The completion of this thesis has been possible due to the help extended by members of a kin-community, peers and supervisors from places as dispersed as Jorhat and Zurich. I would firstly like to thank my supervisor, Prof. C. Nunthara for his unqualified support and patience. The faculty and staff at the department of Sociology, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong have been most accommodative of my infrequent appearances and persistent assaults on their kindness and time.

This thesis was supported from its inception by the National Centre for Competence and Research (NCCR) North-South Berne and the Department of Ethnology, University of Zurich. Thanks are especially due to Danilo Geiger and Prof. Jürg Helbling, who took it upon themselves to bring the thesis within the ambit of sub-project “Frontiers” and the NCCR. Danilo Geiger’s constant encouragement and supervision never flagged since the inception of the study and drawbacks in the thesis would have been manifold were it not for his guidance. To the kin-group that adopted us in Zurich – Danilo, Nadja, Inab, Dara and Neil, Toby, Juan, Julia, Gennaro, Christoph, Irina, Balz and the ping-pong playing folks at the park – danke schön!

I am eternally grateful to Walter Fernandes and the staff at North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati for their constant support. Immeasurable gratitude is extended to Sarat Phukan, Uttam Bathari, Achyut Deka and his wonderful family for helping at all times. Working on my thesis meant relegating other activities to the back-burner while I was at Guwahati. I am thankful to Lachit Bordoloi and Kazu Ahmed, colleagues and fellow-travelers who put up with my absences with stoic silence and good-humoured smiles. My work in Nagaon and Karbi Anglong
would not have taken off it wasn’t for the assistance that I received from Hemanta Saikia and his family, Lachit-da and the people of Srimala/ Gospara and Juria, in Nagaon district. Hemanta also helped me with fieldwork in Karbi Anglong, where I must also acknowledge the immense support extended to me by Uttam Barthari and Holiram Teraiig and various people in Diphu and Hanlokrok. Without their incisive comments and descriptions of the district and its politics, I would have been all at sea.

This work seemed exciting because of the interest and support that I received from senior academics and fellow-students. Prof. Sanjib Baruah never failed to show an interest in my work and made my berankaries sound like pearls of wisdom. Dr. Ranabir Sammadar and his colleagues at Calcutta Research Group – Dr. Paula Banerjee and Dr. Samir Das – were ever helpful in sharing their work and allowing me to share mine with them. Thanks are due to Dr. M.S. Prabhakara for sharing his library, ideas and wine and to Shimreichon Luithui-Emi for being around when I really, really needed to sound someone out on my work.

All of this was made even more fulfilling because of the presence of family members, who supported my partner and me all these years. To Ma, Ba, Mummy Mhalo, Mamamidew, Pranab, Ishani, Longshiben, Mhademo, Rosemary, Michael Carl, Jullie, Michael Sautman, Kimiro and Samantha, thank you for being around and for putting up with late-night pangs of anxiety and crankiness (on my part). Dolly Kikon – where do I begin? – Thank you!

There are so many others to whom I owe an intellectual debt and cannot name here for various reasons. The bright spots of the thesis are largely due to them and the people mentioned above and any discrepancies and drawbacks are mine alone.