslims in Makrabari. In the five years since they were driven out of their homes and unable to return, there was always palpable helplessness, and anger. Anger towards the NDFB militants that made their return to the village impossible, anger against their Bodo neighbours who refused to do anything to help them return, and anger at the district and council-level governments, for failing to do anything to help them return or resettle elsewhere, save for a meagre compensation amount. The only organisation they could turn to, which did help, was the pan-Indian Jamiat-e-Ulema Hind, which helped them secure lands, build tin houses, a few toilets and wells for water. Over the years, the only substantial support they received was from charitable Islamic organisations. On the other hand, despite having lived in their village since the 1930s, their displacement and lack of a stable home allowed an opportunity for a tribal organisation to file a petition in the Guwahati High Court declaring them illegal Bangladeshis. To counter this in court, they, yet again, took the Jamiat-e-Ulema's help, and the case was thrown out.

After five years of neglect and being displaced, most families at the camp are starting to sell the lands in their village of origin to Bodo neighbours, expecting not to return. While they continued to be registered there formally (also to enable their enrolment in Assam's National Register of Citizens, where a lack of formal documents could lead to one's citizenship being in doubt), over the years they became de-rooted from the place, and yet unable to completely feel settled in their makeshift camp-like new home. Being located at the edge of another Muslim village, they were secure in their immediate environment, but far more insecure on a larger scale.

In May 2017, a rumour of a vaccine being used to make Muslim children impotent under the guise of preventing Japanese encephalitis flew around Assam, soon after doing the rounds in

Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Haryana (Saikia 2017a). The video of a news broadcast about this, as well as several conspiracy theories, spread among Muslims in the Makrabari camp. For some, who dismissed it, it was just another rumour, if anything it evoked memories of medical malpractice rather than ethnic cleansing — a person having a bad reaction to a shot, another suffering because an injection had been unrefrigerated when instructions were to the contrary. For others, however, it confirmed their worst suspicions — like the rest of India’s Muslims, they too were going to be eliminated.

“It is a bad period coming for Muslims in India, the next 100 years at least”, says Rafiqul. “In Assam and the country, the BJP looks set to rule.” Then he contemplates. “Actually, it’s going to be bad for Muslims everywhere, world-over”. Others have heard of riots, lynchings that have occurred in the state of Uttar Pradesh since the BJP came to power, and connect these to their own troubles. Shohidul, another resident, goes further, invoking the plight of the Rohingyas, and people drowning in boats trying to leave Syria. Rafiqul’s brother Jamal still remembers the 2012 riots, and the BJP’s attempts to make it a Hindu-Muslim issue, and the insistence of everyone writing “Bengali Muslim” when referring to the violence, as if to signal some sense of doubt about their citizenship.

These are the same people who, during the 2016 Assembly election, when confronted with the choice between a Bodo party that attempted to include minorities but allied with the BJP (the BPF), and one that excluded non-Bodos (in support of separate statehood for Bodoland) but allied with the Congress, chose the former over the latter. They’d rather have the BJP in power at some level, than deal with the immediate threat of a Bodoland-supporting group, whom they associate directly with the violence and insecurity that they have faced. This calculus is by no means unimportant. Most still maintain this is the case. Simultaneously, there is also a greater sense of alienation, not just for being a group of Muslims in an area dominated by Bodos, or a Muslim in Bodoland, or a Bengali Muslim in Assam, but for being an Indian Muslim, and a global Muslim citizen as well. With the threat of being excluded from the National Register of Citizens in Assam a real possibility, there is a sense of being excluded from the country as a whole, through the politics of Bodoland and Assam.

It is exactly this sort of exclusionary narrative, often repeated with regard to Muslims, especially Bengali-speaking Muslims in BTAD and Assam, that has the potential to become a strand in the process of making Muslims outsiders in India as a whole. Issues of “love

‘‘love jihad’’⁵⁰ for instance, which have polarised the rest of India, have the potential to take hold in the BTAD. Inter-marriage between Bodos and Muslims is already discouraged and the subject of village-level disputes — as with Hindutva, women are framed as markers of cultural boundaries among Bodos — but not yet framed in terms of the desecration of Hinduism (Hindu women) by Islam (Muslim men). For RSS operatives like Dinanath, however, ‘‘love jihad’’ is already the conceptual framework that he uses to see these inter-faith marriages. Beef consumption is another issue that is so far negotiated on local terms within communities (Sharma 2017), but, should Hindutva become more influential, could also become framed in anti-Muslim and anti-Christian rhetoric.

7.5 Conclusion: New exclusions for citizenship

What might these new social and political dynamics mean for BTAD? On the one hand, the RSS aligns itself with existing ideas of belonging and exclusion, and on another, its own ideology has the potential to change these narratives. If Muslims in BTAD feel excluded not just in their own local contexts, but also have a sense of being a marginalised community nationally (and even globally), what might this mean for how local issues are interpreted and resolved? Could alliances such as the one between different non-Bodo groups, including Muslims, in the 2014 elections still be forged? It is, of course, too early to say that the entire narrative will change completely. Moreover, even if it remains strong, each place would also adapt to RSS ideology in its own way, much as the RSS would adapt its own process to local contexts.

It remains to be seen what impact Hindutva will have on the BTAD and its politics, and how it could affect a sense of belonging in the BTAD. It is unclear how and whether it will impact relations between Bathou, Brahma and Christian Bodos, who do not currently recognise these differences as fundamental; or whether it will impact how groups that are already outsiders, like Muslims, could be further marginalised. It is clear, however, in observing Hindutva’s rapid ascent over the last few years, that it is not a phenomenon that can be easily dismissed or ignored.

⁵⁰ Inter-religious marriages, especially between Hindu women and Muslim men, have been framed under the narrative of ‘‘love jihad’’ by Hindu nationalist groups.



8. BELONGING (AND NOT) IN BODOLAND

CHAPTER 8. BELONGING (AND NOT) IN BODOLAND: CITIZENSHIP AND EVERYDAY LIFE

“All the communities supported the Bodoland Territorial Council — how else would it have been made?”

- Rafiqul, Makrabari resident

8.1 Introduction

What do these findings tell us about citizenship in Bodoland, and its position in Northeast India more generally? Citizenship and belonging are inherently exclusionary, and the construction of the figure of the outsider emerges as a crucial dimension along which the rights and privileges that come with citizenship are accorded (or are not) (Mouffe 2000, Isin 2002, Román 2010). Northeast India makes for a particularly relevant context to understand the inherently spatial nature of citizenship, and in particular, the idea of territory as a powerful marker of citizen identity, which is seen as intrinsically linked to the nation state and the territorialised form of sovereignty that is associated with it (Hansen and Stepputat 2005b, Rudolph 2005).

The main contributions of this thesis look towards disaggregating the idea of citizenship beyond status (while continuing to acknowledge the continuing importance of formal citizenship status), through looking at practices of citizenship, as well as acts of citizenship that disrupt given norms. The first research question and subsequent contribution focusses on acts of citizenship — both through formal routes and informal tactics, and how they both reinforce and disrupt existing categories of citizenship. I employ the term “acts of citizenship” in an attempt to recognise disruption even in seemingly routine practices of citizenship, as well as in acts of patronage or clientelism that might otherwise appear as purely transactional, or as subversions of genuine democratic citizenship. My goal is to identify these acts, but also consider what they mean in the context in which they are enacted, especially as they come up against the constraining processes of formal citizenship status.

The second contribution that I elaborate on here relates to the reinforcement of territorialised citizenship — not just through historical precedence and law, but also in ordinary practices at the level of the village and local officials. This territorialisation is not just an abstract

principle of policy, but a daily experience of lived reality. While the idea of territorialised identities as imposed by the state have been a recurring theme in Northeast Indian scholarship, one of the goals in this thesis was to examine how this is reproduced in everyday life, the ways in which it percolates from policy into practice. Equally, just as many political movements in the Northeast have appropriated these territorialised identities as a bargaining chip for autonomy, the idea has been re-interpreted in local contexts as well.

A third research question derives from the context of Northeast Indian identity in relation to the rest of India. Citizenship in the Northeast has always been constructed in terms of difference, especially in how categories of the state reinforced these ideas of a “periphery” to the national imagination. What has rarely been expressed, however, is how Northeast Muslim identity has also emerged as a distinctive one. As the preceding chapters have shown, Muslims in Bodoland see their status in Assam as distinct from the rest of India, and many expressed worry at recent efforts that attempt to conflate the two, particularly by Hindu nationalists. I have also attempted to shed some light on this differentiated identity and its implications for citizenship, which have seen little expression in public or academic discourse.

8.2 Acts of citizenship

In the analysis of citizenship in Bodoland undertaken here, I have attempted to focus on acts of citizenship in the everyday, and acts of “insurgent citizenship”. What distinguishes acts of citizenship from ordinary, routine practices of citizenship, and what is their value? Following Isin (2008b), a key factor in identifying acts of citizenship is the notion of disruption, where a given order or habitus is broken. In the process, the definition of citizenship itself is expanded. While some of the examples of the routinisation of territorialised citizenship considered the reinforcing of existing norms, other practices attempted to subvert these ideas.

The movement for Bodoland was in itself, and continues to be, a reclamation of citizen rights through the acts of protest and disruption, sometimes even in violent ways. But I also address whether “acts” could be read in certain practices of informal politics, which are not merely manifestations of instrumental patron-client relations. The attempt through this contribution

is to understand subtler modes of insurgency and subversion, often couched in less than ideal practices of patronage and uneven power dynamics.

As observed in Chapter 6, the national elections of 2014 in Kokrajhar served as one example of a rupture — as elections often are (Banerjee 2014) — the historic win of a non-Bodo candidate in a constituency that has elected a Bodo Member of Parliament every year since India's independence, much before the demand for Bodoland, or the formation of the autonomous council. Like the urban poor in Sao Paulo in Holston's (2009) understanding of insurgent citizenship, non-Bodos (and Muslims among them) used the democratic process to challenge the idea of politicised and territorialised ethnicities and express their indignation at the lack of political representation in the BTAD, as well as performing a form of patronage politics in electing the strongman Sarania in exchange for a sense of security.

Tactical use of the national level elections rather than the council showed a level of strategy and symbolism that went beyond instrumental calculations of patronage, however. In doing this, citizen identity was negotiated at multiple scales, showing a sophisticated understanding of the lived, everyday consequences of different elections, and where the potential for disruption lay. The MP elected through the national election rarely does much on the ground work in the Kokrajhar constituency, and thus choosing symbolism here had greater value (in parliament, for instance). In contrast, in the BTC, state-level elections can also be irrelevant, as we saw with relative voter indifference in Uzanpara — due to being “caught” in a constituency outside of the BTC, they had learnt not to expect much from their state-level representative.

In Makrabari, however, voters saw the state and council levels as intertwined — were the BPF to lose here, there would be consequences from the council-level representative as well, and few other parties were poised to effect much change from within the Council. Equally, not only did voters choose to negotiate multiple citizen identities, they also chose to vote the party of *negotiation*, i.e., the one that they saw themselves being able to bargain with even after the election, as Rafiqul put it. Just as with the elections, the AGAA programme showed that political decision-making is more complex than just falling along the lines of ethnicity-based patron-client decision-making. It represented a more ordinary politics than the election, and brought into even sharper relief the practical value of inter-ethnic cooperation (Varshney 2003). Adopting principles of equality and collaboration in the face of constant divisive

efforts from politicians and the state itself became a form of upending conventional principles of citizenship (Butler 2011). The “act” here was subtler than the shock value of electing Sarania, instead, it was to reclaim their identities as more than just citizens that voted along community cleavages, focussing on local issues and overall welfare, despite nudges from politicians to behave otherwise.

Acts of citizenship were not confined to forms of patronage-based action alone, but also enacted in finding new spaces of legitimacy for otherwise “illegal” actions. In Chapter 5, the actual land registration and sale practices on the ground in both Makrabari and Uzanpara showed residents finding (or being forced to find) creative ways around the legislation to ensure their continued legitimacy in the eyes of the state. Makrabari residents retained their names on the voter lists of their former village of Dewalgaon, and resisted being formally associated with Makrabari at least till their status as genuine citizens was established. Their previous history notwithstanding, if they were seen as “new” migrants settling elsewhere, this would make them more likely to be considered suspect citizens, or as the official nomenclature puts it, “Doubtful Voters”.

Uzanpara residents took to selling and buying land between Bodos and Muslims illegally, but using practices that legitimised them at the level of the village, and from their perspective, also in the eyes of the law. While subverting the law and undertaking illegal sales are not necessarily acts of citizenship in themselves, what gives them significance are the procedures surrounding them, to make them legitimate — the signed stamp paper, the witnesses from both communities, and the idea that it is backed by the law (even though at another level it is understood that the sale can’t be registered at the Circle office precisely because it is illegal). This local level practice works in contradiction to the intention of the policy itself — to restrict land ownership and transfer among Bodos — but in a way that recognises the non-Bodo seller, also in the eyes of the Bodo community. The ABSU leaders who attempt to threaten or intervene to prevent these sales from taking place also respect the terms of this validation, and do not report such sales to the authorities, or take other legal routes through the state, perhaps in recognition of the interdependence between Bodos and other communities where they have lived together for several decades.

These practices of “mimicking” the state (McConnell 2012) have the effect of nuancing the binary categories offered by the law. In the case of the Tibetan refugees whose experience

McConnell draws on, it is the binary between refugee and citizen that is blurred (McConnell 2013); in Bodoland, it is the demarcation between legal and illegal sales as enshrined in the land laws. The complex relationship between Bodos and Muslims in a place like Uzanpara, while not finding resonance in the law, is nonetheless represented in the rules and norms of the community and village, as the practices in Chapter 5 showed. It also reframes the significance of territorialised citizenship, redefining the bounds of authority within the space of the village, providing a legitimate contrast to the authority of the state or Council government (Lund 2006).

In looking at the negotiations surrounding citizenship, and focussing on acts of citizenship, the idea of Holston's "insurgent citizenship", and of the very idea of citizenship being defined from the peripheries, becomes especially interesting to consider (Holston 2008). While Holston's empirical context of the marginalised urban poor in Sao Paulo is very different from the largely rural areas of Kokrajhar that I studied, the theme of the periphery, and of the Northeast being India's periphery lends itself to interesting comparisons. The residents in Holston's study find themselves using the language of rights and the idiom of democracy to claim legitimacy, forming new organisations that assert their rights to citizenship. While Holston recognizes that insurgent citizenship and the practices of *jeitinhos* (bending the law) sit uneasily together in the Brazilian context, he nonetheless separates insurgent citizenship and clientelistic processes (pp. 247-48), underlining the differences in the basis of the demands.

In the Indian context (but one that he proposes to extend beyond India), Chatterjee (2004) sees the disadvantaged as belonging to the realm of political society, where they seek entitlements (which he sees as distinct from rights, pp. 68-69) as a population rather than a collective of citizens, mobilising politicians and the state. They do so using not the claims of law or constitutional provisions, but through categories of moral solidarity (p. 74), and on the basis of a category of population that the state recognises. For Chatterjee, this is separate from legitimate processes of citizenship, conceived of in the realm of civil society, and only enacted among India's elite. Political society is not an illegitimate form of politics for Chatterjee, but is certainly not a form of citizenship.

Holston distances himself from Chatterjee's notion of political society (Holston 2009, p. 257, p. 264), suggesting that other works on the urban poor in India suggest a more complex

understanding of rights and citizenship than Chatterjee allows for. He questions the dichotomy between a citizen (in civil society) and a category of the state (in political society), suggesting instead that these categories are inhabited simultaneously. This is an important point that Holston raises, of citizens being both targets of policy and agents of rights.

Equally, Holston is perhaps too quick to segregate the realms of *jeitinhos* from that of insurgent citizenship, even as he acknowledges their uncomfortable presence beside each other. In Holston's formulation, clientelism is one form of making demands, but only the new associations making rights-based claims have the capacity to destabilise and change the meaning of citizenship. In Chatterjee's formulation, these forms of bargaining, which are a part of the practice of political society, are in themselves what make political modernity dynamic, bringing "into the hallways and corridors of power some of the squalor, ugliness, and violence of popular life" (p. 74). Although they argue it in different ways (and in Holston's case, in opposition to Chatterjee), both Holston and Chatterjee argue that the periphery, far from being marginal to or secondary to the way politics is conducted at the centre, is the *driving force* of dynamism in politics. Such an argument resonates with Northeast India, whose construction as a periphery in mainstream discourse has served to obscure the ways in which it is, to bring back Saikia and Baishya's memorable phrase "the original locus of sovereign power... in the postcolonial Indian context" (Saikia and Baishya 2017a, p. 8).

In Bodoland, as the empirical work shows, entitlements predicated on rights, and those secured on the basis of clientelism, or political favours and patronage, are not in neatly distinct categories. Not only are both forms of negotiation and contestation used, in different situations, but the same act can be interpreted — using either Holston's or Chatterjee's formulation — as both an act of citizenship, and a form of patronage. Instead, they resonate more closely with the hybrid forms of claims-making encountered in Veena Das's work (Das 2011), where patronage-based claims are viewed as a legitimate means to secure rights. Holston describes rights-based movements as having the ability to shape law, but many of the legal provisions in Bodoland (such as around land rights or political representation) are immovable through such movements, precisely because they pit not a marginalised group against the wealthy or elite, but one vulnerable group against another protected class, leaving the law to take sides, at different points and in different spheres, with one group or another. In the end, the groups are pitted not against the might of the state, but against each other.

In such a framework, there are few avenues of rights-based “insurgency” left for those on the sidelines. In Bodoland, and in Northeast India more generally, Holston’s formulation of insurgent citizenship takes on an additional meaning — as an area that continues to experience militant insurgency, and where insurgency is also a form of reclaiming rights from the Indian state. Once again, while not in the context of the urban, it is from the periphery (of Northeast India) that the reframing of citizenship in the Indian context occurs. Examples include not just formal amendments to the Constitution, but also the potential of disruptive acts of citizenship to transform the experience of being a citizen.

The actors in Bodoland use a variety of acts to upturn the status quo, using hybrid forms of rights-based or clientelistic and subversion-based methods. In Chapter 6, non-Bodos used the democratic act of voting to elect Hira Sarania, but Sarania himself is a strongman, former militant with dubious credentials to being indigenous. His election is less a claiming of rights, and more a symbolic act, which does not fit neatly into the category of clientelism, but certainly has elements of political patronage embedded within it (security being offered as a service in lieu of votes). At the same time, it was the only democratic means of claiming political space that non-Bodos could exercise. In that sense, elections as an act of citizenship in Bodoland find parallels with Holston’s and Sundar’s (2011) observation of oppressed communities using provisions within the law to access substantive citizenship, but once again its relationship with patronage brings it closer to Das’s (2011) hybrid forms.

The case of the land transfers between Bodos and Muslims in Chapter 5 is also similarly multi-layered. Using illegal practices of land transfer is a way of maintaining economic relations between Bodos and Muslims, and doing so in a way that the law does not allow for. Such informal practices and their legitimisation at the village level shows that they are seen as a claim to rights that are absent, rather than favours (Baghdasaryan 2017). Holston’s case study in Sao Paulo shows that the reasons that the urban “insurgents” end up in illegal settlements, on the peripheries of both the law and the city, are to do with unjust historic land regulations designed to keep land circulating within a few select elites, leaving the poor on the margins. In the present period, this class of poor citizens has fought its way back into the law once again.

The subversion of law encountered in Bodoland also tries to circumvent this existing historical legal structure, but as previously mentioned, this structure does not just pit the elite against the vulnerable, it (more often) also pits different vulnerable groups against each other. In this regard, groups are forced to find new, creative ways to get around the structures of the state. As can be seen with the trajectory of the region — the means are sometimes violent in character (like the Bodo insurgency of the 1990s), sometimes involve other forms of protest (like the continuing strikes and shutdowns imposed by different competing community groups), appeals to the law or government (the Plains Tribal agitation, demands for specific legal provisions like ST status), and in many instances, uses of existing state processes and structures to innovative ends. In doing so, a wide range of activities are encompassed in the “insurgency” of this citizenship, but among the less visible but as fascinating of these has been the everyday rebellions from ordinary citizens, on which I have tried to throw some light in this thesis.

Acts of citizenship are not always inclusive or exclusive, positive or negative in meaning (Isin 2009). A challenge to the idea of acts as solely emancipatory or progressive comes from the disruptive potential of Hindu right-wing nationalism to reshape the terms of citizenship in Bodoland. Narratives from the RSS challenged complex categories of local citizenship, in turn imbuing them with hues of Hindu fundamentalism. During the riots, their spokespersons reinforced the equivalence between Bengali Muslims and Bangladeshis, regardless of proof. By equating indigeneity and tribal identity, RSS operatives emphasised a pan-Hindu identity, that stood in direct opposition to Muslims in particular, using practices akin to what Lobo (2002) described in Gujarat, and what Froerer (2006) observed in Chhattisgarh.

Could this majoritarian challenge to the idea of (Indian and Assamese) citizenship be labelled “insurgent”? Holston’s “insurgents” are the marginalised urban poor, Chatterjee’s political society is formed of those living in informal settlements and outside what he calls “the corridors of power” — the RSS is a powerful group with a vast network of operatives, and reportedly large amounts of foreign funding from diasporic Hindus (Fernandes 2014). Their intervention reflects the other side of “active” citizenship as exercised by elite members of society (Fyfe and Milligan 2003), as well as a form of “shadow state” apparatus that does not merely supplement state services, like employment creation or resettlement and rehabilitation activities (Trudeau 2008), but also articulates new forms of citizenship (Trudeau 2012). While such forms of citizen acts can supplement important gaps, they can also act with a

degree of social bias that makes their actions problematic (Yarwood and Edwards 1995). While Trudeau's arguments about alternative constructions of citizenship in the shadow state concern non-governmental organisations contracted by the state to undertake a welfare role, it is an important intervention that showcases the importance of the local in alternative constructions of citizenship (Trudeau 2012). Moreover, the study illustrates that non-state actors of the shadow state do not construct alternative ideas of citizenship in isolation from the state, but *work with existing state structures* to articulate new forms of belonging (Ibid.). In this case, it is the (now more overt than tacit) support that the RSS receives from the state apparatus, which willingly concedes certain spaces of citizenship to the Hindu nationalist agenda, that allow for it to become a more powerful and larger force than before.

The RSS and other Hindu nationalist groups are hugely influential in the formation of India's current government, led by the BJP, which is also in power in the state of Assam. At the same time, this prominent group is capitalising on the grievances of a beleaguered minority, the Bodos, whose leaders also try and use the RSS instrumentally (as seen in interviews with Council members and leaders of the All Bodo Students Union), in an attempt to reclaim what they see as their own shrinking spaces of citizenship — be it land ownership, political representation, or the future of their ethnic homeland.

8.3 Territorialising identity

Historical and present-day policies show the ways in which the Indian state (both colonial and post-colonial) has conceived of the Northeast primarily from the point of view of territory. In doing so, Northeastern identity has been constructed in territorial terms, as have terms of citizenship and inclusion in the Indian imaginary as a periphery. The point of this thesis has not been to imply that these historically constructed identities were simply imposed from above and never challenged or subverted, or re-appropriated for different ends. Negotiation and contestation have been crucial to these articulations of citizenship, and the empirical chapters show this — through land ownership and sale practices, election and political practices — both political actors and ordinary citizens have reinforced, and at other times, challenged these imposed categories in daily practice.

The movement for Bodoland, for instance, draws on these highly territorialised identities by demanding a political and physical recognition of this idea through the creation of a separate state, a genuine homeland for Bodos. The homeland replaced, in the late 1980s, what was a demand for greater recognition and economic advancement, with what Bodo leaders astutely observed was a more effective bargaining chip — territory. This ethnic homeland is repeatedly reproduced in public discourse, through regular *bandhs*, rallies, and events, and also through campaigning during elections, where the issue is played out in front of Bodo voters as a campaign promise, and in front of non-Bodo ones as a threat (Chapter 6). Significantly, these ideas of territory (at least in Bodoland) are articulated as carving out territorialised identities *within* the context of the Indian constitution, and not separately from it. The challenge to the idea emerges from those who do not feature in this spatial imagination of the ethnic homeland — non-Bodos, like Muslims and *Adivasis*.

Localised history in the villages of Bodoland challenges these neat categories of administration. As observed in Chapter 7, when violence erupted in 2012, and entire villages were displaced or burnt down, local notions of which “outsiders” were perpetrators were more complex than the divisive rhetoric of “Bangladeshi Muslims” employed by political leaders. Similarly, in Uzanpara, Bodos recalled the migration trajectories of their Muslim neighbours as not being across national borders (from Bangladesh, as is often alleged in political rhetoric), but from neighbouring districts, the flood-prone *char* areas of the Brahmaputra river (Chapter 5). Muslims also corroborated these histories — many still have families (and in a few cases, land) in their erstwhile villages of the *char*. Most recall being settled here by former district officials, in what was then a relatively sparsely populated, forested area, before the agitation for Bodoland crystallised in 1987. Even their territorialised non-belonging was not without complexity — many Muslims, residents of the relief camp in Makrabari recalled, were supportive of the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council, seeing it as a resolution that would bring peace, and an end to the targeted attacks on Muslims. That the promise has not panned out for many of the people who supported the Council does not negate the complex nature of its origins.

As seen in Chapter 7, right-wing groups like the RSS also served to capitalise on these territorialised ideas of belonging, and in the process, introduce new boundaries for territories to conform to. This is in line with the essentially spatial nature of right-wing Hindu nationalist ideology in India, which is carved on to the nation space (Oza 2007). Territorial

questions are at the heart of many right-wing nationalist ideologies (Mareš 2009), and territoriality has been central to the political debate in Northeast India since it was part of the British Empire. Territorial anxieties in Bodoland provide rich opportunities for the creation of Hindu nationalist “heterotopias”, mediating the presence of an ideal utopia in a given space (Deshpande 1998). The imagined territory of *Akhand Bharat* (Greater India) is well known in Hindu nationalist propaganda (Indian Express 2016), and in the discourse of the RSS in Bodoland, imaginations of unified territory took on hues of pan-indigenous solidarity, reminiscent of but essentially separate from the idea of Udayachal.

In replacing the ethnonationalist formation of Bodoland with a Hindu nation, the RSS is both re-appropriating the idea of territorialised identity, as well as reinforcing it. Such grand ideas appear in subtler discourses about “encroachment” of land by Muslims, which capitalise on existing anxieties about tribal land alienation. Localised territorial practices in villages are one aspect of how territory enters everyday vernacular politics, and the subversion of territorial ideas by right-wing ideology is another. While territory has historically been used in Northeast India as a means to fix people to place, its basic characteristic as a social process rather than a pre-defined entity (Paasi 2003a) means it is constantly evolving in meaning. Right-wing politics in India, more emboldened than ever, has the potential to build on, and in the process radically transform the meaning of territory in Northeast India. In turn, such a transformation, even if partially successful, could shift the very basis of exclusion from citizenship, as well as the point from which re-interpretations of local citizenship occur. One of the most striking examples of this, in my field research, were the conversations with Raju, the young Bodo man who had been attending RSS camps regularly for the last few years. His re-interpretation of his Muslim neighbours, around whom he grew up and had friends, as “Bangladeshi” stood in stark contrast to other local interpretations of their outsider status. While his political affiliations were clearly still multiple, as his relationship with the local ABSU unit showed, the subtle shift in his perception of local village identity showed that even if such an understanding was not absolute, it had the potential to enter everyday expression.

Just as acts of citizenship did not always prove to be emancipatory in nature, local re-interpretations of territorialised identity also could not be easily classified as solely progressive. These experiences support the complexity of local citizenship norms, as noted in multiple reflections on the multiple scales of citizenship, and the potential for citizenship

to be redefined from the grassroots. Local expressions of citizenship can be emancipatory (Spiro 2010, Villazor 2010), but given the fluid and shifting dynamics, can also shift in the ways that they align (or not) with other citizenship identities. Citizenship enacted “from below” need not necessarily mean it is produced by the actions of ordinary people (Ibid., p. 283). Equally, the ideas produced in these local contexts may not always be progressive ones.

In this instance, the RSS’s categories of local citizenship, by re-aligning along national norms, subverted local identities that were themselves differentiated from prevailing norms of ethno-territorial citizenship. Nonetheless, these multiple expressions of territorial citizenship co-existed with one another, with different expressions being put to use at different moments.

8.4 Northeast Indian Muslim citizenship

While scholars of Northeast India have reflected on the spaces and practices of exception that constitute Northeast Indian citizenship (Baruah 2003b, 2009), there is less understanding of the specific connotations of citizenship for Northeast India’s Muslims. Just as other Northeastern inhabitants (particularly those from states that have large populations of Schedules Tribes) experience racialised, differentiated citizenship in the rest of India, so too do the region’s Muslims (and in this context, especially Assam’s Muslims) experience discriminatory citizenship in the Northeast. I argue here that while discriminatory citizenship for Muslims is increasingly becoming the norm in India, its particular context in the Northeast leads to not just differentiated Muslim citizenship, but *differentiated Northeastern Muslim citizenship*, or in this specific instance, a distinctly Bodoland Muslim citizenship.

In popular discourse, Muslims are the Other that construct Northeast Indian identity. As Ahmed (2014) notes specifically for Assam, vilifying Bengali Muslims is essential to nation building in Assam. Widespread use of terms like “illegal”, but also “plague”, “malady”, “infiltrator”, “encroacher” and “invader” in the context of migration address Bengali-speaking Muslims as essentially the opposite of “indigenous” (in this case not just tribal) Assamese identity. The language used to describe them has not moved much further from terms like “advance guard”, “army” used in the early and mid-20th century (Chapter 5). These constructions lie essentially in imaginative geographies where “a landscape can be easily

sealed off” (Ahmed 2014, p. 58), and anxiety around the border (in this case, the India–Bangladesh border) are at the heart of creating this category of non-belonging for Bengali Muslims. The NRC process has brought this in particularly stark light, as the controversy around documentation and “D” voter labels, coupled with an increasingly intolerant and anti-Muslim political climate has rendered Muslim citizens in Assam (and in particular, Bengali-speaking ones) in constant citizenship limbo (Singh 2018, Siddique 2019).

In the wider concept of citizenship in India too, Muslim citizenship has been a differentiated experience (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012, Jaffrelot 2019). Shani (2010) looks at the question of Muslim citizenship from the inception of independent India, focussing on co-existing notions of liberal, republican and ethno-nationalist, and non-statist ideas of citizenship, and how Muslim groups have aligned themselves with these ideas over time. While the early decades of independence, until the 1970s, saw Muslims aligning with liberal and republican notions of citizenship, in an effort to carve a space as loyal minority citizens in an otherwise majority Hindu nation, the 1980s onwards have seen a revival of the demand for an ethno-nationalist nation from Hindu nationalist groups (Ibid.). Moreover, Muslim demands for greater political representation, access to educational opportunities, or linguistic recognition (in the form of a greater emphasis on the Urdu language) were always charged with accusations of Muslim appeasement, or specifically “Muslim grievances”, even where these demands were employed by Muslim groups in service of greater integration of Muslims within notions of republican and liberal Indian citizenship (Ibid.). In contemporary India, Muslims continue to create their own organisations and networks to compensate for the absence of the state, and attempt to carve out these institutions as secular, inclusive ones, and not simply attending to Muslim concerns (Williams 2015). In Bodoland, the Kokrajhar district committee of the Jamiat-e-Ulema Hind, an Islamic charitable organisation, also encouraged me to travel to nearby villages and observe the post-conflict reconstruction that they undertook in Bodo villages, and not just Muslim ones.

As Shani (2010) observes, Hindu nationalist imaginations of India were directed at quelling the uprising of oppressed groups *within* the Hindu fold (lower and backward castes) aimed at the powerful upper castes who continue to be at the helm of Hindu nationalist groups. The “Muslim question” is retained as an issue of integrity, so that more critical threats to the integrity of India, from the lower and backward classes, could be contained (Ibid., p. 171). What Ahmed (2014) observes in Assam for Bengali Muslims holds true in the Indian context

for Muslims in general in an ethno-nationalist context — their Otherness is produced to construct boundaries around a unified “Hindu” nation (Shani 2010). *Akhand Bharat* then emerges as the territorialised aspiration of this imagined country.

While cultural and religious protections may have existed for Muslim citizens by virtue of the liberal construction of citizenship in postcolonial India, the lack of socio-economic protection (as for other categories like Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes), has left much to be done in the substantive realisation of citizenship for Muslims. In 2006, the influential Sachar Committee (named after its chairperson, Justice Rajinder Sachar), commissioned by the Prime Minister’s Office, released a detailed and scathing report on the status of Muslims across India (Prime Minister’s High Level Committee 2006). The report considers 13 states, including Assam. While it does not specifically disaggregate findings in the context of Assam, one notable point is that Assam, and its neighbouring state, West Bengal, stand out as exceptions in that poverty among Muslims is higher in rural than urban areas, whereas the rest of India sees the opposite trend (Ibid., p. 158). In Assam this is especially telling, given the migration of Muslim peasants from East Bengal in the pre-Independence period.

One of the contributions of this thesis has been to show that while the Northeast remains a category of Others against which mainstream Indian citizenship is constructed, very little is understood about the dynamics of Northeast Muslim identity. Instead, Muslims, often framed in the discourse of migration, are a category of exclusion against which Assamese/Northeastern identity (and its sub-categories of indigenous, *khilonjiya*, or sons-of-the-soil) is reified. In Chapter 4, I looked at how this came to be during the Assam movement in the 1980s, as well as the movement for Bodoland in the 1990s, and into the present day. Both movements began as anti-state, and to a large extent retained this character, but both also gravitated towards “anti-foreigner” positions, which were the issues the Indian state chose to address and validate. As much as forms of asymmetrical federalism that reinforced ideas of difference about the Northeast were tools of conflict management for the Indian state, so too was recognition and amplification of anti-migrant rhetoric. This rhetoric is translated into action by ordinary practices — such as those of Rajeshwar Islary in Chapter 5, the circle officer who has unilaterally interpreted Muslims as being excluded from post-disaster land allocation, because in his understanding of the law, they are all “strictly treated as encroachers”.

The RSS project also made use of Muslims in the BTAD in an instrumental way — capitalising on a lingering resentment from Assamese Muslims towards Bengali Muslims. Yasmin Saikia (2017) demonstrated the erasure of Assamese Muslims from Assamese history, and this sub-section of the Assamese population has been unduly vilified by the conflation of this group with their Bengali-speaking counterparts. As a result, Assamese Muslims have sought to separate themselves as a community, and the RSS has offered another space for this cleavage to solidify. In the process, the RSS has also created the category of a new kind of Muslim outsider in Bodoland — one that is an outsider by way of being a Muslim subject of the Indian state, rather than through the historical context of Assam.

Much of this has placed Northeast India's Muslims, and Assam's Muslims more specifically, in a particularly vulnerable position. Residents of the precariously housed Makrabari were increasingly excluded by the state, and forced to craft different ways of proving their legitimacy. They were also under threat from being not just “encroachers” or “D” voters (and thereby threats to Bodo or Assamese identity), but in the context of the RSS, even enemies of the nation (and thus threats to Indian identity overall). This leads to a double bind — being excluded as Muslims (encroachers/migrants) in the historical context of Assam, as well as in the newly hatred-fuelled environment of India. This is expressed best by Rafiqul who says, at different times, that Indian Muslims will suffer for the next 100 years, but also that he refuses to move away and buy land outside of BTAD area, elsewhere in Assam or India, because this is where he belongs. He spends a few months of the year in the southern Indian state of Kerala as a migrant worker (as do many other young Muslim men from the region), and is struck by what he sees as a greater sense of tolerance and inclusiveness towards Muslims there. Despite feeling that he is treated better, he continues to return to Bodoland, and insists he will bring up his family there, even if it is in a makeshift relief camp like space for now. Though there is no such category, he expresses himself as a distinctly Bodoland Muslim, a local identity that finds no articulation in rhetoric or administrative categories (save for perhaps the existence of All BTAD Minority Students Union), but is constructed through practice, like those of land transfer and ownership, voter registration, and subtler practices of dress, language, culinary habits, and so on. While his attachment to place is as strong as those considered autochthonous (Geschiere 2011), Muslim identity rarely finds the space to assert belonging in Bodoland, focussed as the narrative is on countering claims of being “foreign” or “Doubtful”.

Regional and place-based identities are constructed in multiple ways, through rituals, discourses, ideas of nature and built environment, as well as stereotypical images of what a people or community are that make up a region (Paasi 2003b, p. 477). The recognition of group-based citizenship, which responds to demands “from below”, might in itself contain exclusionary processes that do not represent the interests of all, privileging specific ideas of “community” over others (Kyed and Buur 2006). Saikia (2017) speaks of the erasure of an Assamese Muslim identity, referring specifically to Assamese speaking Muslims, but other particular and local Muslim identities are also erased in the broad sweep of generalisations about Muslims as victims or villains, as being framed only through the threat they pose to law and order in Assam.

In fact, Muslims in Bodoland have particular relationships to belonging that no others in Assam, the Northeast, or India do, as would be the case for Muslims elsewhere, in particular places. In Uzanpara, many Muslims speak fluent Bodo, as they do in Makrabari (and other parts of Bodoland), a fact that is never captured in the census or other administrative or scholarly understandings about them. Inter-marriages between Bodos and Muslims are controversial but do exist (Jamal is married to a Bodo woman, but his children do not officially have Scheduled Tribe status, though they are eligible). I also had the opportunity to meet with and interview a former cadre of the insurgent outfit, the Bodoland Liberation Tigers, who was Muslim. That may sound like a paradox today, but for him, living among other Bodos in his Kokrajhar town neighbourhood, was at the time a natural choice. While he is candid about the fact that he never “moved up the ranks” in the leadership because of his Muslim identity, he claims never to have been treated differently as a cadre, and retains connections with the members of the outfit until today. His story may not be a common one, but he was far from the only non-Bodo in Bodo insurgent outfits. As Muslims and those from other non-Bodo groups emphasised repeatedly, there would have been no BTAD agreement without the tacit support of non-Bodo groups, who make up a majority of the population. That this remains unacknowledged allows for the persistence of the single narrative that BTAD, or even a future separate state if it ever emerges, is a singularly Bodo project. What it renders invisible, in the process, is the local, Bodoland-specific identity of those who are not Bodos, beyond being impediments to an ethnonationalist project.

8.5 Conclusion

The findings from the thesis consistently show that citizenship is reinterpreted and re-enacted by citizens at multiple levels. Political agency and claims on the state are often made through informal channels, or insurgent re-appropriation of existing practices like elections. Equally, practices at the local level confer different forms of legitimacy than those granted by the state, and express forms of cooperation between communities. Such actions are especially important to highlight in Bodoland, where popular perception in the form of media and even many academic discourses constantly pit different communities as inherently in opposition.

Nonetheless, all these acts and the expanding meaning of citizenship take place in the context of the formal status of citizenship, one which is only conferred by the state. What has been argued in the context of increasing global flows is also true for acts of citizenship that expand its practice — “the state remains” (Diener 2017, p. 52). Territorial forms of national citizenship are still crucial to claim rights, still embedded in ideas of national community (Ibid.). Current political events across the globe are evidence of the enduring appeal of nationalism, and India is not immune. In Assam, this has been made firmly, and sometimes brutally evident in the National Register of Citizens process. In August 2019, the Assamese state conducted a series of “re-verifications” of some people already included in the existing draft of the register, against whom “objections” had been filed, sometimes by unknown others. In contravention to existing due process, some applicants were asked to travel across the state for last-minute hearings held at 48 hours (and in some cases 24 hours) notice (Saikia 2019b). This led many to sell land, cattle, and possessions to undertake expensive journeys at short notice, and caused panic and worry. The idea of exclusion as the basis of this citizenship found crude expression in the ruling party’s refusal to accept the final draft of the NRC because it was “too inclusive”, and not enough people were excluded from the register (Daniyal 2019).

While daily life is full of examples of ways in which ideas of citizenship are expanded, none are immune from the formal process of proving one’s legality as a citizen, where it is only the categories of the state, rather than local ones, that are important. It is unclear what the fate of those left off the register of citizens will be, or what the final desired outcome of the process is even for those in charge of undertaking it. Nonetheless, the NRC makes clear that citizenship as status, especially when combined with the might of state power, still remains a

primary, and in some cases, the most important measure of citizenship. In this thesis, I have attempted to complicate this picture by showing how the space of citizenship can be reclaimed through local practice and disruptive acts, but it remains to be seen whether the effects of these reclamations can be sustained in the face of the might of the state.



9. CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSIONS: REFLECTIONS ON CITIZENSHIP IN BODOLAND

In this final chapter, I will reiterate some of the main contributions of this thesis, add an Epilogue outlining events that transpired in Bodoland after the completion of my own primary field research, and conclude with suggesting future directions for research. The overarching narrative throughout this thesis has been a concern with inclusion and exclusion from citizenship, and the practices that serve to construct these categories. Bodoland as an empirical context provides for particularly visceral aspects of this debate, given both its history of insurgency and demand for an ethnic homeland, and its participation in the current process of updating of the National Register of Citizens.

9.1 Main contributions

Each of the contributions respond to the focus on forms of citizenship, inclusion and exclusion, and the practices of citizenship in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts. The thesis locates the findings from Bodoland within a wider context of literature on citizenship practices, particularly as these pertain to spatial understandings of citizenship, and as they become manifested through the everyday practices of the state. In doing so, I situate the findings at the intersection of scholarship in political geography and the anthropology of the state, as well as within the emergent field of regional studies that engages seriously with Northeast India.

Political scientist Sanjib Baruah spoke of structures of autonomy in the Northeast, like the Bodoland Territorial Council, creating two classes of citizens — “citizens and denizens” (Baruah 2003b), resulting in differential access for different categories of citizens in an ethnic homeland. In many ways, this has been borne out by experience in Bodoland, emerging largely from what Vandekerckhove (2009) called “too powerfully territorialised identities”. As the empirical material in this thesis showed, land ownership and political representation are two very visible manifestations of these principles. Equally, as was shown in this analysis, citizens are capable of exercising “acts” of citizenship, whether through subverting formal processes of law (in the case of land) or through using the law (in the case of elections). However, engaging analytically with these practices shows that both instances are

more complex than simply breaking or strategic use of laws. Each instance is shaped and guided by the options made available by the historical structure of the law, and its particular evolution in the specific place-based context of Bodoland.

The first major contribution of this thesis has been to show how territorialised identities in Bodoland are manifested in everyday practice. This has been done by looking at the larger historical picture, particularly looking at debates about the Sixth Schedule, agitations by the Plains Tribal Council of Assam, and the ways in which state responses have encouraged territorially-based ethnicity demands in Northeast India. This engages with theories of territoriality in political geography, and the notion of territory being essentially a process rather than a fixed idea. I have examined how everyday practices, like those of land management, and broader political processes, like federalism, both serve to constantly reproduce the idea of Bodoland as a territory, a model that has been replicated across Northeast India, and served to exacerbate the sense of difference in the region.

The second major contribution has been to show how everyday practices can also be used to subvert or reorient these expressions of territoriality with regard to citizenship. I show how land transactions create new institutions and practices of legitimacy, and how political practices challenge existing categories of state practices through using political processes like elections or local government in new ways. I locate these findings within the fields of political geography, and also the anthropology of the state, focussing on specific practices and focussing on the meaning and legitimacy ascribed to these. In doing so, I locate the findings within a wider literature in citizenship studies on acts of citizenship, insurgent citizenship, citizenship as claimed from below, and *de jure* and *de facto* citizenship.

A third contribution has been to examine the use of acts of citizenship by more powerful elements of the “shadow state” (Trudeau 2008, 2012), like Hindu nationalist groups, in creating new categories of inclusion and exclusion for citizenship. Given the pace at which right wing nationalism has spread in India in the last few years, and its more recent hold in the Northeast, I believe this is an important phenomenon to document. Using existing categories of inclusion and exclusion, Hindu nationalism has built up a careful narrative tailored to the Northeast, and in this case, specific to Bodoland. These specific strategies mean that these are still *differentiated terms of citizenship for Northeast India*, marking both continuity and a break from the status quo. The radicalisation of young Bodo men like Raju,

or even more seasoned leaders like Charan, who consider themselves caretakers of Bodo culture, has the potential to sow seeds for further polarisation, and even violence. While these may not be the acts of “insurgent” citizenship claimed from below, they are claims on citizenship made from outside the state, but in this case, with its tacit sanction.

A final contribution is to look more closely at the dynamics of citizenship for Muslims in Bodoland, and what this might mean for a wider Northeast Indian Muslim identity. These findings are only an initial look at this issue, and capture some place-specific aspects which might nonetheless have implications for the wider region. While territorialised belonging in Northeast India is more widely accepted and studied (and also explored here through looking at material practices), the categories of (non)belonging constructed around Muslims also draw from territorialised ideas. Tensions between internal divides among Muslims (in this case between Assamese and Bengali speaking Muslims, for instance), as well as the sweeping derogatory narratives under which one or both groups are clubbed, are all contributing factors shaping these identities. Despite having strong attachments to place, similar to Bodos, Muslims’ sense of belonging in the BTAD or in Northeast India is always a challenge to recognise in the emergent nationalist political discourse, which benefits from treating them as outsiders. Nonetheless, to some extent local practices continue to recognise this attachment to place, and create new categories of legitimacy, which sit uneasily alongside wider categories of exclusion. As observed above, Hindu nationalist narratives have the potential to shake up this balance *at the local level*, although it is hard to predict how this will ultimately unfold more widely across the region.

Both contributions on territorialised identities and their subversion aim to engage the conversation about Northeast India and the forms of citizenship experienced by its inhabitants, the internal diversity within, as well as the forms that the exclusions can take. Within the wider scope of Northeast Indian studies, there has been a trend away from focussing on violence, conflict and security as themes (although these still remain crucial to understanding the region), and towards an understanding of everyday politics as rejecting binary notions of belonging and exclusion (Pachau 2014, Saikia and Baishya 2017b, Vandenhelsken *et al.* 2017). I locate my own research within this wider trend, adding more detailed ethnographic texture from Bodoland, in particular.

9.2 Epilogue

Though the findings from the NRC process were referred to at various points in the thesis, the actual publication of the first draft occurred after I had left Assam. I attempted to make enquiries by phone about the status of various respondents and participants in getting their names in the draft. Much to their relief, all the residents of Makrabari were able to find their names in the first draft (which excluded 4 million), largely as a result of staying on the electoral rolls of their former village, Dewalgaon, and for some residents, through finding lineage data in the NRC of 1951. In Uzanpara, results were more mixed, some residents had made their way into the first draft, while others had been left off. These included both Bodos and Muslims, from what I could gauge, and people were hopeful of finding their way on to the document in a later phase. The NRC process in Assam has also inspired a similar project in the neighbouring state of Mizoram, which aims to create a register of “citizen residents” and “non-citizen residents” (Saikia 2019a).

The discourse around the NRC and migration, however, remained as toxic as ever, especially with the growing hold of the BJP in the Northeast. As noted in Chapter 8, the final NRC draft published in August 2019 left out nearly 2 million of Assam’s residents, a result that the BJP was not happy with, as it was at odds with the vastly greater numbers suggested earlier (Daniyal 2019). In addition, many of those left off the register were Bengali Hindus, rather than Muslims, against the sort of divisive political rhetoric employed by the BJP and RSS.

While 2016 marked an important entry point of Hindu nationalist politics via the BJP in Assam (as well as in Sikkim, in alliance with a regional party), state elections across the Northeast in the following years saw many more states come under its rule. In Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura, the BJP now leads the state government, while in Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, it supports allies in the formation of the government. All of these alliances are grouped under the umbrella of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) (Hindustan Times 2016), signalling a greater push made by the BJP towards Northeast India. The national elections in May 2019 demonstrated the durability of these alliances, showing that a Hindu nationalist agenda has the potential to reshape politics around ethnicity in Northeast India. These alliances were briefly threatened by the BJP’s renewed effort to push through the Citizenship Amendment Bill, causing many of its allies to openly participate in

protests and threatening to sever ties (BBC 2019). This led to the amendment being quietly shelved (Ibid.), and alliances were renewed for the national elections.

Bodoland has seen its fair share of major events in the last two years — to start with, Pramila Rani Brahma, the candidate who won the 2016 state elections discussed here, was nominated to fight the national elections from Kokrajhar. This was likely an attempt by the ruling Bodoland Political Front to counter the impact of incumbent Hira Sarania, whose anti-Bodo message has been disruptive to the movement for separate statehood. But the issues that propelled Sarania's rise in the first place — the insecurity of non-Bodo groups of their fate in a future Bodoland state — remain as entrenched as ever, and he won the election yet again. In August 2017, an All BTC Minority Students Union (ABMSU) leader, representative of Muslims in the BTAD area, was shot dead in a busy marketplace (The Telegraph 2017b), increasing the sense of fear and uncertainty for Muslims in particular. A few months later, non-Bodos were further moved to calling a *bandh* across the BTAD when rumours indicated that the central government was planning to bestow “Union Territorial Council” status on the BTC (The Telegraph 2018b), which thus far has no official meaning in the Indian state. The rumours were quickly dispelled.

9.3 Moving forward

Recent events show that citizenship, territoriality, Hindu nationalism, all remain important themes in the discourse about Bodoland. Citizenship in Northeast India continues to be differentiated, and contestations of that differentiation also persist alongside attempts to formalise categories of inclusion and exclusion, using instruments such as the NRC.

One gap in this research has been a relatively less detailed understanding of the role of women in BTAD politics. While this was briefly explored with regard to elections, and the stark absence of women in decision-making roles, there is a need for greater exploration of this topic in this context. As I have noted at different points, women are used in many different narratives — to signify cultural purity and ethnic markers for Bodos (and the cause of Bodoland), and as upholders of honour for Hindu nationalists. But the agency of women themselves in constructing the narrative of Bodoland is a crucial aspect of understanding its conception. Some recent work on women's roles in militant outfits in the BTAD highlights

their status not just as “links” but as key elements of the organisations (Dutta 2018). A growing body of research in other areas of Northeast looks at this complex casting of women as victims and agents in the politics of cultural nationalism (Bora 2017, Haripriya 2017, Kikon 2017c).

Further research in the BTAD could highlight other practices of contestation and claims to citizenship. In particular, the work of the Hindu right wing in this region is important to document further. This is true for the Northeast more widely, where territorialised ethnicities are assumed by default, but in fact, are actively produced and reproduced. An important future direction of research in this regard, particularly given Hindu nationalism’s use of social media, is in understanding how the digital world contributes to reinforcing these identities, building on methods of digital ethnography (Horst and Miller 2012) along with on-the-ground participant observation. Some research into Bodo digital identity based on existing networks and uses of online platforms has already begun to adopt this perspective (Bhuyan 2016).

Just as understanding the everyday reifications of territorialised identities in the Northeast is important, so too is further exploration of the specific, territorialised aspects of Northeast Indian Muslim identity, which remains understudied except in the context of migration or violence. Saikia (2017) makes an important intervention in speaking of the relative absence of Assamese Muslims in the construction of Assamese history, and Ahmed (2014) makes another relevant argument about the vilification of Bengali-speaking Muslims as being essential to the construction of Assamese nationalism. Both point towards an erasure of Muslims from the narration of Assamese society, through either being made invisible, or discussed only in pre-set binary categories. The same could be extended, I would argue, to other parts of the Northeast, where most scholarship focusses on (admittedly crucial) questions of tribal autonomy, the politics of ethnicity, the exception of militarisation, and more recently, migration from the Northeast towards other parts of India, pan-Northeastern solidarity, and its place in a wider Southeast Asian imagination. There is a greater need in these narratives to consider the lived experience of being a Muslim in this region, and this also becomes more crucial to understand as the polarising rhetoric of right wing nationalism intensifies across the region.

9.4 Questions of belonging

The findings and contributions of this thesis have been built on a long period of fieldwork, as well as through engaging with scholarship in the relevant academic fields. The state here has been looked at through the prism of citizenship, a concept that has enduring relevance everywhere in the world. By focussing on strongly territorialised expressions of citizenship in particular, I have attempted to examine how these territorialised identities are reproduced, and equally, how they are challenged. While my empirical data drew on insights from Northeast India, seemingly a specific context where the idea of deeply rooted identities is central to politics, I wrote the final drafts of this project in Cambridge, UK, in the midst of intensifying debates about Brexit, what it means to be British or European, and what the true nature of sovereignty is. I could not have created a more relevant backdrop for the writing process if I had tried. These struggles continue to exemplify the contradictions of state practice, and serve as a reminder that ideas of belonging and citizenship are never a settled debate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, P., 1988. Notes on the difficulty of studying the State (1977). *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 1 (1), 58–89.
- Adebanwi, W., 2009. Terror, territoriality and the struggle for indigeneity and citizenship in northern Nigeria. *Citizenship Studies*, 13 (4), 349–363.
- Agamben, G., 1998. *Sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Agnew, J., 2005. Sovereignty regimes: Territoriality and state authority in contemporary world politics. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 95 (2), 437–461.
- Ahmed, K.A., 2010. *The Muslims of Assam*. Guwahati: EBH Publishers India.
- Ahmed, R., 2014. Anxiety, violence and the postcolonial state: Understanding the “anti-Bangladeshi” rage in Assam, India. *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*, 19 (1), 55–70.
- Ahmed, R., 2018. The NRC as “Truth Machine” in Assam. *South Asia @ LSE*. 30 Apr. Available from: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2018/04/30/the-nrc-as-the-truth-machine-in-assam/> [Accessed 24 Mar 2019].
- Ahuja, A. and Chhibber, P., 2012. Why the poor vote in India: “If I don’t vote, I am dead to the state”. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 47 (4), 389–410.
- Aminzade, R., 2013. *Race, nation, and citizenship in postcolonial Africa: The case of Tanzania*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Amit, V., 2000. *Constructing the field: Ethnographic fieldwork in the contemporary world*. London: Routledge.
- Amoore, L., 2006. Biometric borders: Governing mobilities in the war on terror. *Political Geography*, 25 (3), 336–351.
- Anand, N., 2017. *Hydraulic city: Water and the infrastructures of citizenship in Mumbai*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Anderson, B., 2006. *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Revised. London; New York: Verso.
- Andrijasevic, R., 2013. Acts of citizenship as methodology. In: E. F. Isin and M. Saward, eds. *Enacting European citizenship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 47–65.
- Antonsich, M., 2009. On territory, the nation-state and the crisis of the hyphen. *Progress in Human Geography*, 33 (6), 789–806.
- Anwar, N.H. and Viqar, S., 2016. Research assistants, reflexivity and the politics of fieldwork in urban Pakistan. *Area*, 49 (1), 114–121.
- Appadurai, A., 1990. Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. *Public Culture*, 2 (2).

- Appadurai, A., 1996. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis, M.N.: University of Minnesota Press.
- Archibugi, D. and Held, D., 1995. *Cosmopolitan democracy: An agenda for a new world Order*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Assam State Archives, 1952a. TW(P) 126/52: Assembly question (unstarred) to be asked by Shri Hakim Chandra Rabha, M.L.A. on the September session of the assembly 52 viz particulars about the plains tribal. Guwahati, Assam State Archives.
- Assam State Archives, 1952b. TW(P) 140/52: Conference regarding developing scheduled tribes and tribal areas. Guwahati, Assam, State Archives.
- Assam State Archives, 1952c. TW(P) 173/52: Memorandum of the plains Tribal people of Assam submitted to the Prime Ministers of India on his August visit to Dibrugarh on the 22nd October 52. Guwahati, Assam State Archives.
- Assam State Archives, 1958. TAD/Rev/53/58: Representation dated 5/11/57 before the Chief Minister, Assam from General Secretary - Assam Tribal Sangha. Guwahati, Assam State Archives.
- Assam State Archives, 1962. PLB 143/1962: Census of Muslims in Assam with reference to the check of infiltration of Pakistanis into Assam. Guwahati, Assam State Archives.
- Assam State Archives, 1968a. PLA 316/1968: Incidents during polling for bye-election, Kokrajhar, Goalpara District. Guwahati, Assam State Archives.
- Assam State Archives, 1968b. PLA 759/1968: Starred Assembly question to be asked by Shri Bhadra Kanta Gogoi, M.L.A. during the August Session of the Assembly, 1968 regarding arrest of tribal people at Kokrajhar on 19-5-68. Guwahati, Assam State Archives.
- Assam State Archives, 1970. PLA 623/1970: Starred question to be asked by Mr. Gauri Sankar Bhattacharya, M.L.A. during the Assembly Session regarding news item published in the Times of India regarding non-Assamese to quit Assam. Guwahati, Assam State Archives.
- Assam State Archives, 1980. PLA 1072/1980: News Item of Assam Tribune dated 21-7-1980 regarding fresh influx of Foreign national into Assam. Guwahati, Assam State Archives.
- Assam Tribune, 2012. Bandh hits normal life. *Assam Tribune*, 28 August.
- Ataç, I., Rygiel, K., and Stierl, M., 2016. Introduction: The contentious politics of refugee and migrant protest and solidarity movements: Remaking citizenship from the margins. *Citizenship Studies*, 20 (5), 527–544.
- Baghdasaryan, M., 2017. The practice of political rights and patron–client relations: A case study of a party in Armenia. *Citizenship Studies*, 21 (8), 1034–51.
- Banerjee, M., 1998. *Women in local governance: Macro myths, micro realities*. Bangalore: Institute of Social Studies Trust, ISST Occasional Paper.

- Banerjee, M., 2007. Sacred elections. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 42 (17), 1556–1562.
- Banerjee, M., 2014. *Why India votes*. New Delhi; Oxford: Routledge.
- Banks, N., Hulme, D., and Edwards, M., 2015. NGOs, states, and donors revisited: Still too close for comfort? *World Development*, 66, 707–718.
- Barbero, I., 2012a. Expanding acts of citizenship: The struggles of Sinpapeles migrants. *Social and Legal Studies*, 21 (4), 529–47.
- Barbero, I., 2012b. Orientalising citizenship: The legitimization of immigration regimes in the European Union. *Citizenship Studies*, 16 (5–6), 751–768.
- Barbora, S., 2002. Ethnic politics and land use: Genesis of conflicts in India’s North-East. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37 (13), 1285–1292.
- Barbora, S., 2008. Autonomous districts and/or ethnic homelands: An ethnographic account of the genesis of political violence in Assam (North-East India) against the normative frame of the Indian Constitution. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 15 (2), 313–334.
- Barbora, S., 2015. Uneasy homecomings: Political entanglements in contemporary Assam. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38 (2), 290–303.
- Barbora, S., 2017. Violence, agrarian change and the politics of autonomy in Assam. In: M. Vandenhelsken, M. Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and B.G. Karlsson, eds. *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian studies*. New Delhi: Routledge, 128–139.
- Barnes, T.J. and Sheppard, E., 2010. “Nothing includes everything”: Towards engaged pluralism in Anglophone economic geography. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34 (2), 193–214.
- Barreto, A.A. and Lozano, K., 2017. Hierarchies of belonging: Intersecting race, ethnicity, and territoriality in the construction of US citizenship. *Citizenship Studies*, 21 (8), 999–1014.
- Baruah, A.K. and Dev, R., eds., 2006. *Ethnic identities and democracy: Electoral politics in North-East India*. New Delhi: Regency Publications.
- Baruah, M., 2017a. (Un)natural disasters and the role of the state in the Brahmaputra Valley, Assam. In: Y. Saikia and A.R. Baishya, eds. *Northeast India: A place of relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 68–90.
- Baruah, S., 1999. *India against itself: Assam and the politics of nationality*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Baruah, S., 2003a. Protective discrimination and crisis of citizenship in North-East India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38 (17), 1624–1626.
- Baruah, S., 2003b. Citizens and denizens: Ethnicity, homelands, and the crisis of displacement in Northeast India. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 16 (1), 44–66.

- Baruah, S., 2004. *Between South and Southeast Asia: Northeast India and the Look East Policy*. Guwahati: CENISEAS, No. 4.
- Baruah, S., 2005. *Durable disorder: Understanding the politics of Northeast India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baruah, S., 2007. *Postfrontier blues: Toward a new policy framework for Northeast India*. Washington, D.C: East-West Center Washington.
- Baruah, S., 2009. The Partition's long shadow: The ambiguities of citizenship in Assam, India. *Citizenship Studies*, 13 (6), 593–606.
- Baruah, S., 2010a. Regionalism and secessionism. In: N.G. Jayal and P.B. Mehta, eds. *Oxford companion to politics in India*. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 181–191.
- Baruah, S., 2010b. *Ethnonationalism in India: A reader*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Baruah, S., 2014. The politics of electoral violence. *Outlook*. 9 May.
- Baruah, S., 2017b. Reading Fürer-Haimendorf in Northeast India. In: M. Vandenhelsken, M. Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and B.G. Karlsson, eds. *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian studies*. New Delhi: Routledge, 17–30.
- Baruah, S., 2017c. India and its Northeast: Another big push without a take-off? In: Y. Saikia and A.R. Baishya, eds. *Northeast India: A place of relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 45–67.
- Batliwala, S. and Dhanraj, D., 2004. Gender myths that instrumentalise Women: A view from the Indian frontline. *IDS Bulletin*, 35 (4), 11–18.
- Baviskar, A., 2005. Adivasi encounters with Hindu nationalism in MP. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40 (48), 5105–5133.
- BBC, 2019. BJP drops citizenship bill amid protests. *British Broadcasting Corporation*, 13 Feb.
- Bebbington, A. and Thiele, G., 1993. *Non-governmental organizations and the state in Latin America: Rethinking roles in sustainable agricultural development*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Begum, A.A., 2011. Narratives of D-voters in Assam. *TwoCircles.net*. 3 Jan. Available from: http://twocircles.net/2011jan03/narratives_dvoters_assam.html [Accessed 28 Mar 2019].
- Bell, D., 1995. Pleasure and danger: The paradoxical spaces of sexual citizenship. *Political Geography*, 14 (2), 139–153.
- Bell, D. and Binnie, J., 2004. Authenticating queer space: Citizenship, urbanism and governance. *Urban Studies*, 41 (9), 1807–1820.
- Benbabaali, D., 2018. Caste dominance and territory in South India: Understanding Kammas' socio-spatial mobility. *Modern Asian Studies*, 1–39.

- Benhabib, S., 2004. *Rights of others: Aliens, residents, and citizens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berenschot, W., 2011a. On the usefulness of *Goondas* in Indian politics: “Moneypower” and “musclepower” in a Gujarati locality. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 34 (2), 255–75.
- Berenschot, W., 2011b. Political fixers and the rise of Hindu nationalism in Gujarat, India: Lubricating a patronage democracy. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 34 (3), 382–401.
- Berenschot, W., 2011c. The spatial distribution of riots: Patronage and the instigation of communal violence in Gujarat, India. *World Development*, 39 (2), 221–230.
- Berenschot, W., and van Klinken, G., 2018. Informality and citizenship: The everyday state in Indonesia. *Citizenship Studies*, 22 (2), 95–111.
- Béteille, A., 1998. The idea of indigenous people. *Current Anthropology*, 39 (2), 187–192.
- Bezmez, D., 2013. Urban citizenship, the right to the city and politics of disability in Istanbul: The right to the city and politics of disability in Istanbul. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 37 (1), 93–114.
- Bhattacharyya, H., 2015. Indian federalism and democracy: The growing salience of diversity-claims over equality-claims in comparative and Indian perspective. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 25 (3), 211–227.
- Bhattacharyya, H., Hausing, K.K. S., and Mukherjee, J., 2017. Indian federalism at the crossroads: Limits of the territorial management of ethnic conflict. *India Review*, 16 (1), 149–178.
- Bhaumik, S., 2009. *Troubled periphery: The crisis of India’s North East*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Bhuyan, A., 2016. Culture, Conflict and Cyberspace: Towards a Bodo digital identity. *Sarai*. Available from: <http://sarai.net/culture-conflict-and-cyberspace-towards-a-bodo-digital-identity/> [Accessed 19 Mar 2019].
- Billig, M., 1995. *Banal nationalism*. London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Bjorkman, L., 2014. “You can’t buy a vote”: Meanings of money in a Mumbai election. *American Ethnologist*, 41 (4), 617–634.
- Bora, P., 2017. Politics of difference in the Northeast: A feminist reflection. In: Y. Saikia and A.R. Baishya, eds. *Northeast India: A place of relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 244–261.
- Bose, S. and Jalal, A., 1998. *Modern South Asia: History, culture, political economy*. New Delhi; London: Routledge.
- Brass, P., 1991. *Ethnicity and nationalism: Theory and comparison*. New Delhi; London: SAGE Publications.

- Brass, P., 2003. *The production of Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India*. Jackson School publications in international studies. Seattle; London: University of Washington Press.
- Brown, G., 2007. Mutinous eruptions: Autonomous spaces of radical queer activism. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 39 (11), 2685–2698.
- Brubaker, R., 1996. *Nationalism reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bussemaker, J. and Voet, R., 1998. Citizenship and gender: Theoretical approaches and historical legacies. *Critical Social Policy*, 18 (56), 277–307.
- Butler, J., 2011. Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street. *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*. Available from: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en> [Accessed 3 Mar 2019].
- Cairns, A., 2010. Afterword: International dimensions of the citizen issue for indigenous peoples/nations. *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (4), 497–512.
- Canessa, A., 2012. New indigenous citizenship in Bolivia: Challenging the liberal model of the state and its subjects. *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 7 (2), 201–221.
- Caretta, M.A., 2014. Situated knowledge in cross-cultural, cross-language research: A collaborative reflexive analysis of researcher, assistant and participant subjectivities. *Qualitative Research*, 15 (4), 489–505.
- Carey, A.C., 2009. *On the margins of citizenship: Intellectual disability and civil rights in twentieth-century America*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Castree, N., 2004. Differential geographies: Place, indigenous rights and “local” resources. *Political Geography*, 23 (2), 133–167.
- Census of India, 2011. *Census of India 2011*. New Delhi: Registrar General of India.
- Cerwonka, A. and Malkki, L., 2007. *Improvising theory: Process and temporality in ethnographic fieldwork*. Chicago, I.L.; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Chadda, M., 1997. *Ethnicity, security, and separatism in India*. New York; Chichester, UK: Columbia University Press.
- Chakravarty, I., 2017. In Assam, the National Register of Citizens sparks fresh fears among the state’s minorities. *Scroll.in*, 18 Nov. Available from: <https://scroll.in/article/858021/in-assam-the-national-register-of-citizens-sparks-fresh-fears-among-the-states-minorities> [Accessed 9 Mar 2019]
- Chandra, K., 2004. *Why ethnic parties succeed: Patronage and ethnic headcounts in India*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chandra, K., 2007. Counting heads. In: H. Kitschelt and S.I. Wilkinson, eds. *Patrons, clients, and policies: Patterns of democratic accountability and political competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 515–563.

- Chatterjee, I., 2013. *Forgotten friends: Monks, marriages, and memories of Northeast India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Chatterjee, I., 2018. Connected histories and the dream of decolonial history. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 41 (1), 69–86.
- Chatterjee, P., 1993. The Nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories.
- Chatterjee, P., 2004. *The politics of the governed: Reflections on popular politics in most of the world*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Chatterji, J., 2012. South Asian histories of citizenship, 1946–1970. *The Historical Journal*, 55 (04), 1049–1071.
- Chee, H.L., Lu, M.C.W., and Yeoh, B.S.A., 2014. Ethnicity, citizenship and reproduction: Taiwanese wives making citizenship claims in Malaysia. *Citizenship Studies*, 18 (8), 823–838.
- Chhibber, P., 2002. Why are some women politically active? The household, public space, and political participation in India. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 43 (3–5), 409–429.
- Choi, J., 2009. Strategic voting in India: Its extent and determinants in the 2004 general election. *Asian Survey*, 49 (4), 609–624.
- Chopra, D., Williams, P., and Vira, B., 2011. Politics of citizenship: Experiencing state–society relations from the margins. *Contemporary South Asia*, 19 (3), 243–247.
- Choudhury, S., 2007. *The Bodos: Emergence and assertion of an ethnic minority*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.
- Choudry, A.A. and Kapoor, D., eds., 2013. *NGOization: Complicity, contradictions and prospects*. London; New York, NY: Zed Books.
- Christie, G., 2010. Aboriginal citizenship: Sections 35, 25 and 15 of Canada’s Constitution Act, 1982. *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (4), 481–495.
- Collins, P.H., 2001. Like one of the family: Race, ethnicity, and the paradox of US national identity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24 (1), 3–28.
- Connor, W., 1990. When is a nation? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 13 (1), 92–103.
- Cons, J. and Sanyal, R., 2013. Geographies at the margins: Borders in South Asia—an introduction. *Political Geography*, 35, 5–13.
- Constituent Assembly Debates, 1948. Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. 7. Available from: https://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/7 [Accessed 17 Mar 2019].
- Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949a. Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. 9. Available from: https://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/9 [Accessed 17 Mar 2019].

- Constituent Assembly Debates, 1949b. Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol. 11. Available from: https://cadindia.clpr.org.in/constitution_assembly_debates/volume/11 [Accessed 17 Mar 2019].
- Corbin, J. and Morse, J.M., 2003. The unstructured interactive interview: Issues of reciprocity and risks when dealing with sensitive topics. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9 (3), 335–354.
- Corbridge, S., 2000. Competing Inequalities: The Scheduled Tribes and the reservations system in India's Jharkhand. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 59 (1), 62.
- Corbridge, S. and Harriss, J., 2000. *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and popular democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Crooks, V.A., Dorn, M.L., and Wilton, R.D., 2008. Emerging scholarship in the geographies of disability. *Health & Place*, 14 (4), 883–888.
- Cupples, J. and Kindon, S., 2003. Far from being “Home Alone”: The dynamics of accompanied fieldwork. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 24 (2), 211–228.
- D’Andrade, R., 1995. Moral models in anthropology. *Current Anthropology*, 36 (3), 399–408.
- Dangmei, S., 2013. Cultural positioning of tribes in North-East India: Mapping the evolving Heraka identity. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48 (1), 27–30.
- Daniyal, S. 2019, Why the Assam BJP is now against the NRC: Explaining the politics behind the exercise. *Scroll.in*, 1 September. Available at: <https://scroll.in/article/935840/why-the-assam-bjp-is-now-against-the-nrc-explaining-the-politics-behind-the-exercise> [Accessed 1 September 2019].
- Das, A.K., 2016. Book Review: Why India votes. *Society and Culture in South Asia*, 2 (1), 144–146.
- Das, S.K., 2010. India's Look East Policy: Imagining a new geography of India's Northeast. *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, 66 (4), 343–358.
- Das, V., 2011. State, citizenship, and the urban poor. *Citizenship Studies*, 15 (3–4), 319–333.
- Das, V. and Poole, D., 2004a. State and its margins: Comparative ethnographies. In: V. Das and D. Poole, eds. *Anthropology in the margins of the state*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 3–34.
- Das, V. and Poole, D., eds., 2004b. *Anthropology in the margins of the state*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Dawar, J.L., 2008. Politics of religious identities in Arunachal Pradesh since the 1950s: A Case Study of the Tani Group of Tribes. Presented at the Political Roles of Religious Communities in India, Stockholm-Nacka, Sweden: Institute for Security and Development Policy.
- De Maaker, E. and Joshi, V., 2007. Introduction: The Northeast and beyond: Region and culture. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 30 (3), 381–390.

- Deka, K., 2017. Decades of “ethnic massacre” in Bodoland. In: M. Vandenhelsken, M. Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and B.G. Karlsson, eds. *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian studies*. New Delhi: Routledge, 177–195.
- Desforges, L., Jones, R., and Woods, M., 2005. New geographies of citizenship. *Citizenship Studies*, 9 (5), 439–451.
- Deshpande, S., 1998. Hegemonic spatial strategies: The nation-space and Hindu communalism in twentieth-century India. *Public Culture*, 10 (2), 249–83.
- Dev, B.J. and Lahiri, D.K., 1985. *Assam Muslims: Politics and cohesion*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- Diener, A. C., 2017. Re-scaling the geography of citizenship. In: A. Shachar, R. Bauböck, I. Bloemraad, & M. Vink, eds, *The Oxford handbook of citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 36–59.
- Dissertation Reviews, 2013. Nehru Memorial Museum & Library. *Dissertation Reviews*. Available from: <http://dissertationreviews.org/archives/1922> [Accessed 25 Mar 2019].
- Dissertation Reviews, 2014. Assam State Archives in Northeast India. *Dissertation Reviews*. Available from: <http://dissertationreviews.org/archives/9949> [Accessed 25 Mar 2019].
- Dixit, N., 2016. #OperationBabyLift. *Outlook*. 29 Jul.
- Dixon, D.P. and Marston, S.A., 2011. Introduction: Feminist engagements with geopolitics. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 18 (4), 445–453.
- Dorling, D. and Shaw, M., 2002. Geographies of the agenda: Public policy, the discipline and its (re)“turns”. *Progress in Human Geography*, 26 (5), 629–646.
- Dowler, L. and Sharp, J., 2001. A feminist geopolitics? *Space and Polity*, 5 (3), 165–176.
- Dutta, A., 2016. The politics of complexity in Bodoland: The interplay of contentious politics, the production of collective identities and elections in Assam. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 39 (2), 1–16.
- Dutta, A., 2018. More than “link” persons: Women recruits and insurgency in Assam. *South Asia @ LSE*. Available from: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2018/05/17/a-look-at-insurgency-and-women-recruits-of-assams-bodo-areas/> [Accessed 28 Mar 2019]
- Eckert, J., Biner, Z.Ö., Donahoe, B., and Strümpell, C., 2012. Law’s travels and transformations. In: J. Eckert, B. Donahoe, C. Strumpell, and Z.O. Biner, eds. *Law against the state*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1–22.
- Edwards, M. and Hulme, D., 1996. Too close for comfort? The impact of official aid on nongovernmental organizations. *World Development*, 24 (6), 961–973.
- Elbourne, E., 2010. “The fact so often disputed by the black man”: Khoekhoe citizenship at the Cape in the early to mid nineteenth century. *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (4), 379–400.
- Elden, S., 2005. Missing the point: Globalisation, deterritorialisation and the space of the world. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30 (1), 8–19.

- Elden, S., 2010. Land, terrain, territory. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34 (6), 799–817.
- Election Commission of India, 2016. Assam General Legislative Election 2016. *Election Commission of India*. Available from: <https://eci.gov.in/files/file/4017-assam-general-legislative-election-2016/> [Accessed 17 Mar 2019].
- Endle, S., 1911. *The Kacharis*. London: Macmillan and Co.
- Erazo, J.S., 2013. *Governing indigenous territories: Enacting sovereignty in the Ecuadorian Amazon*. Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press.
- Fernandes, N., 2014. An unnoticed fact: the RSS, India’s biggest NGO, gets foreign funding too. *Scroll.in*, 13 Jun. Available from <http://scroll.in/article/667071/an-unnoticed-fact-the-rss-indias-biggest-ngo-gets-foreign-funding-too> [Accessed 25 Mar 2019]
- FitzGerald, D.S., 2017. The History of Racialized Citizenship. In: A. Shachar, R. Bauböck, I. Bloemraad, and M. Vink, eds. *The Oxford handbook of citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 129–152.
- Flint, C., 2003. Dying for a “P”? Some questions facing contemporary political geography. *Political Geography*, 22 (6), 617–620.
- Fraser, N. and Gordon, L., 1992. Contract vs. charity: Why is there no social citizenship in the United States? *The Socialist Review*, 22, 45–68.
- Froerer, P., 2006. Emphasizing “Others”: The emergence of Hindu nationalism in a central Indian tribal community. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 12 (1), 39–59.
- Froerer, P., 2007. Disciplining the saffron way: Moral education and the Hindu Rashtra. *Modern Asian Studies*, 41 (05), 1033.
- Fyfe, N.R. and Milligan, C., 2003. Out of the shadows: Exploring contemporary geographies of voluntarism. *Progress in Human Geography*, 27 (4), 397–413.
- Gaikwad, N., 2009. Revolting bodies, hysterical state: Women protesting the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958). *Contemporary South Asia*, 17 (3), 299–311.
- Gallaher, C., 2009. Researching repellent groups: Some methodological considerations on how to represent militants, radicals, and other belligerents. In: C.L. Sriram, J.C. King, J.A. Mertus, O. Martin-Ortega, and J. Herman, eds. *Surviving field research: Working in violent and difficult situations*. London: Routledge, 127–146.
- Gayer, L. and Jaffrelot, C., eds., 2012. *Muslims in Indian cities: Trajectories of marginalisation*. London: Hurst.
- Gellner, E., 2008. *Nations and nationalism*. 2nd ed. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
- Geschiere, P., 2011. Autochthony, citizenship and exclusion: New patterns in the politics of belonging in Africa and Europe. *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 18 (1), 175–198.

- Geschiere, P. and Jackson, S., 2006. Autochthony and the crisis of citizenship: Democratization, decentralization, and the politics of belonging. *African Studies Review*, 49 (2), 1–7.
- Gilmartin, D., 2012. Towards a global history of voting: Sovereignty, the diffusion of ideas, and the enchanted individual. *Religions*, 3 (2), 407–423.
- Goswami, U., 2014. *Conflict and reconciliation: The politics of ethnicity in Assam*. London; New York; New Delhi: Routledge.
- Government of Assam, 2012. *White Paper on Foreigners' Issue*. Guwahati: Home and Political Department, Government of Assam.
- Government of Assam, 2014. Rajior Padulit Rajior Sarkar (RPRS), Assam. Available from: <http://103.8.249.90/rprs/indexpublic.php> [Accessed 4 Mar 2019].
- Grewal, I., 1999. “Women’s rights as human rights”: Feminist practices, global feminism, and human rights regimes in transnationality. *Citizenship Studies*, 3 (3), 337–354.
- Guenauer, C., 2017. Diversity and difference: The art of electioneering in Meghalaya. In: M. Vandenhelsken, M. Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and B.G. Karlsson, eds. *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian studies*. New Delhi: Routledge, 196–214.
- Gupta, A., 1995. Blurred boundaries: The discourse of corruption, the culture of politics, and the imagined state. *American Ethnologist*, 22 (2), 375–402.
- Gupta, A., 2001. Governing population: The Integrated Child Services Program in India. In: T.B. Hansen and F. Stepputat, eds. *States of imagination: Ethnographic explorations of the postcolonial state*. Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 65–96.
- Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J., 1997. *Anthropological locations: Boundaries and grounds of a field science*. Berkeley, C.A.; London: University of California Press.
- Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J., 2002. Spatialising states: Towards an ethnography of neoliberal governmentality. *American Ethnologist*, 29 (4), 981–1002.
- Guyot-Réchar, B., 2013. Nation-building or state-making? India’s North-East Frontier and the ambiguities of Nehruvian developmentalism, 1950–1959. *Contemporary South Asia*, 21 (1), 22–37.
- Hammett, D. and Sporton, D., 2012. Paying for interviews? Negotiating ethics, power and expectation. *Area*, 44 (4), 496–502.
- Hansen, T.B., 1999. *Saffron wave: Democracy and Hindu nationalism in modern India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hansen, T.B. and Stepputat, F., 2001. *States of imagination: Ethnographic explorations of the postcolonial state*. Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press.
- Hansen, T.B. and Stepputat, F., 2005a. Introduction. In: T.B. Hansen and F. Stepputat, eds. *Sovereign bodies: Citizens, migrants, and states in the postcolonial world*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1–38.

- Hansen, T.B. and Stepputat, F., 2005b. *Sovereign bodies: Citizens, migrants, and states in the postcolonial world*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Hansen, T.B. and Stepputat, F., 2006. Sovereignty revisited. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35 (1), 295–315.
- Haokip, T., 2015. India’s Look East policy: Prospects and challenges for Northeast India. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 3 (2), 198–211.
- Harder, L., 2010. “In Canada of all places”: National belonging and the lost Canadians. *Citizenship Studies*, 14 (2), 203–220.
- Hardt, M. and Negri, A., 2011. The fight for “Real Democracy” at the heart of Occupy Wall Street. *Foreign Affairs*, (October 2011).
- HariPriya, S., 2017. From the shackles of tradition: Motherhood and women’s agitation in Manipur. In: M. VandenHelsken, M. Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and B.G. Karlsson, eds. *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian studies*. New Delhi: Routledge, 215–233.
- Harris, J.M., 2018. Tamazgha in France: Indigeneity and citizenship in the diasporic Amazigh movement. PhD thesis. University of Cambridge, Cambridge.
- Harriss, J., 2006. Middle class activism and the politics of the working class: A perspective on class relations and civil society in Indian cities. *Critical Asian Studies*, 38 (4), 445–465.
- Harvey, D., 2012. *Rebel cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution*. London: Verso.
- Hasan, Z., 2000. *Politics and the state in India*. New Delhi; London: SAGE Publications.
- Hausing, K.K.S., 2007. Salvaging autonomy in India’s Northeast: Beyond the Sixth Schedule way. *Eastern Quarterly*, 4 (1), 5–16.
- Hausing, K.K.S., 2014. Asymmetric federalism and the question of democratic justice in Northeast India. *India Review*, 13 (2), 87–111.
- Hausing, K.K.S., 2015. Framing the North-East in Indian politics: Beyond the integration framework. *Studies in Indian Politics*, 3 (2), 277–283.
- Hazarika, M., 2017. *Prehistory and archaeology of Northeast India: Multidisciplinary investigation in an archaeological terra incognita*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hazarika, S., 2000. *Strangers of The Mist: Tales of war and peace from India’s Northeast*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Hazarika, S., 2018. *Strangers no more: New narratives from India’s Northeast*. New Delhi: Aleph.
- Heath, O., Verniers, G., and Kumar, S., 2015. Do Muslim voters prefer Muslim candidates? Co-religiosity and voting behaviour in India. *Electoral Studies*, 38, 10–18.

- Herbert, S., 2000. For ethnography. *Progress in Human Geography*, 24 (4), 550–568.
- Hickman, M.J., Thomas, L., Silvestri, S., and Nickels, H., 2011. “Suspect Communities”? Counter-terrorism policy, the press, and the impact on Irish and Muslim communities in Britain. ESRC Report, London Metropolitan University.
- Hindustan Times, 2016. Amit Shah holds meeting with northeast CMs, forms alliance. *Hindustan Times*, 25 May.
- Hoffman, D., 2003. Frontline anthropology: Research in a time of war. *Anthropology Today*, 19 (3), 9–12.
- Holston, J., 2008. *Insurgent citizenship*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Holston, J., 2009. Insurgent citizenship in an era of global urban peripheries. *City & Society*, 21 (2), 245–267.
- Hooker, J., 2005. Indigenous inclusion/Black exclusion: Race, ethnicity and multicultural citizenship in Latin America. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 37 (2), 285–310.
- Horst, H.A. and Miller, D., eds., 2012. *Digital anthropology*. London; New York: Berg.
- Hosein, G.J., 2012. Transnational spirituality, invented ethnicity and performances of citizenship in Trinidad. *Citizenship Studies*, 16 (5–6), 737–749.
- Hussain, M., 1987. Muslims of the Indian state of Assam: A note. *Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs Journal*, 8 (2), 397–402.
- Hyndman, J., 2001. Towards a feminist geopolitics. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 45 (2), 210–222.
- Hyndman, J., 2004. Mind the gap: Bridging feminist and political geography through geopolitics. *Political Geography*, 23 (3), 307–322.
- Imrie, R. and Edwards, C., 2007. The geographies of disability: Reflections on the development of a sub-discipline. *Geography Compass*, 1 (3), 623–640.
- Indian Express, 2012. BJP to send fact finding team. *Indian Express*, 25 Jul.
- Indian Express, 2016. RSS and the idea of Akhand Bharat. *Indian Express*, 4 Jan.
- Isin, E.F., 2002. *Being political: Genealogies of citizenship*. Minneapolis, M.N.; University of Minnesota Press.
- Isin, E.F., 2008a. *Recasting the social in citizenship*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Isin, E. F., 2008b. Theorizing acts of citizenship. In: E. F. Isin and G. M. Nielsen, eds. *Acts of citizenship*. London; New York: Zed Books, 15–43.
- Isin, E. F., 2009. Citizenship in flux: The figure of the activist citizen. *Subjectivity*, 29 (1), 367–88.
- Isin, E.F., 2012. Citizens without nations. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 30 (3), 450–467.
- Isin, E.F. and Nielsen, G.M., 2008. *Acts of citizenship*. London: Zed Books.

- Ite, U., 1997. Home, abroad, home: The challenges of post-graduate fieldwork “at home”. In: E. Robson and K. Willis, eds. *Postgraduate fieldwork in developing areas: A rough guide*. London: Developing Areas Research Group Monograph, 75–84.
- Jacobs, B., 2006. The case for dangerous fieldwork. In: D. Hobbs and R. Wright, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Fieldwork*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Jaffrelot, C., 2007. *Hindu nationalism: A reader*. Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Jaffrelot, C., 2019. Muslim exclusion in Narendra Modi’s de facto Hindu Rashtra. *The Caravan*. 1 Mar.
- Jamal, A., 2007. Strategies of minority struggle for equality in ethnic states: Arab politics in Israel. *Citizenship Studies*, 11 (3), 263–282.
- Jarvis, L. and Lister, M., 2013. Disconnected citizenship? The impacts of anti-terrorism policy on citizenship in the UK. *Political Studies*, 61 (3), 656–675.
- Jayal, N.G., 2013. *Citizenship and its discontents*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Jayal, N.G., 2014. Indian citizenship: A century of disagreement. In: E.F. Isin and P. Nyers, eds. *Routledge handbook of global citizenship studies*. London; New York: Routledge, 397–405.
- Jayal, N.G. and Mehta, P.B., 2010. Introduction. In: N.G. Jayal and P.B. Mehta, eds. *Oxford companion to politics in India*. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, xv–xxvi.
- Jazeel, T., 2014. Subaltern geographies: Geographical knowledge and postcolonial strategy, *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 35 (1) , 88–103.
- Jazeel, T. and McFarlane, C., 2010. The limits of responsibility: A postcolonial politics of academic knowledge production. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 35, 109–124.
- Jeffrey, C., 2017. *Modern India: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jilangamba, Y., 2015. Beyond the ethno–territorial binary: Evidencing the Hill and Valley Peoples in Manipur. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38 (2), 276–289.
- Jones, R., 2008. Relocating nationalism: On the geographies of reproducing nations. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 33 (3), 319–334.
- Kabeer, N., 2006. Citizenship, affiliation and exclusion: Perspectives from the south. *IDS Bulletin*, 37 (4), 91–101.
- Kamat, S., 2004. The privatization of public interest: Theorizing NGO discourse in a neoliberal era. *Review of International Political Economy*, 11 (1), 155–176.
- Kanungo, P., 2011. Casting community, culture and faith: Hindutva’s entrenchment in Arunachal Pradesh. In: D. Berti, N. Jaoul, and P. Kanungo, eds. *Cultural*

- entrenchment of Hindutva: Local meditations and forms of convergence*. New Delhi; Abingdon: Routledge, 91–117.
- Kaplan, D.H. and Herb, G.H., 2011. How geography shapes *National Identities*. *National Identities*, 13 (4), 349–360.
- Kar, M., 1997. *Muslims in Assam politics*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
- Karlsson, B.G., 2001. Indigenous politics: Community formation and indigenous peoples' struggle for self-determination in northeast India. *Identities*, 8 (1), 7–45.
- Karlsson, B.G., 2011. *Unruly hills: A political ecology of India's Northeast*. Berghahn Books.
- Karlsson, B.G., 2017a. Introduction: Northeastern research entanglements. In: M. Vandenhelsken, M. Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and B.G. Karlsson, eds. *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian studies*. New Delhi: Routledge, 1–13.
- Karlsson, B.G., 2017b. Bonnie Guest House: Fieldwork and friendship across borders. In: Y. Saikia and A.R. Baishya, eds. *Northeast India: A place of relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 93–110.
- Kashiwazaki, C., 2013. Incorporating immigrants as foreigners: Multicultural politics in Japan. *Citizenship Studies*, 17 (1), 31–47.
- Katz, C., 1994. Playing the field: Questions of fieldwork in geography. *Professional Geographer*.
- Kaviraj, S., 2010. Nationalism. In: N.G. Jayal and P.B. Mehta, eds. *Oxford companion to politics in India*. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 317–332.
- Khilnani, S., 2010. Politics and national identity. In: N.G. Jayal and P.B. Mehta, eds. *Oxford companion to politics in India*. New Delhi; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 192–204.
- Khilnani, S., 2012. *The idea of India*. New. London: Penguin.
- Kikon, D., 2009. The Predicament of justice: Fifty years of Armed Forces Special Powers Act in India. *Contemporary South Asia*, 17 (3), 271–282.
- Kikon, D., 2017a. Difficult loves: Purity and hardship. In: Y. Saikia and A.R. Baishya, eds. *Northeast India: A place of relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 225–243.
- Kikon, D., 2017b. Portrait of a place: Reflections about fieldwork from the foothills of Northeast India. In: M. Vandenhelsken, M. Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and B.G. Karlsson, eds. *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian studies*. New Delhi: Routledge, 72–88.
- Kikon, D., 2017c. Women at work: The gender, culture and customary law debate in Nagaland. In: P. Singh, ed. *Centrepiece: New writing and art from Northeast India*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 113–121.

- Kitschelt, H. and Wilkinson, S.I., 2007. Citizen–politician linkages: An introduction. *In*: H. Kitschelt and S.I. Wilkinson, eds. *Patrons, clients, and policies: Patterns of democratic accountability and political competition*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1–49.
- Kofman, E., 2005. Figures of the cosmopolitan: Privileged nationals and national outsiders. *Innovation*, 18 (1), 83–97.
- Kohli, A., 1994. Centralization and powerlessness: India’s democracy in a comparative perspective. *In*: J.S. Migdal, A. Kohli, and V. Shue, eds. *State power and social forces*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 89–107.
- Kondakov, A., 2017. Rethinking the sexual citizenship from queer and post-Soviet perspectives: Queer urban spaces and the right to the socialist city. *Sexualities*, 22 (3), 401–417.
- Koopman, S., 2011. Alter-geopolitics: Other securities are happening. *Geoforum*, 42 (3), 274–284.
- Kotwal, D., 2000. The Naga insurgency: The past and the future. *Strategic Analysis*, 24 (4), 751–772.
- Kovats-Bernat, J.C., 2002. Negotiating dangerous fields: Pragmatic strategies for fieldwork amid violence and terror. *American Anthropologist*, 104 (1), 208–222.
- Krohn-Hansen, C. and Nustad, K.G., 2005. *State formation: Anthropological perspectives*. London: Pluto Press.
- Kunnath, G.J., 2013. Anthropology’s ethical dilemmas: Reflections from the Maoist fields of India. *Current Anthropology*, 54 (6), 740–752.
- Kuus, M. and Agnew, J., 2008. Theorizing the state geographically: Sovereignty, subjectivity, territoriality. *In*: K.R. Cox, M. Low, and J. Robinson, eds. *The SAGE handbook of political geography*. London; Thousand Oaks, C.A.: SAGE Publications, 95–106.
- Kyed, H.M. and Buur, L., 2006. New sites of citizenship: Recognition of traditional authority and group-based citizenship in Mozambique. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32 (3), 563–581.
- Latta, A., 2009. Between political worlds: Indigenous citizenship in Chile’s Alto Bío Bío. *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 4 (1), 47–71.
- Lazar, S., 2004. Personalist politics, clientelism and citizenship: Local elections in El Alto, Bolivia. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 23 (2), 228–43.
- Lazar, S., 2013. *The Anthropology of Citizenship: A Reader*. Malden, MA; Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
- Lazar, S. and Nuijten, M., 2013. Citizenship, the self, and political agency. *Critique of Anthropology*, 33 (1), 3–7.

- Ledeneva, A., 2018. Introduction: The informal view of the world – key challenges and main findings of the Global Informality Project. *In: A. Ledeneva, ed. The Global Encyclopaedia of Informality: Volume 1*. London: UCL Press, 1–27.
- Levy, G., 2005. From subjects to citizens: On educational reforms and the demarcation of the “Israeli-Arabs”. *Citizenship Studies*, 9 (3), 271–291.
- Lewis, D. and Opoku-Mensah, P., 2006. Moving forward research agendas on international NGOs: Theory, agency and context. *Journal of International Development*, 18 (5), 665–675.
- Li, J., 2008. Ethical challenges in participant observation : A reflection on ethnographic fieldwork. *The Qualitative Report*, 13 (1), 100–115.
- Lister, R., 1991. Citizenship engendered. *Critical Social Policy*, 11 (32), 65–71.
- Lister, R., 1997. Citizenship: Towards a feminist synthesis. *Feminist Review*, 57 (1), 28–48.
- Lister, R., 2003. Sexual citizenship. *In: E.F. Isin and B.S. Turner, eds. Handbook of citizenship studies*. London; Thousand Oaks, C.A.; New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 191–207.
- Lister, R., 2012. Citizenship and gender. *In: E. Amenta, K. Nash, and A. Scott, eds. The Wiley-Blackwell companion to political sociology*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 372–382.
- Lobo, L., 2002. Adivasis, Hindutva and post-Godhra riots in Gujarat. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37 (48), 4844–4849.
- Longkumer, A., 2011. *Reform, identity and narratives of belonging: The Heraka movement in Northeast India*. London: Continuum.
- Longkumer, A., 2015. Inserting Hindutva in Nagaland. The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy. Available from: <https://www.thehinducentre.com/the-arena/current-issues/article6916230.ece> [Accessed 28 Mar 2019]
- Longkumer, A., 2017. The power of persuasion: Hindutva, Christianity, and the discourse of religion and culture in Northeast India. *Religion*, 47 (2), 203–227.
- Longkumer, A., 2018. “Nagas can’t sit lotus style”: Baba Ramdev, Patanjali, and Neo-Hindutva. *Contemporary South Asia*, 26 (4), 400–420.
- Lund, C., 2006. Twilight institutions: Public authority and local politics in Africa. *Development and Change*, 37 (4), 685–705.
- Lund, C., 2011. Property and citizenship: Conceptually connecting land rights and belonging in Africa. *Africa Spectrum*, 46 (3), 71–75.
- Madge, C., 1993. Boundary disputes: Comments on Sidaway (1992). *Area*, 25 (3), 294–299.
- Mahanta, N.G., 2013. Politics of space and violence in Bodoland. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48 (23), 49–58.

- Malkki, L., 1992. National geographic: The rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees. *Cultural Anthropology*, 7 (1), 24–44.
- Mamdani, M., 1996. *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Mamdani, M., 2001. *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda*. Oxford: J. Currey.
- Mamdani, M., 2005. Political identity, citizenship and ethnicity in postcolonial Africa: Keynote Address. Presented at the New Frontiers of Social Policy: Development in a Globalizing World Conference, Arusha, Tanzania.
- Mandiyani, D., 2009. The dilemma of conducting research back in your own country as a returning student: Reflections of research fieldwork in Zimbabwe. *Area*, 41 (1), 64–71.
- Mareš, M., 2009. The extreme right in Eastern Europe and territorial issues. *Central European Political Studies Review*, 11 (2–3), 82–106.
- Marshall, T.H., 1950. *Citizenship and social class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marston, S.A., 2004. Space, culture, state: uneven developments in political geography. *Political Geography*, 23 (1), 1–16.
- Martin, R., 2002. A geography for policy, or a policy for geography? A response to Dorling and Shaw. *Progress in Human Geography*, 26 (5), 642–44.
- Massey, D., 2000. Editorial: Practising political relevance. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 25 (2), 131–133.
- Massey, D., 2002. Geography, policy and politics: A response to Dorling and Shaw. *Progress in Human Geography*, 26 (5), 645–646.
- Mathur, N., 2015. *Paper tiger: Law, bureaucracy and the developmental state in Himalayan India*. New Delhi, India: Cambridge University Press.
- Mawdsley, E., 2002. Redrawing the Body Politic: Federalism, regionalism and the creation of new states in India. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 40 (3), 34–54.
- Mawdsley, E., 2006. Hindu nationalism, neo-traditionalism and environmental discourses in India. *Geoforum*, 37 (3), 380–390.
- McClintock, A., 1995. *Imperial Leather: Race, gender, and sexuality in the colonial contest*. New York: Routledge.
- McConnell, F., 2011. A state within a state? Exploring relations between the Indian state and the Tibetan community and government-in-exile. *Contemporary South Asia*, 19 (3), 297–313.
- McConnell, F., 2012. Governmentality to practise the state? Constructing a Tibetan population in exile. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 30 (1), 78–95.

- McConnell, F., 2013. Citizens and refugees: Constructing and negotiating Tibetan identities in exile. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 103 (4), 967–983.
- McDuie-Ra, D., 2009. Vision 2020 or re-vision 1958: The contradictory politics of counter-insurgency in India’s regional engagement. *Contemporary South Asia*, 17 (3), 313–330.
- McDuie-Ra, D., 2012. *Northeast migrants in Delhi*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- McDuie-Ra, D., 2013. Leaving the Northeast borderland: Place-making and the inward pull of citizenship in India. *Eurasia Border Review*, 4 (1), 1–17.
- McDuie-Ra, D., 2017. Solidarity, visibility and vulnerability: “Northeast” as a Racial Category in India. In: Y. Saikia and A.R. Baishya, eds. *Northeast India: A place of relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 27–44.
- McFarlane, C., 2012. Rethinking informality: Politics, crisis, and the city. *Planning Theory & Practice*, 13 (1), 89–108.
- MDoNER, 2019. Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, North East India. Available from: <http://mdoner.gov.in/activities/btc-package> [Accessed 4 Mar 2019].
- Meekosha, H. and Dowse, L., 1997. Enabling citizenship: Gender, disability and citizenship in Australia. *Feminist Review*, 57 (1), 49–72.
- Megoran, N., 2006. For ethnography in political geography: Experiencing and re-imagining Ferghana Valley boundary closures. *Political Geography*, 25 (6), 622–640.
- Mercer, D., 2010. “Citizen minus”? Indigenous Australians and the citizenship question. *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (4), 421–445.
- Middleton, T. and Cons, J., 2014. Coming to terms: Reinserting research assistants into ethnography’s past and present. *Ethnography*, 15 (3), 279–290.
- Migdal, J.S., 2001. *State in society: Studying how states and societies transform and constitute one another*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ministry of External Affairs, 2019. Summary of Agreed Decisions regarding Indo-Pakistan Passport Arrangements. Available from: <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/7617/Summary+of+Agreed+Decisions+regarding+IndoPakistan+Passport+Arrangements> [Accessed 18 Mar 2019].
- Miraftab, F. and Wills, S., 2005. Insurgency and spaces of active citizenship: The story of Western Cape anti-eviction campaign in South Africa. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 25 (2), 200–217.
- Misra, U., 1989. Bodo stir: Complex issues, unattainable demands. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 24 (21), 1146–1149.
- Misra, U., 2012. Bodoland: The burden of history. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47 (37), 36–42.

- Mitchell, L., 2014. The visual turn in political anthropology and the mediation of political practice in contemporary India. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 37 (3), 515–540.
- Mitchell, T., 1990. Everyday metaphors of power. *Theory and Society*, 19 (5), 545–577.
- Mitchell, T., 1991. The limits of the state: Beyond statist approaches and their critics. *The American Political Science Review*, 85 (1), 77–96.
- Mitchell, T., 1998. Nationalism, imperialism, economism: A comment on Habermas. *Public Culture*, 10 (2), 417–424.
- Mitchell, T., 2006. Society, economy and the state effect. In: A. Sharma and A. Gupta, eds. *The anthropology of the state: A reader*. Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell, 169–186.
- Moore, F. P. L., 2009. Tales from the archive: Methodological and ethical issues in historical geography research. *Area*. 42 (3), 262–270.
- Motiram, S. and Sarma, N., 2014. The tragedy of identity: Reflections on violent social conflict in Western Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49 (11), 45–53.
- Mouffe, C., 2000. *The democratic paradox*. London: Verso.
- Mountz, A., 2003. Human smuggling, the transnational imaginary, and everyday geographies of the nation-state. *Antipode*, 35 (3), 622–644.
- Mountz, A., 2013. Political geography I: Reconfiguring geographies of sovereignty. *Progress in Human Geography*, 37 (6), 829–841.
- Nandy, A., 1989. The political culture of the Indian State. *Daedalus*, 118 (4), 1–26.
- Nandy, A., 1998. The twilight of certitudes: Secularism, Hindu nationalism and other masks of deculturation. *Postcolonial Studies*, 1 (3), 283–298.
- Narayan, K., 1993. How native is a “native” anthropologist? *American Anthropologist*, 95 (3), 671–686.
- Naveed, A., Sakata, N., Kefallinou, A., Young, S., and Anand, K., 2017. Understanding, embracing and reflecting upon the messiness of doctoral fieldwork. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 47 (5), 773–792.
- Nayak, A. and Jeffrey, A., 2013. *Geographical thought: An introduction to ideas in Human Geography*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge.
- Naylor, L., Daigle, M., Zaragocin, S., Ramírez, M.M., and Gilmartin, M., 2018. Interventions: Bringing the decolonial to political geography. *Political Geography*, 66, 199–209.
- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1944. All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers: P-36. New Delhi: NMML.
- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1955. Assam Pradesh Congress Committee Files: P-44/F-12. New Delhi: NMML.

- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1967. Assam Pradesh Congress Committee Files: P-46/F-5. New Delhi: NMML.
- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1969a. Assam Pradesh Congress Committee Files: P-136/F-9. New Delhi: NMML.
- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1969b. Assam Pradesh Congress Committee Files: P-132/F-19. New Delhi: NMML.
- Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, n.d. All India Hindu Mahasabha Papers: P-129. New Delhi: NMML.
- Niezen, R., 2000. Recognizing Indigenism: Canadian unity and the international movement of Indigenous Peoples. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42 (1), 119–148.
- Nordstrom, C., 2007. War on the front lines. In: A.C.G.M. Robben and J.A. Sluka, eds. *Ethnographic fieldwork: An anthropological reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 245–258.
- Omvedt, G., 2005. Women in governance in South Asia. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40 (44/45), 4746–4752.
- Ong, A., 1999. *Flexible citizenship: The cultural logics of transnationality*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Oza, R., 2007. The geography of Hindu right-wing violence in India. In: D. Gregory and A. Pred, eds. *Violent geographies: Fear, terror, and political violence*. New York; London: Routledge, 153–72.
- Paasi, A., 1998. Boundaries as social processes: Territoriality in the world of flows. *Geopolitics*, 3 (1), 69–88.
- Paasi, A., 2003a. Territory. In: J. Agnew, K. Mitchell, and G. Toal, eds. *A companion to political geography*. Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell, 109–122.
- Paasi, A., 2003b. Region and place: Regional identity in question. *Progress in Human Geography*, 27 (4), 475–485.
- Pachau, J., 2014. *Being Mizo: Identity and belonging in Northeast India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Painter, J., 2006. Prosaic geographies of stateness. *Political Geography*, 25 (7), 752–774.
- Painter, J. and Jeffrey, A.S., 2009. *Political geography: An introduction to space and power*. Los Angeles, C.A.; London: SAGE Publications.
- Painter, J. and Philo, C., 1995. Spaces of citizenship: An introduction. *Political Geography*, 14 (2), 107–120.
- Pandey, G., 2001. *Remembering partition: Violence, nationalism, and history in India*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Penrose, J., 2002. Nations, states and homelands: Territory and territoriality in nationalist thought. *Nations and Nationalism*, 8 (3), 277–297.

- Piliavsky, A., ed., 2014a. *Patronage as the politics of South Asia*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Piliavsky, A., 2014b. Introduction. In: A. Piliavsky, ed. *Patronage as the politics of South Asia*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Postero, N., 2013. Introduction: Negotiating indigeneity. *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 8 (2), 107–121.
- Postero, N.G., 2007. *Now we are citizens: Indigenous politics in postmulticultural Bolivia*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Potter, R., 1993. Little England and Little Geography: Reflections on Third World teaching and research. *Area*, 25 (3), 291–294.
- Prime Minister’s High Level Committee, 2006. *Social, economic and educational status of the Muslim community of India*. New Delhi: Cabinet Secretariat, Government of India.
- PRS, 2016. The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016. *PRSIndia*. Available from: <https://www.prsindia.org/billtrack/the-citizenship-amendment-bill-2016-4348> [Accessed 6 Mar 2019].
- Puri, H.K., 1998. Political uses of federalism: Managing diversities in the states of North-East India. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 6 (1), 16–29.
- Radcliffe, S.A., 2001. Imagining the state as a space: Territoriality and the formation of the state in Ecuador. In: T.B. Hansen and F. Stepputat, eds. *States of imagination: Ethnographic explorations of the postcolonial state*. Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 123–148.
- Radcliffe, S.A., 2017. Geography and indigeneity I: Indigeneity, coloniality and knowledge. *Progress in Human Geography*, 41 (2), 220–229.
- Radnitz, S., 2011. Informal politics and the state. *Comparative Politics*, 43 (3), 351–71.
- Rai, S.M., 2012. The politics of access: Narratives of women MPs in the Indian Parliament. *Political Studies*, 60 (1), 195–212.
- Ramos, A.R., 2010. The special (or specious?) status of Brazilian Indians. *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (4), 401–420.
- Rapley, T.J., 2001. The art(fulness) of open-ended interviewing: Some considerations on analysing interviews. *Qualitative Research*, 1 (3), 303–323.
- Richardson, D., 1998. Sexuality and citizenship. *Sociology*, 32 (1), 83–100.
- Richardson, D., 2000. Constructing sexual citizenship: Theorizing sexual rights. *Critical Social Policy*, 20 (1), 105–135.
- Rifkin, M., 2009. Indigenizing Agamben: Rethinking sovereignty in light of the “Peculiar” status of Native Peoples. *Cultural Critique*, 73 (1), 88–124.

- Román, E., 2010. *Citizenship and its exclusions: A classical, constitutional, and critical race critique*. New York, N.Y: New York University Press.
- Roy, A., 2009. Why India cannot plan its cities: Informality, insurgence and the idiom of urbanization. *Planning Theory*, 8 (1), 76–87.
- Roy, A., 2010. *Mapping citizenship in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Roy, A., 2011. Slumdog cities: Rethinking subaltern urbanism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 35 (2), 223–38.
- Rudolph, C., 2005. Sovereignty and territorial borders in a global age. *International Studies Review*, 7 (1), 1–20.
- Rumford, C., 2008. Introduction: Citizens and borderwork in Europe. *Space and Polity*, 12 (1), 1–12.
- Sabsay, L., 2014. Sexual citizenship and cultural imperialism. In: E.F. Isin and P. Nyers, eds. *Routledge handbook of global citizenship studies*. London; New York: Routledge, 96–109.
- Sack, R.D., 1983. Human territoriality: A theory. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 73 (1), 55–74.
- Sack, R.D., 1986. *Human territoriality: Its theory and history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sadanandan, A., 2012. Patronage and decentralization: The politics of poverty in India. *Comparative Politics*, 44 (2), 211–228.
- Sadiq, K., 2017. Postcolonial citizenship. In: A. Shachar, R. Bauböck, I. Bloemraad, and M. Vink, eds. *The Oxford handbook of citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 178–199.
- Saikia, A., 2008. State, peasants and land reclamation: The predicament of forest conservation in Assam, 1850s-1980s. *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 45(1), 77–114.
- Saikia, A., 2011. *Forests and ecological history of Assam*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Saikia, A., 2017a. “They are targeting Muslim children”: A rumour about “impotency vaccine” is causing panic in Assam. *Scroll.in*, 19 Mar. Available from: <https://scroll.in/article/837988/they-are-targeting-muslim-children-how-a-rumour-about-impotency-vaccine-caused-panic-in-assam> [Accessed 28 Mar 2019].
- Saikia, A., 2019a. “We will be targeted”: Mizoram’s plan to initiate Assam-like NRC worries state’s Chakmas. *Scroll.in*, 21 Mar. Available from: <https://scroll.in/article/917318/we-will-be-targeted-mizorams-plan-to-initiate-assam-like-nrc-worries-states-chakmas> [Accessed 21 Mar 2019].
- Saikia, A., 2019b. Panic in Assam as people rush to attend NRC re-verification hearings on 24-hour notice, *Scroll.in*, 5 Aug. Available from:

- <https://scroll.in/article/932815/panic-in-assam-as-people-rush-to-attend-nrc-hearings-on-24-hour-notice> [Accessed 21 Aug 2019]
- Saikia, S., 2014. 9/11 of India: A critical review on Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), and human rights violations in North East India. *Journal of Social Welfare and Human Rights*, 2 (1), 265–279.
- Saikia, S., 2015. General elections 2014: Ethnic outbidding and politics of “homelands” in Assam’s Bodoland. *Contemporary South Asia*, 23 (2), 211–222.
- Saikia, Y., 2017b. The Muslims of Assam: Present/absent history. In: Y. Saikia and A.R. Baishya, eds. *Northeast India: A place of relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 111–134.
- Saikia, Y. and Baishya, A.R., 2017a. Introduction. In: Y. Saikia and A.R. Baishya, eds. *Northeast India: A place of relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1–24.
- Saikia, Y. and Baishya, A.R., eds., 2017b. *Northeast India: A place of relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Salter, M.B., 2008. When the exception becomes the rule: Borders, sovereignty, and citizenship. *Citizenship Studies*, 12 (4), 365–380.
- Scheper-Hughes, N., 1995. The primacy of the ethical: Propositions for a militant anthropology. *Current Anthropology*, 36 (3), 409–440.
- Scott, J.C., 1998. *Seeing like a state: how certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. New Haven, C.T.; London: Yale University Press.
- Scott, J.C., 2009. *The art of not being governed: An Anarchist history of upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press.
- Scott, S., Miller, F., and Lloyd, K., 2006. Doing fieldwork in Development Geography: Research culture and research spaces in Vietnam. *Geographical Review*, 44 (1), 28–40.
- Scroll.in, 2019a. Citizenship Bill row: Protestors wave black flags at PM Modi as he arrives in Assam. *Scroll.in*, 8 Feb. Available from: <https://scroll.in/latest/912586/citizenship-bill-row-protestors-wave-black-flags-at-pm-modi-as-he-arrives-in-assam> [Accessed 6 Mar 2019].
- Scroll.in, 2019b. Citizenship Bill: Manipuri filmmaker Aribam Syam Sharma returns Padma Shri in protest. *Scroll.in*, 3 Feb. Available from: <https://scroll.in/latest/911879/citizenship-bill-manipuri-filmmaker-aribam-syam-sharma-returns-padma-shri-in-protest> [Accessed 6 Mar 2019].
- Scroll.in, 2019c. Former CM Lal Thanhawla seen with banner calling for independent Mizoram at Citizenship Bill protest. *Scroll.in*, 12 Feb. Available from: <https://scroll.in/latest/913014/former-cm-lal-thanhawla-seen-with-banner-calling-for-independent-mizoram-at-citizenship-bill-protest> [Accessed 6 Mar 2019].

- Scroll.in, 2019d. Protest singer Rahul Rajkhowa is back, rapping against the Citizenship Amendment Bill. *Scroll.in*, 13 Feb. Available from: <https://scroll.in/video/912981/watch-protest-singer-rahul-rajkhowa-is-back-rapping-against-the-citizenship-amendment-bill> [Accessed 6 Mar 2019].
- Seven Sisters Post, 2012a. India vs foreigner issue, says Advani. *Seven Sisters Post*, 1 Aug.
- Seven Sisters Post, 2012b. BJP sniffs a “sinister” design behind clashes. *Seven Sisters Post*, 2 Aug.
- Seven Sisters Post, 2012c. Jamiat hires 40 professional lawyers to help victims. *Seven Sisters Post*, 6 Aug.
- Shah, A., 2010. *In the shadows of the state: Indigenous politics, environmentalism, and insurgency in Jharkhand, India*. Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press.
- Shah, A., 2013. The tensions over liberal citizenship in a Marxist revolutionary situation: The Maoists in India. *Critique of Anthropology*, 33 (1), 91–109.
- Shani, O., 2010. Conceptions of citizenship in India and the “Muslim Question”. *Modern Asian Studies*, 44 (01), 145–173.
- Shapiro, M.J., 2003. Nation-States. In: J. Agnew, K. Mitchell, and G. Toal, eds. *A companion to Political Geography*. Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 271–288.
- Sharma, A. and Gupta, A., 2006a. *The anthropology of the state: A reader*. Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sharma, A. and Gupta, A., 2006b. Introduction: Rethinking theories of the state in an age of globalization. In: A. Sharma and A. Gupta, eds. *The anthropology of the state: A reader*. Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1–41.
- Sharma, J., 2011. *Empire’s garden: Assam and the making of India*. Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press.
- Sharma, S., 2017. Eating beef in Kokrajhar, Assam: A field researcher’s food diary. *Scroll.in*, 14 Apr. Available from: <https://scroll.in/article/834113/eating-beef-in-kokrajhar-assam-a-field-researchers-food-diary> [Accessed 28 Mar 2019].
- Sharma, S., 2018a. Why India’s new citizenship law is so controversial – and why some regions are angrier than others. *The Conversation*, 4 Jul. Available from: <http://theconversation.com/why-indias-new-citizenship-law-is-so-controversial-and-why-some-regions-are-angrier-than-others-97799> [Accessed 6 Mar 2019].
- Sharma, S., 2018b. Me again: Fieldwork, practice and returning. *Area*. Available from: <https://rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/area.12493> [Accessed 28 Mar 2019].
- Sharp, J.P., 2013. Geopolitics at the margins? Reconsidering genealogies of critical geopolitics. *Political Geography*, 37, 20–29.
- Sidaway, J.D., 1992. In Other worlds: On the politics of research by “First World” geographers in the “Third World”. *Area*, 24 (4), 403–408.

- Sidaway, J.D., 1993. The Decolonisation of Development Geography? *Area*, 25 (3), 299–300.
- Siddique, N., 2019. Understanding the Crisis of Citizenship in Assam, (10), 6.
- Siddle, R., 2010. The limits to citizenship in Japan: Multiculturalism, indigenous rights and the Ainu. *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (4), 447–462.
- Siim, B., 2000. *Gender and citizenship: Politics and agency in France, Britain and Denmark*. Cambridge University Press.
- Singh, G., 2008. In search of peace in Manipur: Lessons from Nagaland. *Strategic Analysis*, 32 (6), 1115–1129.
- Singh, P., 2018. NRC: This graphic novelist sketches the citizenship test that may render millions in Assam stateless. *HuffPost India*, 8 Jan.
- Sluka, J. A., 1990. Participant observation in violent social contexts. *Human Organization*, 49 (2), 114–126.
- Sluka, J.A., 2007. Fieldwork conflicts, hazards and dangers. In: A.C.G.M. Robben and J.A. Sluka, eds. *Ethnographic fieldwork: An anthropological reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 234–244.
- Smart, A., and Lin, G. C. S., 2007. Local capitalisms, local citizenship and Translocality: Rescaling from below in the Pearl River Delta Region, China. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 31(2), 280–302.
- Smith, A.D., 1986. *The ethnic origins of nations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Smith, L. and Kleinman, A., 2010. Emotional engagements: Acknowledgement, advocacy, and direct action. In: J. Davies and D. Spencer, eds. *Emotions in the field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 171–187.
- Soedirgo, J., 2018. Informal networks and religious intolerance: How clientelism incentivizes the discrimination of the Ahmadiyah in Indonesia. *Citizenship Studies*, 22 (2), 191–207.
- Sparke, M.B., 2006. A neoliberal nexus: Economy, security and the biopolitics of citizenship on the border. *Political Geography*, 25 (2), 151–180.
- Speed, S., 2001. Indigenous women and gendered resistance in the wake of Acteal: A feminist activist research perspective. In: V. Sanford and A. Angel-Ajani, eds. *Engaged observer: Anthropology, advocacy, and activism*. New Brunswick, N.J.; London: Rutgers University Press, 170–188.
- Spencer, J., 1997. Post-Colonialism and the political imagination. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 3 (1), 1.
- Spencer, J., 2007. *Anthropology, politics, and the State*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Spiro, P. J., 2010. Formalizing local citizenship. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 37(2), 559-

572.

- Staeheli, L.A., 2010. Political geography: Where's citizenship? *Progress in Human Geography*, 35 (3), 393–400.
- Staeheli, L.A., Kofman, E., and Peake, L., 2004. *Mapping women, Making politics: Feminist perspectives on political geography*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Stepan, A.C., Linz, J.J., and Yadav, Y., 2011. *Crafting State-Nations: India and other multinational democracies*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Stierl, M., 2016. A sea of struggle: Activist border interventions in the Mediterranean Sea. *Citizenship Studies*, 20 (5), 561–578.
- Sultana, F., 2007. Participatory ethics: Negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research. *An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 6 (3), 374–385.
- Sundar, N., 2002. “Indigenise, nationalise and spiritualise”: An agenda for education? *International Social Science Journal*, 54 (173), 373–383.
- Sundar, N., 2004. Teaching to hate: RSS’ pedagogical programme. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39 (16), 1605–1612.
- Sundar, N., 2011. The rule of law and citizenship in central India: Post-colonial dilemmas. *Citizenship Studies*, 15 (3–4), 419–432.
- Taylor, L., 2004. Client-ship and citizenship in Latin America. *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 23 (2), 213–27.
- Temple, B. and Edwards, R., 2002. Interpreters/Translators and Cross-Language Research: Reflexivity and Border Crossings. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1 (2), 1–12.
- The Economic Times, 2018. Assam citizenship status: 2.89 crore names appear in the final NRC draft. *The Economic Times*, 30 Jul.
- The Hindu, 2014. Assam’s “doubtful” voters await clearance by foreigners’ tribunals. *The Hindu*, 16 Feb.
- The Sentinel, 2012a. Kokrajhar on the boil, death toll reached 9. *The Sentinel*, 22 Jul.
- The Sentinel, 2012b. Centre and State equally responsible for BTAD carnage. *The Sentinel*, 30 Jul.
- The Sentinel, 2012c. “Bangladesh Occupied Assam”. *The Sentinel*, 11 Aug.
- The Sentinel, 2012d. VHP seeks immediate deportation of Bangladeshi Muslims. *The Sentinel*, 5 Aug.
- The Sentinel, 2019. Kokrajhar AASA staged massive rally demanding Special ST status to Tea Tribe Communities in Assam. *The Sentinel*, 8 Feb.
- The Telegraph, 2012. Muslims advised to lodge FIRs. *The Telegraph*, 4 Aug.
- The Telegraph, 2014a. Sarania ST status challenged. *The Telegraph*, 22 Apr.

- The Telegraph, 2014b. Assam flare-up linked to elections. *The Telegraph*, 4 May.
- The Telegraph, 2017a. Bodo issue raised at UN. *The Telegraph*, 15 May.
- The Telegraph, 2017b. Student leader shot dead. *The Telegraph*, 2 Aug.
- The Telegraph, 2018a. Everything you want to know about the NRC. *The Telegraph*, 30 Jul.
- The Telegraph, 2018b. Bandh over UTC status for Bodoland. *The Telegraph*, 20 Nov.
- The Tribune, 2016. Bodos oppose land grant to Patanjali. *The Tribune*, 28 Aug.
- Tillin, L., 2007. United in diversity? Asymmetry in Indian federalism. *Publius*, 37 (1), 45–67.
- Tillin, L., 2013. *Remapping India: New states and their political origins*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tonkiss, K. and Bloom, T., 2015. Theorising noncitizenship: Concepts, debates and challenges. *Citizenship Studies*, 19 (8), 837–852.
- Topinka, R.J., 2016. “Wandering and settled tribes”: Biopolitics, citizenship, and the racialized migrant. *Citizenship Studies*, 20 (3–4), 444–456.
- Trudeau, D., 2008. Towards a relational view of the shadow state. *Political Geography*, 27 (6), 669–690.
- Trudeau, D., 2012. Constructing citizenship in the shadow state. *Geoforum*, 43 (3), 442–452.
- Turner, S., 2010. The silenced assistant: Reflections of invisible interpreters and research assistants. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 51 (2), 206–219.
- Valentine, G., 2005. Geography and ethics: Moral geographies? Ethical commitment in research and teaching. *Progress in Human Geography*, 29 (4), 483–487.
- Valentine, G. and Skelton, T., 2007. The right to be heard: Citizenship and language. *Political Geography*, 26 (2), 121–140.
- van der Muur, W., 2018. Forest conflicts and the informal nature of realizing indigenous land rights in Indonesia. *Citizenship Studies*, 22 (2), 160–74.
- van der Veer, P., 1994. Hindu nationalism and the discourse of modernity. In: M.E. Marty and R.S. Appleby, eds. *Accounting for fundamentalisms: The dynamic character of movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 653–668.
- van Schendel, W., 2002a. Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: Jumping scale in Southeast Asia. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20 (6), 647–668.
- van Schendel, W., 2002b. Stateless in South Asia: The making of the India-Bangladesh enclaves. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61 (1), 115–147.
- van Schendel, W., 2017. Afterword: Contested, vertical, fragmenting: de-partitioning “Northeast India” studies. In: M. Vandenhesken, M. Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, and B.G. Karlsson, eds. *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian studies*. New Delhi: Routledge, 272–288.

- Vandekerckhove, N., 2009. "We are sons of this soil": The endless battle over indigenous homelands in Assam, India. *Critical Asian Studies*, 41 (4), 523–548.
- Vandekerckhove, N., 2010. No land, no peace: Dynamics of violent conflict and land use in Assam, India. Ghent University, Ghent.
- Vandekerckhove, N., 2013. Democracy through the gun? Challenges of post conflict reconstruction in conflict-torn Assam. In: V. Arora and N. Jayaram, eds. *Routeing democracy in the Himalayas: Experiments and experiences*. New Delhi; London: Routledge, 156–177.
- Vandekerckhove, N. and Suykens, B., 2008. "The Liberation of Bodoland": Tea, forestry and tribal entrapment in western Assam. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 31 (3), 450–471.
- Vandenhelsken, M., Barkataki-Ruscheweyh, M., and Karlsson, B.G., eds., 2017. *Geographies of difference: Explorations in Northeast Indian studies*. Routledge.
- Vandenhelsken, M. and Karlsson, B.G., 2016. Fluid attachments in Northeast India: Introduction. *Asian Ethnicity*, 17 (3), 330–339.
- Varshney, A., 2003. *Ethnic conflict and civil life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Haven, C.T.; London: Yale University Press.
- Varshney, A., 2014. *Battles half won: India's improbable democracy*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Vaughan-Williams, N., 2008. Borderwork beyond inside/outside? Frontex, the citizen-detective and the war on terror. *Space and Polity*, 12 (1), 63–79.
- Verloo, N., 2017. Learning from informality? Rethinking the mismatch between formal policy strategies and informal tactics of citizenship. *Current Sociology*, 65 (2), 167–81.
- Villazor, R., 2010. Sanctuary cities and local citizenship. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 37(2), 573-598.
- Volpp, L., 2017. *Feminist, sexual, and queer citizenship*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walby, S., 1994. Is citizenship gendered? *Sociology*, 28 (2), 379–395.
- Weiner, M., 1978. *Sons of the soil: Migration and ethnic conflict in India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Williams, P., 2015. *Everyday peace? Politics, citizenship and Muslim lives in India*. Chichester; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell.
- Williams, P., Vira, B., and Chopra, D., 2011. Marginality, agency and power: Experiencing the state in contemporary India. *Pacific Affairs*, 84 (1), 7–23.
- Wood, P.K., 2010a. Aboriginal/indigenous citizenship: an introduction. *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (4), 371–378.
- Wood, P.K., 2010b. A road runs through it: Aboriginal citizenship at the edge of urban development. *Citizenship Studies*, 7 (4), 463–473.

- Wouters, J.J.P., 2015. Polythetic democracy: Tribal elections, bogus votes, and political imagination in the Naga uplands of Northeast India. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 5 (2), 121–151.
- Xaxa, V., 1999. Tribes as indigenous people of India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34 (51), 3589–3595.
- Xaxa, V., 2005. Politics of language, religion and identity: Tribes in India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 40 (13), 1363–1370.
- Yarwood, R., 2014. *Citizenship*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Yarwood, R. and Edwards, B., 1995. Voluntary action in rural areas: The case of neighbourhood watch. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 11 (4), 447–459.
- Young, I.M., 1989. Polity and group difference: A critique of the ideal of universal citizenship. *Ethics*, 99 (2), 250–274.
- Yuval-Davis, N., 1999. The “multi-layered citizen”. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1 (1), 119–136.
- Yuval-Davis, N., 2000. Gender and nation. In: V. Moghadam, R. Wilford, and R.L. Miller, eds. *Women, Ethnicity and nationalism: The politics of transition*. London; New York: Routledge, 23–35.
- Zhao, Y., 2017. Doing fieldwork the Chinese way: A returning researcher’s insider/outsider status in her home town. *Area*, 49 (2), 185–191.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Memorandum of Settlement on Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

1. The Government of India and the Government of Assam have been making concerted efforts to fulfil the aspirations of the Bodo people relating to their cultural identity, language, education and economic development. Towards this end, a series of talks were held between Government of India, Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) since March, 2000. As a result, it is agreed to create a self-governing body for the Bodo Areas in the State of Assam as follows:

2. Objectives

The objectives of the agreement are: to create an Autonomous self governing body to be known as Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) within the State of Assam and to provide constitutional protection under Sixth Schedule to the said Autonomous Body; to fulfil economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos; and speed up the infrastructure development in BTC area.

3. Area

3.1. The area of proposed BTC shall comprise all the 3082 villages and areas to be so notified by the State Government. The above mentioned villages and areas shall be divided into 4 contiguous districts after reorganisation of the existing districts of Assam within a period of 6 months of the signing of the agreement on the lines of the proposal given by BLT subject to clearance of the Delimitation Commission.

3.2 A committee comprising one representative each from Governments of India & Assam and BLT will decide by consensus on the inclusion of additional villages and areas in the BTC from out of 95 villages and areas on the basis of the criteria of tribal population being not less than 50%, contiguity or any other agreed relevant criteria within a period of three months of signing of this MoS.

4. Status of Bodoland Territorial Council

The provision of the Sixth schedule and other relevant Articles of the Constitution of India will apply to BTC, mutatis mutandis in terms of this agreement. The safeguards/modifications for the non-tribals in BTC area, inter-alia, will include the following:

4.1. Provision of para1(2) of Sixth Schedule regarding Autonomous Regions will not be applicable to BTC.

4.2. A provision will be made in para 2(1) of the Sixth Schedule for increasing the number of members for BTC up to 46 out of which 30 will be reserved for Scheduled Tribes, 5 for non-tribal communities, 5 open for all communities and 6 to be nominated by Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities for BTC area of which atleast two should be women. Nominated members will have the same rights and privileges as other members, including voting rights. Election from the 40 constituencies of BTC shall be on the basis of adult franchise. The term of the elected members of BTC shall be for 5 years.

4.3. Safeguards for the settlement rights, transfer and inheritance of property etc. of non-tribals will be suitably incorporated in para 3 of the Sixth Schedule. Any such law as may be made by the BTC in this regard will not, in particular:

(a) Extinguish the rights and privileges enjoyed by an citizen of India in respect of their land at the commencement of BTC, and

(b) Bar any citizen from acquiring land either by way of inheritance, allotment, settlement or by way of transfer if such citizens were eligible for such bonafide acquisition of land within the BTC area.

4.4. Provision will be added in para 6 of Sixth Schedule that in BTC area, language and medium of instruction in educational institutions will not be changed without approval of the State Government.

4.5. Provision of para 8 of Sixth Schedule regarding power to assess and collect land revenue and impose taxes shall be applicable to BTC.

4.6. Para 10 of the Sixth Schedule will not be applicable to BTC area.

4.7. Provision of Article 332(6) of the Constitution will be so modified that the existing status of representation of BTC area in the State Assembly is kept intact. After the creation of BTC, the Parliamentary & Assembly Constituencies shall be delimited by the Delimitation Commission in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

4.8. In the event, **Panchayati Raj** system ceases to be in force in the council area, the powers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in such matters shall be vested with the Council.

The Amendments to the Sixth Schedule shall include provisions in such a manner that non-tribals are not disadvantaged in relation to the rights enjoyed by them at the commencement of BTC and their rights and privileges including land rights are fully protected.

5. Power and Functions

5.1. The Council shall have legislative powers in respect to subjects transferred to it as enumerated below. All laws made under this paragraph shall be submitted forthwith to the Governor and until assented to by him, shall have no effect. The BTC shall have executive, administrative and financial powers in respect of subjects transferred to it.

Subjects to be entrusted to BTC by Assam Government

1. Small, Cottage and Rural Industry; 2. Animal Husbandry & Veterinary; 3. Forest; 4. Agriculture; 5. PWD; 6. Sericulture; 7. Education (Primary Education, Higher Secondary Including vocational training, Adult Education, College Education (General); 8. Cultural Affairs; 9. Soil Conservation; 10. Co-operation; 11. Fisheries; 12. Panchayat and Rural Development; 13. Handloom and Textile; 14. Health & Family Welfare; 15. Public Health Engineering; 16. Irrigation; 17. Social Welfare; 18. Flood Control; 19. Sports & Youth Welfare; 20. Weights and Measures; 21. Library Services; 22. Museum & Archaeology; 23. Urban Development – Town and Country Planning; 24. Tribal Research Institute; 25. Land & Revenue; 26. Publicity/Public Relations; 27. Printing & Stationery; 28. Tourism; 29. Transport;

30. Planning and Development; 31. Municipal Corporation, Improvement Trust, District Boards and other local authorities; 32. Welfare of Plan Tribes and Backward Classes; 33. Markets and fairs; 34. Lotteries, Theatres, Dramatic performance and cinema; 35. Statistics; 36. Food and Civil supply; 37. Intoxicating liquors, opium and derivatives etc.; 38. Labour and employment; 39. Relief and Rehabilitation; 40. Registration of Births and Deaths.

5.2. There shall be an Executive Council comprising of not more than 12 Executive Members, one of whom shall be the Chief and another one the Deputy Chief of the said Executive Council. There shall be adequate representation for the non-tribal members in the Executive Council. The Chief and the Deputy Chief of the Council shall have the status equivalent to the Cabinet Minister and the other Executive Members equivalent to the Minister of the State of Assam for protocol purposes in BTC area.

5.3. The BTC shall have the full control over the officers and staff connected with the delegated subjects working in the BTC area and shall be competent to transfer officers and staff within the BTC area. ACRs of these officers shall also be written by the appropriated BTC authority.

5.4. BTC shall also be competent to make appointments for all posts under its control in accordance with the rules of appointment followed by the Government of Assam. However, the posts, where recruitment is made on the recommendation of APSC, shall not be covered under this provision. The Council may constitute a Selection Board for appointments to be made by it and may also make rules, with the approval of the Governor of Assam to regulate appointments and to ensure adequate representation for all communities living in the Council area.

5.5. No posts shall be created by BTC without concurrence of the Government of Assam and it shall also abide by the decision of the Government of Assam in respect of abolition of/temporarily keeping vacant any post.

5.6. Development functions and bodies within the competence of BTC shall be transferred to BTC. In respect of DRDA, concurrence of Government of India will be obtained.

5.7. The offices of the Dy. Commissioner and Superintendent of Police will be outside the superintendence and control of BTC.

5.8. The State Government would provide an amount, to be decided every year on population ratio basis, as grants-in-aid in two equal instalments to the BTC for executing development works. The proportionate share for the BTC shall be calculated on the basis of the plan funds available after setting aside the funds required for earmarked sectors and the salary. This amount may be reduced proportionately if the state plan allocation is reduced or there is plan cut due to resource problem. In addition, the Council will be paid a suitable amount of plan funds and non-plan funds to cover the office expenses and the salaries of the staff working under their control. The BTC shall disburse the salaries of the staff under their control and would ensure strict economy in the matter.

5.9. BTC authority shall prepare a plan with the amounts likely to be available for development works, both under State share and Central share, covering any or all the activities of the departments under their control. The Council shall have full discretion in selecting the activities and choosing the amount for the investment under the same in any year covering all groups of people in a fair and equitable manner. This plan will be a sub set of the State plan and would

be treated as its integral part. Once the plan of the State, including BTC plan, gets the approval of the Planning Commission the BTC authority will start execution of their plan in the BTC area. Modifications, if any, made by the Planning Commission in the BTC proposal, shall be binding on the BTC authority. The State Government shall not divert the funds allocated to the BTC to other heads and also ensure its timely release. BTC may have Planning Department to prepare the plans for BTC area to be submitted to Planning Commission through the Government of Assam.

5.10. The executive functions of the BTC shall be exercised through its Principal Secretary who shall be an officer of the rank not below of Commissioner/Secretary to Government of Assam. The sanctioning powers of the Government of Assam shall be vested with the Principal Secretary of BTC and sanctioning powers of head(s) of the Department(s) including for technical sanction shall be conferred on the senior most officer of that Department preferably not below the rank of Additional Director, who may be designated as Director of BTC for that department. The Principal Secretary and other officers shall exercise their powers under the overall guidance and supervision of BTC.

6. Law and Order

To strengthen the Police Administration, Government of Assam shall appoint an IGP for 4 districts of BTC and the jurisdiction of the DIG Kokrajhar shall also be modified to cover these 4 districts.

7. Revision of list of ST

Consequent to the inclusion of BTC area into the Sixth Schedule, the list of ST for the State of Assam shall be so modified so as to ensure that the tribal status of Bodos and other tribals living outside the BTC are does not get affected adversely.

8. Grant of ST status of Bodo Kacharis of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills districts

The Government of India agrees to consider sympathetically the inclusion of the Bodo Kacharis living in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills Autonomous Council area in the ST (Hill) List of State of Assam.

9. Development of Bodo Language

9.1. The Government of India agrees to consider favourably the inclusion of Bodo Language in Devnagri Script in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

9.2. Bodo language shall be the official language of BTC subject to the condition that Assamese and English shall also continue to be used for official purpose.

10. Additional Development Package for BTC

10.1. The State Government, within the limitation of financial and other constraints, may offer or allow the Council to offer, possible and sustainable additional incentives for attracting private investment in the Council area and would also support projects for external funding.

10.2. In order to accelerate the development of the region and to meet the aspirations of the people, the Government of India will provide financial assistance of Rs 100 crores per annum for 5 years for projects to develop the socio-economic infrastructure in BTC areas over and above the normal plan assistance to the State of Assam. The size of the Corpus will be reviewed after a period of 5 years. Suitable mechanism will be built in the system to ensure that the funds are transferred to BTC in time and at regular intervals. An illustrative list of projects which may be considered to be taken up in BTC given below:

List of projects:

1. To establish a centre for development and research of Bodo language;
2. Upgradation of existing educational infrastructure by way of renovation/addition of buildings, providing modern facilities for teaching such as computers, science laboratories etc. from primary level to college level in BTC area;
3. A cultural complex to be established at Kokrajhar to promote and develop Bodo tradition and cultural heritage;
4. To establish a super-speciality hospital with all modern facilities at Kokrajhar Government Hospitals shall be established in all district, sub-divisional and block headquarter;
5. To establish sports complexes in all the district headquarters;
6. Food processing plants and cold storage facilities at Kokrajhar, Kajolgaon, Udalguri and Tamulpur;
7. Construction of a bridge over river Aai to connect Koilamoila, Amguri etc. with the rest of the district;
8. To build a Bodoland Bhawan in Delhi;
9. To set up integrated agro-processing park and textile-cum-apparel park;
10. Revitalisation of Kokilabari Agricultural Farm;
11. To develop adequate infrastructure to promote Manas sanctuary as an international tourist spot;
12. To complete Champa, Suklai and Dhansiri irrigation projects;
13. To construct a highway on the Indo-Bhutan border from Jamduar to Bhairabkunda to connect remote places located adjacent to the border;
14. To set up model dairy, fishery, horticulture and poultry farms/training centres at different places in all the 4 districts to encourage youth for self-employment;
15. To enhance the existing facilities in veterinary hospitals in BTC area.

10.3. Government of India will provide necessary one time financial assistance required for development of administrative infrastructure in the newly created district headquarters, sub-divisional headquarters and block headquarters, besides the BTC Secretariat Complex at Kokrajhar

11. Centrally funded University

11.1. A centrally funded Central Institute of Technology (CIT) will be set up to impart education in various technological/vocational disciplines such as Information Technology, Bio-Technology, Food Processing, Rural Industries, Business Management, etc.

11.2. The CIT will be subsequently upgraded to a Centrally funded State University with technical and non-technical disciplines to be run by the BTC.

12. Relief & Rehabilitation

12.1. The BLT would join the national mainstream and shun the path of violence in the interest of peace and development. After the formation of the interim council of BTC, BLT will dissolve itself as an organisation and surrender with arms within a week of swearing-in of the interim council. The State Government would provide full support to relief and rehabilitation of the members of BLT who would surrender with arms in this process in accordance with the existing policy of the State. Financial support in such cases, however shall be limited to be

provisions of the scheme prepared and funded by the Government of India. Withdrawal of cases against such persons and those related to overground Bodo movement since 1987 shall be considered according to the existing policy of the State of Assam.

12.2. The Government of India will initiate steps for review of action against the Bodo employees of Government of India and subordinate officers as well as in respect of Central Government Undertakings. Similar action would be taken by the Government of Assam.

12.3. Bodo youth will be considered for recruitment in Police, Army and Paramilitary forces to increase their representation in these forces.

13. Special Rehabilitation Programme for the people affected by ethnic disturbances:

The Special Rehabilitation Programme (SRP) for the people affected by ethnic disturbances in Assam, who are at present living at relief camps in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon etc. shall be completed by the Government of Assam with active support of BTC. Necessary funds for their rehabilitation shall be provided by the Government of India and lands which are free from all encumbrances required for such rehabilitation shall be made available by the BTC.

14. Interim Council

Immediately after signing of the agreement, Interim Executive Council for BTC shall be formed by Governor of Assam from amongst the leaders of the present Bodo movement, including the signatories to this settlement, and shall include adequate representation to the non-tribal communities in BTC area. The Interim Council shall not continue for a period beyond 6 months during which period election to the Council shall be held. Government of Assam shall dissolve the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) and repeal the BAC Act.

15. Government of Assam will consider inclusion of all tribals including Bodos in RHAC/MAC/LAC in consultation with leaders of these Councils.

16. The Implementation of the provision of the Memorandum of Settlement shall be periodically reviewed by a Committee comprising representatives of Government of India, Government of Assam and BTC.

Signed on 10th February, 2003 at New Delhi in the presence of Shri L.K. Advani, Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister of India and Shri Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister of Assam.

(Hagrama Basumatary)
Chairman
Bodo Liberation Tigers

(P K Dutta)
Chief Secretary
Govt. of Assam

(R C A Jain)
Secretary (BM)
Ministry of Home Affairs
Government of India

APPENDIX B: The Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act 1950

Be it enacted by Parliament as follows:

1. (1) This Act may be called the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950.

(2) It extends to the whole of India.

2. If the Central Government is of opinion that any person or class of persons, having been ordinarily resident in any place outside India, has or have, whether before or after the commencement of this Act, come into Assam and that the stay of such person or class of persons in Assam is detrimental to the interests of the general public or any section thereof or of any Scheduled Tribe in Assam, the Central Government may by order -

(a) direct such persons or class of persons to remove himself or themselves from India or Assam within such time and by such route as may be specified in the order; and

(b) give such further directions in regard to his or their removal from India or Assam as it may consider necessary or expedient:

Provided that nothing in this section shall apply to any person who on account of civil disturbances or the fear of such disturbances in any area now forming part of Pakistan has been displaced from or has left his place of residence in such area and who has been subsequently residing in Assam.

3. The Central Government may, by notification in the official Gazette, direct that the powers and duties conferred or imposed on it by Section 2 shall, subject to such conditions, if any, as may be specified in the notification, be exercised or discharged also by -

(a) any officer subordinate to the Central Government;

(b) the Government of Assam, Meghalaya or any officer subordinate to that Government.

4. Any authority empowered by or in pursuance of the provisions of this Act to exercise any power may, in addition to any other action expressly provided for in this Act, take or cause to be taken such steps, and use or cause to be used such force, as may in its opinion be reasonably necessary for the effective exercise of such power.

5. Any person who-

(a) contravenes or attempts to contravene or abets the contravention of any order made under section 2, or

(b) fails to comply with any direction given by any such order, or

(c) harbours any person who has contravened any order made under section 2 or has failed to comply with any direction given by any such order

shall be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

6. No. suit, prosecution or other legal proceedings shall lie against any person for anything which in good faith is done or intended to be done under this Act.

7. In this Act, except in section 3, references to Assam shall be construed as including also a reference to the State of Meghalaya and Nagaland and the Union territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram.

**APPENDIX C: Section 3 of the Sixth Schedule [Articles 244(2) and 275(1)] of the
Constitution of India**

3. Powers of the District Councils and Regional Councils to make laws

(1) The Regional Council for an autonomous region in respect of all areas within such region and the District Council for an autonomous district in respect of all areas within the district except those which are under the authority of Regional Councils, if any, within the district shall have power to make laws with respect to—

(a) the allotment, occupation or use, or the setting apart, of land, other than any land which is a reserved forest for the purposes of agriculture or grazing or for residential or other non-agricultural purposes or for any other purpose likely to promote the interests of the inhabitants of any village or town:

Provided that nothing in such laws shall prevent the compulsory acquisition of any land, whether occupied or unoccupied, for public purposes ¹[by the Government of the State concerned] in accordance with the law for the time being in force authorising such acquisition;

(b) the management of any forest not being a reserved forest;

(c) the use of any canal or water-course for the purpose of agriculture;

(d) the regulation of the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation;

(e) the establishment of village or town committees or councils and their powers;

(f) any other matter relating to village or town administration, including village or town police and public health and sanitation;

(g) the appointment or succession of Chiefs or Headmen; (h) the inheritance of property; ²[(i) marriage and divorce;]

(j) social customs.

(2) In this paragraph, a “reserved forest” means any area which is a reserved forest under the Assam Forest Regulation, 1891, or under any other law for the time being in force in the area in question.

(3) All laws made under this paragraph shall be submitted forthwith to the Governor and, until assented to by him, shall have no effect.

3B. Additional powers of the Bodoland Territorial Council to make laws

(1) Without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph 3, the Bodoland Territorial Council within its areas shall have power to make laws with respect to:—(i) agriculture, including agricultural education and research, protection against pests and prevention of plant diseases; (ii) animal husbandry and veterinary, that is to say, preservation, protection and improvement of stock and

prevention of animal diseases, veterinary training and practice, cattle pounds; (iii) co-operation; (iv) cultural affairs; (v) education, that is to say, primary education, higher secondary including vocational training, adult education, college education (general); (vi) fisheries; (vii) flood control for protection of village, paddy fields, markets and towns (not of technical nature); (viii) Food and civil supply; (ix) forests (other than reserved forests); (x) handloom and textile; (xi) health and family welfare; (xii) intoxicating liquors, opium and derivatives, subject to the provisions of entry 84 of List I of the Seventh Schedule; (xiii) irrigation; (xiv) labour and employment; (xv) land and revenue; (xvi) library services (financed and controlled by the State Government); (xvii) lotteries (subject to the provisions of entry 40 of List I of the Seventh Schedule), theatres, dramatic performances and cinemas (subject to the provisions of entry 60 of List I of the Seventh Schedule); (xviii) markets and fairs; (xix) municipal corporation, improvement trust, district boards and other local authorities; (xx) museum and archaeology institutions controlled or financed by the State, ancient and historical monuments and records other than those declared by or under any law made by Parliament to be of national importance; (xxi) panchayat and rural development; (xxii) planning and development; (xxiii) printing and stationery; (xxiv) public health engineering; (xxv) public works department; (xxvi) publicity and public relations; (xxvii) registration of births and deaths; (xxviii) relief and rehabilitation; (xxix) sericulture; (xxx) small, cottage and rural industry subject to the provisions of entries 7 and 52 of List I of the Seventh Schedule; (xxxi) Social Welfare; (xxxii) soil conservation; (xxxiii) sports and youth welfare; (xxxiv) statistics; (xxxv) tourism; (xxxvi) transport (roads, bridges, ferries and other means of communications not specified in List I of the Seventh Schedule, municipal tramways, ropeways, inland waterways and traffic thereon subject to the provision of List I and List III of the Seventh Schedule with regard to such waterways, vehicles other than mechanically propelled vehicles); (xxxvii) tribal research institute controlled and financed by the State Government; (xxxviii) urban development—town and country planning; (xxxix) weights and measures subject to the provisions of entry 50 of List I of the Seventh Schedule; and (xl) Welfare of plain tribes and backward classes:

Provided that nothing in such laws shall— (a) extinguish or modify the existing rights and privileges of any citizen in respect of his land at the date of commencement of this Act; and (b) disallow any citizen from acquiring land either by way of inheritance, allotment, settlement or by any other way of transfer if such citizen is otherwise eligible for such acquisition of land within the Bodoland Territorial Areas District.

(2) All laws made under paragraph 3 or under this paragraph shall in so far as they relate to matters specified in List III of the Seventh Schedule, be submitted forthwith to the Governor who shall reserve the same for the consideration of the President.

(3) When a law is reserved for the consideration of the President, the President shall declare either that he assents to the said law or that he withholds assent therefrom:

Provided that the President may direct the Governor to return the law to the Bodoland Territorial Council, together with the message requesting that the said Council will reconsider the law or any specified provisions thereof and, in particular, will consider the desirability of introducing any such amendments as he may recommend in his message and, when the law is so returned, the said Council shall consider the law accordingly within a period of six month from the date of receipt of such message and, if the law is again passed by the said Council with or without amendments it shall be presented again to the President for his consideration.”