This thesis opened with the Parliamentary proceedings in Delhi that led to the enactment of Nagaland state in 1963. After five decades of statehood, this thesis offered a set of ethnographic explorations into the dyadic relations that emerged between state, development, and democracy on the one hand and the form and substance of Naga lifeworlds on the other. This concluding chapter recaptures some of the main findings of this thesis.

At its enactment, it was anticipated that Nagaland state would culminate into the discontinuation of insurgency and violence, capture Nagas’ ‘hearts and minds’, bring progress and prosperity, and nourish Nagas’ loyalty and patriotism to the idea of India; hopes that ran through the discourses of Nehru in Parliament and Dr. Radhakrishnan’s inaugural speech (and reiterated by India’s current President Pranab Mukherjee during Nagaland’s Golden Jubilee celebrations in 2013). My ethnography, outlined across seven main chapters, however, variously painted a social reality, moral commensality, and political sociality that is more complex, more convoluted, and more intricate. Few, if any, Naga in Nagaland, moreover, would probably conclude that statehood has been a harbinger of peace and progress, even though they would certainly agree that it has brought many other changes.

I began, after the introduction, by introducing the Chakhesang and Chang tribes, which were the ethnographic foci of this thesis. I did so by discussing the historical contingencies and conjectures that lay behind their relatively nascent social formations.
The Chang tribe, as they exist today, was the cumulative outcome of an expansionist movement in which Tuensang village, during the course of the 19th century, conquered and ‘converted’ nearby villages, Noksen included, in a then emerging Chang fold. The Chakhesang tribe, in turn, was formed in 1946 through a merger of different language groups, mostly for political and economic reasons, hitherto part of other tribes. Theoretically I emphasized the problematic cultural transitivity of the idea and idiom of ‘tribe’, which, as a concept, is exogenous to Nagaland, and to India more widely. Instead, I argued how Nagas’ contemporary configuration as a tribal landscape largely resulted from the colonial emphasis on ‘tribe’ as the pillar of Naga society, the resultant administrative and ethnological structuring and restructuring of Nagas, and its gradual infatuation locally. While not arguing that the ‘tribe’ was entirely a colonial invention, I nevertheless argued that, rather than an ancient survival, it was only after the entrance of colonial administration that the ‘tribe’ became a single and affective category capable of categorizing and incorporating Nagas’ hitherto mostly clan, khel, and village based identities.

All subsequent chapters dealt with the post-colonial, post-statehood period. Chapter III discussed – both historically and ethnographically – the long lingering Naga Movement. It did so through the prism of ‘rebel accounting’, and critically aligned itself with wider theorizing on ‘the economy’ of insurgency (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler 2004) and the notion that political disorder is not merely a ‘state of dereliction’ but also often ‘a condition which offers [lucrative] opportunities’ (Chabal and Daloz 1999: xix), or at least so for some. As the Naga Movement now enters its seventh decade, my ethnography suggests that the politics of insurgency has come to interlace with the state, its
functionaries, and its development policies and projects in ways that are at once complex and resented by most Naga villagers, who lament the downfall of the once united and revered Naga Movement into rivaling factions whose cadres appear – to them – as pursuing purely personal (often pecuniary) interests rather than actively and selflessly forwarding the Naga cause.

Rather than resisting the Indian state tooth and nail, my ethnography of the Block Development Office illustrated how Naga underground groups have meticulously inserted themselves as additional layers of governance and authority within the existing framework of Nagaland state and lay claim on sizeable percentages of both government salaries and development budgets. This is to the extent that their very (financial) survival has come to depend, first, on the continuing influx of development resources in Nagaland, and, secondly, on safeguarding their privileged, even if shadowy, access to the lucrative echelons of Nagaland state. As such, certainly at the grassroots, Naga underground groups, their anti-state rhetoric apart, no longer operate first and foremost against ‘Indian’ state structures but in conjunction with it. This observation not only contests the boundaries between state and underground – any neat delineation as may appear between them I have theorized as the ‘underground effect’ – but also indicates the hydra-headed local manifestation of, what I have called, the centre-led policy of ‘seduction’, as rather than ‘co-opting’ Naga insurgency state-led development budgets have turned into a prime source of the ‘rebel revenues’ Naga underground groups need to continue their resistance against that state.

Chapter IV further discussed the local manifestation of the state. It traced the onset and consequences of the policy of ‘seduction’, which revealed itself in the
‘excessive’ and ‘politically driven’ influx of state resources into Nagaland in a clear attempt to ‘nationalize space’ (Baruah 2003b). But despite Nagaland having been a focal point of centre-led development for the past decades, most development policies and projects have been deemed failures. To discuss this, I have considered seriously Jamir’s (2002: 3) observation that there exists ‘a lack of sense of belonging in the government by the people.’ I showed how Nagas relationships with the post-colonial state have been shaped by their historical experiences of that state, and which have been shot through with ambivalences, ranging from unspeakable violence to confusing amounts of state largesse. Amongst such experiences, state-violence has been especially definitive for many Nagas, and made them perceive the post-colonial state as a repository of violence, coercion, and apprehension, as an invading and ruthless force from which there was nothing truly to gain, only oppression and misery to reap. The enactment of Nagaland state and its associated policy of ‘seduction’ added another dimension to the state, but this shift of focus from violent ‘coercion’ to ‘seduction’ through development came to interlace with the continuing armed conflict and villagers’ past experiences of violence in indissoluble and complex ways.

I then proceeded by connecting Nagas’ historical experiences of the post-colonial state with the emergence of a particularistic moral economy of state resources, one nourished by a clear absence of belonging and moral commitment to the state, and which feeds the continual and widespread pilfering of state resources at the grassroots (cf. Shah 2010). Hence, while corruption is thought to be endemic across Nagaland, conventional evaluations of corruption purely in legal terms conceal more than they reveal about the local workings, inner-logic, and intricacies of state, politics, and governance. It is also in
the absence of moral accountability to the state that we find the policy of ‘seduction’ backfiring; while villagers now increasingly depend on the state, they mostly engage with its resources without pledging their moral commitment and belonging to that state. I illustrated this ethnographically, among others by discussing the villagers’ idiom of ‘eating’ and ‘drinking’ development, cuts and commissions, the failing policy of ‘communitisation’, and a colloquial distinction that is locally accepted between ‘official budgets’ and the amounts ‘socially sanctioned’ by the village community, which equated roughly half of its total and indicated the range of socially and morally approved (or at least not disapproved) private cuts.

Such a reading of Nagaland’s ‘failed’ development – of villagers becoming ‘agents’ and ‘stakeholders’ of continuing corruption rather than its helpless victims – deviates from a recent, and important, critique of India’s development state formulated by Akhil Gupta (2012), in which he theorizes the state’s enduring failure to eradicate widespread and chronic poverty. Gupta insists that poverty in India does not persist because of the absence of development budgets and policies, of which there are many, but that the problem lies at the point of their implementation by the lower rungs of the bureaucracy. The reason for this is only partially ‘corruption’, but must also be understood in terms of the procedures by which the bureaucracy operates (e.g. through written documents, rule-books, statistics, identity cards, etc.) and which remain detached from the everyday realities of the poor, thus culminating into an enduring predicament Gupta provocatively defines as ‘structural violence’ given that the poorest suffer and die premature deaths which could have been prevented. Gupta (2012: 23) writes thus:
‘no matter how noble the intentions of programs, and no matter how sincere the officials in charge of them, the overt goals of helping the poor is subverted by the very procedures of bureaucracy.’

This bureaucratic subversion is because state officers are made to follow rules that are fixed, rather than achieving results on the ground, and these rules, when followed to the letter, produce indifference, arbitrariness, and apathy towards the plights of the poor, in the upshot ‘naturalizing’ and ‘depoliticizing’ their suffering.

The case of Nagaland differs from Gupta’s analysis, and not only because the implementation of development projects are locally hampered by the mutually beneficial (but illegal) relations that exist between state and underground actors. Perhaps more than anywhere else in India, development activities in Nagaland bypass the lower rungs of the state administration as development has been decentralized and deregulated to village levels, and which, in theory, absolves development projects from the ‘arbitrariness’ and ‘indifference’ produced by the lower bureaucracy. Moreover, as the result of the policy of ‘seduction’, development budgets in Nagaland are exceptionally high, thus promising a high pace of development. And yet, development fails. However, rather than the prime result of state-induced ‘structural violence’ as Gupta proposes, my ethnography suggested that the reasons for such failures might be found in a particularistic moral economy of state resources that has locally evolved in response to embodied experiences of state violence, the contested legitimacy of Nagaland state, and the policy of ‘seduction’, all of which led to the shrouding of state resources into a field of moral ambiguity. Put differently, villagers in Nagaland are hardly the innocent, pitiful victims of development failures, corruption, and absenteeism perpetuated by an indifferent and
arbitrary bureaucracy, but rather they are active agents in perpetuating the continuous failures of development projects and the pilfering of state resources, and so on purpose.

Chapter V subsequently showed how post-statehood development apparatuses also came to present themselves as a divisive contest over control and lucrative access to state resources between Naga communities. In Noksen, among the Chang, and the Eastern Nagas more widely, it was the frustration of people’s expectations of what Nagaland state can and should do for them that translated into a demand for a new state, to be called Frontier Nagaland. While Nagaland state was envisaged as a tribal homeland, both inhabited and governed by Nagas, what the desire for Frontier Nagaland indicates is that Nagaland’s creation, and its subsequent functioning, produced new constellations of power, new fault-lines, and new axes of differentiation within Naga society. Many Eastern Nagas today lament – what they experience as – the dominating and exploitative modalities of governance exerted by Western Naga tribes, whom they see as ‘advanced’ and suspect of disproportionally appropriating state resources, thus preventing Eastern Nagas from receiving their dues. For them, it is only the creation of a new state that can bring ‘economic salvation’, making their statehood demand not an agitation for the rolling back of ‘Indian’ state structures – in the way Naga undergrounds propound – but for more of the ‘Indian’ state and more state resources.

Any exploration, in Nagaland, on how the state and its resources manifest themselves locally, and into Nagas’ post-statehood lifeworlds more widely, must include an assessment of the vernacular forms of democratic politics, and which make up chapters VI, VII, and VIII of this thesis. Most, if not all, treatises on Nagaland democracy highlight its perceived deficits and electoral ills and focus on ‘vote-buying’, inflated
electoral lists, clientelism, corruption, muscle-power, and proxy-voting, and then use such instances for judging Nagaland’s democracy as dissolute and perverse (e.g. Misra 1987; Singh 2004; Dev 2006; Amer 2014). In exploring the form and substance of Nagaland’s democracy, I have sought to flick this paradigm by asking what happens to our understanding of what democracy means, and is about, when we interpret such local manifestations not necessarily as deviant and deluded but simply as empirical data based on particularistic and cultural inferences in need for explanation, even theorizing.

In chapters VI, VII, and VIII, I have argued towards a more contextualized, culturally-embedded understanding of Naga democracy and its electoral processes, one which rendered bare the incongruence between modern democratic ideals and the form and moral ethos of pre-existing Naga polities, and one which illustrated how Naga villagers were never the passive recipients of ‘externally’ imposed institutions, of which procedural democracy is one, but actively applied their agency and imagination to, instead of adjusting themselves to modern democratic ideals, adjust democracy to themselves.

I have sought to illustrate that in order to understand the inner-logic, intricacies, idioms, and moralities of Nagaland’s complex democratic arena one does well to situate contemporary democratic politics in the vernacular and ethnographic longue durée, from which they may then emerge as a remapping of a pre-existing political sociality and moral commensality. Such a remapping is always partial, often problematic, and will continue to evolve. It is also inherently a two-way process; a set of dialectical relations that exist between modern Indian democracy and the cultural penchants and prejudices that shape the substance of home-grown Naga political theory and praxis, resulting in the
vernacularisation of democratic institutions, ideals, and practices into a democratic
sociality and structure of political morals that are at once historically traceable and
culturally contested, but also scripted and evaluated afresh.

What such dialectical relations culminated into ethnographically were, among
others, Phugwumi villagers trying to defend tooth and nail the proposed deletion of bogus
votes from the village electoral list, their desire (but failed attempt) to agree on a village
consensus-candidate, and villagers across Nagaland not voting as ‘enchanted individuals’
(Gilmartin 2012) but as part of traditional political systems in which the locus of political
decision-making was variously vested in chiefs and aristocrats, village councils, and clan
elders. In terms of political representation (Chapter VIII), this dialectical process led to
politicians throwing lavish feasts for their followers, electors evaluating politicians’
successes and failures by their capacity and commitment to act as ‘providers’ (which
must also make us rethink further the conventional depiction of Nagaland as finding itself
in a ‘crisis of corruption’), elected MLAs appropriating and redirecting state resources to
reciprocate their electors, politicians serving as generous chief guests in public functions,
and, at the level of state politics, politicians vying and defecting in a continuous struggle
over the control of the ‘plump’ portfolios that would help them ‘provide’ to their
constituents and therewith elongate their political life expectancy.

I now turn to highlighting a few limitations of this thesis. First, while I
occasionally speak about Naga society as a whole, my fieldwork has been conducted
solely among Nagas in Nagaland, and has not included those who reside in neighbouring
states or across the border with Myanmar. This has been for practical reasons given that it
was already arduous enough to obtain research permissions for a single state. I must
stress however that Nagas outside Nagaland might have divergent experiences with state, development, and democracy given their now prolonged incorporation into different state structures and social milieus. Further research is needed to explore this. Secondly, my thesis presents first and foremost a ‘rural view’ of Nagaland. Had I studied state, development, and democracy in Nagaland’s now rapidly expanding urban centres – where the pace of life is different, populations belong to multiple tribes and communities, and the forms of closely-knit political sociality and moral commensality I found operative in Phugwumi and Noksen are likely to be much less pronounced – my ethnography would probably have looked somewhat different. The inclusion of ‘urban voices’ and their comparative analysis could result in fresh insights. Thirdly, while I have interacted with national workers who happened to reside in Phugwumi and Noksen I did not interview any of the underground leaders out of the fear that Intelligence Agencies could misread my interactions with them. Their personal perspectives would have benefitted this thesis, but, alas, remain wanting.

I end this thesis with two final reflections. First, after Nagaland statehood, institutions of state, development, and democracy have come to interlace with the politics of insurgency in complex ways. What has emerged in the shadows of the protracted Indo-Naga conflict, and since the 1997 ceasefire, are, among others, diabolic inter-factional feuds, an agitation for Frontier Nagaland, a lucrative ‘ceasefire-economy’, failing development, and widespread corruption. While, at the time of writing these concluding sentences, a final political settlement is purportedly closer than ever before, any political solution is unlikely to instantly untangle and resolve the above predicaments. About any transition from war and conflict to peace, Nordstrom (2004: 141) writes:
‘The habits of war [and, I would add, ‘ceasefire’ as well] die hard. They can carry beyond the front lines and into the fragile pulse of peace. If peace starts in the midst of war, aspects of war continue past peace accords to affect the daily life of a society until they are dismantled, habit by habit. Such work is not easy: some have learned in the pursuits of war that power, profit, and militarized control offer irresistible rewards.’

Nordstrom’s statement is a generalized one, but nevertheless relevant to the especially protracted Indo-Naga conflict. The reaching of a political solution and the signing of a peace treaty alone is unlikely to bring peace and progress to the Naga uplands until and unless the conflicts, struggles and malgovernance that have, over the decades past, unfolded in the shadows of the Indo-Naga conflict, too, are addressed. On the need to rebuild Naga society to render peace and development durable, Kikon (2016: 77) has reflected thus:

‘It would be a mistake to demand that the Indian government rebuild Naga society to what it was in the 1930s and 1940s before the armed conflict began. When I underline the importance of the state in rehabilitating militarized societies, I am saying that the process of reconstruction of a democratic society, which establishes practices of justice and human right, must begin by acknowledging that the state has played a fundamental role in legalizing violence and creating a milieu of impunity.’

While Kikon’s proposition is pertinent, the same logic may – perhaps must – be extended to Naga underground groups, which, too, in the eyes of my Naga respondents and friends,
have a thing or two to acknowledge in the spirit of rebuilding and revitalizing Naga society.

Finally, research for this thesis was conducted in uncertain and politically volatile times, and which makes the idea of the ‘ethnographic present’ an especially fluid one. Since I completed my fieldwork in 2014 fresh political dynamics and events have already added new dimensions and complexities to my ethnographic field. Moreover, the reported drawing closer of a (or yet another?) final political solution might work to reduce this thesis to a piece of history perhaps sooner than is destined to happen to any ethnography. In this light, I would like to concur with Daniel (1996: 12) who, while researching and writing amidst the civil-war in Sri-Lanka, reflected on the locally fast changing ‘ethnographic present’ thus:

‘I have come to realize the value of the periodicism of even the best-theorized descriptions. Even if all they do is continue to serve us as period pieces in that they preserve the concerns, values, and prejudices of certain times and places, they will have served us and future generations well.’

In this spirit, it is my hope that, new political developments notwithstanding, the contents of this thesis may stand as a set of reflections on the everyday lives of ordinary Naga villagers in a particular period of uncertain social and political transitions.