INTRODUCTION
EXPLORING TERRITORIALITY AND ITS HISTORIES

In the political discussions on the North-East, in so far as the legitimacy of the Indian state is concerned, there is usually a fierce debate about whether or not the contemporary politics could be termed a continuation of colonial occupation or a post-colonial one. The 'illegitimacy' of the Indian state's takeover of Manipur, the right to self-determination of the Nagas, demand for a sovereign state in Assam – each is symptomatic of the different voices challenging the legitimacy of the Indian state. Most of these voices often position themselves in the vocabulary of 'national contradiction' or 'nationality struggle'. On the other hand, in its nationalistic narrative the integrity of an Indian national unity is always already assumed, which envisions assimilating the peoples of the region into the 'mainstream'. And this is often quoted as reasonable ground to dismiss claims for more autonomy or independentist voices. Of course, there are many more voices other than this simplistic binary. But that does not diminish the strong political divide between the two opposite political positions.

Most of these political articulations are about territory and identity.¹ This is, of course, not exceptional to the region given the history of brutal conflicts that have been fought in the name of territory. Even when such conflicts are not directly about controlling a particular territory, they are linked to the question of territoriality since the principal vocabulary of collective political articulation implicates territoriality. The Indian state’s exercise to maintain the sovereign territory of the nation, the Manipuri nationalists’ articulation for the preservation of ‘territorial integrity’, the Nagas’ demand to unify all the ‘Naga inhabited areas’ under one political unit are all examples of collective political voices in which territory is the key central element.

Very often, one finds that these political articulations about territory take recourse to a primordial right. An important feature of this territorial claim is to consider it as a natural phenomenon, historyless, and therefore, self-evident and unquestionable. In the process, this projection masks the relevant role of power and history. Nevertheless, once a particular territory has been identified, it forms a point of reference for the collective identity. At the same time, claiming the same geographical location on the surface of the earth by more than one party often leads to conflict over that territory. The important role of territoriality for identity formation in the North-East is generally explained by taking recourse to politico-cultural obsession of the ‘tribals’ with territory. This has marred the imagery of the North-East. Interestingly, some even argue that the inevitability of the resultant protracted violence is a consequence of the abrupt modernization that the peoples of the region have undergone.

B.P. Singh writes,

> Along with politicization, there was a very sudden exposure of particularly the tribals in remote hill areas to a complex modern civilization. The tribes of head hunters were exposed to writing and argument, the scantily clad tribes were initiated to the comforts of tropical and woollen garments, the nomadic tribes who had not even handled a bullock cart were given training to drive jeeps and trucks, the practitioners of slash-and-burn methods in cultivation were imparted virtues of permanent cultivation, high yielding crops and irrigation. And all these have been achieved in one or two generations. A certain degree of conflict and violence, was thus, inevitable in this process of change.

This may in fact be linked to an observation made by Thongchai Winichakul that in most of the Southeast Asian cultures soil is crucial in human genesis and civilization. He points out that the concept of motherland is deeply rooted in various forms. He traces a continuity of the concept of motherland from the premodern times in the form of origin myths to the contemporary period of association with the geo-body. As he puts it, “The geo-body supplies the new objectification for the beloved motherland or common soil and, reciprocally, acquires the human loyalty originally given to the soil. As the soil had been an identification of commonality, the geo-body has been given the concrete magnitude of the soil while it makes itself an identification of commonality.” Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1994, p. 133. The premodern ways of associating with land and the contemporary articulations of motherland may not be the same. Some aspect of the ‘premodern’ modes of associating with land would be discussed in Chapter 6 ‘Origin Narratives and Territoriality’. For Thongchai, the geo-body of a nation is an effect of modern geographical discourse, with map as the primary technology. He uses the term geo-body to signify its difference from territory. Territory, in his sense, seems to be a mere container rather than an active process. Moreover, my use of the term geo-body differs from his since map forms only one of the technologies and practices of territoriality in this study.

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Within the myriad historical political conflicts, colonialism comes to be a reminder of claims and counter-claims. From the ‘unknown’, ‘warlike’, ‘savage’ frontier in the beginning of the British interest in the early part of the nineteenth century, to the ‘threatened’ frontier during the Second World War, the frontier has become an ‘insurgent’ region. From a land of *terra incognita* it has become the land of the exotic and the unknown - a remote region far from the psyche of ‘mainstream’ imagination. It is with these concerns that I begin to look at history, to search for those moments of becoming, an ‘origin’, a time of the making. But I do realise, as Mary Louise Pratt says, “Arguments about origins are notoriously pointless.” Especially, in the context of the region when exclusive ethnicity and territoriality have been made to become the only acceptable forms of articulation, questions of history are highly contested.

Administrative unification on the one hand and social heterogeneity on the other mark the dichotomous feature of the North-East of India. My study is not a historical exploration of accounting for these territorial claims. Nor does it study the contemporary politics that gives rise to such territorialisation. My main focus, instead, is to study the constitution of territorialities within the context of British colonialism in the region, and to look at territorialities as complex practices and processes rather than simple taken-for-granted natural entities.

The question of territoriality is very closely related to modern forms of polity, for instance, the nation. The notion of territorial integrity, by which it means an absence of territorial violation, is generally taken to be a matter of inter-national affair. But it could very well take the form of group assertion, as is the case in contemporary North-East. And those groups of people, who aspire to have a nation of their own, or rather whose political orientations are national in character, maintain the significance of geography or territoriality as a part of their social and political being. This seems to be one of the main reasons why the question of territoriality is so significantly fought over in the North-East of India, where one finds multitudes of claims to being a nation-in-the-making. At another level, temporality rather

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4 There are many books and articles that suggest this contemporary imagery. For instance, see Phanjoubam _Tarapot_, *Insurgent North Eastern Region of India*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1996.

than spatiality is the modern form of organising the everyday social memories. Or, in other words, there is an obsessive orientation to ‘history’. Nation-state may attempt to maintain a balance of the two in order to maintain its existence. It is usually pointed out that in ‘primitive’ societies, or non-literate societies, geography, or spatial ordering plays a more important role in its social function rather than time as in the case of modern societies. This assertion, if one were to accept it, may lead us to question if the significance of territoriality in the contemporary North-East is a re-invigoration of its ‘primitive’, non-literate past. A region characterised as a habitat inhabited by ‘tribes’ may lead us to such an easy connection. This, however, poses a logical discordance – if the territories of the nation are modern, they cannot be the same as that of the ‘primitive’ territories. Moreover, such a simple connection misses an important historical dimension. If the modern and ‘primitive’ territories are not the same, how did it change? In this context, one must keep in mind David Harvey’s observation: “Space and time are neither absolute nor external to processes but are contingent and contained with them. There are multiple spaces and times (and space-times) implicated in different physical, biological, and social processes. . . . Processes do not operate in but actively construct space and time and in so doing define distinctive scales for their development.”

The specificity of the North-East is a case that is commonly accepted. The creation of a union ministry, specifically for the North-East, is good enough reason to accept that there is a unified vision through which the region is looked at from the outside. Many scholars have pointed out the lingering connections between independent India’s policy frameworks and the colonial past. In the context of the North-East, this lineage has been drawn out much more sharply. In fact, the connection, even continuation, between the colonial practices of maintaining the territory as a frontier and the post-colonial Indian state’s policies has been pointed out. In the sphere of strategic policy framing there seems to be far greater continuation. My attempt, here, is not so much to explore the linkages between colonialism and post-colonial Indian state’s policies. But it can be argued that without understanding how colonialism created and ruled the North-East as a frontier, the post-colonial Indian state’s

attitude towards the region cannot be understood. In this light, it would be important to historically explore the connection between the meanings and the practices of frontier and the state’s overwhelmingly militaristic approach. In other words, it is significant to ask if there is a relationship between violence and practices of colonial control in the frontier.

**NORTH-EAST: IMAGERY AND HISTORY**

The Indo-Burma region, which is described as the connecting zone between South Asia and Southeast Asia, is commonly visualised as a mountainous, isolated tract. Most of the writings on the region would point out the topography to depict the setting of historical events. These imageries of the place and the people were presaged in the ways in which colonial policies were formed and articulated. As a nineteenth century text depicted,

> The general appearance of Assam is that of a number of irregular, insulated hills, at short distances, clothed with trees and verdure to their very summits, while to the north and east, lofty mountains rise abruptly, like a wall, to the height of from 5 to 6000 feet above the adjacent plains. . . . The western mountains, and part of those to the north, are inhabited by a fierce race consisting of two tribes, the Abors and the Meshness, of whom little is known. 7

Even after taking over large tracts of the North-East frontier of Bengal within the direct administrative control of the British, frontier continued to exist both administratively as well as in representations. This fuzziness of the territory had a close relationship with the forms of rule through temporary measures like military operations termed punitive expeditions, use of ‘princely states’ and chiefs of the ‘hill-tribes’, etc. The practice of ‘non-interference’ or ‘indirect rule’ was not specific to colonial rule in this frontier; they were practiced in other parts of the British Indian empire as well. But the specificity, here, is not merely the continuance of these modes of colonial control but the scale. A large part of the frontier was ruled by these ‘temporary’ measures throughout the course of the colonial period and, in fact,

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some areas were never explored though included within the frontier. In other words, this form of rule could be argued as an exception in other areas but in the North-East frontier this was the norm. These modes of control continued till the end of colonial period in the form of Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas and then transformed into the administrative structure of the nascent Indian state as well. The attempt here is to explore these forms of colonial practices, which were other than direct administration. My contention is that the peripherisation through the imagery of the frontier and the characterisation of the people, who inhabit this territory, has a history. The territoriality encompassed by the nomenclature of the North-East frontier has been enmeshed with the larger histories of colonialism and empire-building. These historical processes have to be located within the histories of two expanding empires – the British Indian and the Burmese in which the territoriality that came to be understood as the North-East frontier became a zone of connection and contestation between the two.

The use of the concept called frontier in post-colonial Indian historiography both as an administrative unit as well as to mean a peripheral, marginal zone, encompassing the ‘region’ within the Indian national territoriality, throws up a lot of important and complex relationship between the colonial and the post-colonial in so far as the ordering and controlling of spatial imaginations are concerned. Furthermore, ascribing certain territoriality as frontier produces certain imageries of the area. The perception of an unfamiliar territoriality of the areas east of Bengal to the British colonisers and the subsequent frontierization of the area, inhabited by ‘wild’, ‘barbaric’, ‘warlike’, ‘savages’ in the colonial imagery have led to a strong basis for

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8 Excluded Areas directly descended from an earlier phrase called the ‘Backward Tracts’. By Excluded Areas it meant that the areas enumerated as such in the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order 1936 are excluded from the operation of the said Act. Instead, these areas were directly administered by the Governor. The elected Ministry has no jurisdiction over them. A distinctive feature of the Excluded Areas of Assam from elsewhere in India was that these areas formed a block, mostly on the borders but also within Assam. The Excluded Areas of Assam were as follows. On the north Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract, on the east Tirap Frontier Tract, the Naga Hills District, and the Lushai Hills. Manipur, on the east, being a ‘princely state’ was outside the Constitution altogether. Then, the North Cachar Sub-Division of the Cachar District was also an Excluded Area. There were three Partially Excluded Areas, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills and the Mikir Hills. The term Partially Excluded, a legislative expression, invented for the purposes of the said Act meant that they had elected representative in the Legislature and the Ministry was primarily responsible for the administration but the Governor would be charged with a special responsibility for their ‘peace and good government’. Robert Reid, ‘The Excluded Areas of Assam,’ The Geographical Journal, Vol. 103, No. 1/2, Jan.-Feb., 1944, 18-29. Also see Robert Reid, History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883-1941, Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1942.
producing a history to look at the Bengal delta as the end of ‘civilized’ territoriality. It is tempting to conclude from such an observation to demonstrate how the Bengal deltaic area has been the limits of historical processes and the area (north) east of it has always remained throughout as the frontier (of) history.9 Pushing the frontier further eastward within the British period, which has become the frame of reference in post-colonial writings on South Asia, takes for granted the ‘naturalness’ of these areas as marginalised and on the periphery, invoking one of the meanings alluded to frontier as an outpost. Whatever the various origins and associations of these terms might have been, two characteristics have become dominant—a strong normative content, and a formidable resistance to conceptual clarification. By looking at these areas as frontiers, it assumes the presence of a centre elsewhere. If we are to challenge these assumptions and the inherited models, a few tasks become important. First, to see how the frontier(s) come into being, and secondly, by looking at the complex histories of building an empire, how we can shift the focus to the sites where the frontiers are being created and practiced. The purpose, here, is not to look at the area east of Bengal as an isolated, self-contained territory without any connection to the neighbouring areas. But at the same time, it is also not to see the area east of Bengal as “simply an extension of India and Bengal”,10 within a larger cultural imagination of Brahmanic, Buddhist or Sanskrit influences called Farther India.11 Such a conception, rather than showing the inter-connected

9 See Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204 – 1760*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. XXII – XXIII. The hills on the north and east of the Bengal plains were considered in colonial writings as the natural limits of the ‘Indian Empire’. At the same time, the extension of political control beyond the mountain ranges, running southwards from the Himalayas is explained as a measure to “repress the marauding by the hill-men.” Bampfylde Fuller, *The Empire of India*, London: Sir Issac Pitman & Sons, 1913, p. 2. Even when the linkages between the Bengal plains and the hills are written about, they are generally perceived to be flowing from the former to the latter. As P.J. Marshall puts it “a variety of peoples who were ethnically distinct from the Bengalis on the plains lived in these hills: Kochs in the far north; Garos, Khasis and Cacharis in the spur north of Sylhet; and Tripuras, Reangs, Chakmas and Kukis to the south. . . . [T]here was a long history of penetration of the hills by ideas, settlers and trade [from the plains].” P. J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead, Eastern India 1740 – 1828*, The New Cambridge History of India, II.2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 42-3.


11 For a colonial foundation on the idea of Farther India see F. Mason, *Burmah, its People and Natural Productions, or Notes on the Nations, Fauna, Flora and Minerals of Tenasserim, Pegu and Burmah*, with systematic Catalogues of the known mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, insects, mollusks, crustaceans, annelids, radiates, plants and minerals, with vernacular names, Rangoon: Thos. Stowe Ranney; London: Trubner & Co.; New York: Phynney, Blakeman & Mason, 1860. Some people challenged this concept of Farther India as Max and Bertha Ferrars did: “The phrase Further India gives point to a wide misconception. The surprise of so many persons on finding that the Burmans have no caste – to take the commonest instance – betrays the notion that Burma is part of India. . . . In respect of climate, flora and fauna, Further India is not
histories, reproduces the peripheral model. Other scholars like Sanjib Baruah seems to suggest that the making of the North-East as a frontier was accidental: “Northeast India seemed destined for a frontier model of development with the advent of British colonial rule and the ‘discovery’ of tea.” He acknowledges that “frontiers are not natural, they are man-made.” At the same time, the making of frontiers is explained merely through geo-political logic: “Unequal political power, and often conquest, turns territories into frontiers for other people.” And in turn, there is a deterministic logic that follows: “It is not surprising therefore that political resistance in a frontier typically makes an appeal to the principle of self-determination. Yet once an area becomes a frontier, the process is not easily reversed.”

Such an understanding fails to look at the complex processes through which frontiers are made and falls into what John Agnew calls the ‘territorial trap’ – a state centred account of spatiality of power in which territoriality is inextricably linked to state.

As many scholars have pointed out, colonialism was about politics of difference, how difference was produced and reproduced, maintained and contested. Much of the focus in this literature on colonial ‘rule of difference’ or ‘politics of difference’ is about cultural differences of race, gender, religion, etc., which was made possible by the new systems of classification at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. This production of ‘cultural’ differences under colonialism could be linked to Neil Smith’s theoretical formulation of capitalism and its associated production of uneven
geographies or territorialities. Once we establish that the creation of the frontier was a part of the process of colonial expansion, can we then begin to see the ways in which the frontier operated, controlled, practised? In order to understand some of these historical processes there is a need to interrogate the following questions. What is the history of territory making through which the territoriality of the North-East frontier was produced and reproduced? What are the linkages and foundations of identities to be formed and what are the limits and coherence of the generic categories that transform into concrete larger identity orientations through the mediation of colonialism? How do we write a history, which opens up the possibilities of looking beyond the state-centric narratives?

The attempt, here, is to explore the interlinked historical processes of constructing territorialities to create artificially marked distinct and demarcated geo-bodies, and control populations through various classificatory practices. If the border is so important in defining the limits of the modern state’s sovereignty, there is a need to look at it as the central protagonist. Studying the different regimes of territoriality and identity during colonialism in the frontier is an entry point to question and move beyond the challenges of history-writing confined by the boundaries of the nation. My attempt is to study the historical trajectories of spatial reorganisations and the intersections with social ordering, the negotiations and contestations and the transformations brought by colonialism. By looking at the historical linkages both temporally and spatially beyond the confines of the new national boundaries, it is an attempt at writing ‘connected histories’.

**TERRITORY**

The term North-East (in the context of India) signifies various meanings. This may be true of any territory in general. As David Delaney argues, “If a territory is a kind of thing, an artefact, it is a meaningful thing, an artefact that is understood as ‘containing’ and

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‘conveying' various sorts of meaning.” According to him, “Territories are not only spatial entities but also communicative devices.” He notes that a territory is ‘a bounded meaningful space’. And, territoruality “refers more to the relationship between territories and some other social phenomena. It draws attention to the territorial aspects, conditions, or implications of something else.” Territoriality is always implicated in the creation, circulation and interpretation of meaning. Apart from being meaningful what distinguishes territory from other enclosed space is that it is also about power and “the contingencies of their relationship”. Delaney calls ‘grammar of territory’ to refer to an emphasis to “see territories as more than static, inert things and instead focuses on the dynamic social processes and practices through and in relation to which territorial forms emerge or are transformed.” Or, in other words, the shift from territory as a product, object to territoriality as practices or processes. He argues that “[f]ar from being a timeless, universal feature of human social existence, territory is deeply historical (and historically contingent) in a number of ways.” Territory not only conveys meanings but these meanings are also open to various interpretations. Modern territory, particularly, is often textually represented and even the most obvious meanings are open to reinterpretation in light of authoritative texts like legal statutes or constitutions or competing interpretative frameworks. As he argues, “Much of the dynamism of modern territory is related to this textuality and interpretability.” Following from this argument, the term North-East can be used in the sense of territory or territoruality. Territory can refer to an object, or a product but the territoriality of the North-East would allow for the possibility of looking at the practices and the processes involved. Territoriality, understood in this sense, then, has been applied, here, to refer to the processes involved in the making and maintenance of a territory called the North-East frontier by the British Indian empire. But before we move on further let us have a look at the various theoretical aspects involved with the concept of territory.

The word territory is sometimes used as synonymous with place or space. But one dominant usage has a particular political connotation, say in the exercise of power to control certain place. The management and control of space by groups give specific meanings, thus,

producing particular types of spatialities. In this sense, territoriality is a particular use of space. In the contemporary usage, territory is often associated with the spatial organisations of the modern state with its associated absolute claims over its population and the desire to have well-defined boundaries.\(^{18}\) In Achim von Oppen's words, “[T]erritoriality [is] a particular construction of space, based on a radical idea of geographical surface – territory in the strict sense, [is] surrounded and effectively defined by a continuous boundary that divides a supposedly homogenous inside from an utterly different outside.”\(^{19}\) This approach often tends to concentrate its focus on the sovereignty of state and elevates the sanctity of territoriality, which has led to look at territory mostly from the viewpoint of either the machinations of a particular state or inter-state relations. This leads to see the territorial state form without its historical specificities. Moreover, the territorial state, with its concomitant aspiration to have a well-demarcated boundary, is often justified as a means of providing security to those ‘inside’ from the ‘outside’ threats.

This focus on the territorial state has been challenged by studying human territoriality in relation to individual and organizational strategies. Robert D. Sack defined human territoriality as: “By human territoriality I mean the attempt to affect, influence, or control actions and interactions (of people, things, and relationships) by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a geographic area. This definition applies whether such attempts are made by individuals or by groups, and it applies at any scale from the room to the international arena.”\(^{20}\) According to him, territoriality involves three basic human behaviours – a form of classification by area, a form of communication by boundary, and an attempt at enforcing. He asserts that territoriality as the “basic geographical expression of influence and power” is always socially or humanly constructed. “[B]ecause it is a product of social


context, whatever is said about it . . . can have normative implications affixed to it and can lead back to a social context."\(^{21}\)

In both of these approaches, according to Mattias Kärholm, territoriality has been preoccupied with the "actors of territoriality rather than with the territories or the consequences of territorial production."\(^{22}\) Looking at territory in relationship to social forces has been best described in David Harvey’s words: "Territorialization is, in the end, an outcome of political struggles and decisions made in a context of technological and political-economic conditions."\(^{23}\)

In the historiography of South Asia, the focus on territory has tended to be largely based on inter-state conflicts. The numerous works on the Indo-China border dispute, and the emotive articulations in the case of Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh, is a testimony to that obsession. Moreover, they also fall easily into either a nationalistic account of territoriality or the ‘naturalness’ of these territories. The historicity of how these territories were formed is rarely discussed.\(^{24}\) There have been works, which look at the trans-national networks and connections without putting the state as the prime focus.\(^{25}\) There are different forms of territorial configurations and assemblages that shape human social life, relationships, and


\(^{23}\) David Harvey, Spaces of Hope, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, p. 75.


\(^{25}\) See Willem van Schendel and Itty Abraham, eds., Illicit Flows and Criminal Things: States, Borders, and the Other Side of Globalization, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005. At the same time, P. Hirst reminds us, “Territory still matters. States remain the most effective governors of populations. . . . The powers to exclude, to tax, and to define political rights are those over which states acquired a monopoly in the seventeenth century. They remain the essentials of state power and explain why state sovereignty survives today and why it is indispensable to the international order”. P. Hirst, Space and Power: Politics, War and Architecture, Cambridge: Polity, 2005, p. 45. Nevertheless, as Delaney argues “[T]he 200 or so territorial spaces that constitute the international system of states do not exhaust the forms that territory takes in the modern world.” Delaney, Territory, p. 4.
interactions. One can see different innumerable territorialities both within and above the nation-state.

It is now commonly accepted, in the academic circle, that territoriality is a social, political, economic and cultural process that implicates not only place but also time.\textsuperscript{26} But it is also a common practice to look at territories as natural thus avoiding the need to historicise. This, in turn, obfuscates the politics and the historical nature of the production and the reproduction of territories. A historically informed interrogation of territories will bring to light the socially constructed and ideologically grounded nature of territorialities.

Etymologically, territory has a long and chequered history. It is usually considered that its origin is from the political concept \textit{territorium} in Latin to describe either foreign states or the area surrounding a town or under its jurisdiction. From the 15th century, the words \textit{terratorium} in Latin and the French \textit{terroir} referred to a district of certain geological and/or geographical qualities. By the 1950s and the 1960s territory began to denote a human behavioural phenomenon in the social and behavioural sciences. At the same time, the concept was also used in a political sense to mean an intentional power strategy and a way of exerting administrative and spatial influence in society. Since the 1960s the concept has been studied mostly in two senses – human territoriality and politico-geographical territoriality.\textsuperscript{27} Nevertheless, William E. Connolly gives us a more remarkable story:

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\item \textsuperscript{26} Achille Mbembe differentiates place and territory in the following way: “[A] place is the order according to which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. A place . . . is an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies a stability. As for a territory, it is fundamentally an intersection of moving bodies. It is defined essentially by the set of movements that take place within it. Seen in this way, it is a set of possibilities that historically situated actors constantly resist or realize.” Achille Mbembe, ‘At the Edge of the world: Boundaries, Territoriality, and Sovereignty in Africa’, transl. Steven Rendall, \textit{Public Culture}, 12, 1, 2000, p. 261. See Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}, trans. Steven Rendall, Bekeley: University of California Press, 1984; Henri Lefebvre, \textit{The Production of Space}, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Kärrholm, ‘The Materiality of Territorial Production’, p. 438. As David Armitage argues any search for origins is fraught with a basic conceptual ambiguity. In his words, “An origin can be either a beginning or a cause, a logical and chronological \textit{terminus a quo}, or the starting-point from which a chain of consequences derives.” In that sense, to uncover the etymology of a term or concept cannot explain its contemporary meaning, unless approached contextually. By the same logic, “the context within which a concept emerges does not determine its future usage, though the history of its usage across time will reveal a great deal about the history of the later contexts within which it was deployed.” David Armitage, \textit{The Ideological Origins of the British Empire}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 5. For a study which looks at the confrontation with colonialism as a dialectic process rather than a one-directional flow see Charles Lindholm, \textit{Frontier Perspectives: Essays in Comparative Anthropology}, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996.
\end{itemize}
Terra means land, earth, nourishment, sustenance; it conveys the sense of a sustaining medium, solid, fading off into indefiniteness. But the form of the word . . . suggests that it derives from terrerei, meaning to frighten, to terrorize. And Territorium is a 'place from which people are warned'. Perhaps these two contending derivations continue to occupy territory today. To occupy a territory is to receive sustenance and to exercise violence. Territory is land occupied by violence. 28

This dual meaning, in fact, plays out very starkly in our historical exploration in which possessing territory in the North-East frontier intersects with violence. The two, in one sense, was never separated. This aspect of the inter-linked nature of the territoriality of the frontier and violence will be explored in the following chapters, especially Chapter 4. This dual meaning of the term brings into light, as Talal Asad argues, the dubious nature of the liberal assumption that "the problem of politics is radically separate from the problem of violence and that it is the primary task of the state to exclude violence from the arena of politics and confine it to the domain of war." As he points out, war is defined in international law, with a formal cause and a formal conclusion but the state's violence may precede and succeed war, "especially in a war of independence (by whose unauthorized use of terror a sovereign state is founded) or in a 'small war' (against so-called uncivilized populations, in which terror may be used precisely because they lack a sovereign state)." According to him, one can find continuities of the new wars with the earlier colonial wars that were often called 'small wars', in which "'uncivilized' enemies were not entitled to be treated with the same restraint as 'civilized' ones." In the same way that Talal Asad argues how the categories of 'war' and 'terrorism' are "constituted according to different logical criteria, the one taking its primary sense from the question of legality and the other from feelings of vulnerability and fear of social disorder, and that they are not therefore mutually exclusive", 29 during the colonial period in the frontier, one can see the distinction between 'military expedition' and 'tribal raids'. The right to defend one's way of life may bring into focus the connection between the

conception of the 'savage other' in the North-East frontier and the centrality of violence that colonialism foreground for the continuance of its political control.

In fact, it has been argued that "all human geography is ultimately a product of warfare, because space is always imagined as the zones of defensive barriers and/or offensive operations. The requirements of military geography establish the possibilities and parameters for human geography." In Charles Tilly's formulation states not only make war but it is through war that states are made. In this analysis, war is central in the construction of state, therefore, territory. In this understanding of the territorial state, the peace treaties of Westphalia (1648) and Pyrenees (1659) have often been taken as the decisive turning point in defining the modern territorial state and its constituent element of boundary making. As Jan Zielonka argues, "The 1648 Peace of Westphalia symbolized the advent of territorial politics. It was at that time that the ideal of a sovereign state controlling a given territory became prevalent." The post Westphalia state has been described to refer to an ideal Weberian model with monopolies of legitimate violence, rational bureaucracies and centralized policy-making authority that corresponded to a territorially exclusive political order.

The new-Weberian historical sociological approach, which looks at the history of territory-formation, particularly territorial modern state, as a result of the war-driven competition between centralising rulers and their bureaucratic-rationalising efforts has been refuted by Benno Teschke by putting social property relations and the forms of class conflict as key players in accounting for different forms of political communities and territoriality. In Teschke's words,

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The equation of the modern state, defined as exercising a legitimate monopoly in the means of violence over a bounded and contiguous territory, with 'Westphalian sovereignty' is historically incorrect. The Peace Treaties of Westphalia did not enshrine the principle of modern sovereignty and their associated international relations. Rather, they remained rooted in dynastic sovereignty, imperial forms of territoriality and pre-capitalist property relations that structured the early-modern system of states.  

Teschke contends that the "Westphalian system remained essentially pre-modern in character, based on political communities and forms of territoriality that were still rooted in pre-capitalist property relations." According to him very different types of states coexisted in the European states-system in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For Teschke, then, modern sovereignty emerged and became more generalised only in the nineteenth-century Europe. He argues that the establishment of the world-market under the aegis of the British and the system of sovereign states were mutually co-developing and co-constitutive processes. He indicates that the relationship between capitalism and territoriality is theoretically indeterminate. According to him, "capitalist states have different 'strategies of territorialisation' at their disposal".  

In this context, an obvious question that could be asked about the history of the North-East frontier is why this territory was colonised by the British. There can be various reasons – opening trading routes to China, control of the Burmese economy, strategic concerns of protecting Bengal, imperial competitions, especially with France, etc. Important as the answers to this question may be, historically, it does not lead us further. Another way of approaching the history of the North-East could be – what are the ways in which the territory called the North-East frontier was made? What are the practices and the processes through which colonialism operated in this territory? What are the meanings that were ascribed and produced of this territory? These necessarily involve characterisation and ways of dealing with the peoples in this territory. Answers to these questions are more likely to give us a clue to understand the contemporary situations in the region, with a historically informed view.

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34 Ibid, pp. 52, 62.
In one sense, a discussion on boundaries cannot be limited to territorialities because there are other different social, cultural boundaries as well. It is in this sense that identity will be discussed here. In a way, it is also a history of the identities of the different territorialities but at another level, there is an investigation of how new forms of social boundaries were created through colonial interventions. Territorial strategies facilitate classification, communication, authority enforcement, planning, impersonalisation of authority and reification of power. But there is a need for a note of caution. Given the multiple meanings with which the term identity could be used, it is difficult to find a concise definition. For our purpose here, it is understood in two senses. Firstly, it is understood in the sense of possessing some distinctive attributes, such as, the imagery associated with the territoriality of the North-East frontier. Secondly, it is used in the sense of a ‘social’ category, as a group of persons understood to have some common characteristic features. But the use of the term in both of these senses take into consideration an argument put forward by Stuart Hall that identity, “far from the simple thing that we think it is . . . understood properly is always a structure that is split; it always has ambivalence within it.”35 Such an understanding orients us to reconceptualise identity as a process. In Peter Robb’s words, “[I]dentities are always multiple, contingent and continuously constructed”.36 But one may add that certain traits of identity or identification can dominate over others at one historical point, or they may continue to do so over a long historical period. In Robb’s formulation, there were three elements of British colonial administration that helped in the creation of an Indian identity – establishment of fixed borders, the assertion of undivided jurisdiction or sovereignty within those borders, and assumption of state responsibility between the ruler and the ruled. Though the success of an ‘Indian’ identity being created is doubtful, all of these three features were present in the North-East frontier in the colonial period as will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 5.

MEANINGS OF FRONTIER

It is very often the case that while using the terms frontier, border and boundary, they are referred to mean roughly the same meaning. As E. R. Leach puts, "In modern political geography a frontier is a precisely defined line on the map (and on the ground) marking the exact division between two adjacent states." Stressing the significance of arbitrary political decision by accident, it is further argued, "Yet wars are fought to defend such frontiers and from such wars there has emerged a European myth which asserts, not only that every political state must, ipso facto, have a definite boundary, but also that the frontiers in question ought in some way to correspond with differences of culture and language." Here, the terms boundary and frontier are interchangeably used to mean the same politically defined line on the map. Moreover, the problem, here, is said to lie in the arbitrary political decision which does not correspond to natural topography and the modern European political myth to have those precisely defined lines to mark out one's sovereign territory from the other. In other words, it is a problem of imagining the modern sovereign state and its relationship to space. But in the colonial context, the question of a definitive boundary was not always a necessity but the vaguely defined concept as well as the territory could very well serve better for colonial expansion. Moreover, it might often be the case that boundaries, wherever they were drawn, would have introduced more rigid cultural and linguistic differences rather than territorial boundaries corresponding with these differences. If we were to explore this problem from a historical perspective, it is also important to ask – What are the histories through which certain territorialities become frontiers effecting at the same time the corresponding production of frontier peoples?

In the post-colonial context of India, the usage of the term frontier has been quite ambiguous and multifarious. On the one hand, there was an administrative unit called the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) that continued to be termed with an appellation of the colonial cartographical lineage with supposedly marked limits within the sovereign national territory of the newly formed Indian nation-state. On the other hand, though administratively NEFA was used to define only a smaller territoriality, (which has now become Arunachal Pradesh) the connotation of using frontier to refer to the North-East in general, a unit of reference

formed by combining the whole area has continued. For instance, when Jawaharlal Nehru wrote his foreword to the first edition of Verrier Elwin's *A Philosophy for NEFA* in 1957, both the meanings were used interchangeably. When Nehru writes, “[C]hallenge to us from the North-East Frontier Agency fascinates me” it carries the meaning of the frontier in the sense of a politically governed, geographically well defined unit. But the term frontier was also used in the same page to mean a larger territorial connotation than merely the unit: “I came across the tribal people first, rather distantly, in various parts of India other than the North-East Frontier.” In other words, the lineage from the colonial category of the North-East frontier of Bengal, which later on was changed into North-East frontier of (British) India continues.

This dual usage of the term frontier, perhaps, is tied up and informed by the multiple and changing meanings of the term frontier. There have been attempts to differentiate the varying meanings ascribed to the three terms – boundary, border and frontier. As Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel argue, boundary has often been used in “diplomatic discussion on the precise location of borders”, along with its more general usage “pointing at the dividing line between different peoples or cultures.” The term border has been usually preferred while discussing “psychological differences and when emphasizing regions rather than lines drawn on maps”. The term frontier has been commonly referred to the “territorial expansion of nations or civilizations into ‘empty’ areas.” However, such a distinction often misses the historicity of the different changing meanings and the usages given to the three terms. Tracing the different usages of the meanings of the term frontier, historically, John T. Juricek differentiates three meanings prior to what is popularly called the ‘frontier thesis’ in American historiography. The first, he points out, has the sense of an ‘outpost’. The second meaning was used to mean ‘a barrier against attack’. The third meaning was associated with ‘a settler on the frontier’. The first two meanings had its usage in England, and Europe in general whereas the third meaning was a peculiarity of American English. Until the mid

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38 Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘Foreword to the First Edition’ in Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, reprint Itanagar: Directorate of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 1999. The North-East Frontier Agency was put under Assam, constitutionally, with the aim of uniting it fully once it reached a ‘sufficient level of development’. But it was administered by the Ministry of External Affairs with the Governor of Assam acting as agent to the President and the administrative head was the Advisor to the Governor.

nineteenth century, the meaning of frontier was understood to be closer to border referring to peripheral areas and not lines of demarcation which was expressed through boundary.40

By the middle of the twentieth century the British Association Geographical Glossary Committee attempted to give a definitive shape to the meanings of the terms frontier and boundary. It defined the terms frontier and boundary as follows: Frontier has two meanings. First, it was defined as a border region, zone, or tract which forms a belt of separation, contact, or transition between political units. Secondly, it could mean a delimited or demarcated boundary between States, more properly a frontier line. Boundary, on the other hand, was also defined with two meanings. First, it was similar to the sense of a frontier line. Secondly, it also meant a line of delimitation or demarcation between administrative units or between geographical regions of various types, whether physical or human.41

Malcolm Anderson maintains that frontier has the widest meaning referring to a region; border could be used to mean a narrower zone or a line of demarcation whereas boundary is the line of delimitation. But more importantly, he argues that frontiers are institutions and processes. According to him, understanding frontiers as processes have four dimensions. First, they are instruments of state policy. Second, the policies and practices of the state are constrained by the degree of de facto control that they have over their frontiers. Third, frontiers are markers of identity, which often work to produce the ‘natural’ unity of a

40 John T. Jurieck, ‘American Usage of the Word “Frontier” from Colonial Times to Frederick Jackson Turner,’ Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 110, No. 1, February 18, 1966, pp. 10-34. According to Fulmer Mood, in the later half of the eighteenth century the word began to have an American meaning with a new connotation – ‘furthest settlements’, thus, imbuing a ‘western’ subtext. The English emigrants brought the word to the Atlantic seaboard in the opening years of the seventeenth century. From there it reached the Pacific coast moving with the Anglo-Americans and their American descendants. Though the word has been in use since then, the altered circumstances of its application, after being brought from England, gave new shades of meaning. The term frontier does not occur frequently after the first two decades of the nineteenth century till almost the end of the century in America. Fulmer Mood, ‘Notes on the History of the Word “Frontier”’, Agricultural History, Vol. 22, No. 2, April 1948, pp. 78-83.

territory and identity. Fourth, frontier is also a term of discourse by giving meaning to frontiers in general and to particular frontiers though the meanings are not permanent. The meaning of a frontier could also be context specific.\textsuperscript{42} According to Ladis K.D. Kristof, in its historical origin the frontier was neither a legal concept nor, at least not essentially, a political or intellectual concept. But it was rather a phenomenon of the ‘facts of life’.\textsuperscript{43}

The understanding of territoriality as social relations can be studied in the light of a growing literature that looks at the British conceptions of empire shaped by tense encounters with indigenous political culture. Robert Travers argues that the history of European imperialism was a “complex story of European interactions with non-European imperial traditions like the Mughal empire, a story of confrontation and conquest, but also of selective appropriations.”\textsuperscript{44} Such a viewpoint of colonialism can be linked to an understanding put forward by Robert L. Solomon in the context of Southeast Asia: “Many of the colonial boundaries bore a superficial resemblance to the broad outlines of earlier indigenous states.” Solomon admits that this is merely an “apparent resemblance” but in actuality “a new and alien concept of boundaries had been introduced.” At the same time, he also argues that the hinterlands were not affected by colonialism: “the colonial administrative pattern in the hinterlands stayed roughly as it had been in precolonial days; there was little additional economic or governmental penetration of the interior fringe areas.”\textsuperscript{45} But if we begin by accepting that concepts like frontiers were always already imbued with civilizational meanings and hierarchisation then the very terrain of ‘confrontation and conquest’ or isolation of the hinterland could be understood differently. One may debate the accuracy of his periodization when Jean-Paul Sartre writes “[Colonization] is a system which was put in place around the middle of the nineteenth century, began to bear fruit in about 1880, started to decline after the First World War, and is today turning against the colonizing nation.” But there is an echo of historical truth when he puts one of the characteristics of colonialism to be: “First of all overcome resistance, smash the framework, subdue, terrorize, [territorialize]. Only then will

\textsuperscript{43} Kristof, ‘The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries’, pp.269-82.
the economic system be put in place.” To look at the making of the North-East frontier as historical practices and processes is not to equate colonization with “a series of chance occurrences nor the statistical result of thousands of individual undertakings”\textsuperscript{46} but to be aware that the different historical moments and initiatives changed the very ways in which the territoriality of the North-East came to be understood. Some of these issues will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter one – ‘The Making of a Frontier: Empire Wars, Political unrest, Territorialisation’ will try to look, briefly, into the ‘prehistory’ of the territories, later called the frontier, and the ways in which they were related with different political formations from the pre-colonial to the early colonial. This is also an attempt to see how colonialism transformed the histories of the people and the area irreversibly to pave way for its persistence into the post-colonial. In many ways, the first Anglo-Burmese war became not merely the foundation for political and economic extension of British colonial expansion eastward but also the establishment of new forms of knowledge.

The founding of the North-East frontier as a result of the first Anglo-Burmese war highlights the two interconnected meanings of territory discussed earlier. As Jean-Michel Brabant points out, “Thinking about and organizing space is one of the pre-occupations of [colonial] power.”\textsuperscript{47} But at the same time it is also noted that the “practice of spatial domination cannot be totally identified with military practice. The latter is only one aspect, one that is perhaps institutionally concentrated, of the spatial practice of power.”\textsuperscript{47} The conclusion of the first Anglo-Burmese war was attended by the desire for peaceful commercial expansion and political control for the British. However, despite the formal cessation of the war with the Burmese, there were many ‘small wars’ that the British continued to fight. Chapter 2 – “Small Wars” and the unsettled Frontier’ discusses some of these ‘small wars’ against those rebellious chiefs who lost their authority as a result of the changes that the British colonialism introduced. The different strategies adopted just after the making of the North-


East frontier would be explored in chapter 3 – ‘Settling the Frontier: North-East Frontier after the first Anglo-Burmese War’. Chapter 4 – ‘Boundary making: Kabaw valley and the politics of colonial mediation’ looks at the claims over an area called the Kabaw valley between the Burmese and the Manipuris in the aftermath of the first Anglo-Burmese war. Various issues of territoriality, and that of the boundary came up in the course of the negotiations. Interestingly, in this negotiation, the British represented the case of the Manipuris. The British mediation in the territorial conflict over Kabaw valley, undoubtedly, introduced a new way of associating with territorial boundaries. Chapter 5 – ‘Practices of Frontier regime’ is an exploration of the British strategies of controlling the frontier, especially its relationship with the ‘hill tribes’. The chapter argues against the historiography of the frontier that sees the ‘hill tribes’ as problems in a reproduction of the colonial logic. By looking at the heterogeneous yet connected practices of ‘indirect’ colonial rule against those who were outside the directly administered British territory, the chapter highlights how ‘exceptional’ colonial practices became the norm in the frontier. In this context, the role of violence is explored. There is also an attempt to study the concept of frontier itself within the context of colonial expansion and the logic of the modern state. The effects of the introductions of socio-political changes under colonialism will be visible much more clearly in chapter 6 – ‘Colonial Classifications: Anthropological Knowledge and Colonial Control’, in which efforts were made to enforce distinctions of different groups of people, through both political and discursive moves. The chapter discusses different processes of classifying people in the frontier. One of the prominent features of that classification was between ‘lowland’ and ‘highland’, or ‘valley’ and ‘hill’ dwellers. The territorial marker of being lowlander or highlander is co-constitutive of the cultural characteristics that were given to them. The chapter does not discuss the ‘pre-colonial’ relations between the two but rather focuses on the different strategies employed in the making of this distinction during colonialism. Interestingly, the colonial imperative of classification does not stop with this classification. There were various ‘theories’ which were propounded to map the scale of civilization within the highlanders as well. Chapter 7 – ‘Origin narratives and Territoriality’ studies the colonial

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obsession of the idea of origin. By examining the narratives of origin collected by colonial officials, the chapter explores the discursive practices of controlling the history of a community by freezing the origin, thus, producing a means of control. At the same time, a closer examination of these narratives gives us a hint of the multiple histories of spatial organization, control of territoriality, relationships amongst different groups of people and political systems.

Colonial power intervened in the frontier in multiple ways. On the importance of geographical knowledge Lieutenant-Colonel Michael Symes announced, “Geography is the foundation of all historical knowledge, without which history becomes little better than romance.”49 As discussed in the chapters 1, 5 and 6, gathering of information was an important element of colonialism in the frontier. The two chapters 4 and 6 can also be read together. Though the two processes that are being discussed in these chapters differ in historical locations over time and space, they demonstrate the twin projects of modern territorialisation, especially through the processes of creating and demarcating a fixed boundary, on the one hand and the creation of modern ‘ethnic’ identities on the other. It has often been argued that modern political boundary “violently, arbitrarily divides ethnic peoples into different nationals.”50 But not often do we see this division of ‘ethnic’ group into different nationals in the light of the process of colonial classification and the making of modern ‘ethnic’ groups. This is not to argue that the modern ethnic groups did not have any cultural, social basis. But the point I am making, here, is how an uncritical approach to ethnicity assumes the existence of a primordial entity without recognising the many processes through which the ‘collectivity’ of the group is made. In many instances in the North-East we see a major contribution of the colonial regime in forging those bigger ethnic identity formations.

50 Thongchai, Siam Mapped, p. 164..