‘Hoot, hoot, hoot! Chuba honked the horn of his vehicle as he approached the towering Ao Baptist Church in Mokokchung, where he had asked me to wait for him.

Mokokchung, the Ao Naga headquarters, initially grew around a British out-post established there in 1880 on top of – what became unimaginatively dubbed – the DC’s (Deputy Commissioner’s) Hill. Over time, Mokokchung town first expanded downwards, then sideways, and today makes a sprawling urban settlement; congested, short of water, but with a lingering charm. Mokokchung is also the main gateway into Eastern Nagaland, the erstwhile land of the so-called ‘free’, ‘wild’, and ‘unadministered’ Nagas, historically left outside the direct pale of British rule. The area came under India shortly after its Independence, and is today home to a movement for a new federal state, to be called *Frontier Nagaland*.

‘Sure you want to come to Noksen?’, asked Chuba from the window of his car.

‘This time of year most villagers sleep in their *jhum* fields. They return to the village only for the Wednesday and Sunday church services. You will hardly find anyone around. Moreover, the electricity transformer has blasted again. There has been no power for the last two weeks.’

‘I am sure’, I said as I nestled myself into the passenger seat. Besides the power supply, what had broken down too was the single public vehicle that plied between Noksen town – a small administrative hub built on land donated by Noksen village – situated on a hill opposite Noksen village. The driver, a notorious drunkard, lacked the
money to have his vehicle repaired, and as a result Noksen was cut off. But few in Noksen owned a private vehicle, and I had waited for days for one of them to travel to Mokokchung.

This was my second trip to Noksen and Eastern Nagaland. My first trip, several months earlier, had been to request research permissions and to explore the mundane practicalities of staying in the village. Prime among them was accommodation. Houses in Noksen, as in all Naga villages, were built for living, not for renting, but fortunately a family was willing to take me in, even if this meant (as I discovered to my dismay later) that two brothers had to give up their single rooms and squeeze together to make one vacant for me. I had met Chuba during my first trip. It was nearly impossible not to. His wooden house with its characteristic large bamboo veranda that overlooked the hills was a landmark, situated in the middle of Noksen town. Chuba himself was a local strongman, well-built, and better educated than most. He had stood for elections in the past, and though his bid had gone unsuccessful, he had grown influential as a trusted aide to the constituency’s present MLA. I also came to know Chuba as a passionate supporter of the idea of Frontier Nagaland, and a topic he did not take long to share his views on as we drove out of Mokokchung.

‘Welcome to the land of the backward people’, Chuba remarked cheerfully as we left Mokokchung District behind and entered into Tuensang District. Soon, however, the conversation took on a more serious tone. ‘See the condition of the road’, he said. ‘It was blacktopped just last year, but the contract was not given to us Eastern Nagas but to an Angami from Kohima, a friend of the Chief Minister. He was only interested in his cuts and commissions, and applied the tarmac as thin as lipstick. It was washed away with the
first rains.’ After entering Tuensang District, the road, indeed, had quickly narrowed, looking in some places more like a dirt track, cracked and potholed, and lined with shrubs that encroached unto the little tarmac that was left. ‘It is like that with most development projects allocated to Eastern Nagaland’, Chuba continued while skillfully steering his vehicle, trying to evade the deepest potholes. ‘The works are given to Western Naga contractors, who then do scrappy jobs and pocket most of the budgets.’

Our conversation had turned into a monologue. ‘We Eastern Nagas are lagging behind in every way. But instead of helping us develop, Western Nagas have been exploiting us ever since our areas [the Tuensang Frontier Division and the Naga Hills District] were joined together to make Nagaland state. By now, we should have been at par with them, but they keep all development budgets to themselves. They do not want us to develop. We have understood their behaviour. For us Eastern Nagas, separate statehood is now the only solution.’

Chuba’s narrative was matched by billboards and banners erected alongside the road. They read: ‘We want Frontier Nagaland’ or ‘Justice delayed is justice denied. Frontier Nagaland!’ The same banners were spun across the single line of wooden shops, invariably selling groceries, small household items, phone recharge cards, and pan, that defined the centre of Noksen town.

In the months following, whenever we caught up in Noksen town, Chuba would bring up the topic of Frontier Nagaland. ‘If we have our own state, our own people will be in charge of development. There will be less exploitation, less corruption, and more development’, Chuba was sure. ‘See’, he said on another occasion as we sat on his balcony, ‘western and eastern Nagas are brothers, that’s why we propose to keep the
name ‘Nagaland’ as part of our new state’s nomenclature, but how can we live in the same house if one brother suppresses the other? ‘But it is going to be a long struggle’, he sighed. ‘Getting a new state is not easy. Until there is blood and dead bodies, Delhi will not take our demand seriously.’

Chuba’s remark that without a spell of violence, the spilling of blood, dead bodies on the streets, there was little hope of Frontier Nagaland converting from a political imaginary into a new state is disquieting, but equally a perceptive reading of the history and politics of India’s federal restructuring. In recent decades, in all cardinal directions of India, communities have come to commit themselves so deeply to statehood demands that they risk limbs and life for it. But while statehood demands, or demands for other forms of administrative and political devolution, are numerous and agitated, successes remain few and far between. Those that succeeded were nearly all preceded by protracted, at times decades-long struggles, and hardly ever non-violent but including mass-agitations, violence, vandalism, stone-pelting, aggressive ultimatums, shut-downs, hunger-strikes, railway blockades, slayings and suicides, suggesting a dyadic relation between violence, dead bodies, and the enactment of new states ever since India deviated from its initial stance of reorganizing states first and foremost on linguistic lines. The enactment of Nagaland state constituted the first such deviation and, as shown in the previous chapter, was preceded by agonizing violence.

Given that the making of new state tends to involve volatilities, violence, victims, and decades to achieve, what, then, made Eastern Nagas still want to join the long queue
of statehood demands in India? Was not Nagaland state created as a tribal homeland, an upland realm both inhabited and governed by Nagas, one protected through legislation from the ‘exploitative influences’ by non-tribals as witnessed in several nooks of the country (cf. Shah and Bates 2013)? How does this demand appear in the context of the wider movement for Naga Independence, or at the very least the projected integration of Naga inhabited areas within India under a single political administration? Put differently, does the current demand for Frontier Nagaland not negate the very essence of what Naga nationalism stands for, and what many Nagas have suffered and sacrificed for? And what are the chances of Frontier Nagaland ever to turn into a reality? Finally, what does the demand for this new state, articulated by a people long – as we will discuss – left outside the ambit of the (colonial) state might tell us about how the state is viewed, understood, and engaged with in contemporary India more widely?

This chapter reflects on these questions through a social-historical and ethnographic discussion of Noksen, the Chang, and Eastern Nagaland more widely, focusing in the particular on its largely ‘non-colonial past’, or ‘non-postcoloniality’ as Des Chene (2007) captures this condition for Nepal, and perceived post-statehood deprivations. A couple of caveats would be in order before proceeding. The movement for Frontier Nagaland, presided over by the ENPO, remains, relatively speaking, in its

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64 although there exist no predefined criteria on what characteristics do, and what don’t, legitimize a demand for statehood, Tillin (2013: 11) distinguishes four main categories of explanation for state reorganization: sociological (based on the recognition of distinct territorial ethnicities), political economy (the alignment of borders with resource-rich territories), administrative convenience (to improve the quality of governance), and, electoral interests (on part of the ruling coalition at the Centre).
infancy, and is much younger compared to, for instance, demands for Gorkhaland in West Bengal, Karbi Anglong in Assam, Kongu Nadu in Tamil Nadu, or Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh. The Frontier Nagaland Movement is also a ‘mixed-up story’, to quote a former Nagaland minister who I interviewed at length in Tuensang town. He lamented that former ENPO leaders had been ‘bought’ by the state’s elite in Kohima, and after rallying for Frontier Nagaland, and lobbying in Delhi, for years, decided to stand for elections and were subsequently bequeathed with plump portfolios in the very Nagaland Government they wanted to divorce. He adjudged this as shrewd politics played by Western Naga politicians to contain the demand for Frontier Nagaland: ‘When I give you money, then from your mouth my voice will speak, not yours’, as the ex-minister articulated his disappointment. Other critics see in the demand for Frontier Nagaland the deliberate and divisive politics of India’s intelligence services, which, they claim, instigated a group of ‘defeated’ politicians and gullible public leaders into raising the statehood demand in order to implode the larger Naga Movement. But most in Eastern Nagaland perceive the demand for Frontier Nagaland as legitimate, historically justified, and worth struggling for. That said, the Frontier Nagaland movement is still evolving and its future is difficult to predict, making this chapter only an early, preliminary reading of this statehood demand, its rationale, intricacies, and indeterminacies.

**Talking statehood in Noksen**

In the years preceding my fieldwork in Noksen I had followed the rise of the Frontier Nagaland Movement, formally launched in 2010, at a distance, mostly through newspapers, of which I kept clippings. Information seemed scarce, also because the
ENPO resolved not to entertain (with a few exceptions), journalists. In one early newspaper article on Frontier Nagaland, ENPO’s then General Secretary explained the rationale of the statehood demand thus:

‘For decades, gross injustice has been done to the people of these four districts by the successive governments. Of the eleven districts in Nagaland, these four backward districts have almost half of the state’s population. But despite that, they continue to remain extremely underdeveloped. Our demand for the creation of Frontier Nagaland is based on historical facts. This is something like going back to the earlier arrangement when the entire area was under the erstwhile Tuensang Frontier Division of NEFA’ (cited in Assam Tribune 23-06-2012).

Another piece in a Nagaland daily clarified further:

‘The reason for such a movement is for development and welfare of the people in eastern Nagaland. Eastern Nagas have been neglected by the successive governments, our talents have been suppressed, our development have [sic] been stalled, our basic demands never redressed. Our fundamental rights to have equal share with the advanced [Western Nagaland] brethren have been denied since the inception as a full-fledge state of Nagaland… The Eastern Nagas will continue to remain backward because of the step-motherly attitude and negligence by our fellow advanced tribes who were and are at the helm of all government functionaries’ (cited in Morung Express 30-01-2011).

Political rhetoric and ethnographic realities, every anthropologist knows, may often be found disjointed locally. But while I refrained from taking such newspaper statements at face value, as I embarked on my fieldwork in Noksen I soon found that the prospect of a
new state inspired a good deal of hopeful conversation in the village. ‘Frontier Nagaland’ was mired in many of the conversations men held while trotting arduous hours up and down their *jhum* fields, when spending the night in elevated bamboo and thatch jungle huts, and as they visited shops in Noksen town. The topic also frequently cropped up during my interviews with them, even if the gist of my questions seemed far removed from the politics of statehood.

When, for instance, I discussed with a Noksen elder past and present instances of lycanthropy, or when a villager momentarily inhabits a tiger’s body or are possessed by a tiger’s soul, a condition widely reported among Nagas (Hutton 1920; 1931, Mills 1926: 248, Ovesen 1983; Sutter 2008), he explained at length about an annual ‘tiger cabinet meeting’ held on a hill in the Phom area, and which was attended by ‘ENPO tigermen’. During this meeting, the tigermen, so he explained, would conduct rituals to predict the year’s elements – especially rain, wind, and fire – the quantity and quality of the upcoming harvest, and whether misfortunes would befall the ENPO area. Upon my probing why no Western Naga tigermen were part of this conclave, I was told that they may have their own tigermen ‘association’, but in any case had nothing to do with the ENPO tigermen. Clearly, the idea of Frontier Nagaland had transcended the bounds of what is conventionally configured as the field of ‘the political.’ The statehood demand had similarly infused Christian discourses and prayers. The pastor of Noksen Town Baptist Church told me thus: ‘Eastern Nagaland churches wholly support Frontier Nagaland. We pray and fast regularly for the ENPO, and we trust God will end our suppression by Western Nagas and open a way for Frontier Nagaland to be created.’ If in its struggle for Naga Independence, the NNC, as early as 1956, issued an order directing
that ‘God ought to be included in every practical fields of Nagas’, popularized the slogan ‘Nagaland for Christ’, and promoted that ‘as many pastors as possible should be appointed to prepare the war affairs’ (cited in Elwin 1961: 63), it is perhaps paradoxical, or certainly worth noting, that an entirely opposite political demand – the further branching of Naga inhabited lands – has become infused by a similar Christian discourse.

In discussing Frontier Nagaland, and the benefits it was projected to bring, most Noksen villagers had internalized the ENPO’s official stance and explained that the absence of development amongst them was not merely neglect, but that their progress was deliberately thwarted by Western Naga politicians, bureaucrats, contractors, and engineers, who they sometimes described as cunning, conceited, and greedy, and whose actions prevented them from receiving their development dues. In line with Chuba’s lament, the dismal state of the roads was readily invoked as an example. ‘Even when I travel with my eyes closed, I know the moment we cross from Frontier Nagaland into Nagaland by the amount of the bumping of the vehicle’, one villager explained in reference to the rough, potholed roads of Tuensang and the smoother, blacktopped ones maintained in Mokokchung District. The villagers knew that the government had allocated substantial sums for road construction and maintenance in Tuensang to Western Naga contractors based in Kohima. But since the condition of the road seemed to deteriorate further with each rainy season, and their intermittent journeys to Tuensang Town or Mokokchung seemed to grow longer every year, they concluded that the contractors must have pocketed the budget, instead of working earnestly towards their welfare. Those Noksen villagers who occasionally traveled to Kohima and Dimapur readily reinforced such narratives of neglect’ in Western Nagaland, so I heard them
explain to others, villages and towns are developed better, roads potholed less, hospitals and clinics furnished with modern equipment, and schools and colleges with sufficient and qualified teachers. These observations made them ask why, within the same Nagaland state, such differential levels of development could exist and persist. Inevitably they concluded that Nagaland state was controlled by Western Nagas, and their vision of the common good remained restricted to the welfare and progress of their own families, clans, villages, and tribes, and whose partisan attitudes rendered Nagaland state incapable of fulfilling its repeated promise of bringing Eastern Nagaland at par with Western Nagaland.

But even as ‘development’, and its perceived deficiency thereof, resides at the heart of the Frontier Nagaland movement, the statehood demand travels deeper than the materiality of the present. The next section discusses critically the differential colonial trajectories between today’s Eastern and Western Nagaland, and which advocates of Frontier Nagaland emphasize as the historical backdrop against which their statehood demand must be understood.

The Land of the Free Nagas

In April 1888, the British officer McCabe escorted by a handful British military men and a large consignment of Indian sepoys and Naga coolies, crossed the river Dikhu and entered into the rugged, unadministered wilds, what was then referred to as the land of the ‘free’ or ‘wild’ Nagas. On April 25, they arrived at the hilltop village of Noksen, fought themselves through its sturdy stockades, blasted bullets to rout its villagers, and completed the assault by setting its houses and granaries ablaze. Noksen – then and now
was compactly built, a labyrinth of houses standing roof to roof. Back then, long before Central development schemes distributed corrugated and galvanized iron sheets, roofs in the village were made of thatch, the perfect material for fire to spread quickly. Soon, most of Noksen was reduced to smoldering ashes. Neighbouring village Litem was similarly reduced to rubble. In those days the burning down of villages was a punishment frequently meted out to recalcitrant Naga villages, as entries in colonial tour diaries reveal. This instance was no different. In the months preceding the assault, Noksen and Litem had jointly raided several Ao Naga villages situated within the parameters of the Naga Hills District, which made the raids’ victims de facto British subjects. McCabe’s punitive expedition, as it was framed, was intended to forever dissuade Noksen and Litem from raiding administered territories and peoples.

Bamboo and thatched houses, however, did not take long to rebuild, certainly not longer than the sentiments of revenge to cool down. And as early as July the same year, Noksen had regained sufficient strength and – in alliance with Litem and several other nearby villages – swooped down on a number of Ao Naga villages, reportedly killing and decapitating scores of Ao villagers. The village of Mongsemdi was attacked in broad daylight, when most of the able-bodied men were away in their jhum fields. ‘[They] swarmed over the village like ants’, a survivor told a British investigating officer later, ‘and cut down every man, woman, or child who was unable to escape, a few young children who were taken alive excepted. After taking all the heads, they set fire to the village’ (Reid 1942: 116) In the official correspondence that followed the attack, Mokokchung’s then District Commissioner Mr Porteous wrote:
The attacks were unquestionably intended as a retaliation for the expedition against Noksen and Litam in April last, undertaken to punish those villages for raids on Susu, Mongsemdi, and Lunkung. As I have now learnt, these villages suffered far more severely than could ever have been intended by my predecessor. Not only were several men killed by the small guard left by Mr. McCabe at Litam while he proceeded to Noksen, but a number, approaching 40, was killed in the jungles round the two villages during Mr. McCabe’s halt, by a rabble of some hundreds of friendlies who had followed from Susu, Mongsemdi, Lungkung, Salachu, and other villages in the wake of our force’ (Reid 1942: 117).

Noksen’s retaliatory attack, Mr. Porteous admitted, had not emerged out of thin air: ‘I had previously so far back as May received news from Mr. Clark [a missionary stationed among the Ao Nagas] that these villages [Noksen and Litem] were boasting of the vengeance they intended taking.’ He, however, sought to justify his inaction: ‘As no messengers reached me directly, and no demand for assistance came through Mr. Clark… I considered these threats as mere empty bravado.’ The report concluded:

‘It is small wonder that, after losing so many men in addition to the destruction of their villages and the loss of most of their cattle, either killed or carried off as loot, the men of Noksen and Litam should have sent round the fiery cross, and, with the help of their allies, taken a savage revenge on the villages at whose hands (with our aid) they had suffered so heavy a punishment’ (Reid 1942: 118).

In Noksen today, these and other past raids and battles form an evocative part of oral history which elders narrate in succinct detail, even though multiple generations have now passed. ‘The Aos were afraid of us’, elders would emphasize. ‘Our daos and spears
were sharp, and our forefathers bold and brave. Whenever a Chang raised his dao it was
never lowered before it had been put to use.’ Back then, the Chang were known, in
colonial annals, as ‘Mazung’, which was an Ao Naga term that freely translated as ‘bad’
or ‘wicked’ people, a nomenclature the British initially adopted (perhaps not knowing its
meaning). ‘But all of that was in the past’, Noksen elders inevitably ended their
narrations. ‘We are Christians now, and peace-loving.’

When Noksen figured in colonial reports, often in relation to raids, the village’s
name was usually preceded by such adjectives as ‘trans-frontier’, ‘trans-Dikhu’,
‘unadministered’ or ‘free’, all communicating the village’s position outside the direct
ambit of colonial control. In fact, until well into the 20th century, large parts of today’s
Eastern Nagaland remained marked on British maps with the white of an unexplored
country, and as late as 1933 Fürer-Haimendorf could receive a letter from J.P. Mills
inviting him for an ‘expedition into “un-administrated territory”’ (1939: 125), bringing
him to a country ‘not yet been entered by any white man.’ Its inhabitants were referred to,
by British officers, in a vocabulary of wild, savage, warring, and uncivilized tribes,
practitioners of forms of slavery, head-cutting, and human sacrifices, and as such
contrasted with administered Nagas amongst such activities had been ceased by the
British. Of the Chang specifically Hutton wrote in the late 1920s:

‘The Chang is one of those Naga tribes which occupy the hinterland, as it were, of
the Naga Hills district, stretching back to the high range, which divides Assam
from Burma. Only two small Chang villages of mixed population fall far enough
west to come within the boundary of the administered district, the bulk of the tribe
being situated in the area of loose political control which forms a buffer between
the district and the still unknown tribes which occupy the slopes of the high range on both the Assam and Burma sides’ (1987[1929]: iii).

That the Chang, and tribes further east, should fall outside British administration had been subject to intense debate within colonial circles. Opinions and policies advocated varied with some suggesting that a classic ‘civilization mission’ be bestowed upon them, others arguing in favour of routine punitive expeditions to instill in them fear and respect towards the colonial government without actually having to administer them, while again others propagated their complete annexation and enclosure into the Naga Hills District. The official, and prevailing view, however, remained one of limited interference based on the economic rationale that extending British rule upon them would be unproductive and costly. Führer-Haimendorf (1939: 124) captured this prevailing view thus: ‘As long as the feuds in the tribal [unadministered] area are restricted to the usual head-hunting raids, a more or less casual affair leading to little loss of life the British authorities do not usually interfere.’

But while Noksen, and villagers further east, were to remain outside direct colonial contract, and paid no taxes, the political and administrative ordering of the area changed and complicated as the result of the authoritative presence of colonial offices in nearby Mokokchung. In fact, one of the fallacies of many historical narratives, popular reconstructions, and incidental scholarship on the then ‘free Nagas’ is the tendency to equate their unadministered past with a near complete isolation from colonial powers and influences. As early as 1889, barely a year after McCabe’s force torched down Noksen, an administrative report reads: ‘The headmen of Noksen have repeatedly visited Mr. Davis [then Sub-Divisional Officer] at the sub-divisional headquarters at Mokokchang.’
During one such visit Noksen elders solicited Mr. Davis’s intervention in a conflict with Litem, the village with which it had only recently allied in attacking Ao Naga villages. The report details:

‘A man of Litam stole from the grave of a man of Noksen the dead man’s dao and cloth. The name of the thief being known, his surrender, or in lieu of him, a large fine, was demanded by Noksen. On this the father of the thief who felt himself disgraced by his son’s conduct, voluntarily offered to give him up. He was accordingly made over to the men of Noksen who forthwith knocked him on the head and threw his body into the jungle’ (cited in Assam Administrative Report 1982-1940).

Not only Noksen elders had presented themselves before the Sub-Divisional Officer. In the same year: ‘Men of Litam, Yanu, Yarr, Laksotang and even Mazung-Jami [Tuensang village] have all been into Mongsemdi [where a British outpost was enacted], the four first named to express submission, and the last to ask for intervention on the part of Government to put a stop to the fierce khel feuds which prevails in that village.’\textsuperscript{65} Such ‘submissions’ without actual administration are telling, complicate the usual narrative of ‘free Nagas’, and were gladly accepted by the colonial administration. Should one, perhaps, see in such ostensibly ‘semi-voluntary’ submissions, and occasional requests for British intervention, a defensive measure, a reflection of the superior powers displayed by British-led forces which made villages decide it safer to offer submission, even if such

was not always demanded for? Or should we also read in these actions the villagers’ imagination and agency to appropriate the nearby colonial machinery to their own benefits, as offering new avenues for Naga villages, clans, khels, and individuals to settle pre-existing struggles and old scores?

To illustrate, when a British punitive force took on the Khiamniungan village of Pangsha, which they accused of headhunting and slavery, in 1933 they established their base in the unadministered Chang village of Chingmei, whose chief, Chingmak, had earlier ‘undertaken the long journey to Mokokchung to make friends with Mills [then District Commissioner]. Chingmak now offered to act as ‘mediator in the negotiations with neighbouring villages’ on the way to Pangsha, a service he reportedly was only ‘too happy to render’ as Chingmei itself had a ‘lon-standing feud with the Kalyo Kengyu [Khiamniungan] villages to the east’ (Fürer-Haimendorf 1939: 141). When Pangsha, or a part of it, was burned down by the British punitive force, Fürer-Haimendorf observed so about Chingmak: ‘generally so dignified and calm, I see venting his furious rage on a perfectly innocent rice-basket, slashing it from end to end. In his boldest dreams he had probably never dared to hope that he would one day plunder the almighty Pangsha’ (ibid.: 166).

On the whole, British relations with unadministered villages varied and fluctuated, ranging from ‘submissions’ and ‘friendship’ to volatile enmity, and, thus, framing the relations between the colonial administration and ‘free Nagas’ in terms of a single narrative would involve grave over-simplification. An instance which underscores that, while left officially unadministered, the colonial government exerted considerable influence among the Chang was the participation of a sizeable consignment of Changs in
the Naga Labour Corps that was dispatched to France during the First World War. Takam (1999: 2) writes: ‘There is none [in the Chang area] who has not heard of the First World War. During this, it was only they [British] who fought, but also smart and able young men from our Eastern lands, who went to take part in the Labour Corps.’ And when Verrier Elwin (1961: 28) visited the Tuensang area in 1947, just before India’s Independence, he noted how: ‘Tuensang was then divided into what were called “controlled” and “un-administered” areas, but how his [Mr Archer, then District Commissioner of Mokokchung] writ did, in practice, extend over the whole area. Local chiefs and headmen, who were called Command Dobashis and paid by the Government, acted on his behalf and reported major incidents which required attention.’

In legal terms, the Tuensang Area had been incorporated into British India in 1902, a decree that was ratified in the Government of India Act of 1935, in which it was ‘defined as a “tribal area” within India’ (Elwin 1961: 27). This legislation, however, never translated into actual administration; no outpost was established, and no state resources officially allocated. It was only in 1947 that decisive steps towards enclosing the area were made through the creation of Tuensang Town, on land donated by Tuensang village, for the purposes of administration. A year later the Tuensang Administrative Circle was called into being (Prakash 2007). In 1951, the Tuensang Area was brought under the so-called North-Eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA), which included large parts of today’s Arunachal Pradesh, and of which it became a Frontier Division. The year 1951 also saw the first Political Officer posted to Tuensang and the opening of administrative outposts in Kiphiri, Mon, and Noklak. Tuensang’s status as part of NEFA was to be short-lived however, and in 1957 the area was merged with the Naga Hills
District, which was called the Naga Hills Tuensang Area (NHTA) and later upgraded into Nagaland state. It is this merger with the (then) Naga Hills District, and its subsequent inclusion in Nagaland State, the Frontier Nagaland Movement now seeks to undo.

**Chang Dobashis in Mokokchung: Onglingaku and Imlong Chang**

During the colonial era, the post of *Dobashi* became a coveted one, and head-dobashi denoted the highest administrative post that was bestowed upon Nagas in the colonial setup. Literally, dobashi, an Assamese term, translated as ‘speaker of two languages’, or interpreter, and dobashis, thus appointed, were meant to translate communications between villages and colonial offices. But if this reads as a low-level clerical job, in actual practice dobashis’ duties well exceeded that as a ‘go-between’, and a dobashi ‘enjoyed much more powers and privileges’ (Ketholesie 2015: 1). They resided in administrative headquarters where they functioned as mediators and brokers between colonial offices and Naga villages, while they occasionally acted on their own in settling disputes, meting out judgments, and enacting new rules, and always with the implicit backing of British force. When the British left, the dobashi system stayed, and dobashis today assist the local administration and staff in local courts, where they are seen as ‘custodians of the traditional customs’ (Ketholesie 2015: 2).

In remarkable twist of history, two long-serving and influential head-dobashis in Mokokchung administrative headquarters, overseeing the Ao area, were not Aos, but Changs. They were Onglingaku and Imlong Chang. Tour diaries and administrative reports from the first half of the twentieth century are replete with references to Onglingaku and Imlong, both of whom were held in reverence by Ao villagers, to the
extent, in the case of Onglingaku, villagers reportedly insisted on carrying him to their village, when on a tour, rather than letting him walk. If ultimate power was vested in serving British officers, they knew his decisions were often in line with the judgments and opinions of his head-dobashi. Onglingaku, while a Chang was born in a mixed Chang and Ao village within the Mokokchung administration. Imlong Chang hailed from Sipongsang village in then unadministered Tuensang. Imlong’s father had served in France as part of the Naga labour corps, and had earned the respect and friendship of J.H. Hutton, who awarded a scholarship to study in a mission school to one of his sons. It was this opportunity that had brought Imlong to Mokokchung, where he soon picked up the Ao language, and later, on a stint in Kohima, also acquired fluency in Assamese.

Within a few years Imlong Chang became a flourishing businessman, owning a successful co-operative society in Mokokchung, turning himself into, ‘the salt mine of the Chang tribe’ (Takam 1988: 7). As his social standing grew, he eventually ascended to the position of head-dobashi, and became ‘one of the pioneers of Mokokchung town’ (ibid.) as it was then forming around the administrative headquarters. His voice was heard loud and far across the Ao area; he married an Ao girl, and became the treasurer of the Mokokchung Ao Baptist Church.

The observation that two members of the Chang Naga, today considered to be ‘backward’, occupied the highest non-British administrative position in Mokokchung and as such had considerable influence and sway over Ao Naga villages, now considered to be ‘advanced’, provides a remarkable counter-narrative to the historical domination of the Eastern Nagas by the Western Nagas, as is often alleged.
**Becoming Backward**

I open this section with three diagnostic expressions about the ‘free’ Nagas during the colonial era. The first two are from Hutton and Elwin respectively, both colonial administrators but who maintained oppositional views on the administration, or the absence thereof, of today’s Eastern Nagas. The third is from a Konyak politician, and a frontrunner of the demand for Frontier Nagaland.

‘There are still across the frontier happy tribes, have not yet touched pitch and become civilized like their administered brothers; which pay no house-tax, and do no reluctant coolie work, which known not the seed of conversion and the sword of dissension which missionaries bring, nor have yet been made to eat of that forbidden fruit which drove our first parents into fig-leaves and banishment. The diseases which follow like the jackals in the wake of invasion have not yet touched them… No paternal government forbids them the taking of heads or their fittest to survive, and no profane hand is raised against their customs of primaeval antiquity’ (Hutton 1921a: viii).

‘Even after the Naga Hills District had been brought under ordered Government, the wild and rugged tract to the north-east remained. It was populated by martial tribes; there were no communications and no money to build or maintain them; and despite constant urging that it was inconsistent to develop one part of the hills and neglect another, the Supreme Government felt that until there were men and funds available it would be better to leave this territory alone for the time being’ (Elwin 1961: 27).
‘It is a process of civilization that administration extends from administrated to un-administrated area… But still there was a vast tract of land between Naga Hills and Burma that was not administered… Today, the problems faced by the people of ENPO areas are that administratively we are more than 82 years behind [vis-à-vis the establishment of the Naga Hills District in 1866] and educationally much more behind than the other advanced tribes, namely Aos, Angamis, Lothas, and Semas… On the 1st December 1963, Nagaland state was inaugurated… that time there were hardly any graduate from Tuensang. Even matriculate were very few, so people of present ENPO area could not get into government service… [Till today] they [Eastern Nagas] have a social handicap as they have no tradition of education’ (Konyak 2012).

Behind each statement lies a particular evaluation of the nature of colonial rule among Nagas. Hutton, in a moment of self-reflection, lamented the cultural onslaught colonial administration and missionaries had effectuated in the Naga Hills District and considered the ‘free Nagas’ fortunate to have been spared from such cultural destruction, Elwin pointed towards the long-term inconsistency of administration and developing only a part of the Naga inhabited hills, while Chingwang Konyak diagnoses Eastern Nagaland’s non-colonial past as a prime cause behind their eventual incorporation into Nagaland state on unequal footings and for contemporary development deficits in the area. More broadly, most Eastern Nagas today do not congratulate themselves on their prolonged non-state existence, nor do they celebrate the comparatively lesser impact colonial rule had on its culture and traditions, but instead locate the roots of their current ‘backwardness’ in their non-colonial history. In this section, as well as the next, we discuss how Eastern Nagas
went from being perceived as ‘savage’ but ‘free’ and ‘happy’ to their contemporary self-articulation, as well as state-recognition, as ‘backward’, ‘undeveloped’, and ‘deficient.’ While not discounting that Eastern Nagas lag behind in terms of educational attainment and development vis-à-vis today’s Western Nagas, I argue that the ENPO, and the Frontier Nagaland Movement more widely, crucially pivots on a semantic politics of ‘backwardness’ to, first, claim access to government jobs and state resources within Nagaland state, and, secondly, to frame its demand for a separate state.

‘We are backward around here’, Lanu, a member of Noksen’s village council, explained as we walked the rough path leading to his wooden house. ‘See the state of our development. No proper houses and roads, electricity fluctuates always, and no jobs for our youth. The Chakhesang say they are backward [referring to my earlier fieldwork among them Lanu was aware of], but in reality they are not as much. We Changs are the real backward people.’ Across my stay in Noksen, and in the Chang area more widely, my respondents and friends often spoke of themselves as primitive, backward, and undeveloped, and compared themselves unfavorably with Western Nagas, whom they called ‘advanced.’ The ENPO, similarly and consistently, presents itself as the apex body of ‘six backward tribes’ inhabiting ‘four backward districts’, and projects as its ultimate goal the redemption of Eastern Nagas from their backwardness through the creation of a separate state.

In the debate on classifying communities, labels like ‘primitive’, ‘stone-age’, and ‘backward’ should have been long extinct. But if decades ago scholars agreed that such tags find their genesis in the colonial encounter (Asad 1973), are an ‘invention’ of the Western mind (Kuper 1988), and therefore best understood as imperialist myth, no
analyst of contemporary Nagaland (and perhaps India more widely) can afford to ignore
the evocative discourse of ‘backwardness’ in today’s public sphere. But whereas in the
past colonizers were the authors of Nagas’ savagery, backwardness, and primitivity; in
doing so reasserted their own self-proclaimed supremacy, and for doing so received flak
from post-colonial scholars (cf. Thong 2014), today a host of Naga communities, through
its apex bodies, leaders, and activists, actively author their own ‘backwardness’ and
contest, as did Lanu, the genuine ‘backwardness’ of other tribes. What must be accounted
for, then, is why this narrative of ‘backwardness’, rather than dying out alongside its use
in ethnological literature, came to acquire a new lease on life, particularly in Nagaland.

To start understanding Eastern Nagas’ infatuation with the idea and idiom of
backwardness as a source of self-referral, as though a trope of identity, we must situate
this mode of self-assertion within India’s wider post-colonial logic of governance in
which, if anything, the idea that all citizens should be governed, and afforded
opportunities, equally is seen as a strange idea indeed. From the 1950s onward, the
government systematically sets aside a certain percentage of government jobs and
university seats for communities listed as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and (some
time later) ‘Other Backward Classes’ on account of their historical deprivations and their
lagging behind in the path towards development. Initially such reservations hovered
around 20% of those jobs and seats available, but in the early 1990s such policies were
vastly expanded to 49.5% reservations for so-classed disadvantaged communities, in
addition to a host of other affirmative actions. From then onwards, to be perceived as
disadvantaged and historically backward could profoundly improve one’s educational
and professional prospects with communities across the country starting to vie for being recognized as such.

While such reservations did not bypass Nagaland, its pan-Indian classification had little impact in view of the state’s purely tribal demography. Absent, in Nagaland, are high or dominant castes, or a single community preponderating numerically, and at whose hands tribal communities were historically marginalized, as reported in other parts of the country. Locally, and from the very beginnings of Nagaland state, the competition over government jobs, university admissions, as well as development allocations, came to manifest itself as a contest within the fold of Scheduled Tribes’, whose status was bequeathed on all Naga tribes. But while in the pan-Indian classification, Scheduled Tribes are deemed collectively marginalized, it was precisely to this blanket-categorizations some Naga tribes, especially Eastern Nagas, came to object. What it concealed, their apex-bodies argued, were the differential trajectories, power hierarchies, and social inequalities that existed within the category of Scheduled Tribes within Nagaland. What was at stake in Nagaland, they insisted, was not a development discrepancy between upper or dominant castes and tribes that had to be evened out through reservations, but one that existed between developed and underdeveloped tribes.

In response, as early as 1977, the Nagaland Government added an extra layer to the pan-Indian reservation system and classified each Nagaland tribe as either ‘forward’ or ‘backward’, offering special quota for the latter. This ‘backward quota’, so-called, was pitched at 25%, then extended to 37%, and reserved for, besides the six Eastern Nagaland tribes, the Chakhesang, Pochury, Zeliang and a section of Sumis inhabiting Kiphiri district (in Eastern Nagaland). But if designed as a remedial measure, to be upheld
temporarily, soon this official backward / forward distinction etched itself at the Centre of Nagaland’s governance and politics, and where it became a bone of strife, litigation, and contentious politics. Some tribes initially classed as forward have since insisted on their re-classification as backward and access to its quota, other tribal apex bodies postulated that some of the tribes initially listed as backward were not, or no longer, ‘properly’ backward, while the ENPO, in turn, argued that Eastern Naga tribes were more backward compared to other Nagaland backward tribes and thence were entitled to a ‘very backward quota’ within the existing ‘backward quota’. Of the various demands levied, the Government assessed the ENPO’s argument positively, and, by adding yet another layer to Nagaland’s reservation policy, reserved 4% of the backward quota individually to each Naga tribe.

If a discourse of ‘backwardness’ became thus recognized and institutionalized through a specifically tailored reservation system, its idea and idiom was further reified through the establishment by the Nagaland Government, in 2003, of the Department of Underdeveloped Areas (DUDA), and which took on as its vision: ‘to cater to the special needs of the underdeveloped areas, aspires to and hopes to improve the condition of the backward areas and accelerate the pace of development, thereby bringing them at par with the rest of the State in the near future.’ Backwardness, clearly, was returned as a category of administration, identity, and politics.

But if backward quota is the remedial measure envisaged by the Nagaland Government to bring those tribes lagging behind, and especially Eastern Nagaland tribes, at par with ‘advanced tribes’, the ENPO now rejects this policy as providing the ultimate solution. Chingwang Konyak evaluated thus: ‘The reservation in Government jobs alone
cannot itself achieve the larger purpose of transforming social attitudes.’ It is to such ‘social attitudes’ displayed by Western Nagas, as Chingwang Konyak laments them, that we will presently turn.

Postings into the ‘wild east’

‘All Nagas are almost primitively simple people’, Kanwar Singh (1987: 23) wrote about his position as Kohima’s Superintendent of Police in 1953, ‘and the moment you land amongst them, you feel you have travelled back from the present atomic age to the primitive stage of human life.’ Singh’s remarks exemplify post-colonial ‘home-grown orientalism’ (Po’dar and Subba 1991), in which colonial stereotypes were extended by post-colonial administrators, at its most vehement. In so doing, Singh and other reproduced prejudices which painted Nagas as ‘those savages wild’ (Clark 1907: 1) and adjudged them as ‘very low in the scale of civilization’ (Godden 1898: 9). While such remarks – at once disparaging and depreciatory – would draw ready criticism today, images of Nagas as ‘backward’ and ‘wild’ and their lands as ‘remote’ and ‘far-flung’ portray a more subtle yet remarkable resilience in ‘Mainland’ understandings of the region. Remoteness, Ardener (2007: 214) explained us, is not an objective status, and while it has a position in topographical space, remoteness is ‘defined within a topological space whose features are expressed in a cultural vocabulary.’ Even recent depictions of Nagaland as a Forgotten Frontier (Glancey 2011), a BBC travel writer dubbing Nagas as the ‘last surviving headhunters’, Indian soldiers returning home with ‘stories of “treacherous” rebels hiding in bamboo groves’ (Baruah 2005), and the existing Inner
Line Permit ‘Mainland’ Indians require to enter the state, further reinforces images of Nagas as fierce and fickle and Nagaland as a distant place hard to access.

Many non-Naga officers posted to Nagaland tend to look upon their transfer as a ‘punishment posting’, a reprisal for mal-performance elsewhere rather than a promotion, even if their transfer may entail a raise in rank, and one that removes them far from the comforts of ‘civilization.’ Within Nagaland such officers are sometimes mocked as ‘suitcase administrators’ for their perceived reluctance to ever fully make home their quarters allotted in their hope – and vivacious string-pulling – of a swift transfer away. But if such negative stereotyping by ‘Mainland’ Indians, and a perceived reluctance to serve in Nagaland by officers is a grievance many Nagas articulate, this section turns the gaze inwards and draws attention to similar processes at work within Naga society. In a press conference, legislators from Eastern Nagaland’s Mon District appeal to Nagaland’s government servants, of all ranks, to stop viewing their transfers to Mon District as a ‘punishment’ but to consider working for ‘backward people’ a ‘privilege and a blessing.’ They alleged lack of dedication of Western Naga officers posted to Eastern Nagaland with them being ‘absent from their posing place for months, neglecting their duty.’ In Noksen, too, villagers complained about the absenteeism and the, to use Chingwang Konyak’s term, ‘social attitudes’ of government officers posted there, and amongst whom they discerned an absence of commitment to serve in the area. I will illustrate this by discussing the social persona of Apok, an Ao Naga who, at the time of my fieldwork, was the manager of the newly opened State Bank of India branch in Noksen town.

‘Surprised to see you in the village’, I remarked as I crossed ways with Apok in Noksen village. During his long career in the State Bank of India, Apok had worked in
places across Nagaland, and had been entrusted the task to open the branch in Noksen Town. The climb from the town to the village made him breathe heavily and sweat break out on his forehead. But Apok had come with a mission: to distribute passbooks to the Noksen villagers. For the past couple of months, Apok had worked hard to dissuade the villagers to stop storing their savings inside their houses and instead open bank accounts. But while he had managed to sway several villagers, those who had opened accounts had not bothered to collect their passbooks. It frustrated Apok: ‘without passbooks how will they be able to operate their accounts?’, he sighed. ‘But what can I do? This is the land of the Chang. They simply don’t understand.’ He then turned to Topong, my research assistant in the village, and expecting him to be from elsewhere inquired, in Nagamese, about his natal village. No sooner Apok realized that Topong was not an outsider, but a local he realized his mistake. He had talked lowly about a Chang in front of one. ‘See! Now you know’, Topong said after Apok had left hurriedly. ‘This is how Western Nagas think about us.’

I had met Apok on several earlier occasions and, in private, he was outspoken about his frustrations of being posted to Noksen town. He was senior in his job, he explained, ‘but still they posted me to a place as remote as this. Nothing is available here. And how can I expect my wife to live with me there? I told her she’d better stay in our village, and wait for my retirement, which will not take long anymore.’ What also concerned Apok was the security arrangement. While the bank was encircled by sandbagged gun emplacements, and guarded round the clock by Naga armed police, it did not offer Apok the security he desired. ‘This is the Wild East’, as he put it. ‘Undergrounds roam freely here, and carry weapons openly, despite the ceasefire.
Anything can happen anytime.’ On the whole, the ‘backwardness’, as he called it, of the Chang disturbed and frustrated him, and in a ‘civilization mission’ of his own he daily filled his pockets with sweets to dole out to children, but only to those who looked neat and clean. ‘All children come to me for sweets now’, he said, smilingly. ‘But if they look dirty, I won’t give them any. I tell them to go home, wash their faces, and then come and collect a sweet from me. In this way, I want to teach them hygiene.’ While ostensibly well-intended, it is in such reasoning and actions that Eastern Nagas discern attitudes of ‘superiority’ and ‘self-worth’ they resent in Western Naga officers posted among them.

Like Apok, many of the Western Naga officers I interviewed across Eastern Nagaland, expressed their displeasure about their postings, which they commonly described as ‘away from civilization’ in ways remarkably similar as Kanwar Singh (1987), cited above, did for Nagaland in its entirety. ‘It is just that we all have to take turns in this part of the state’, a Sub-Divisional Officer confessed, albeit only after half a bottle of adulterated rum had been shared between us. ‘This place is god-forsaken, and people still very backward’, he added. ‘I want to complete a task or two’, another officer posted in Tuensang, and slightly more spirited, said, ‘but after that I am gone. I have already approached the MLA from my constituency to help me in getting a transfer. It is difficult to live around here for long.’ Adopting a logic of his own, another officer was able to identify a brighter side of his posting in Eastern Nagaland: ‘Among backward tribes my duties occupy only a fraction of my time as people are hardly educated here. There are only few petitions, demands, and complications I have to deal with. I can easily go home [to Kohima] and spend time with my family without anyone missing my absence here.’ He contrasted this experience with his various postings in Western
Nagaland: ‘There everyone is running after the government, complaining and demanding this and that. We hardly get time to even sleep.’

Exceptions, however, were certainly there. At the time of my fieldwork, Noksen town’s sub-divisional officer was widely respected by the Noksen villagers, and praised for occupying his quarters not alone - ‘as though a bachelor’ as villagers remarked about those officers who refused to bring their families - but with his pregnant wife and two small children. The Noksen villagers explained his unusual commitment in kinship terms. While the officer was an Ao Naga, as was his wife, his mother was Chang. ‘When he first arrived here’, a Dobashi told me, ‘we already knew about his family background. We told him: ‘since you have some Chang blood running in your veins, we have high expectations of you.’

Complexities and Tensions within Eastern Nagaland

If the story of Frontier Nagaland emerges as a tale of Eastern Naga tribes trying to redeem themselves from their developmental ‘backwardness’ and the ‘discrimination’ and ‘domination’ they experience at the hands of Western Nagas, what this political coming together of the six Eastern Nagaland tribe conceals is longstanding animosities and rivalries within, and which made some of my respondents doubt the viability of Frontier Nagaland in the long run. ‘Differences are currently kept under the surface as Frontier Nagaland can only emerge if Eastern Nagas stand united’, one Chang public leader assessed, then continuing: ‘But what will happen if we have to run our own state? Who will lead? Who will follow? Soon, it will be Konyaks against Changs, Yimchungers against Khiamiuangangs, and tribalism everywhere.’
‘Tribes go headhunting’, a 1990 newspaper headline read. ‘The raid had all the ingredients of a bloodcurdling horror-film. War-cries resonated in the stillness of the night as the village in Tuensang District inhabited by Chang tribesmen was attacked by the warriors who belonged to the fierce tribe of Konyaks, who made up the backbone of the underground insurgent group: the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN).’

The clash was about Tobu town, and whether it belonged to the Chang, who first established it, or the Konyak, whose members preponderated numerically in the area. The disagreement was an old one, and anger and resentment long cropped up had come to burst. ‘While most of the Chang men managed to escape into the surrounding forests, the marauders went away with nearly 40 heads as trophies… The very next day, August 18, the Chang men killed three Konyak tribesmen including a policeman in swift reprisal.’

The report concludes by stating that ‘The rivalry of the both tribes is however an old one. And the mutual distrust and hatred is such that for purchasing essential goods or even for medical attention, both tribesmen prefer to skirt each other’s areas and travel much longer distances.’

‘I was still a child when the Tobu clashes happened’, Toshi, residing in Noksen town, recounted. ‘What I remember were the rumours. Heads were hunted, it was said, and that the Konyaks were on their way to Noksen.’ Toshi’s father, a dobashi, took charge of distributing weapons to both Noksen town and village dwellers, and positioned them strategically to ward of a possible Konyak attack. Toshi and his siblings were taken

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deep in the jungle by their mother to seek refuge, to wait for the violence to cease. ‘But the Konyaks never came to Noksen. It was just rumour’, Toshi continued. ‘Later we learned that similar rumours had spread to the Konyak area. That the Changs were advancing, bent on revenge over the Tobu killings. Konyak villages too had armed themselves and sent their women and children to safety in the jungle.’ The Chang-Konyak clashes around Tobu, of course, had not been rumour, and have gone down as the last inter-tribal headhunting episode among Nagas. The history and territory of Tobu, meanwhile, remains disputed, even though nearly all Changs have since left the place.

The Chang-Konyak had far-reaching, even unexpected, consequences. Back then, it made Abou join the NNC where he soon ascended to the position of Secretary of the NNC of Chang region. In the earlier days of the conflict, Chang underground cadres were many, and in Thongti Chang had the first Commander-in-Chief of the Naga Armed Forces. But Thongti Chang came overground (and was later assassinated), taking most Chang cadres with him, thus reducing the Chang sway in the underground network. This, Abou explained, was a prime reason for the Chang ‘losing’ Tobu later: ‘Many Konyaks were part of the NSCN, and the NSCN therefore sided with the Konyak during the Tobu clashes which gave them the upper-hand. It was to restore the underground balance between Konyak and Chang that I joined the NNC.’ During the day, Abou worked as a primary school teacher, but at night he labored tirelessly to revive the NNC in the Chang region, much to the detriment of his wife who, fearing the Indian Army would find out about her husband’s activities, burned his correspondence and eventually convinced him, three years later, to resign from the NNC. Few Changs today wish to talk about the
killings that took place around Tobu, citing the need for communal harmony in view of the statehood demand. Yet, resentment lingers.

But while the Chang-Konyak clashes were certainly the bloodiest in recent Eastern Nagaland’s history, there are other inter-tribal disputes and tensions. Some time after I had left the field a land dispute between the Chang and the Yimchunger flared up, and quickly turned violent. Soon, the Nagaland Tribes Council arrived in Tuensang Town to mediate between the opposing parties, but only to find the violence escalating. They released a statement, which said:

‘The team saw how the properties were savagely burnt and damaged at Tuensang town and Saddle village some days ago. While our team was still in Tuensang town, a teenager, Chang, was kidnapped and murdered. A mob also ransacked the deputy commissioner’s office and the police had to resort to blank firing to disperse the protesters.’

Several Yimchunger were also murdered, including a policeman. ‘The situation is very bad’, my Chang friends told me as I contacted them from afar. ‘It is full-on tribalism’, one of them said. Later, a truce was signed by the Chang and Yimchunger tribal councils, but the land-dispute lingers. Meanwhile, within the fold of a Yimchunger simmers another controversy as a section of them, who call themselves Tikhir, wish to separate from the Yimchunger and be recognized as a tribe of its own, resulting, over the past years, in several assassinations, kidnappings, and strikes. Then there is the Khiamiungan tribe, interspersed between India and Myanmar, and whose members are considered the

most ‘backward’, even among Eastern Nagas, whose elite often employs Khiamniungan
boys and girls as domestic servants. What will their status be in the envisaged new state?

Is, then, the joint statehood demand by Eastern Naga tribes a travesty, a political
project doomed in the long run by inter-tribal divisions and differences? Will shared
experiences of ‘backwardness’ and negligence, which nourish an ever feeble united
Eastern Nagas political front, work as a sustainable unifier once Frontier Nagaland is
created? Or will such unity quickly give way to inter-tribal contests and competition over
land and leadership? For the moment, these questions just remain.

Integration and Unity, not Bifurcation

The demand for Frontier Nagaland evidently goes against the grain of the wider Naga
Movement which seeks, at the minimum, the political integration of Naga inhabited areas
lying within India. The agitation for Frontier Nagaland was thence widely criticized for
undermining the larger ‘Naga cause’; ‘they [the ENPO] cannot be said to be in support of
the integration issue while they are demanding a separate state of their own’ (Shonreiphy
2014: 44). Or in the words of a Nagaland Minister: ‘The Naga people – be it the
NSCN(IM) or the NSCN(K) and NNC – they all had been fighting for the sovereignty of
the Nagas, whereas some group [now] tries to divide the Nagas’ (cited in Kangla 04-03-
2011). Nagas’ underground leadership, indeed, strongly opposes the demand for Frontier
Nagaland, and even if the NSCN-IM, in its dialogues with the Centre, apparently
professes readiness to absolve its demand for absolute territorial sovereignty, it remains
firm on the unification for Naga territories within India:
‘We will never compromise on our demand for the reunification of the Naga homeland. We were divided first by the British and then India perpetuated the divisions. The NSCN wants a unified Naga homeland and we will either have it or we will fight for it’ (Muivah cited in Samaddar 2009: 182).

This desire to unify Naga lands within India, rather than only an underground demand, finds articulation across the Naga political spectrum. A resolution unanimously adopted by the Nagaland Assembly in 1994 reads:

‘Whereas, by quirk of history, the Naga-inhabited areas have been disintegrated and scattered under different administrative units without the knowledge and consent of the Nagas…Whereas, the Nagas irrespective of territorial barriers have strong desire to come together under one administrative roof…the Assembly, therefore, resolves to urge upon the Government of India and all concerned to help the Nagas achieve this desired goal…’ (Cited in Chasie 2005: 61).

Naga civil societies, too, demand this, and, in 2010, the Naga Hoho – a pan Naga apex body – went so far as to state that ‘henceforth, we derecognize any artificial boundary lines drawn across our ancestral lands in the so-called Manipur state’, while within Manipur, Naga civil bodies submitted multiple memoranda to the Centre to express ‘the desire and aspiration of the Nagas to live together as a people under one political roof’, and that this is justified by ‘historical facts’ (cited in Shonreiphy 2014: 44). But if the prospect of Naga integration remains staunchly opposed by the states potentially affected by the redrawing of state boundaries, and whose governments invariably insist on the integrity of their territories, the current demand for Frontier Nagaland now adds further complexities to the political aspiration of seeing Naga territories united administratively.
and politically. ‘Our struggle is for greater Nagalim, not smaller Nagaland’, as one underground cadre put it to me succinctly.

Within Nagaland, most Western Nagas, too, object strongly to any prospect of Frontier Nagaland emerging. During the course of my fieldwork, Noksen played host to the 22nd Chang Gazetted Officers Meet, and whose chief guest was Nagaland’s (then) chief-secretary Alemtemshi Jamir, a ‘western’ Naga hailing from Mokokchung District. In the meeting he criticized the Frontier Nagaland Movement. I quote him at some length:

‘I am going to speak from my heart, and there might be certain things which you [the Chang Gazetted Officers] might not like to hear, but in that case please bear with me… The ENPO is in confusion, because when they submit their representations I observed that 99.99% of their grievances have to do with development. Such development issues can be solved with proper planning, good leadership and special packages. We Nagas cannot live divided. If we are not united we will fall. That is why this statehood demand hurts me.

He then continued:

‘I tell you, Changs are not backward. One of the first wealthy families of Mokokchung was a Chang family [Imlong Chang, quoted above]. He was richer than all the Aos. We are not evaluating properly. This is not to say there is no gap. Missionaries in Eastern Nagaland arrived later compared to the rest of the state. It was not the British administrators but missionaries that brought education. This gap needs to be closed. It is not a development gap but a historical gap, which, I believe, can be bridged with sincere effort. The problem, therefore, is a mental
state. There is nothing exceptionally less in Eastern Nagaland compared to other parts of Nagaland, only a historical gap. You Chang officers should show leadership to help us bridge this gap. You cannot rely on your politicians, whose visions only go so far as the next elections.

He eventually concluded:

‘This statehood claim is nonsense. What will a separate state bring? It will only divide. The Chang and the Ao cannot live separately. We share folklore and so many historical relations. Does this need to be stopped? Some of you might not like to hear this, but as I said in the beginning, I am speaking from my heart today.’

Most of the Chang officers I spoke to after the meeting indeed did not agree: ‘Western Naga officers can speak very sweet, but their words and actions do not match. We will continue to struggle for Frontier Nagaland until we get it.’