

Civil society and human security in Meghalaya: identity, power and inequalities

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Civil Society and Human Security in Meghalaya: Identity, Power and Inequalities

By

Duncan McDuie-Ra

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements of
Doctor of Philosophy

School of Social Sciences and International Studies
University of New South and Wales, 2007

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of civil society in addressing human security in the Indian state of Meghalaya. Civil society has been revived over the last two decades and is now one of the key concepts in the study of politics. Yet there are few detailed empirical studies of civil society at a local level examining the constraints on participation and the ways this affects what is contested. Human security has also gained prominence in the past decade as both a challenge to state-centric conceptions of security and as an alternative approach to development by focussing on the security and insecurity of groups and individuals. In order for those experiencing insecurity to identify and contest the causes of insecurity, participation in civil society is necessary. Yet there is very limited analysis on the *ability* of civil society actors to contest the causes of insecurity in particular local contexts.

Meghalaya is part of the region known as Northeast India, one of the least researched regions in South Asia. Identity politics dominate civil society in Meghalaya, empowering particular actors and particular causes of insecurity and marginalising others. Furthermore the construction of Meghalaya in the Indian national context leaves it isolated from civil society actors in other parts of India, intensifying the impact of local circumstances. This thesis examines the responses of civil society actors to environmental insecurity and gender-based insecurity in Meghalaya and finds that participation is constrained by the dominance of identity politics, the power differentials between civil society actors, and existing inequalities within the local context.

This thesis reaches three conclusions. First, civil society is constrained by both the state and the power of particular actors and ideas in civil society itself. Secondly, the relationship between civil society and human security is constitutive. Constraints on civil society affect which insecurities can be contested and the prevalence of particular forms of insecurity, especially identity insecurity, empower particular civil society actors and marginalise others. Thirdly, context is vital for understanding the constraints on civil society and the conditions under which these constraints may be transcended. This requires

a deeper understanding of Meghalaya that goes beyond the reproduction of homogenous and unchanging ethnic categories.

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List of Abbreviations

AFSPA	Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958
APHLC	All Party Hill Leaders Conference
CHS	Commission on Human Security
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DONER	Department of Development of the North Eastern Region
EITU	Eastern India Tribal Union
FKJGP	Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo Peoples
HSPDP	Hill State Peoples Democratic Party
HYF	Hyinñiewtrep Youth Front
ITMCS	Iai-Treilang Multi Purpose Cooperative Society
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IFAD	International Foundation for Agricultural Development
INGOs	International Non Governmental Organisations
KHADC	Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council
KHNAME	Khun Hyinñiewtrep National Awakening Movement
KSO	Khatar Shnong Socio Organisation
KSU	Khasi Student Union
MEIs	Multilateral Economic Institutions
MPHRC	Meghalaya People's Human Rights Organisation
NACO	National AIDS Control Organisation
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NERCMP	North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas
NCW	National Commission for Women
NEC	North East Council
NEN	North East Network
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
PRIA	Society for Participatory Research in Asia
SAHRDC	South Asian Human Rights Documentation Centre

SHGs	Self Help Groups
SRT	Ka Syngkong Rympei Thymmai - Association of New Hearths
SSSS	Synjuk Seng Samla Shnong
UCIL	Uranium Corporation of India Limited
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations
WISE	Women for Integrated Sustainable Empowerment

Chapter 1- Introduction: civil society, insecurity, and identity

When used by its friends as an ethical standard... [civil society]... champions the political vision of a world founded on non-violent legally sanctioned power-sharing arrangements among many different and interconnected forms of socio-economic life that are distinct from Government institutions.

-Keane, 2003: xi

Political thinking is thus at times an act of intellectual desperation, not of calm and orderly introspection. It is not surprising, therefore, that once the idea of civil society gains a certain currency, it would be pressed into service by authors desperately seeking solutions to their specific historical problems in Third World contexts.

-Kaviraj and Khilnani, 2001: 4

There was a time...when civil society was an essentially contested concept. Today it has become a consensual concept, a 'hurrah word', and a matter of tiresomely unanimous acclaim.

-Chandhoke, 2003: 8

1.0 Introduction

This thesis analyses civil society in the Indian state of Meghalaya. It uses the case studies of environmental and gender-based insecurity as a basis for critically examining the ability of civil society actors to contest the causes of insecurity, challenging contemporary understandings of civil society, of the relationship between civil society and insecurity, and of Meghalaya and the Northeast region of India. The primary concern of this thesis is to come to an understanding of the complexities of civil society in the domestic sphere, especially in the Third World, and draw upon this to re-imagine civil society making it more applicable to the realities of complex empirical circumstances. In order to do so this thesis focuses on civil society at the local level. I argue that at the local level the ability of civil society to contest the causes of insecurity is *constrained* by identity politics, the

power of particular actors and political discourses, and inequalities between and within different groups. Furthermore, the relationship between civil society and human security goes beyond being merely functional and is more accurately described as constitutive; the constraints on civil society lead to further insecurity, and further insecurity constrains civil society. These constraints lead to insecurity for some groups and less insecurity for others. These constraints come from the state and from within civil society itself. They are diverse ranging from inadequate material resources, to insufficient language skills, to open hostility from the state and ethno-nationalist civil society actors. Yet as this thesis demonstrates, transcending the constraints on civil society is possible in certain circumstances, and this will become apparent as the thesis progresses.

My initial research question asked what role civil society played in providing human security. At the commencement of this research my understandings of civil society were orthodox, in that I viewed civil society as a functional sphere where non-state actors provided, or attempted to provide, human security to varying degrees of success in different circumstances. I was interested in the dynamics of multi-ethnic settings, thus I was drawn to the Myanmar-India-Bangladesh borderlands to search for sites to carry out field research. After spending several months in late 2003 and early 2004 visiting different areas in these countries, I settled on Meghalaya in Northeast India (Northeast hereafter). My understanding of civil society and human security, or to be more accurate the absence of human security, in Meghalaya was straightforward. That is to say in minority areas in the peripheries of states, civil society organisations have to compensate for state neglect by providing services in order to achieve human security. State neglect has led to demands for autonomy, these demands have been unsatisfactorily addressed, and thus some civil society organisations have been forced to carry out the functions of the state while others continue to press for further autonomy for ethnic minority groups, often by using violence. After spending a long period of time conducting field research in 2005, I realised that this equation was fanciful. Civil society and the causes of insecurity were far more complex than I had envisaged. Thus my empirical research not only brought unexpected answers to my initial research question, but also led me to ask other questions about the relationship between civil society and human security. I went further to ask not only how civil society

contributes to human security, but also how it fails to contribute to human security and how it can lead to further insecurity. Consequently I adopted a critical approach to civil society at the local and national levels.

The evolution of this research from a functional to a critical approach was driven primarily by my longer period of fieldwork in 2005. My previously unambiguous understandings of ethnicity, civil society, and power in Meghalaya were soon challenged by events in the state capital Shillong, and by everyday life in the back streets and villages of the Khasi Hills districts, which were the primary sites of my research. The more people I met and the further I travelled in the Khasi Hills, the more complex the situation appeared. Things I had never noticed on previous visits were soon glaringly apparent. Perspectives I had previously accepted now appeared narrow-minded. My understandings of place, space, and identity were fundamentally challenged. Trying to conceptualise civil society in this environment was difficult and at times discouraging as it became clear that the story I had wanted to tell was very distant from the realities I was experiencing. I felt I had neither the conceptual tools nor the explanatory ability to translate these experiences into a study that could challenge the ways civil society and human security are conceptualised in academic and policy circles. Yet rapidly things gained clarity. A particular incident, a particular conversation, a particular comment, a particular person, life in a particular village, sharpened and redirected my research. By focussing on a critical methodology, explained below, I found I was able to better understand the complexities and contradictions of civil society and of political, social, and economic life in Meghalaya.

Throughout this thesis I argue that civil society is a far more complex and contradictory sphere than is generally acknowledged. The mere existence of civil society actors does not guarantee progressive or ‘good’ forms of agency, and existing inequalities are often reproduced in civil society, denying voice and perpetuating particular discourses, rendering many causes of insecurity unseen and marginalising actors attempting to address these causes. Transcending these inequalities and contesting these power structures, both ideational and material, involves challenging the power relations underpinning them. This is often very difficult and many civil society actors must struggle against the power of

particular groups and institutions in order to achieve transcendence. These struggles are severely undervalued and under-emphasised in contemporary understandings of civil society. These struggles are, in their essence, political, and this thesis values the political aspects of civil society in contrast to de-politicised, value-laden, and hastily defined understandings of civil society. These findings led me to develop a framework for the study of civil society that considers the ideational power of national and local narratives of identity, the influence of conflicts within civil society on shaping outcomes, and the influence of insecurity in constraining the agency of civil society actors attempting to contest dominant discourses. This framework will be further developed in Chapters 2 and 3.

1.1 Civil Society and Meghalaya

In a post Cold War context, civil society commonly refers to a ‘third sphere’ of political activity that is separate from the state and the market (Cohen, 1995: 35-40; Cohen and Arato, 1992: 18; Keane, 2003: 8-11; Scholte, 2002: 281-5). Civil society is theorised as an un-coerced autonomous space in which citizens organise themselves in voluntary organisations and associations to participate in social and political life (Walzer, 1995: 7). Much of the theoretical literature on civil society emphasises the need for liberal democratic state structures with tolerant and legally binding institutions to enable civil society to function (see especially Cohen and Arato, 1992; Gellner, 1994). In other types of states, civil society is presumed to be non-existent, or partial and fragmented. The implication here is that contemporary civil society is something that European and North American societies once had but subsequently lost and are now regaining, and once regained this version of civil society needs to be discovered in, or exported to, the Third World as a solution to incivility, violence, corruption, and poverty.

Several authors recognise that civil society is far more difficult to define, or that it is varied or embryonic, yet often this concession is simply an acknowledgment buried in an introduction or in the final paragraph of a conclusion. Despite these acknowledgements the

concept is firmly embedded in normative conceptions of ‘good’ associational life in contrast to the ‘bad’ coercive practices of the state and the dehumanising practices of the market, and as a result the concept is both de-politicised and blind to power inequalities (Amoore and Langley, 2004; Chandhoke, 2002, 2003; Robinson, 2003). Chambers argues that associational life itself does not necessarily mean that civil society is a force for progressive change and civil society can be restrictive, harmful, and repressive (2002: 101). Mosher argues that there are groups within civil society that can be more harmful than repressive states (2002: 222-3). Examples of such organisations can be obvious, such as racist organisations, criminal gangs, or fundamentalist organisations (Kaldor and Muro, 2003). Yet civil society also contains less obvious forms of repression; organisations and other actors that support and spread the values of the dominant and powerful in a given context, marginalising opposing ideas, values, and those that espouse them (Cox, 1999: 6). These constraints are less visible, though no less influential in shaping civil society. In such circumstances civil society is constrained, and in some cases closed, reproducing the inequalities and power relations that lead to insecurity for different groups and individuals in society.

By examining civil society at the local level in the Third World, this thesis challenges the notion that civil society is a solely European concept but also challenges the liberal model of civil society and recent attempts to identify civil society in monolithic cultural blocs. In the local sphere, civil society is more accurately viewed as a site or sites of contestation by non-state actors of various forms and sizes. In this way civil society can be viewed as a diverse space, a space where certain actors legitimise the status quo, but also a space where the potential for emancipation from the status quo can be realised. As empirical research suggests, emancipation must be fought for within civil society, new spaces must be created that contest existing inequalities and the material and ideational power structures that maintain them by transcending the constraints on agency. Thus the local political, institutional, social, and economic contexts must be taken into consideration in order to analyse the effectiveness of civil society. As James argues, ‘civil society may coalesce around the politics of the local, resistant to the modernist promise of universal progress and

development; it may represent the preserved memory of oppressed peoples, enunciated in myth, folklore, and legend.’ (2005: 16)

This thesis seeks to examine the role of civil society at the local level and asks the following questions: who has access to civil society? Which issues are included on the political agenda of civil society, which issues are marginalised? How do local circumstances prevent or enable participation in civil society for certain groups? How do the dynamics of civil society at a local level challenge the assumptions made about the nature of civil society at a transnational or global level? In order to address these questions, this thesis examines civil society actors in the Indian state of Meghalaya. While the empirical context of Meghalaya forms a major part of this thesis, the conclusions have broader implications for the study of civil society in other contexts, particularly in the Third World, and offer a critique of the generalisations contained within contemporary literature on civil society. The empirical context shows that key assumptions from the generalised literature on civil society are not universal, and because of this we need to have cognisance of the specifications of context. This is not to say that we cannot use generalisations about civil society, but we must use them in a grounded way, and this thesis grounds civil society in the complex politics of Meghalaya.

Meghalaya

Meghalaya is a state in Northeast India, the wedge of land between Bhutan, China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. The population of the Northeast is enormously diverse, and a large proportion of the population trace their linguistic heritage to the Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burman sub-families of the larger Indo-Chinese linguistic group (Das, 1989: 34). The Northeast is almost completely cut off from the rest of India, joined only by a narrow corridor of land zigzagging between the borders of Nepal and Bangladesh. The overwhelming majority of Meghalaya’s population of just over two million people are Scheduled Tribes. The term ‘tribe’ is a colonial category, perhaps an English label for the Hindi term *mleccha*, meaning outcast or a group outside the mainstream of society (Parasher-Sen, 2004b: 292-3). In colonial India, the category was used to denote a lack of

civilisation, backwardness, and primitiveness (Robb, 1997: 270-1). It was also a term employed to enable the violent subjugation of ‘savage’ frontier areas by the colonial authorities, and later the paternalism of European and North American missionaries (Downs, 2003; Pels, 1999). The category ‘tribe’ has persisted in postcolonial India, and tribal communities fall under either the Fifth Schedule or the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. In the Northeast, the majority of hill-dwelling ethnic groups fall under the Sixth Schedule, which grants autonomy to traditional institutions to allocate land, resolve disputes of a limited nature, and provides reservations in employment, educational institutions, and state parliaments.

Meghalaya is a small state, one of the smallest in India (see map in Appendix B). It borders Bangladesh to its south and west, and the Indian state of Assam to its north and east. It is also one of the poorest states in India. Unemployment, urban migration, poverty, and school dropout rates are high and access to health care, adequate housing, adequate sanitation, and adequate livelihoods are very low (Planning Commission, 2001). As an agrarian society, Meghalaya faces extreme insecurity from declining land quality, the impacts of coal mining, the privatisation of common land, high levels of deforestation, and shifts in production towards agribusiness (Datta, 2000; Lahiri, 2000; Karlsson, 2004). Despite the hyperbole around matrilineal inheritance systems, the remnants of which are still practiced amongst the two main ethnic groups in Meghalaya, gender-based insecurity is widespread (Agarwal, 1994; Krishna, 2004b; Nongbri, 2003). Gender-based insecurity includes the marginalisation of women from political institutions, the gendered impacts of poverty, and high levels of domestic violence. Thus this thesis uses the concept of human security to analyse these and other obstacles that different groups in Meghalaya face in their everyday lives. These insecurities are real, in that they are visible and measurable using conventional and non-conventional indicators, through quantitative and qualitative methods. Yet only certain causes of insecurity are politicised and this depends on the power of different actors in civil society. In other words, while the causes of insecurity are widespread in Meghalaya, only the causes of insecurity that are constructed as problems are part of the political agenda.

1.2 Central Postulates

The first postulate in this thesis is that civil society actors are constrained by both the state and, most importantly, by civil society itself. By adopting a critical approach to civil society that identifies both dominant forms of association and forms of association that contest this domination, I argue that contemporary understandings of civil society overlook and/or underestimate both the constraints on civil society actors and the consequences of these constraints. When constraints are acknowledged in the literature they are usually restricted to the actions of states, not the restrictions that come from within civil society itself. I use empirical case studies to identify these overlooked aspects and argue that civil society is a diverse space constituted by identity politics, power relations, and existing inequalities. The ability of civil society actors to transcend existing social, political, and economic structures is dependent on challenging the power relations underpinning them.

The second postulate is that the relationship between civil society and human security is constitutive. Human security challenges constructions of security imposed from above, especially by the state, and opens the possibility for smaller, locally based actors to define what constitutes insecurity. The role of civil society is crucial in making the causes of insecurity visible and calling for them to be addressed by state and non-state actors. Thus the constraints on civil society actors from identity politics, power relations, and existing inequalities affect which insecurities are politicised by civil society and whether particular causes of insecurity will be addressed. However, it is not just the constraints on civil society from identity, power, and inequalities that jeopardise the search for human security; the persistence of insecurity contributes to the constraints on civil society. Thus, I argue, the relationship between civil society and human security is constitutive; they are embedded in the same contextual and spatial power relations.

The third postulate is that the impacts of identity, power, and inequalities within civil society need to be examined in a given empirical context. In order to understand the complexities of civil society, the constraints on agency, and the ability of different actors to transcend these constraints, a deep understanding of identity, power and inequalities in

local contexts is vital. Transcendence will depend upon the recognition of the political struggles taking place in civil society and the deconstruction of existing categories of ethnicity embedded in conventional understandings of Meghalaya. The construction of Meghalaya (and the Northeast region) in the national context, and in the local context, has reified agency and insecurities and new political spaces must be formed if these constructions are to be transcended. As discussed at various points in this thesis, especially in Chapter 6, transcendence has begun where dominant discourses and power structures have been challenged through political action.

1.3 Contributions of the Thesis

I am making claims to originality in three areas of academic inquiry: civil society, human security, and South Asian Studies.

Civil society

By adopting a critical approach to civil society I am making two claims to originality. First, the majority of the literature discussing civil society is too abstract and neglects the ways in which individuals and groups participate in civil society and the ways in which participation is constrained. There are few studies that examine civil society in the local context and thus there is a strong emphasis on the local level in this thesis as I argue that it is local circumstances that have the most influence on the functioning of civil society. This is particularly relevant to studies of civil society in the Third World, as conventional understandings of civil society are predominantly Eurocentric, modern, liberal, and viewed as something that needs to be exported to the Third World (Beckman, 1998). Counter claims focus on civil society in cultural or civilisational blocs, which can be equally unhelpful (see Bayart, 1986; Goody, 2001; Ibrahim 1995; Schak and Hudson, 2003; Stone, 2002). This thesis seeks to go beyond the debate over whether civil society is European or not by examining the ways civil society is constituted in the local context. In other words, while the origins of the term are important this thesis is concerned with the forms of non-state political association taking place in existing empirical circumstances. However, I am

also careful not to view the local in isolation from other spaces. I claim that viewing the local as the opposite of the global, and that conceptualising a linear set of spaces from local to national to global, overlooks the ways ideas, values, norms, institutions, identities, and other factors influence access to civil society across spatial boundaries. Yet without access to local political spaces it becomes very difficult for many actors to become part of national, transnational, or global public spheres.

My second claim is that civil society is constrained by both state *and* non-state actors. When scholars and some organisations acknowledge limitations and constraints on civil society, they are either attributed to the state or to a lack of volition of people within national societies. While the role of the state is important, the characteristics of civil society may or may not correlate neatly with national boundaries. The state may constrain civil society in one area and not in others. The state may constrain agency on particular issues, but not on others. Civil society may be active in urban areas but fragmented in some rural areas or vice-versa. There are numerous reasons why this may be the case; the state has the power to ban, harass, and imprison civil society actors but also the power to enable, fund, and communicate with civil society actors. Yet there are also other constraints beyond the state, constraints from within civil society itself. These can be more influential on civil society than the state itself. Current literature focuses on national or regional civil societies, ‘Indian civil society’, or ‘East Asian civil society’, privileging states and regional organisations as enablers or disablers of civil society. This thesis seeks to go beyond this by examining the role of identity, power, and inequalities produced by the interactions between different groups, both state and non-state, in enabling and disabling civil society.

Human security

This thesis takes a critical approach to human security and the relationship between the absence of human security and civil society. I am making an original claim about agency in the human security discourse. The literature on human security discusses normative and analytical aspects of the concept effectively, challenging traditional frameworks of security

and proposing alternative visions of security. However few studies examine agency in any depth, particularly agency from civil society actors. Human security priorities cannot be assumed, they differ *within* national groups, ethnic groups, and communities. I argue that civil society is vital for making the causes of insecurity visible for states, institutions, and other actors to address. I am making a secondary claim that the relationship between civil society and human security is constitutive. The constraints on civil society affect the visibility of insecurity and the persistence of certain constructions of insecurity can affect the agency of civil society actors.

South Asian studies

The discipline of South Asian studies has had a minimal engagement with Northeast India. The isolation of the region's politics and cultures, the way the region has been constructed in the Indian national context, the location of the region, and its inaccessibility, have all contributed to this neglect. When the Northeast or its states are studied the focus is on military conflict, insurgency, and ethnic autonomy movements (Das, 1989; Hazarika, 1995; Nag, 2002; Phukon, 2003; Singh, 2002; Verghese, 1996). While some minor studies, especially from within India, focus on anthropology and ethnography, the region is rarely examined beyond these disciplines and much of this literature simply reproduces colonial anthropology, ethnography, and history uncritically. Most of the literature on the Northeast reproduces homogenous and static ethnic categories. With the exception of Sanjib Baruah's larger works (1999, 2005), there are few analyses of power relations, class formation, gender, and poverty within these categories. There have been no studies of Meghalaya that focus specifically on civil society, apart from some reports on the actions of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Gopalakrishnan et al, 2001; PRIA, 2003), or on the causes of insecurity beyond militarism and under-development. Studies of the environment are limited to discussions of *jhum* agriculture and deforestation (Dalong, 2004; Karlsson, 2004), and academic literature on gender has mostly been confined to regional studies with limited depth (Barbora and Fernandes, 2002), or on matriliney (Chacko ed, 1998). The exceptions being Bina Agarwal's extensive study of women and land that includes sections on Meghalaya (1994), and Tiplut Nongbri's work on

development and gender with examples from the Khasi Hills (2003). The few histories of Meghalaya are generally reproductions of colonial histories (Chakravorty, 1964), or contemporary narratives that faithfully reproduce the same assumptions and privilege the same voices (Giri, 1998). This thesis re-examines the history of the region by focussing on the formation of identities and the changes in relations between different groups. Thus this thesis makes a substantial claim to originality based on the empirical research itself, and the linkages between the empirical research, the application of theoretical concepts, and research methods adopted.

1.4 Aims of the Thesis

This thesis asks the question, ‘what is the role of civil society in providing human security in Meghalaya?’ In answering this question the primary aim of this thesis is to come to a critical understanding of civil society, its constraints, and the potential to transcend these constraints. The relationship between civil society and human security is used to test the emancipatory potential of civil society, in other words, human security provides a measure that is ontologically stronger than merely ‘development’ or ‘participation’, to assess the role of civil society in a particular context.

In addition to the primary aim, this thesis has the following secondary aims:

- To analyse the constraints on civil society from the state, but also beyond the state by focussing on the constraints on civil society actors generated from within civil society itself.
- To critically examine civil society at the local level through a focussed empirical study.
- To examine civil society in domestic context in the Third World and in doing so move beyond debates over whether or no civil society is a European concept and examine what actually constitutes civil society at the local level.

- To go beyond the causal relationships between civil society and insecurity and critically analyse the constitutive relationship between civil society and insecurity to come to a deeper understanding of the ways each is constrained by the other.
- To come to a more complex understanding of the politics of civil society and the causes of insecurities in Meghalaya.
- To analyse the colonial and postcolonial constructions of ethnicity and gender in Meghalaya and their impact on civil society and insecurity.
- To identify the ways in which civil society actors pursuing the amelioration of insecurity can transcend these constraints and challenge the structures that produce and reproduce hegemonic social, political, and economic relations.

1.5 Research Methods

Critical theory

This thesis utilises critical theoretical perspectives in order to ask how the existing order came into being, how norms and practices emerge, and most importantly, which forces may have the potential to change or transform the prevailing order. The aim of critical theory is the critique and transformation of the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender structures that exclude, exploit, and constrain human beings in different societies (Guba and Lincoln, 1998: 211). It seeks to examine the existing order and question how that order has been formed, and then focus on the ways that the order may be transformed (Cox, 1981/1996: 89-90). Robert Cox made the famous distinction between problem solving theory and critical theory. Unlike problem solving theory which seeks to explain events using existing structures and actors, a critical theory approach does not take institutions or social and power relations as natural or given, rather critical theory seeks to explore their origins and assess whether they are in the process of changing (Cox, 1981/1996: 97-9; Linklater, 1996: 279). Critical theory is interested in the ways in which institutions, social structures, and economic forces shape identity and affect interest formation and value orientation (Chambers, 2002: 102). Thus questions of inclusion and exclusion form an important element of the critical theory approach (Linklater, 1992: 79). The critical approach explores the potential for alternative orders and encourages struggles

to achieve such ends. The emphasis is on the potential for change, but also on understanding the limits and constraints faced by actors advocating change. Thus this thesis investigates how the status quo in Meghalaya came about through historical processes, how the status quo and those empowered by it constrain civil society and the politicisation of certain causes of insecurity, and how these constraints might be transcended. This raises questions about civil society that are not possible using the dominant liberal approach.

By adopting a critical approach I develop an understanding of the historical, economic, and political conditions that have shaped existing political, social, and economic relations in Meghalaya. In order to come to this understanding I will apply a critical approach to civil society, security, economic development, state formation, and the construction of minorities in the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods. I will extend the aspects of critical theory outlined above to include environmental, feminist, and postcolonial critiques of the power of both state and non-state actors in Meghalaya.

Research methodology

This thesis adopts a critical approach that employs diverse research methods. Cox argues that action is never entirely ‘free’ or detached and takes place within a framework derived from historical structures and changes in the relations between different social forces (1981/1996: 97). Thus I have used two main research methods to gain an understanding of the ways in which the historical framework has developed and the ways in which civil society reinforces and/or contests that framework. First, I have used extensive literature from a number of disciplines to analyse the historical formation of social forces in Meghalaya that forms the framework within which civil society actors pursue human security. Secondly, and most crucially, I have used qualitative research methods to understand the interpretations and experiences of the people involved in civil society in Meghalaya. This thesis seeks to explore the ways different groups of people participating in civil society organisations within Meghalaya understand insecurity, identity, the state, and other civil society actors. This type of data defines numerical representation and the

desire for rich and nuanced responses from respondents and the existence of a relatively small sample base from which to select respondents meant that a qualitative methodology was deemed most appropriate. From this qualitative data I have gained insights into the constraints on civil society actors and the ways in which they contest these constraints. This forms the majority of the research data used, especially in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

In order to gain insight into the ways civil society both reproduces and challenges the existing order, I sought interviews with key civil society actors in Meghalaya. As the thesis focuses on environmental and gender-based insecurity it was important to interview civil society actors involved in addressing these insecurities. However, it was also important to interview prominent civil society actors involved in pursuing the dominant discourses in civil society. While these interviews form the basis of my research data, I have continued to use literature and primary documents to maintain a diverse range of perspectives. As a result my interview data and existing literature complement each other and help me to develop the main argument of the thesis.

The literature on civil society, human security, and Meghalaya helped me to contextualise and formulate the framework within which civil society actors operate and led me to identify the types of respondents I would interview. From there I let the interview data lead the research. My interviews form part of a grounded theory approach, deriving theories from analysis of patterns, themes, and common categories that come from the data (Glasner and Strauss, 1967). I adopted the approach suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1995), ‘de-contextualising’ and ‘re-contextualising’ the data in order to find patterns and themes. In order to get a sense of whether my research correlates with reality, I used triangulation, the attempt to ‘...find convergence among sources of information, different investigators, or different methods of data collection.’ (Cresswell, 1994: 158) By following up interviews with further conversation with respondents and with my contacts in the field, I was able to find convergence and clarify my findings. This data is presented in two case studies on environmental insecurity and gender-based insecurity in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. Case studies can form the basis of the grounded theory approach discussed above but also, as Burawoy et al (1991) have argued, case studies can discover

shortcomings in existing theories and seek to modify them. My case studies have allowed me to develop new approaches to civil society and insecurity as well as critiquing existing approaches.

Fieldwork

As my research relies heavily on interviews I spent a period of six months in Meghalaya from December 2004 until May 2005. The fieldwork process consisted of four main activities: interviews, participant observation, secondary sources, and data analysis. These were not undertaken separately or in any linear order. The priority was the interviews and the participant observation. The time between these activities was spent reading and compiling secondary sources and analysing data.

I selected respondents based on their relevance to the content of the thesis and by seeking the advice of local contacts working in civil society, the media, and academia. I had made contact with academics and journalists in Meghalaya on a previous visit and I was able to discuss my project with these contacts in depth and ask them which sources they thought would be most helpful and appropriate. The assistance of Dr. Nongkynrih from the North East Hill University was invaluable in this process as he has civil society contacts in urban and rural areas. After much consultation I decided to focus my research on the Khasi Hills districts, which meant excluding the Garo Hills districts from the study. There are several reasons for this choice. While the Garo Hills and Khasi Hills together form the state of Meghalaya, the two ethnic groups have no common ancestry, language, or history. Thus making generalisations about both groups would be impossible and to include the Garos would mean an in-depth study based in Tura, the capital of the Garo Hills and travelling between the Khasi Hills to the Garo Hills takes days. This poses two problems. The first is that in leaving out the Garo Hills districts I am perpetuating the sense felt by many Garos including the Garo Student Union and other ethno-nationalist groups that Meghalaya has come to be dominated by Khasis. This problem is regrettable but cannot to be sufficiently addressed. The limitations of time, scope, and language means an in-depth study of the Garo Hills districts is simply not possible. The second problem is that this thesis claims to

be about civil society and human security in Meghalaya rather than the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. This has not resulted in me changing the title of the thesis, nor the use of Meghalaya in certain parts of the thesis. There are two reasons for this. First, it is very difficult to separate the historical circumstances of the Khasis and Garos, especially in the period from the 1920s until the formation of Meghalaya in 1972. In order to maintain analytical clarity I have adopted the following use of terminology. In the empirical chapters, Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I generally refer to the Khasi Hills or to specific districts in the Khasi Hills. In the other chapters, especially Chapter 3, I generally refer to Meghalaya as a whole, especially when discussing state formation and the colonisation of the area. Secondly, much of the statistical data used in this thesis is produced by the Indian Government and is thus correlated and expressed using Meghalaya as the political unit. This is noted where appropriate throughout the thesis.

My field research depended upon purposeful sampling and snowball sampling (Patton, 1997: 197; Babbie, 2001: 180). Purposeful sampling is based on the selection of respondents based upon knowledge of the population, location, and purpose of the study (Babbie, 2001: 179). I had identified ten organisations as sources before coming to Meghalaya, but on arrival I found that some of the organisations were defunct, some had become part of the government, and others were less significant than previously estimated. However, I gained several new respondents during my time in the field through the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is a method that is used to locate other respondents by asking initial respondents for information and recommendations (Babbie, 2001: 180). The second stage was contacting these respondents. Some respondents were easy to contact and others were very difficult to find as they were either out of Meghalaya frequently, or in remote areas that could not be reached by phone. After six months I had completed 13 formal interviews, and in addition had met nine other respondents who agreed to talk to me, often at length, but would not consent to formal interviews. One of the main limitations in selecting respondents is simply that there are relatively few civil society actors in Meghalaya compared to other parts of India and other national contexts. This is due to a small population concentrated in remote rural areas, the fracturing impact of insurgency and counter-insurgency on political organisation, and the power of existing

ethno-nationalist civil society actors and traditional institutions and their hegemonic role within civil society. This reflects the contextual circumstances that form the basis of the thesis, namely that civil society is constrained by dominant actors and dominant discourses. This dominance leaves a very small space for other civil society actors and thus it leaves a relatively limited sample from which to select respondents.

In selecting respondents it is imperative that I gained interviews with the most influential respondents. In the context of Meghalaya this is far more important than the number of respondents. Categorising the respondents is difficult as many of them have dual roles within organisations and as independent activists, while others represent organisations that have multiple agendas. However, the breakdown of respondents into the following groups gives some indication; 5 gender-based organisations/activists; 5 land and environment organisations/activists; and 3 ethno-nationalist organisations. This included the largest and most influential civil society actor in Meghalaya, the Khasi Student Union, and all of the main organisations addressing gender-based insecurity and environmental insecurity at the grassroots level.

Some respondents consented to have their interviews recorded on audiotape, while for other respondents only written notes were taken. These respondents constitute the 13 formal interviews. Other respondents preferred to have informal discussions only and their comments are not identifiable to any particular respondent when mentioned in the thesis. These respondents constitute the nine informal interviews. Only those respondents who signed consent forms agreeing to have their comments used as part of the thesis have been identified. Their comments were made in a professional context as members and representatives of their respective organisations, and do not necessarily reflect their personal views. The interview data will be stored at the University of New South Wales for seven years in accordance with the university's ethics guidelines. A list of the organisations interviewed is included in Appendix A. The interviews were semi-structured and revolved around several general questions. However, the conversations were allowed to flow from one subject to the next as I allowed the respondents to focus on the issues they felt were important. The interview data is not presented as a separate section in the

thesis; rather the relevant findings from the field literature are weaved into the different chapters, especially Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

In terms of participant observation, my role as a researcher afforded many opportunities to spend time in villages, mining areas, classrooms, markets, and border areas. As Marshall and Rossman point out, the degree of participation undertaken by the researcher varies between the two extremes of full participant and complete observer (1995: 60). During my time in Meghalaya, my status as an outsider meant that I had few opportunities to be a full participant in everyday life in the Khasi Hills; I was clearly a foreigner and could not claim to be unnoticed when making observations. However, nor was I a complete observer in that I was not detached from events taking place in these locations. I spent time with friends, contacts, interviewees, and engaged with life in Meghalaya through my associations with these people. Often my status as an outsider allowed me access to certain insights that may not have been granted to a local and similarly there may have been certain things I was not told for the same reason.

I took as many opportunities as I could to go into rural areas and spend time in villages, forests, and mining areas for further participant observation. These villages were selected using a number of criteria. First, many of the respondents interviewed invited me to accompany them to village areas where their organisation operated or where there were particularly notable instances of insecurity. Secondly, many of the smaller civil society organisations are based in villages and rural towns, thus in order to carry out interviews I was required to travel to these areas. Due to the distances and poor infrastructure in rural Meghalaya, this often meant that I stayed in these areas for several days before and after the interviews, affording opportunities to observe the interactions between civil society actors and local people and to gain a deeper understanding of the causes of insecurity in different locations. Thirdly, I travelled to villages in Meghalaya with friends and acquaintances who were not directly involved in civil society, and who were not respondents. In Khasi society, as with many societies in various locations, it is customary to visit one's village of origin as often as possible. While living in Shillong and conducting interviews in other towns and districts I would often be invited to return with Khasi people

to their village of origin. During my time in Meghalaya I visited 21 villages in all four districts of the Khasi Hills for periods ranging from two days to three weeks. These visits provided a further insight into rural life and the causes of insecurity. Many of the rural NGOs offered to take me into interior or border areas, which was a huge advantage as I was quickly introduced into the community and had access to farmers, workers, villagers, all of whom gave me a much richer idea of the issues facing rural people. This provided an excellent insight into the causes of insecurity faced by people in Meghalaya, and the opportunities to discuss these with knowledgeable friends and contacts back in Shillong added important depth to my research. This part of the research process was vital for gaining an understanding of the realities of insecurity in Meghalaya, as there is a paucity of accessible government records, data, and other information available.

Language did not prove to be a difficulty as all interview respondents had excellent English capabilities, and most people in Shillong had some level of English ability. The formal education system in Meghalaya was started by Welsh missionaries and spread by Baptists, Presbyterians, and Catholics. Thus most schools carry out instruction in English. Given the diversity of languages in Meghalaya, English is the language used by the bureaucracy, especially as the two main indigenous language groups, Khasi and Garo, are not mutually intelligible. Hindi, the Indian national language, is rarely spoken in Meghalaya and not taught in schools except for the central government schools in Shillong and Tura, which cater predominantly to the children of central government officials working in Meghalaya, generally not Khasi and Garo children. As a result most people in Meghalaya who have attended some school, and even many who have not but have been in close contact with missionary societies and the church, speak English in addition to their local dialect. However, fluency in English is mostly restricted to urban Khasis and rural Khasis who have been sent to school in Shillong and other large towns (Jowai, Nongstoin, and Nongpoh- see map in Appendix B), and by non-tribal business people, public servants, and the military. Thus in rural areas, most people speak their local dialect and often standard Khasi (the Sohra dialect). It was not my intent to only interview respondents who spoke fluent English. The reality was that anyone working in civil society organisations or as individual activists spoke English, even when I attempted to speak in Khasi. Without

English language abilities, it seems, participation in civil society is severely limited. Again, the fact that all my interviews were conducted in English reflects many of the main arguments made in this thesis about power and access to civil society and the crucial role of language, especially between urban and rural groups. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter 6. In rural areas I was generally accompanied by a member of the civil society organisation from that area, a local returning to their home village who would act as a translator, or if alone I managed basic conversations in Khasi language. By the end of my visit I had a functional understanding of the Sohra dialect of Khasi.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into three parts, and six chapters. Part I contains two chapters that aim to provide the framework for the central arguments of the thesis and the following empirical chapters. Part II contains two chapters drawn from case studies that examine environmental and gender-based insecurity, and the ways in which civil society actors have responded to the causes of insecurity. Part III contains one chapter, and the conclusion to the thesis, examining the ways in which civil society and human security need to be reworked in order to transcend the constraints on agency and applies these to Meghalaya so that the possibilities of transcendence can be evaluated. The conclusion restates the findings of the thesis and suggests possibilities for further research. These will be discussed in more detail below.

Part I- Bounded Spheres, Bounded Identities

In Chapter 2 I discuss the concept of civil society and its conventional depiction as a ‘third sphere’ of political activity separate from the state and the market. I argue that the third sphere model ignores the complexities, diversities, and contradictions of civil society and I advocate the adoption of a critical approach to empirical investigations into civil society at the local level. A critical approach conceptualises civil society as both the sphere of domination by social forces reflecting the values and ideals of the powerful in a particular context, but also as the sphere where emancipation from the existing order can be realised

(Cox, 1999: 6; Gramsci, 1971/2003: 264-7; Simon, 1982: 37). The work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci provides an opening, though not the entire framework, for the critical approach by recognising the complexities, conflicts, and contradictions in civil society, and the often-indistinguishable boundaries between civil society and the state. Importantly for this research, civil society is constrained by not only the state but by civil society itself, and a critical approach enables civil society to be conceptualised in this way.

I then proceed to discuss human security, which is an attempt to come to a holistic understanding of security that focuses on the security of individuals and groups rather than states (Axworthy, 2001; Booth, 1991; Ogata and Cels, 2003; Thomas, 2000). I argue that security has three main uses for this thesis: as an analytical device to uncover the obstacles that different groups in Meghalaya face in their lives, as a way to move beyond debates surrounding development and post-development to discover the causes of insecurity resulting from the processes of development *and* from the absence of development, and it calls for varied forms of agency in politicising insecurities and making them part of the political agenda; thus enabling an assessment to be made on the effectiveness of civil society. I conclude the chapter with four propositions pertaining to the relationship between civil society and insecurity: the impact of identity politics has a major influence on the functioning of civil society, the existence of power relations within civil society has a major impact on which actors have access to civil society and which insecurities will be part of the political agenda and on what grounds they will be contested, existing inequalities are not simply overcome by applying models of civil society or human security over the top of existing social relations in local contexts, and the relationship between civil society and insecurity is constitutive.

Chapter 3 examines the ways identity politics and inequalities based on ethnicity, class, and gender, have developed through historical processes in the Northeast region and in Meghalaya. The chapter takes an historical approach, focussing specifically on the constructions of ethnicity, gender, and ecological interactions in the colonial era, and the reproduction of these constructions in national and local contexts in the postcolonial era. It

then outlines the specific narratives in the ‘outsiders’ discourse, setting up the empirical chapters that follow in Part II.

This chapter consists of four sections. The first section deals with the production of identities in a regional sense, in other words the creation of the categories ‘tribe’ and ‘hill tribe’ and the assigning of particular characteristics to these categories based on readings and misreadings of production methods, trading patterns, and gender relations in the Northeast region. This section draws upon writings on race, ethnography, and anthropology in colonial India and its use to justify colonial intervention and domination of newly categorised peoples, leading to the subsequent extension of British control into the Northeast (Dirks, 1999; Jahoda, 1999; Mayaram, 2003). The second section shifts the spatial focus from the regional to the local and examines the reproduction of these categories in postcolonial Meghalaya. This section uses the hill state movement, a movement that resulted in the formation of Meghalaya as a state in the Indian Union, to demonstrate how identity politics and the emphasis on characteristics created in the colonial era have come to serve tribal elites and powerful social forces in contemporary Meghalaya. The third section discusses how these two sites of identity production and reproduction have led to the dominance of anti-migration politics in Meghalaya, termed the ‘outsiders’ discourse. It is argued that the ‘outsiders’ discourse is the dominant discourse in civil society in Meghalaya and thus causes of insecurity that fall outside this discourse or that challenge this discourse are marginalised, as are the voices advocating their amelioration. The final section discusses which groups have benefited most from identity politics in Meghalaya, and how this is manifested in political power.

Part II- Marginality and Voice: the insecurity of civil society

Chapter 4 discusses environmental insecurity in the Khasi Hills. The purpose of this chapter is to show the severity of the insecurities derived from environmental degradation, but also to demonstrate how environmental issues have been drawn into the ‘outsiders’ discourse, leaving those suffering most from environmental insecurity marginalised from civil society. The chapter focuses on the major forms of environmental degradation in the

Khasi Hills and argues that it is degradation that causes insecurity. It then uses the comparative example of the proposed uranium mine in the West Khasi Hills and coal mining in different areas to demonstrate how powerful civil society actors have politicised one cause of insecurity and not the other. Powerful civil society actors oppose threats to the environment that can be blamed on ‘outsiders’ or that are the result of development projects that may encourage the further migration of ‘outsiders’ into the Khasi Hills. Other types of degradation that are the result of environmental exploitation from within the ethnic group are left unaddressed. Furthermore, attempts to contest these insecurities are largely ineffective as those suffering most from environmental insecurity are unable to challenge the dominance of identity insecurity and economic insecurity.

Chapter 5 discusses gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the extent of insecurity faced by women, and to show the difficulties faced by civil society actors in contesting gender relations that cause insecurity. As in the previous chapter on environmental insecurity, the causes of gender-based insecurities are subject to the power of identity politics and particular actors, meaning that they are difficult to contest or position on the political agenda. There are several aspects to this. First, gender relations are hidden behind the valorising myth of women’s empowerment reproduced through the conventional understandings of the matrilineal inheritance system. There is a significant discord between the perceptions of matriliney and women’s actual experiences of matriliney. There are various reasons for this discord, and they are discussed at length in the chapter. However, the persistence of this perception of women’s empowerment hides many of the causes of insecurity faced by women from wider civil society networks, but also from local civil society actors and political spaces.

Secondly, powerful ethno-nationalist civil society actors have used the ‘outsiders’ discourse to argue that Khasi women who marry ‘outsiders’ or children born from relationships between Khasi women and ‘outsiders’ should not be able to inherit land nor be entitled to the rights contained in the Sixth Schedule. This is a very deliberate attempt to construct gender relations as a source of identity insecurity. Thirdly, women have a very limited role in political institutions. In the village level governance institutions, the

dorbars, women are barred from participating. Furthermore, constitutional changes that have allowed for the reservations of one third of all seats in local governance for women in other parts of India have not been extended into Sixth Schedule areas. This has major repercussions for the participation of women in politics and maintains a normative framework that excludes women from having a political voice in institutions but also in civil society more generally. In addition, the *dorbars* have evolved into powerful modern political institutions with a widespread influence over resources, livelihoods, and land, yet they continue to exclude women on the grounds of ‘tradition’. Thus contesting gender relations threatens these power structures and symbols of Khasi identity at a time when identity politics are heightened. Thus women’s political voices, and particularly for rural, poor, and migrant women, are severely limited.

However, unlike environmental insecurity in Chapter 4, there does appear to be a nascent women’s movement developing in the Khasi Hills that has managed to transcend these constraints to a certain degree. Not only does this have implications for gender-based insecurity, but it may provide some indication of the circumstances in which transcendence is possible in civil society in a range of locations. However, despite the opening of new spaces, the impetus, the key actors, and the issues are still largely urban and middle-class, and voices from rural areas and non-tribal women are still marginal in the movement.

Part III- Transcendence: bringing back the political

Chapter 6 re-examines the key concepts used in this thesis, and argues that both civil society and human security need to be reconsidered in order to understand both the constraints on agency in local contexts and the potential for these constraints to be transcended. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the ways in which the study of Meghalaya and the Northeast region needs to be re-politicised and the social forces re-examined beyond closed ethnic categories. This chapter builds upon the empirical content of Chapters 4 and 5 to make its claims.

This chapter consists of four sections. The first section argues that civil society needs to be rethought by taking into account the impact of identity, the ways in which power constitutes civil society and influences the ability of different groups to participate in civil society, and the importance of examining civil society in context. First, I discuss the influence of identity in determining which causes of insecurity will be politicised in civil society, which actors will have legitimacy in civil society, and the ways in which causes of insecurity are brought into civil society. Secondly, power relationships within civil society in a particular context must be understood. There are two main ways in which power manifests itself in civil society: the first is the role of power in determining which issues come to dominate civil society in a given location, the second is the role of power in influencing which actors have access to civil society, in other words, determining which groups and individuals have power to shape the political agenda. These two manifestations of power are constitutive; discourse has a significant influence on access, and access enables particular actors to shape the discourse. Thirdly, civil society needs to be studied in context. The location, whether local, regional, and possibly national, in which civil society actors are situated must be taken into consideration, while depictions of civil society having particular characteristics and features at a global, hemispheric (North-South), or regional level must be treated with caution.

The second section argues that human security needs to be reinterpreted and move beyond normative and prescriptive analysis towards deeper empirical analysis. Human security has value as a normative concept, and in this sense it provides a useful alternative framework of analysis to both national security and development, as it holds the possibility for local, regional, and sub-regional versions of insecurity and security. If different conceptions of human security are to be realised then the different groups experiencing insecurity need to be able to contest its causes in order for capable actors, both state and non-state, to implement measures to ease insecurity. Thus a more critical understanding of which groups have access to civil society, and what constitutes insecurity for whom, is crucial. I will discuss four ways in which human security needs to be reinterpreted. First, the role of identity in shaping human security preferences in civil society must be recognised. Secondly, the tendency to universalise insecurities based on binaries of ethnicity or

location needs to be overcome. Thirdly, the existence of competing constructions of insecurity must be acknowledged, thus the causes of insecurity cannot be predetermined or given and do not necessarily correspond to existing political or legal categories of people.

The third section of this chapter calls for a re-imagining of Meghalaya, and by extension Northeast India. The majority of the research and literature on the region relies on static categories of people based almost exclusively on ethnicity with pre-given relations between each other and the state. This section calls for a critical approach to these categories in order for insecurities to be made visible and for civil society actors to transcend the constraints discussed above. First, notions of ethnicity are deconstructed in order to focus on differences along class, gender, and urban-rural lines in the Khasi Hills. Secondly, the relevance of legal categories of persons is questioned in analysing diverse human security needs. Thirdly, I argue that the ways in which understandings of the agency of peoples in Meghalaya and the Northeast are limited, and that a more diverse understanding of agency is needed.

This final section draws upon the revised conceptions of civil society, human security, and context to discuss transcendence. I argue that while transcendence may be difficult and agency constrained, it should not be ignored. By rethinking civil society to recognise the impacts of identity, power, and inequalities, and by acknowledging the constitutive relationship between insecurity and civil society we can identify the forces maintaining the status quo and those contesting the power structures that keep the status quo in place. I focus on the creation of new spaces within and across different spatial locations and argue that it is within these new spaces that the possibilities for transcendence can be found. Contesting material and ideational power structures is a struggle, and to effectively understand the potential for transcendence the politics of civil society in local, regional, and transnational spaces must be understood.

Part III also includes the conclusion to this thesis in which I discuss the implications of the study and reflect upon its key findings. I conclude by urging for a flexible and grounded approach to civil society, and the need to examine the complex empirical realities of civil

society in local spaces. Furthermore, I urge for a further critical analysis of Meghalaya and Northeast India that goes beyond existing approaches in order for the condition of insecurity that different groups experience to be better understood and alleviated.

1.7 Boundaries and Limitations

While this thesis attempts to make a thorough empirical study of the limitations on civil society and the relationships between these limitations and human security, there are two limitations to this thesis that need to be taken into consideration. The first is that the thesis is specific to a particular location and while I believe that the study is transferable, this needs to be considered. Secondly, a brief discussion on the use of civil society and human security and the potential difficulties in transferring these into Meghalaya is required.

Location specific

This thesis concentrates on Northeast India and the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. This detailed focus does not contravene the aims of this thesis as I have argued that civil society needs to be examined in local contexts in order to assess critically the impacts of inequality, access, and identity. Thus I needed to have a location to carry out the empirical research. Yet is this transferable? I argue that all the key findings of the study are transferable, especially to other borderlands and minority areas in developing states. Indeed, the constructions of identity and various categories of ethnic and racial groups during the colonial era is an important part of this study and these constructions manifest themselves with particular intensity by those groups who feel that their identity is threatened by the homogenising tendencies of the modern state in both colonial and postcolonial eras (Rae, 2002). The groups that feel that their identity is threatened are often groups who live on the margins of the modern state, due to either their resistance to homogeneity, the remoteness of their location, or due to protective measures put in place by the state in the form of political autonomy.

Terminology

The transferability of the terms ‘civil society’ and ‘human security’ into the context of the Northeast does pose some limitations. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the term civil society has a lineage in European enlightenment thought and later in the bounded spheres of state-market-civil society models. A focus on the lineage of the term raises epistemological problems, yet a focus on the ontology of civil society, especially when viewed simply as a sphere of non-state political association and action, allows the term to be viewed in multiple contexts despite its origins. Furthermore, virtually all respondents interviewed in Meghalaya were familiar with the term, however most associated it directly with NGOs. Although the majority of the interviews I conducted were with formal NGOs, I also interviewed individual activists and respondents involved in much more informal organisations, hence the term civil society actors is used throughout the thesis rather than civil society organisations. Perhaps the use of the term ‘social movements’ would have brought different responses, but for many NGOs in the Northeast, social movements are associated with spontaneity and lack of organisation, something from which several respondents would have been quick to separate themselves. Despite the limitations of the term, most respondents spoke of both organisations and informal social movements when discussing civil society, suggesting that boundaries between categories like civil society organisations and social movements dissolve quickly or do not exist in the first place.

Human security is a much less recognised term. However, respondents and contacts freely identified particular human security issues such as environmental degradation, gender inequality, and problems derived from a lack of development as well as development itself as major issues throughout the Khasi Hills. Again the distinction between epistemology and ontology appears to be clear here. The term has a lineage in human development and critical security literature, mostly written in English; however the conditions that the term encompasses and describes are easily identifiable, if not known as ‘human security issues’. Human security is still a loose discourse, and this thesis has been an attempt to add a critical dimension to it and examine its utility. Thus the thought of human security having a particular set of conditions or solutions is rejected by the arguments above in favour of insecurities being framed by those facing insecurities. This version of human security is

much more applicable to locations where the epistemology of the concept may be unknown or unknowable.

Part I- Bounded Spheres, Bounded Identities

Chapter 2- Civil Society and Human Security: domination and emancipation

The state system that has governed the world for centuries is neither divinely ordained nor easily swept away. It is, however, changing, and one of the most dramatic changes concerns the growth of transnational civil society.

-Florini, 2001: 30

Civil society is a particular form of society, appreciating social diversity and able to limit the depredations of political power, that was born in Europe: it may, with luck, skill, and imagination, spread to some other regions of the world.

-Hall, 1995: 25

...the more the concept of global civil society is detached from any necessary association to 'civility', 'plurality' or 'democracy', the closer we will be to identifying both its full explanatory potential and its political/ethical limitations..

- Colás, 2005: 20

2.0 Introduction

This chapter forms the first half of Part I of this thesis. Part I seeks to establish a framework through which the empirical chapters can be woven in Part II, and from which conclusions about civil society, human security, and the politics of Meghalaya can be drawn in Part III. This chapter deals with the theoretical framework, and the following chapter deals with the contextual framework. The aim of this chapter is to provide a rationale for applying critical approaches to the study of civil society and human security and to outline the relationships between the concepts.

The first section of this chapter discusses the rebirth of civil society in the study of politics. I argue that a critical approach to civil society provides the most effective starting point to

analyse civil society in any empirical depth. A critical approach takes into account the complexities and contradictions in civil society, and recognises the coexistence of dominant and emancipatory groups in the same space. Following this, I discuss the rationale for applying critical approaches to civil society to Meghalaya.

The second section of this chapter discusses human security as a critique of orthodox security and as an alternative framework for the study of development. I argue that in examining the obstacles that different groups of people in Meghalaya face, it is the absence of human security, referred to simply as insecurity, that is the most effective way of conceptualising threats to everyday existence. I argue that insecurity has three main uses in this thesis. First, as a framework for analysis it led me to examine environmental and gender-based insecurity in Meghalaya, as these insecurities are ‘real’, visible, and have a major impact on people’s lives. Secondly, in the context of a developing region within a developing state, insecurity goes beyond the debates surrounding development and post-development to highlight the ways insecurity is caused by the processes of development *and* from the absence of development. Thirdly, identifying and addressing insecurity calls for varied forms of agency in particular contexts and it is here that the role of civil society is vital. I conclude the chapter with a set of propositions on the application on the role of civil society in providing human security in Meghalaya, focussing on the impact of identities, power, and inequalities, and point out that the relationship between civil society and insecurity is constitutive.

2.1 The Ascendancy of the Third Sphere Model

Civil society has become one of the most popular concepts among academics, policy-makers, international organisations, NGOs, and activists over the last 20 years. Definitions of civil society vary greatly, though for the purposes of this chapter I will begin, cautiously, by referring to a ‘third sphere’ of political activity that is separate from the state and the market (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 18; see also Cohen, 1995; Hardenius and Uggla, 1998; Keane, 1988, 2003; Khilnani, 2001; Scholte, 2002; Seligman, 2002; Walzer, 1995,

2002). While I recognise that this is extremely problematic, and that actually locating an autonomous 'sphere' within a particular empirical context is very difficult, the 'three sphere' model forms the basis of contemporary understandings of the concept, and thus it will serve as a useful starting point to critique and modify the concept. The concept of the 'third sphere' gained prominence in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville in the mid 19th century (Tocqueville, 1840/1969; Lipset, 1963: 7-8; see also Birnbaum, 1992). For Tocqueville civil society is a site of trust, unity, and civic virtue, separate from the power of the state and the competition of the market. Tocqueville's conception of the 'third sphere' has become the defining characteristic in the rediscovery of civil society in the post-Cold War era (Cohen and Arato, 1992: 18). This will be discussed further below. Civil society is commonly used to refer to NGOs, social movements, community groups, religious organisations, and advocacy networks. They are theorised as inclusive, vigilant, and progressive social forces in cooperative and oppositional relationships with the state and the market (Cohen and Arato, 1992; Falk, 1995; Kaldor, 2003; Keane, 2003). They also embody the transnational element that theorists are very eager to promote as the defining factor in contemporary understandings of civil society. Thus for these theorists civil society is a transnational ethical space; a culture for the 21st century (Keane, 2003: 203). However, in the local space, civil society is far more complex. Not all actors involved in civil society share a particular normative vision, nor do they all follow progressive ideologies or methods. The organisations investigated in this thesis range from well-funded formal organisations, to part-time collectives, to ethno-nationalist organisations with close ties to insurgent groups. Many of these organisations do not appear in analytical frameworks focussing on civil society at a global or even a national level. Yet these organisations all have an impact on which issues are contested and politicised in civil society, and thus a more complex understanding of the aims and the types of organisations existing in civil society in local contexts is vital for a more critical and empirically-based understanding civil society.

The term 'civil society' on its own usually denotes a bounded sphere, whether domestic or regional, while the term 'global' or 'transnational civil society' refers to a larger network of actors working across international borders. Authors rarely distinguish between the

terms 'global civil society' and 'transnational civil society', however proponents of 'global' civil society argue that although civil society networks are concentrated within certain regions and that many parts of the globe are still not part of global civil society, the term poses a more effective normative counterweight to globalisation (Anheier et al, 2001: 16; Baker and Chandler, 2005: 5; Falk, 1997; Kaldor, 2003: 142). Proponents of the term 'transnational' civil society argue that the majority of the linkages between organisations are much more geographically limited and rarely cross more than a few borders in any one network (Piper and Uhlin, 2004: 5; see also Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 12). This thesis is concerned with civil society at the local level, specifically within the domestic sphere in the Third World, and I argue that without access to civil society at a local level accessing wider networks is extremely difficult.

Why civil society?

The rebirth of civil society in the last twenty years can be explained by four factors. First, the role of social movements in the overthrow of communism in Eastern Europe signalled a new dawn for many activists and academics (Cohen and Arato, 1992; Keane, 2001, 2003; Kaldor, 2003: 50-77). The end of the Cold War removed the last ideological and material barriers to the forming of linkages across international borders and the end of the ideological conflict that dominated the Cold War years was seen as providing non-state actors all over the world with the space and freedom to dissent and demand a new order. The linkages between unions, religious organisations, and human rights organisations in the movements against communism offered a glimpse of the potential for the re-emergence of civil society on a transnational or global scale.

Secondly, while the state has not withered away and still remains the actor with the greatest capacity to influence the course of political, economic, and social life, new centres of authority have become increasingly influential. Scholte argues that contemporary governance is 'multi-layered', and 'includes important local, sub-state regional, supra-state regional and trans-world operations alongside and intertwined with national arrangements.' (2002: 287) Sources of power and authority beyond the state take many forms,

...some of the centres have been in the private sector such as bond rating agencies while some have taken the form of regional regulation such as the European Union or NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement). In other cases it can be seen in the increased importance of MEIs (multilateral economic institutions) in making authoritative statements about how state economic policy should be conducted...In order to influence such authorities citizens must either force their states to engage actively with these new centres or...attempt to engage these authorities directly. (O'Brien et al, 2000: 8)

O'Brien et al term these new relationships 'complex multilateralism' (2000). Civil society actors at all levels; local, national, regional, and transnational, are attempting to engage these forms of governance. Thus civil society has become a sphere of contestation and reclamation, or as Cox puts it, 'civil society has become the crucial battleground for recovering citizen control of public life' (1999: 27).

Thirdly, changes in technology have opened the possibilities for increased linkages and cooperation between actors physically located in different parts of the world. The opportunities offered by instant electronic communication across national borders have led to much hyperbole about the de-territorialisation of the world and the irrelevance of national borders (Omae, 1990/1999). The idea of different societies linked by technology has been one of the main drivers of the concept of a 'global' civil society. The communications 'revolution' of internet, fax and email, has created what Devetak and Higgott term a 'global public sphere' in which social movements, NGOs, advocacy networks, and other civil society groups are able to voice their opposition, organise protests and mobilisations, publicise abuse and atrocities, and share information outside the realm of international institutions and states (1999: 491). The Internet allows local issues global attention and enables new forms of lobbying (Lai, 2004: 105). Yet this does not mean an all-inclusive sphere that reaches across the globe. The majority of civil society networking is concentrated in developed countries, or between urban spaces in different parts of the world, and inequalities in access to communications technology must be taken into consideration (Sassen, 2002: 217).

Fourthly, the inadequacies with positivist theories in the social sciences led to the ‘rediscovery’ of non-state actors, movements, and networks. The growing prominence of critical and heterodox approaches to the social sciences has aided this process, not only within heterodox approaches themselves, but also by influencing the recognition of non-state actors in traditional approaches (see Cox, 1981/1996, 1987).

Thus from these shifts over the last two decades we are left with an understanding of civil society that is liberal, formal, progressive, and Eurocentric. This version of civil society is grounded in Enlightenment thought and values, and heavily rooted in European and North American conceptions of civic mindedness as a democratic and participatory form of politics. Yet where does this leave civil society in non-European settings? The following section will examine the origins of civil society that inform dominant understandings as well as the increasing interest in non-European understandings of civil society, both of which are very important for the conception of civil society adopted in this thesis.

2.2 Euro-centrism and Critical Civil Society

Civil society, whether liberal or critical, normative or empirical, has been critiqued for its Euro-centrism, and thus the validity of using the concept in non-European contexts has been questioned (Beckman, 1998; Chatterjee, 2001). As a response, there is a growing literature attempting to locate civil society in non-European and non-Western ‘cultures’ and ethical traditions (see Chambers and Kymlicka eds, 2002; Kaviraj and Khilnani eds, 2001; Post and Rosenblum eds, 2002). Often this literature focuses on Enlightenment notions of civility and tries to identify these in monolithic ‘cultural’ and civilisational wholes, such as Confucian civil society, Islamic civil society, Jewish civil society, and others. These accounts tend to essentialise peoples into cultural blocs, thus exhibiting the same pitfalls as the dominant European ideas of civil society discussed above. However, the issue of Euro-centrism is important for analysing civil society in India, and many of the criticisms of the hasty application of civil society to particular contexts are valid and must be addressed. I will discuss the European origins of civil society and recent attempts to

reconcile this lineage with non-European understandings of the concept, followed by an outline of the critical approach to civil society adopted in this thesis.

European origins

A discussion of the European origins of civil society reveals some of the major problems with the definition and its applicability in contemporary contexts, especially in the Third World. While some authors argue that the present manifestation of civil society should be detached from previous conceptualisations (Cohen, 1995: 35), the term itself is not new. Seligman argues that the term is strongly rooted in liberal ideals of 17th and 18th century Europe (2002; see also DeLue, 1997). Others maintain that the idea is much older; Black argues that a form of non-state political association close to the contemporary understanding of civil society existed in the towns of Europe from at least the 12th century (2001: 33). Hobbes discusses civil society in terms of the social contract between society and the state, as an oppositional force to the state of nature (Kaviraj, 2001: 288; Macpherson, 1962: 265). For Locke, civil society is the realm where liberty and property rights are preserved and controlled (DeLue, 1997: 234; Macpherson, 1962: 269).

However it is in the Enlightenment that the concept becomes most prevalent. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, Ferguson, Hume, and Smith called for the resurrection of civil society so that citizens (though they referred only to men) could participate in government and in the economy without interference from the state. Though the actual term ‘civil society’ is only vaguely defined by Ferguson, while Hume and Smith rarely use the term at all, instead referring to ‘state’, ‘nation’ and ‘community’ (Oz-Salzberger, 2001: 60). French Enlightenment thinkers saw the need for a self-regulating society; Montesquieu in particular discussed the separation of the political state and the civil state in order to maintain a more humane existence (Baker, 2001). Kant saw civil society as being distanced from the territorial state as a more cosmopolitan rule of law for civilised peoples (Keane, 2001: 25). Alexis de Tocqueville equates civil society with morality and civic-mindedness, making the link between a strong associational life and an enhancement of democratic norms (Béteille, 2000/2003; Hadenius and Uggla, 1998: 44). The idea that

democracy needs a strong civil society continues to be popular (Chambers and Kymlicka, 2002: 2). This is evident in the language of multilateral development banks and international organisations, which use neo-Tocquevillian rhetoric linking civil society with ‘good governance’ and ‘social capital’ as the basis for their prescriptive approach to the Third World (see Chandhoke, 1998, 2003; Harriss, 2001/2004).

For Hegel, civil society is needed to avoid both the extremes of laissez-faire liberalism and the overbearing state, by enabling civic units, ‘corporations’, to be the basis for associational life (Stedman Jones, 2001: 117-24). Marx was highly cynical of civil society, and of Hegel’s model. While Marx agrees with Hegel that there is a distinction between humans as citizens of states and humans as private individuals, he did not believe that the tensions between universal belonging and self-interest could be reconciled through the private property regime and the bourgeois interests behind civil society. For Marx, civil society is a sphere of aggressive associational life where relationships are only built and maintained through monetary transactions leading to alienation and only the elimination of civil society can end this condition (Femia, 2001: 137). The conceptions of civil society in the post-Cold War era vary, yet they are mostly built upon neo-Tocquevillian and Scottish Enlightenment notions of morality and civic participation.

The end of the Cold War and the ascendancy of the three-sphere model have privileged a generalised, normative, and value-laden model of civil society. Civil society has become a singular space, with a singular normative framework. A space where the pain of 20th Century Europe will not be allowed to reoccur, and thus the spectre of 1989 remains in the majority of academic and institutional accounts of the aims, the symbols, and the potential of civil society as the ultimate realisation of participatory democracy.

Non-European perspectives

Discussions concerning Non-European or Non-Western traditions in civil society thought encounter the problem of terminology. The words ‘civil society’ denote a connection to the institutions of the modern state, a connection to distinguishable sectors of state, society,

and market. Thus the term is closely linked to the coming of the modern nation-state to the Non-Western world. Kaviraj and Khilnani argue that the links between civil society and colonialism are understated (2001: 4). In his study of civil society in the Mahgreb, Colás argues that it is impossible to de-link colonial forms of power and anti-colonial resistance from experiences of civil society in postcolonial states (2005: 32). Colonialism brought with it boundaries, which may have been largely artificial, between the institutions of the state and civil society. Yet it is difficult to see clear state-market-society distinctions emerging in many colonies as the stratification of society into included and excluded racial groups created multiple grades of citizens and non-citizens creating multiple categories of people in different relations with each other, with the colonial state, and with pre-colonial formal and informal sources of authority. Furthermore, the varied and changing relationships between private capital and the colonial authorities makes it difficult to clearly define where the state ended and where the market began. For the majority of the colonised populations the distinction itself would have meant very little, though in many cases the concept resonated with elites in the colonised world. Chatterjee argues that in the case of India, civil society is an institution bound up in modernity and established by elites that remains one of limited, rather than participatory, association (2001: 174).

While the term itself, and the clear state-market-civil society distinctions delineated by the term, may not have existed prior to the modern nation-state, several authors have argued that many non-Western cultures and thought traditions have their own conceptions of associational life. Schak and Hudson argue that in agrarian societies in Asia, people were actively involved in community, self-help, and philanthropic organisations outside the realm of state control (2003: 3). Hafani argues that Islam has its own concept of civil society that contains a conception of human rights and responsibility (2002; see also Kelsay, 2002). Pre-modern/pre-colonial Arab and Islamic societies had various civic associations acting as mediators between the general population and the ruling class. Ibrahim argues that these were mostly urban-based guilds, trusts, and foundations that existed between family/village and the state (1995: 28-9). However as Zubaida argues, the actual practice of associational life varied widely between different societies in the Islamic

world, and many guilds were often authoritarian in nature and were led by elites from powerful families (2001: 234).

Several authors have commented on the existence of associational life in Confucian traditions and in pre-modern China (Madsen, 2002; Metzger, 2001; Nosco, 2002; White et al, 1997/2003). Baogang He argues that the idea of ‘public’ organisations has existed since the Qing Dynasty in China, and that increased trade in the early 20th Century led to the establishment of commerce organisations (2003: 114-6). He stresses that these organisations had limited autonomy, a characteristic he identifies in contemporary embodiments of associational life in China. Other authors have identified similar traditions of autonomy and dissent in pre-colonial societies in parts of Latin America, Africa, and India (Goody, 2001; Kamrava and Mora, 1998/2003; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967/2003).

By examining the origins of the term, its contemporary grounding in the Enlightenment, and the equally limiting understandings of non-European civil society, it is clear that civil society is narrowly and exclusively defined limiting its applicability in the Third World (Norton, 1996: 5). The examples of civil society in the literature overwhelmingly focus on particular organisations within civil society; especially NGOs and social movements, without paying significant attention to grassroots organisations, self-help groups, diaspora networks, associations that are arranged along tribal, kin, and ethnic lines, and informal actors. For obvious reasons, formal organisations with professional staff, resources and funding, charters, missions, websites, and visible campaigns will gain more attention. However the role of small, informal, and resource-poor organisations is often overlooked as their impact is only felt locally.

There is limited discussion of the ways in which civil society develops in local contexts in the Third World. Actors with a local orientation are often far more influential over local politics and activism. James argues that ‘it is the national/local, rather than the global, which has the final say in determining the precise formulation and application of the systems of good governance appropriate to the sovereign state.’ (2005: 19) Most people in the world, especially the people whose lives are apparently enriched by the ‘rebirth’ of

civil society, will not have any influence on the policies, strategies, and programs formulated by civil society actors; not only actors from the other side of the world, but local actors as well. The only contact with civil society most people in the developing world will have is with village level associations, kin and clan groups, peasant organisations, co-operatives in town markets, grassroots development groups, schools, and religious organisations. Many of these organisations will have few resources, no office, no telephone number, logo, or full-time staff. Yet these are people organising to act politically. There are numerous studies of civil society in local contexts, focussing on both 'national' civil societies and actors in sub-national contexts; often based on particular issue or campaign (Carapico, 1996; He, 2004; James, 2005; Lesch, 1996; Sassen, 2002; Vichit-Vadakan, 2003; Weiss, 2003, 2004). Yet the variation in the findings from these empirical studies seems to have had little impact on the conceptualisation of civil society overall. In effect, these empirical studies and generalised theoretical studies are talking past each other. This is often a result of the disciplines in which these authors are writing. Many of the detailed local studies of civil society have come from researchers in development studies and anthropology, while the more abstract conceptualisations come from political theorists with a minimal emphasis on empirical fieldwork at the local level.

Examining the origins of the term does expose some of the biases and rigidities that limit its applicability and value. Yet Metzger asks whether it is epistemologically 'proper' to try to apply a European conception of civil society to Chinese thought and society (2001: 204). He suggests that imposing the category of civil society would be justified if, 'one believed...that such categories at least are part of a universally homologous terminology which one can properly use to analyse the facts of human life even when this terminology is unknown to the people one is studying.' (2001: 204) He goes on to argue that there is no epistemic obstacle because culture is not clearly bounded (2001: 205). People will analyse their own culture using ideas borrowed from elsewhere and rather than bypassing imposed categories, the best approach would be to modify them.

Metzger's question unravels the problems of using a specific term bound by geographic, historic, and linguistic particularities to describe diverse empirical realities in multiple

contexts, both European and Non-European. Many of these discussions rest on epistemological questions. If we define civil society in narrow Eurocentric terms, it stands to reason that it will be very difficult to identify the existence of civil society in other societies and thought traditions. For example, Gellner (1994) concludes that civil society is European and other models, especially Islamic models, do not meet the criteria. Conversely, by focussing on ontology rather than epistemology, the dual problem of origin and terminology begins to be broken down. If we define civil society as voluntarism, or community organisation, or even simply as dissent by legal and illegal groups, we can identify it in an increasing number of societies and traditions of thought (Colás, 2005). Adopting this approach allows civil society to be identified and conceptualised across different spaces and historical periods without being caught up in questions of origin. A good example of this is Sampson's study of civil society in Albania (1996), in which he discusses the coexistence of traditional forms of associational life and Western organisational models. Sampson makes the key point that much of the associational life taking place in Albania is invisible to foreigners, but no less valid as expressions of civil society. Carapico (1996) makes a similar point in her study of civil society in Yemen, identifying associations based on clan, kin, and family ties as well as formal organisations. This resembles the situation in Meghalaya that will be discussed in the following chapters. In order to understand the realities of civil society in local contexts a critical approach to civil society is needed, one that adopts a fluid definition of civil society actors and that recognises the existence of formal and informal organisations as well as 'good' and 'bad' forms of association.

Critical civil society

In order to examine civil society in Meghalaya and India, this thesis adopts a critical approach conceptualising civil society as a space of uneven power relations, domination, and contestation. Power in civil society comes not only from access to material resources, but from the power to shape political discourse. Those with material and ideational power establish and maintain hegemony in civil society. Yet civil society also contains actors

seeking to contest hegemony, and the conflicts that take place within civil society shape its outcomes.

Gramsci's conceptualisation of civil society provides important insights for the critical approach adopted here. He conceptualised civil society as the sphere of domination by social forces reflecting the values and ideals of the powerful in a particular context (he referred to states), but also as the sphere where emancipation from the existing order can be realised. He recognised the complexities, conflicts, and contradictions in civil society, and the blurred boundaries between civil society and the state. His conception of civil society provides the most useful starting point for empirical research on civil society, or as Rupert puts it, Gramsci provides the 'conceptual vocabulary for a transformative politics' (2003: 181).

Gramsci makes a significant departure from Marx by arguing that power in the modern state and the capitalist economy is complex and takes sophisticated and often indefinable forms. Capitalism itself is not the sole driver of asymmetrical exploitation, and individuals define their interests in terms of ideals and values that are spread through the state *and* civil society (Femia, 2001: 139). This is the basis of Gramsci's notion of hegemony. Gramsci argues that hegemony exists in the superstructure, not the base, and divided the superstructure into two levels: civil society or the 'private', and the state or 'political society' (1971/2003: 12).

For Gramsci, the state is larger than government, and extends through the institutions of civil society; to the church, the education system, the press, all of which produce and maintain the dominant social order (1971/2003: 264-7). The boundaries between where the state ends and civil society begins may be analytically separable, but not separable in reality, as Nielsen puts it, 'they flow into each other' (1995: 43). Thus control is exercised not only through coercion by the state apparatus, but also through the persuasion and consent of civil society (Simon, 1982: 21). While liberals conceive of civil society as an oppositional sphere to the state, Gramsci saw civil society as a sphere to further the ideals

and values of those controlling the apparatuses of the state, or to use Chandhoke's phrase, 'a buffer zone *for* the state.' (2003: 225; see also Bieler and Morton, 2004: 92)

It is here that the Gramsci's concept of hegemony is most relevant. Hegemony in civil society comes from the values and understandings that permeate the 'structures of society, economy, culture, gender, ethnicity, class, and ideology.' (Bieler and Morton, 2002: 87; see also Cox, 1992) For example, Chandhoke discusses the hegemony of right wing religious ideologies in India and the marginalisation of gender issues in certain communities; the conflict between 'vocabularies of liberation and those of repression' (2003: 211). She argues that while there have been some gains on gender issues in various communities, these are still subject to the dominance of more powerful values among the right wing Hindutva groups within civil society seeking to limit changes to 'traditional' patriarchal structures (2003: 209-11).

Gramscian civil society provides the starting point, rather than the framework, for the study of civil society in this thesis. I acknowledge that the application of Gramsci to the study of civil society in contemporary Meghalaya is not without its problems. Gramscians have been criticised for blindly applying Gramsci to the contemporary international context and thus misrepresenting his understanding of the relationship between civil society and the state, as well as ignoring the ambiguities and inconsistencies in his work (see Femia, 2001; Germain and Kenny, 1998; Keane, 2003). For instance, Germain and Kenny claim that Gramscian analyses tend to dehistoricise Gramsci, ignoring 'analytical silences' in the application of Gramsci to the social relations of the contemporary global order (1998: 19).

These criticisms are indeed valid, and the unqualified use of Gramscian civil society in Meghalaya is problematic as the structural circumstances are very different to Italy in the 1930s. Furthermore his notions of class, social forces, and the primacy of production relations do not necessarily correspond to the realities of Meghalaya in the contemporary context. Rather this thesis uses Gramsci as the basis of a critical approach to civil society that recognises the conflicts within civil society and envisages civil society as a contested

space constituted by power relations. In this space only the practices and ideas approved by the political and intellectual leadership of civil society are allowed to exist. Other ideas become marginalised or rejected. It is the adherents of the marginalised and rejected ideas that have the potential to form a counter-hegemonic movement (Chambers, 2002). Thus civil society not only maintains the idea of the ruling elites but it is also capable of undermining and challenging these ideas, exposing them as fraudulent and leading to social change. This is the essence of critical civil society; civil society is a site of conflict and contestation between different social forces, a diverse space where the status quo is maintained and reproduced but also challenged (Cox, 1999: 6; Simon, 1982: 37). A further aspect of the critical approach is the recognition that civil society has transformative potential, and this potential is the consequence of human agency rather than the structures of local and international systems of governance. Thus civil society is a realm where identities are negotiated out of the conflict of different social forces, ‘...the realm where “I” becomes “we”’. (Murphy, 1994: 31)

A critical approach challenges the conventional liberal view of civil society as ‘good’ associational life in contrast to the ‘bad’ coercive practices of the state and the dehumanising practices of the market. There is very little research on the exclusionary aspects of civil society, or the ways in which civil society can be used to add legitimacy to existing inequalities at local, regional, and transnational levels (see Amoores and Langley, 2004; Cox, 1999). Thus in local, national, and transnational contexts, some actors in civil society can be exclusive, repressive, and coercive in certain circumstances. Thus civil society is not only constrained by the state, but by civil society itself. In other words, civil society is not just a sphere inhabited by oppositional social forces pursuing progressive changes, rights, and equality, but civil society itself can constrain and marginalise certain actors and certain issues. Racist organisations and fundamentalist organisations are obvious examples, yet civil society also contains organisations that support and spread the values of the dominant and powerful in society (Cox, 1999: 6; Simon, 1982: 37). This form of exclusion is less obvious and comes from the marginalisation of particular values that are contrary to dominant values, and the space of civil society becomes closed to actors making claims against the dominant order.

Furthermore, there are forms of association in civil society that can be seen as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ depending on perspective. An organisation campaigning against a dam may be seen as good by members of riverine communities and organisations facing the prospect of displacement and their supporters, but may be seen as bad by urban organisations demanding access to cheaper electricity. A critical approach to civil society identifies both good and bad forms of association (Mosher, 2002: 207). Cox points out that accounting for civil society from the ‘bottom up’ enables us to view protest and contestation, but it ignores the very real occurrence of civil society from the ‘top-down’ (1999: 11). Contestation, conflict, and power determine the outcomes of civil society, and thus the mere existence of associations and organisations does not guarantee a space that is autonomous, participatory, or emancipatory. These must be fought for within civil society. The dynamics of these struggles will become apparent in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.3 Civil Society in India

The study of civil society in India reflects the epistemological tangling discussed above. Despite this, there is a substantial body of literature concerning vastly different aspects of civil society in India. The literature varies greatly between those who argue that civil society is a Western concept ‘new’ to India (Béteille, 2000/2003), and those who focus on non-state political contestation; some of whom use the term ‘civil society, and others who do not. These will be discussed briefly in turn.

The first usage of the term tends to dominate. For instance, renowned sociologist André Béteille argues that civil society is only a relatively new term in discussions on India (2000/2003: 191). Béteille argues that the term comes to India from the West and from Indian scholars working in the West, thus the re-emergence of the term in Western academia and policy making has gradually been transferred to the Indian context and applied by Indian scholars (2000/2003: 193). Several authors have made a similar point, and argue that the transfer of the term into the Indian context is not without its problems

(Chatterjee, 2001; Pai and Narayan, 2003). Indeed the term seems to have been applied with little critical reflection in India, as in other contexts. B  teille goes on to argue that despite these problems, the term is used frequently and that the ‘discovery’ of civil society in recent Indian politics and academia comes from the growing disillusionment with both the state and the market, especially since the opening of the Indian economy in the 1990s (2000/2003: 193).

Literature written before the term was ‘rediscovered’ in the 1990s focuses on more traditional categories of social movements and organisations, such as trade unions (Sinha, 1984), peasant struggles (Dhanagare, 1983), and anti-colonial movements. However, much of the recent work discusses social movements and political participation in the language of civil society (Tandon and Mohanty ed, 2003; Ray and Katzenstein eds, 2005). This literature can be divided into several general themes: civil society and democracy/governance (Blomkvist, 2003; Chandhoke, 1998, 2002; Oomen, 2003; Tandon, 2003), links with historical concepts and philosophies, especially Gandhian notions (Pathak, 2001; Patterly, 2001; Rudolph and Rudolph, 2003), civil society in the colonial era (Bose and Jalal eds, 1999; Metcalfe and Metcalfe, 2002), social movements (Katzenstein et al, 2001; Ray and Katzenstein eds, 2005) including environmental movements (Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Mohanty, 2003; Rangan, 2004), women’s movements (Banerjee, 2004; Butalia, 2002; Sen, 2002; Ray, 1999; Unnithan-Kumar, 2000), anti-development movements (Baviskar, 2005; Mehta, 2000; Palit, 2003; Roy, 1999), separatist movements (Basu, 2006; Behera, 2000; Jeffery, 1994; Hazarika, 1995; Singh, 2002), class and trade union movements (Bhowmik, 1998; Sinha, 1984), civil society and identity, including communalism (Basu, 2001; Varshney, 2001), caste movements (Duncan, 2000; Omvedt, 1998, 2000; Pai, 2001; Shah, 2001; Weiner, 2001), and tribal movements (Arya, 1998; S. Baruah, 1999; Baviskar, 1995, 2005; Joshi, 2003; Singh ed, 1982, 1983).

From the literature surveyed it is difficult to gain any sense of civil society in India possessing distinct characteristics. The only general features appear to be a diversity of groups and interests, and a sense that civil society has been able to keep the institutions of

the state responsive. Katzenstein et al argue that it is through civil society in India, rather than the electoral system, that diverse groups have gained representation (2001: 268; see also Corbridge et al, 2005). Indeed, social movements have remained a powerful symbol of political participation in India, especially internationally recognised struggles like the Narmada Bachao Andolan against the damming of the Narmada River (Baviskar, 1995; Metha, 2000) and the Chipko Movement against deforestation in Uttarakhand (Rangan, 2004). Indeed, much of the literature focuses on these and similar movements that uphold the normative conceptions of civil society as a third sphere of 'good' association against the market and the state.

However, there is also a growing body of critical civil society literature from Indian authors and authors who use India as their empirical focus. For example, Chandhoke (2003) has studied the impact of Hindu nationalism on gender movements, looking at issues of power and domination between different discourses. Mark Robinson has argued that ethnic and religious identities underpin much of civil society in India, and are 'engaged in multiple struggles for ideological supremacy.' (1996/2003: 374) Kudva covers similar territory and demonstrates how state-NGO relations are dependent upon changes in state-society relations in different time periods; she focuses on the shift from Nehruvian developmentalism to religious nationalism and the impact of this on NGOs and their capacity for poverty alleviation (2005). Gupta argues that the renewed emphasis on civil society, especially as a service provider, has 'let the state off the hook' in India (1999/2003). Furthermore, as discussed above, Chatterjee (2001) and Mukherjee (2001) both discuss the imperial and colonial overtones of civil society in India, arguing that it cannot be divorced from colonial era notions of class and is largely the domain of elites.

Civil society in Northeast India generally, and Meghalaya specifically, remains almost completely unstudied with the exception of autonomy movements (Singh, 2002), tribal identity movements (Saikia, 2004; K.S. Singh ed, 1982), and anti-migration movements (Nag, 2002; S. Baruah, 1994a, 1994b, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). There are several reasons for this. First, ethno-politics has dominated the Northeast region since Indian independence, thus autonomy, identity, and anti-migration movements have been

prominent and closely tied to demands for new states and governance structures. Secondly, other civil society movements and actors have been difficult to divorce from these movements at an analytical level. Certain movements began as struggles for a specific goal, however over time the reasons and the purpose of these movements has changed, and in some cases become lost along the way. Thirdly, civil society itself has been heavily curtailed by the Indian state and military in the Northeast region.

Armed insurgency in the Northeast has brought an equally violent counter-insurgency response from the Indian Government and their counter-insurgency operations have brought the military to the region in enormous numbers. The Indian Army has extraordinary powers to wage war on insurgent armies, most notably through the Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 (AFSPA). The AFSPA extends to all seven states of the Northeast and can be put into operation in any area declared ‘disturbed’ by the Indian Government. Any commissioned officer, non-commissioned officer, or warrant officer is allowed to use force ‘...even to the causing of death,’ in disturbed areas in the following circumstances: against any person acting against a law or order, to prevent the assembly of more than five persons, against anyone carrying weapons or anything that is capable of being used as a weapon (SAHRDC, 1995). The AFSPA also allows the armed forces to arrest anyone without a warrant who is suspected to have committed, or being about to commit, any disturbance (SAHRDC, 1995). Perhaps the most significant aspect of the act is Section 6, which ‘...established that no legal proceeding can be brought against any member of the armed forces under the AFSPA, without permission of the central government.’ (SAHRDC, 1995) Drèze and Sen argue that human rights violations by the military are rarely challenged in India, ‘the tolerance of human rights violations is often assumed to be an essential (if ‘regrettable’) condition of effective “counter-insurgency” operations, in border areas...criticism of these operations, no matter how brutal or illegal, tends to be branded as “anti-national”.’ (2002: 24) The effects of the AFSPA, especially the provision to break up the assembly of more than five people, have serious repercussions on the effective functioning and formation of civil society in the region. Thus not only is the analytical focus on insurgency and counter-insurgency, but the militarisation of the Northeast region limits civil society and reduces its capacity.

Despite the focus on ethno-politics and militarism, civil society continues to exist and contest and reinforce various forms of power in the Northeast and Meghalaya. Adopting a critical approach allows for the civil society actors reinforcing these forms of power and those contesting it to be analysed as part of the same terrain. Meghalaya is one of the poorest states in India, and there are multiple causes of insecurity existing beyond the obvious national security frameworks of the Indian state towards the region, and the ethno-nationalist security frameworks that dominate social, political, and economic life and are advocated through powerful civil society actors. The ability of civil society actors to transcend dominant power structures can be measured by their ability to contest causes of insecurity. In order to establish a basis for discussing insecurities beyond the state and beyond ethnic wholes, a discussion of insecurity is required. The following section outlines the utility of the concept of human security, and the consequences of its absence, for this thesis. I will end the chapter by discussing the relationship between civil society and insecurity, arguing that while civil society is vital in contesting the causes of insecurity, the relationship is constitutive.

2.4 Human Security as critique and discourse

This thesis is concerned with human security, yet in the context of Meghalaya human security is far more noticeable in its absence; the condition of insecurity. Insecurity has multiple causes, yet in order to analyse these causes the concept of human security must first be understood. Human security places the security of individuals, not states, at its centre (Axworthy, 2001; Ogata and Cels, 2003; Thomas, 2000; ul Haq, 1995). Human security shifts the focus of security away from the state and armed conflict to focus on other threats affecting human life (Booth, 1991; Booth and Vale, 1997; Thomas, 2000). A human security approach aims to emancipate individuals and communities from security priorities imposed from the outside, whether by the state or non-state actors, by allowing various actors to identify the causes of insecurity and demand that they be addressed, empowering these actors in the process. The concept came to prominence in the 1994

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) *World Development Report* (UNDP, 1994). Thus the concept has been heavily bound up in a normative framework close to sustainable development and distributive justice.

The value of human security is three-fold. First, human security shifts the referent object of security away from the state to examine insecurities occurring in multiple spaces and among various groups within and across national boundaries. Human security recognises that narrow conceptions of security and development may hide various forms of insecurity faced by different groups within particular locations. Secondly, it acts a normative critique of orthodox conceptualisations of security. Human security posits that secure states can contain insecure peoples, and that narrow conceptions of security can themselves generate insecurity. Thus human security challenges orthodox approaches and calls for a reconsideration of what constitutes security. Thirdly, human security opens the possibility for smaller, locally based actors to define what constitutes a security threat, thus alternative conceptions of security can be articulated from the ‘bottom up’. It is here that the agency of civil society actors is important for making insecurities visible to other actors with the capacity to address them. These actors may be part of the state or be non-state actors.

Essentially, if the condition of insecurity is felt by a group, or by individuals, it ‘counts’ as a problem or issue, provided it can be *seen*. In a very basic sense, civil society plays a vital role in making insecurities visible in a political sense. However, an important distinction must be made here between ‘real’ insecurity and the construction of insecurity. As will become clear in the following chapters, there are multiple causes of insecurity facing different groups and individuals. These insecurities are real in so much as they exist in a material sense and can be seen analytically, regardless of whether or not they are constructed as causes of insecurity by state or non-state actors making them visible in a political sense. This is very clear in Chapter 4; the causes of environmental insecurity in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya are real in that their impact can be seen in various aspects of social, political, and economic life. Yet due to the power of certain civil society actors, only particular causes of insecurity are politicised. This does not make the causes of

insecurity that are not politicised any less real or any less severe for those experiencing them. This will become clearer in Chapters 4 and 5.

Origins

Human security developed from the critical approach to Realist and state-centric understandings of security and security studies. Since the 1980s there have been calls from academic, governmental, and non-governmental sources to broaden the concept of security and remove it from narrow conceptions based in the Realist tradition. Critical approaches to security provide a radically different account of the ‘meaning and production of security.’ (Dunne and Wheeler, 2004: 9) Critiques of traditional security come from a range of perspectives, yet despite this diversity, the literature establishes five main critiques of the traditional security discourse:

- i) The state can be a cause of insecurity, and does not always act to secure the lives of its citizens (let alone non-citizens).
- ii) Security has been conceptualised from a masculine perspective, ignoring the role of women and the impact of conflict on women. The impact of conflict overwhelmingly affects women and children as casualties, victims of sexual violence, and refugees. The structure of traditional security legitimises violence and preserves power relationships of male domination and female submission. The security of the state is not necessarily the security of women, and a gendered approach to security forces a broadening of the concept to include issues such as ‘mal-development, poverty, debt, environmental degradation, and the distribution of resources.’ (Steans, 1998: 129)
- iii) By maintaining the state as the referent object of security, traditional security is very limited in dealing with a wider range of non-state and non-military threats that can occur from the inside of states as well as the outside, such as economic inequality, environmental degradation, poverty, hunger, and disease. Moreover these threats are constantly changing over time, whereas traditional approaches use a static and deterministic understanding of threats, structures, and agents.

- iv) Traditional security is constructed by politics, and relies upon notions of otherness to classify threats to the state and its citizenry. The issue of identity, having been left out of traditional security discourse, is an important part of the critical approach.
- v) The security discourse that emerged in the Cold War era inadequately explains the insecurities and conflicts experienced in Third World states and privilege the status quo as natural and desirable. (See Archaya, 1997; Booth and Vale, 1997; Dalby, 1997; Dunne and Wheeler, 2004; Enloe, 1989; Huysmans, 1998; Krause and Williams, 1997; Katzenstein, 1996; McDonald, 2002; 2003; Tickner, 1992; Wendt, 1992; Williams, 1998)

From these critiques three alternative approaches to security have been outlined in the literature (Krause, 1998: 127). The first is marked by attempts to broaden the narrow orthodox conception of security to include a new series of threats such as economic threats, environmental threats, and threats to human rights. The second is characterised by attempts to deepen the agenda beyond the state by taking security down to the individual level, or up to the international or global level. The third retains the state centric approach but concentrates on different forms of interstate security, such as common security, collective security, cooperative security, and comprehensive security. Critical approaches are generally based on one of these or display various elements from each. Despite these differences the crucial characteristic of critical security is that it is based on emancipation from existing structures and the development of a security agenda from the bottom-up (Booth, 1991). It is here that the concept of *human* security becomes relevant. Human security can be seen as a means to achieve an emancipatory concept by recognising the various causes of the condition of insecurity in different spaces and address those causes.

There are a wide range of debates within the critical and human security literature, involving both opponents and proponents alike. These debates include; what human security is (McDonald, 2002; Newman, 2001; Suhrke, 1999), which actors should implement it and whether or not it should be merged with national and state-centred models of security (Abad, 2000; Burke, 2001; Thomas and Tow, 2002; Bellamy and McDonald, 2002; Paris, 2001), which aspects should take priority (Khong, 2001; King and Murray, 2002), and how human security might be measured (Bajpai, 2000). These debates

raise key questions about defining the concept, policy prescriptions, and transferability. However, the concern of this chapter and the following chapters is the absence of human security, insecurity, and the role of civil society in contesting what constitutes insecurity and subsequently in addressing insecurity. Thus the relationship between civil society and insecurity is crucial and will be discussed in the following section.

2.5 Applying Human Security

Human security has three main uses in this thesis. First, as a framework for analysis, human security led me to examine the causes of environmental and gender-based insecurities in Meghalaya. This allows analysis beyond rigid frameworks of national security and the security of ethnic or minority groups as wholes to focus on the different forms of insecurity within national groups, ethnic groups, and smaller communities. Secondly, in the context of a developing region within a developing state, analysing insecurity allows movement beyond the debates surrounding development and post-development to uncover the causes of insecurity resulting from the processes of development *and* from the absence of development. Thirdly, human security calls for varied forms of agency in order to address the causes of insecurity in particular contexts. Thus using human security as a framework for analysis allows an assessment to be made of the effectiveness of civil society in addressing insecurity, yet it also allows for analysis of the impact of insecurity on the functioning of civil society. These will be discussed in turn below.

(i) Analytical and normative elements

As an analytical concept, human security offers the possibility of identifying multiple causes of insecurity within a particular space, whether local, regional, national, or transnational. There has been a tendency to focus on transnational threats in the human security literature, however, the potential to recognise threats at a local or sub-state level should not be undervalued. Human security brings multiple forms of insecurity into new frameworks of analysis while also providing a normative framework that challenges

narrow conceptions of security and insecurity. I argue that the analytical aspects are far more useful for the study of insecurity in Meghalaya than the normative aspects.

As an analytical tool, human security rests heavily on its origins in human development, and in particular the landmark UNDP report from 1994. The UNDP report lists seven aspects of human security that are vital, interdependent, and universal. They are: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security (from violence), community security, political security (UNDP, 1994: 24-25). Further literature deals specifically with refugees and internally displaced people (see Jacobsen, 2002: 95-124; CHS, 2003: 40-52), women and human security (Karamé and Bertinussen, 2001), and the importance of education to achieve all these ends (CHS, 2003: 113-124). The causes of insecurity are complex and intertwined and the causes will be different in different contexts.

Economic security means access to a source of basic income from some kind of productive work and the presence of some kind of minimal social safety net to counter sudden disruptions to livelihoods (UNDP, 1994: 27). Food security is access to sufficient food, both economically and physically. Access to food comes from access to income, equitable distribution of food, a sustainable environment, and sufficiently healthy land (CHS, 2003: 14). Health security is dependent on access to health care. Poor health prevents people from working, from making choices. It depletes communities, creates orphans, deprives states of skilled workers, and compromises future generations. Environmental security is vital for food security, economic security, and health security. Environmental security of the individual and community is becoming increasingly recognised as a transnational and local threat and thus environmental security needs to be addressed at the global, regional, national, and local levels (Græger, 1996: 112). Personal security from physical violence is one of the most obvious aspects of human security. These threats may come from the state, other states, other communities or ethnic groups, crime or street violence, domestic violence, violence against children, and violence against the vulnerable and extreme poor (UNDP, 1994: 30). Community security refers to the security of identity. Communities may be based on racial or ethnic groups, diaspora networks, family, and cultural identity

(UNDP, 1994: 31). Many people reproduce their identity within a community and when this community is threatened its members become insecure. Political security is the freedom of expression and freedom from repression (UNDP, 1994: 32). The ability to practise these rights and to organise as a part of civil society to protest and voice dissent is often dependent on the domestic state and its leadership.

In the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, a predominantly agrarian society located in a border region, human security has the most value as an analytical concept to identify multiple insecurities existing within the local context. It moves away from frameworks that cast communities as monolithic wholes and gloss over the multiple causes of insecurity occurring at different levels simultaneously. In examining the multiple causes of insecurity affecting different groups *within* the Khasi Hills it is important to establish what the referent object is. In other words, who or what is facing insecurity, and who or what needs to be secured? The immediate answer derived from the human security literature is ‘the people of the Khasi Hills’. Yet this is unsatisfactory at an empirical level; which people are we referring to?

One of the central debates in the critical and human security literature is over the utility of making humans the referent object of security (Booth and Vale, 1997: 334; Walker, 1997: 65; Krause and Williams, 1997: 43-46; Dyer, 2001: 442; Huysmans, 1998: 227; Krause, 1998: 135; McDonald, 2002: 283). Krause and Williams argue that making individual humans the referent object risks abstracting them and leaving them ‘ungrounded in any social or historical context.’ (1997: 46) McDonald takes a similar approach arguing that issues of ethnic identity and community identity may be excluded from a human security approach (2002: 281-282). McDonald argues that the referent of human security should be fluid, including both individuals and groups.

This thesis agrees with this approach, as insecurity affects individuals and groups of different sizes at different times. Insecurity can be faced by large groups, such as the Khasi ethnic group as a whole in the context of ethnic violence; smaller communities, such as the inhabitants of an area being leased for mining; by families, such as a family that has lost its

land and faces rural indebtedness; and by individuals, such as those facing unemployment or poor health. Insecurity may simultaneously affect ethnic groups, communities, and individuals, yet the lasting effects may be greater for particular groups, and the capacity to address the causes of insecurity may be greater for some and not others.

There are multiple causes of insecurity in the Khasi Hills and these affect different groups in different ways. The focus of this thesis is on environmental insecurity and gender-based insecurity. The primary reason for this is empirical; they are at the root of the condition of insecurity faced by a large number of people in the Khasi Hills. The Khasi Hills is a predominantly agrarian society and is prone to widespread environmental degradation. This degradation causes insecurity for different groups by jeopardising livelihoods, furthering the privatisation of land, and fuelling urban migration. Despite much-lauded existence of the matrilineal inheritance system, or perhaps because of it, gender-based insecurities are also widespread in the Khasi Hills, derived from the power relations embedded in socially constructed gender roles. This thesis focuses on the gendered impacts of changes in land use and ownership, poverty, and high levels of domestic violence. These insecurities are real, in that they can be seen analytically by using conventional and non-conventional indicators. Yet only some of these causes are politicised by civil society actors, revealing important points about the relationship between civil society and insecurity. This will be discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5.

While human security is a valuable analytical tool, it is also a normative challenge to conceptions of security defined in narrow military terms (Steans, 1998; Thomas, 2000). As a normative concept human security has enormous potential in an area like the Khasi Hills as it may enable a shift in focus away from the military and towards the people of the Khasi Hills and the Northeast region. It may be able to recast security away from the security and insecurity of the nation-state and towards the security of individuals and groups. However, the concept is yet to gain sufficient normative strength among state and non-state actors in Northeast India, where security primarily means security of the Indian state or security of the ethnic/national group and insecurity is perceived as anything threatening these two referents.

Furthermore, as a normative concept, human security does not appear to offer significant deviation from other norms such as sustainable development, human development, and social justice, which have been transmitted through civil society, the state, and international organisations in various parts of India for decades (Ray and Katzenstein, 2005). Thus while human security may be significantly different analytically from previous norms, the actual changes demanded by human security are similar in empirical circumstances. This is not to suggest that human security should be abandoned as a normative project, but merely to suggest that in sites which have been the focus of development policies for decades, the difference between some of these normative approaches may not translate to any *actual* difference in demands made upon the state or NGOs. For instance, inhabitants of a village in the Khasi Hills with no running water will see the provision of that water as the immediate solution to their problem whether it is articulated as the provision of human security, human development, or social justice. Therefore the normative and prescriptive aspects of human security will not be explicitly expressed or addressed in this thesis.

(ii) Development and insecurity

It is necessary to justify the focus on the condition of insecurity in preference to other means of analysing the state of people's lives in Meghalaya. In a context such as the Khasi Hills, a poor, peripheral part of a developing country, it is difficult to detach insecurity from development, or a lack of development. In the last fifteen years, debates over the nature and the necessity of development have become increasingly prominent (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1990/1994; Illich, 1997; Kothari, 1989; Nandy, 1987/2004; Rahnema, 1997; Sachs, 1992; Shiva, 1989; Spivak, 1988). Given the rich and diverse literature around theories and practices of development, the choice to use insecurity as a measure of wellbeing in the Khasi Hills warrants some explanation. In other words, why study the relationship between civil society and insecurity and not the relationship between civil society and development? The short answer is that development is so heavily contested that focussing on insecurity opens the possibility to move beyond what has become a

counterproductive debate. The condition of insecurity can be derived from a lack of development but also from development itself, or at least the way development is implemented. Thus by focussing on insecurity it is possible to acknowledge that particular forms of development produce insecurity but that other forms of development may provide human security. This will be discussed briefly below.

The human security discourse has many similarities with human development. Human security is concerned with livelihoods, food, health, and other core development issues, so is there a difference? Sen argues in the *Commission on Human Security Report* that the difference is that human security is concerned with those that have been left behind by development (2003: 8). Thus insecurity is experienced by those excluded from growth and by those that rise out of depravity through human development only to be plunged back into poverty by a vulnerable market or a destroyed environment. Failed human development can cause insecurity, but even 'successful' human development can be grossly uneven and many people fall through the gaps and into a condition of insecurity (Sen, 2003: 8).

Using insecurity has the advantage of going beyond conventional categories used in much of the development literature and in development agencies. Human development and growth indicators based on quantitative statistics using nation states as the units of analysis disguise the distribution of development benefits within states, underdevelopment in particular regions within states or among different class, gender and ethnic groups, and the impact of development itself on displacement, environmental degradation, and the precarious nature of livelihoods. Human security may enable a more comprehensive view of the complexities of economic, social, and political realities within states than human development.

Human security contains a critique of traditional notions of security; however it also contains a tacit critique of the organisation of the global economy and the dominance of particular development paradigms. Thomas argues that human security 'requires us to consider humanity embedded not simply within discrete sovereign states, but within a

global social structure, the capitalist world economy that has been developing since the sixteenth century.’ (2000: 7) Thus a holistic understanding of insecurity must address the insecurities generated from the failure of development and rapid economic growth to address inequalities in different regions, states, and communities. As a result there are several arguments shared by the human security literature and what has become known as ‘post-development’ (Rahnema and Bawtree eds, 1997).

Several authors, notably Escobar, Ferguson, and Sachs, have argued that development is a form of neo-colonial control, a form of consciousness that divided the world into ‘developed’, and ‘underdeveloped’ areas (Escobar, 1995: 21-54; Ferguson, 1990/1994: xiii-xv, 56; Sachs, 1992). For critics development is not ‘natural’ or necessary, but a culture, a construction, a set of dominant ideas forming a single, unquestionable discourse with its own internal logic (Peet, 1999: 143). Parpart and Marchand argue that despite their diversity, these approaches share some basic similarities,

...(these authors) question the universal pretensions of modernity, and the Eurocentric certainty of both liberal and Marxist development studies. They point out that much of the discourse and practice of development has exaggerated Western knowledge claims, dismissed and silenced knowledge from the South and perpetrated dependence on Northern ‘expertise’. They call for a new approach to development (that) acknowledges difference(s), searches out previously silenced voices/knowledges and recognises the need to welcome multiple interpretations and ‘solutions’ to developmental problems. (1995: 12)

The post-development literature is diverse and contains critiques of development from a number of perspectives, including feminist, environmental, political, and subaltern. A broad range of feminist approaches have critiqued development, arguing for the inclusion of women in development (Boserup, 1970), arguing that development impoverishes women (Chowdhry, 1995; Mies, 1986; Sen and Grown, 1987), arguing that development is gendered in ideology and practice (Parpart, 1995), and arguing that development controls and colonises both women and the environment (Cheney, 1994; Merchant, 1994; Mies and Shiva, 1993; Shiva, 1989, 1993; Warren, 1994). Environmental and ecological critiques argue that development is ecologically destructive and unsustainable, and that it normalises

environmental destruction in order to achieve a natural and desirable state (O'Connor ed, 1994; Goldblatt, 1996; Redclift, 1987). Other authors have argued that development is apolitical and depoliticised, removing contestation in favour of a singular model of social and economic order that is unquestionable and ignores diverse voices and alternatives (Ferguson, 1990/1994; Harriss, 2001/2004; Leys, 1996). Other authors have argued that development ignores or naturalises poverty (Kothari, 1995; Saurin, 1996; Tooze and Murphy, 1996; Thomas, 2005).

Many post-development authors have argued that change is possible by focussing on the local level, on sufficiency rather than consumption, and by reassessing pre-modern societies (Esteva and Prakash, 1997; Illich, 1997). Rahnema argues that traditional modes of thinking and living were attacked by development discourse and sustained by 'racist clichés' that cast traditional societies as oppressive and tyrannical (1997: 380). If development is the problem then the solution is to reassess alternatives, not necessarily the pre-modern but the non-modern and the anti-modern. Thus a return to traditions and knowledge(s) rooted in alternative cultures is seen as a way to resist the destructive influence of modernity (Nandy, 1991/2004). Some authors have argued that cultures, identities, and ethnicities with a closer relationship to the environment and with production and social relations that emphasise sustainability and minimal excess consumption, should be reassessed, nurtured, and included in social movements against development (Esteva and Prakash, 1997; Guha, 2000).

The human security literature has similar concerns; gender, sustainability, livelihoods, poverty alleviation, and alternative voices. Like much of the post-development literature, human security is also concerned with alternative approaches to development. The idea of security from the 'bottom up' resonates with many of the alternative approaches suggested in the post-development literature. While some of these alternatives appear to be reactionary returns to romanticised pre-modern and pre-colonial social structures, others, such as the ideas put forth by Kothari (1995) and Nandy (1987/2004) call for critical approaches to both traditions and modernity to find new approaches to development.

While much of the post-development literature is very persuasive, there are several shortcomings that human security may be able to overcome. First, several of the authors cast development, and indeed modernity, as having a single origin in either the West or in particular institutions, particularly the World Bank. However as Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal argue, development as part of modernity is produced in multiple sites in the West, in the Third World, in regional spaces, and in local spaces (2003: 7-13). They argue that the distinction between the global as a site of hegemony and the production of dominant ideas and the local as the site of purity and resistance is not sustainable empirically, as the understandings of hegemonic concepts such as development will always vary in different locations (2003: 12). Furthermore, understanding the local as the site of particularism discounts the influences of external social, economic, and cultural processes. Peet makes a similar argument, arguing that while there are similarities in the version of development that comes from particular institutions and states, development should be seen as a set of 'conflicting discourses and practices based in positions that contradict one another.' (1999: 156) He argues that development should be seen as 'a system of organised practices produced under definite social relations.' (1999: 161)

Thus in simple terms, the problem with much of the post-development literature is that they conceptualise development as a mammoth discourse originating in a single place, the West, in a single moment, the end of the Second World War, and argue that this version of development must be resisted in local spaces. However, development takes many forms in different locations: regions, states, provinces, localities. Furthermore, as Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal remind us, multiple actors in multiple spaces undertake the practice of development and the production and reproduction of development ideology (2003: 42). They point out that 'the differences even within these...groups (of actors), and the divergences in the processes of development that their goals and strategies introduce forcefully remind us of the impossibility of looking at development through a singularising lens.' (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal, 2003: 42) Thus categories such as the Third World and the West do not allow these variations to be analysed and fence the experiences of development into totalising categories.

This begs the question, where does insecurity fit into debates over development?

Analysing insecurity in India will inevitably raise key questions over the theory and practice of development, so how does the condition of insecurity relate to arguments over development? Insecurity is not a middle ground between a modified version of development, as embodied in human development, and the critiques of post-development, but instead has the potential to move *beyond* these debates altogether. Addressing the causes of insecurity requires a continual critique of development, yet it also requires an understanding of the differentiated impact of development in particular contexts, i.e. local, regional, national, and global, and also the different understandings of development in these spatial contexts. This links the impacts of development to ‘non-development’ issues like national security, political participation, and identity politics.

Yet addressing insecurity can also *require* development. As Peet argues, it is important to discriminate between improvements in health, for example, and the abuse of technology for mass consumption (1999: 160). He argues that development does contain ‘a real quest for improving the human condition, but one perverted by class power and ruling ideologies.’ (1999: 161) He calls for more critical analyses based on class and gender that can reveal potentialities as well as misuses, abuses, and crises. Insecurity, when articulated by groups and individuals at the grassroots, may be able to identify insecurity caused by development and it may be able to identify ways in which development can be altered to alleviate insecurity. Thus the insecurity caused by development projects in a particular location can be identified and contested by particular actors, yet these same actors may argue that they also need the development of a road to enable them to travel to markets to earn a livelihood, or to allow them to access health care.

Furthermore, this approach allows the links between national security and mal-development, to borrow Steans’ phrase (1998: 129), to become more obvious. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the national security approach of the Indian Government to the Northeast region has rested on a singular version of development aimed at facilitating military occupation in the borderlands and propping up local elites. Analysing human security and its absence offers the potential to challenge this approach. However whether

or not this can be operationalised depends on the capacity of civil society, and this, as I argue depends upon the constraints caused by identity, power, and inequalities in local contexts.

(iii) Civil Society and insecurity

Perhaps the key question emerging from the human and critical security literature is the question of agency; who will implement human security? (Abad, 2000; Bellamy and McDonald, 2002; Booth, 1991; Burke, 2001: 215-239; Thomas and Tow, 2002) The debate has centred on the role of state and non-state actors. For example, Thomas and Tow seek to merge human security into a statist framework to make the concept more relevant and policy-friendly (2002). Bellamy and McDonald argue that this misses the point of human security entirely and 'risks limiting the emancipatory potential of this security discourse... (and) threatens to re-legitimise the very social structures (states and an international society) that create insecurity and limit the potential for alleviating suffering, wherever it may be.' (2002: 374) While the state is important in implementing human security, the value of human security as an analytical concept lies in the possibility that people, not states, can identify the sources of their insecurity. This provides the opportunity for emancipation from existing structures that cause insecurity and actors who define security in narrow terms.

One of the key facets of human security is the recognition that insecurity will not be the same for all (Afkami et al, 2002: 663). The causes of insecurity and the severity of insecurity will be different in different locations, not just in different states, but *within* different states, among different ethnic groups, class groups, in different environments, and between genders. Agency in defining and providing security can come from a number of sources and allows security to be realised in a number of contexts (McDonald, 2002: 293).

In a functional sense, civil society actors can politicise certain causes of insecurity and make them part of the political agenda. Similarly they can contest the ways particular causes of insecurity have been politicised. This operates at local, national, and

transnational levels. Insecurities that are politicised locally can become national or international issues if civil society actors have access to networks. A cause of insecurity may not be seen as important locally until it has been politicised by national or transnational actors and vice versa. Later chapters are concerned with the ability to politicise and contest insecurities, i.e. which individuals and organisations are empowered to contest the causes of insecurity locally and globally? Why are some insecurities contested and others not?

One of the main problems with relying on civil society to identify causes of insecurity and contest these causes is that it presupposes a unitary and progressive civil society. The *ability* of civil society to contest insecurities has largely escaped critical analysis. If human security is to be achieved, a new approach to understanding and conceptualising civil society is needed. Questions of identity, power, and inequalities need to be considered. The case studies that follow in Chapters 4 and 5 seek to contribute to a fuller understanding of the ability of civil society to contest the causes of insecurity, and to pursue emancipation from the condition of insecurity. I argue that in particular local contexts civil society can be ineffective in contesting the causes of insecurity and that in such circumstances civil society can even cause greater insecurity.

If civil society is to become effective in emancipating people from insecurity, the restrictions on civil society actors must be understood in their local contexts. Different local contexts mean different restrictions, and a blanket assumption that the existence of civil society will eventually lead to human security is unhelpful and unrealistic. In an ineffective and repressive civil society, actors seeking emancipation must struggle to contest insecurities from within by challenging existing structures and creating new spaces for political action. In keeping with the critical framework discussed above, civil society must be critically examined to identify the actors and ideas constraining emancipation and those struggling to transcend these constraints.

Despite the enormous potential of civil society in identifying and addressing causes of insecurity, the actor with the greatest capacity to provide human security is the state. In the

Khasi Hills the multiple layers of governance complicate this process. There are four basic levels in the Khasi Hills, the Indian Government, the Meghalaya Government, the district councils, and the village *dorbars* (councils). To varying degrees these institutions have an interest in maintaining the status quo, and at the district council and *dorbar* level they lack transparency, accountability, and women are excluded from participating. Thus the role of civil society is even more important under the conditions of state neglect.

However, the relationship between civil society and insecurity is far more complicated than a simple functional relationship which suggests that once constraints on civil society are transcended, insecurity can be addressed and human security can be achieved. This understanding places civil society actors in a vacuum, separating them from the impacts of insecurity and reifying them from the context in which they exist. In other words, conceiving civil society as a functional sphere where insecurities can be politicised, contested, and addressed is limiting. As will become apparent in this thesis, the relationship between civil society and human security is constitutive. The ability of civil society to politicise and contest the causes of insecurity has an enormous bearing on the emancipation of individuals and groups from various power structures, both material and ideational, which perpetuate insecurity. Yet the prevalence of certain insecurities and their reproduction by powerful state and non-state actors constrains civil society. Civil society must overcome constraints to address insecurities, yet insecurities place constraints on civil society. The constraints on civil society from state and non-state actors affect which insecurities are politicised and how they are politicised, while the dominance of particular insecurities constrain civil society and determine which actors have access to political spaces. Those empowered by the reproduction of certain insecurities have the power to set the political agenda, marginalising other causes of insecurity and the actors attempting to contest these causes. This will become apparent in the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 and will be discussed in much greater detail in Chapter 6.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the central debates surrounding civil society and called for a critical approach that recognises the existence of contestation, conflict, and power relations within civil society, and that these processes determine the outcomes of civil society. I have urged caution in using strict epistemological understandings of civil society heavily embedded in Enlightenment and liberal political and moral philosophy in favour of identifying civil society in a fluid way, taking into account forms of political association and participation that are formal and informal, modern and traditional.

The second section of this chapter made a case for using human security, most visible in its absence, as starting point for examining the obstacles different groups of people face in their everyday existence based on its analytical proficiency, the possibilities to move beyond development and post-development, and the need for agency to come from state and non-state actors; especially civil society. Thus the connection between civil society and human security has been made and I argue that civil society is a means of politicising the causes of insecurity making these causes visible, as well as contesting the ways in which certain causes of insecurity have been constructed and used. Yet the mere existence of civil society does not guarantee that insecurity will be ‘seen’ let alone addressed. There are many constraints on civil society, and these will be discussed in the following chapters. Emancipation from the condition of insecurity requires these constraints to be transcended. Chapter 6 will examine the conditions under which transcendence is possible.

I will end this chapter with the following propositions. First, the impact of identity politics has a major influence on the functioning of civil society, especially in locations where identity politics are heightened and constitutive of political, social, and economic relations, as is the case in Meghalaya. Secondly, the existence of power relations within civil society has a major impact on which actors have access to civil society and which insecurities will be part of the political agenda and on what grounds they will be contested. Thirdly, existing inequalities based on ethnicity, class, and gender are not simply overcome by

applying models of civil society or human security over the top of existing social relations in local contexts. Fourthly, the relationship between civil society and insecurity is constitutive. Civil society is required to contest the causes of insecurity, yet certain causes of insecurity marginalise particular civil society actors and particular causes of insecurity. These propositions will be used to direct the empirical Chapters 4 and 5 and will be revisited in Chapter 6.

The following chapter, Chapter 3, takes an historical approach to the context of Northeast India and Meghalaya, and examines the historical relationships between different social groups and between these groups and the state. The purpose of the chapter is to use historical analysis to outline the ways in which identity, power, and inequalities have been formed in Meghalaya, outlining the contextual framework within which insecurities are produced and within which civil society actors operate.

Chapter 3- Ethnography, Evangelism, and Excluded Areas: colonialism, state formation, and the 'outsiders' discourse

Colonial ethnography appropriated barbarism from the missionaries in the late nineteenth century... the civilising mission was less urgent, and yielded increasingly to the imperatives of colonial science that would contain barbarism both through the policing of tradition and the recording of tradition that so frequently emerged out of political activities...involving the delineation of religion, custom, and tradition on the one hand, and the firm maintenance of public order in an imperial regime that held the colonised in place through the knowledge and enlightened protection of tradition on the other. Barbarism was a sign of colonial difference, producing an ever widening chasm between the subjects and objects of colonial knowledge.

-Dirks, 2006: 240

The notion of a rigid and determining "custom" was of course an illusion created by colonial ethnographic and administrative practice, partly through the systematic erasure of all traces of... "everyday life" in the colonial ethnographic record.

-Raheja, 2004: 199

... [the tribes] live a simple integrated life. The kind of differentiation that one is aware of in complex societies where religious life is separated from the cultural and professional undertakings [sic] is not known to them. In a sophisticated society, one is in a position to demarcate various aspects and fields of life. It is not so in the case of tribal society [sic], which is an undifferentiated whole.

-Haldipur, 1972/1986: 311

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a contextual framework to complement the theoretical framework established in the previous chapter. I argue in this and the following chapters, that the ability of civil society actors to contest insecurity is determined by identity, power, and inequalities. This chapter examines the context within which identities have been created

and reproduced, new forms of power have been constructed, and various inequalities have deepened. It is concerned with the creation of identities in Northeast India during the colonial era, the institutionalisation of these identities in the postcolonial era, and the way identities have empowered certain actors in contemporary Meghalaya. By examining these changes, this chapter provides the contextual framework within which civil society can be critically examined in the following chapters.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the creation of the categories of 'tribe' and 'hill tribe' in colonial India. After describing the characteristics attributed by the category, I discuss the rationale for its creation focussing on political subjugation, economic domination, and missionary activities. The second section discusses the persistence of colonial categories in postcolonial India by exploring the debates over the 'tribal problem' in the decades immediately after independence. In the third section I focus on the institutionalisation of hill tribal identity in the movement for a separate hill state, the state of Meghalaya. I argue that the hill state movement depended upon distinctions between hill tribes and others, embedding ethnic identity in social, political, and economic relations in Meghalaya. The fourth section of this chapter describes the contemporary expressions of identity politics in Meghalaya, referred to as the 'outsiders' discourse. The final section examines which actors are empowered by the continual reproduction of the 'outsiders' discourse, including both state and non-state actors. These actors have a vast impact upon civil society and the politicisation of certain causes of insecurity, and this will become evident in the following chapters.

3.1 Creating Tribes and Hill Tribes in Colonial Assam

The colonial authorities divided the Northeast into categories which have formed the basis for identity and ethno-nationalist politics in the region in the subsequent eras. Thus any understanding of the role of identity in the region must trace its origins and its transformations. This section examines the main colonial categories that have been instrumental in this process, 'tribe' and 'hill-tribe'.

In examining the impacts of identity in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, multiple layers of identity need to be considered. An individual or group of individuals may have overlapping identities, and a particular identity may be politically significant at a particular time, and this may change with wider political and social changes. A Khasi living in Meghalaya may identify themselves as a woman, as a member of their clan, as a member of their village, as a member of their sub-tribe or dialect group, as a Khasi, as a Christian, as a tribal, and as an Indian national. Weiner argues that particular agents will emphasise different identities for political and social mobilisation though the actual identities that are politically salient will vary in different locations across India at different times. Caste, class, ethnicity, religion, and linguistic identities all have different levels of political relevance assigned by particular agents (2001: 208).

Identity has become a widely used concept in the social sciences explaining everything from intra-state conflict, to nationalism, to social movements (Anderson, 1991; Castells, 1997; Connor, 1994). Identity can be defined in several ways; the expression of shared similarities and shared differences to other groups (Cohen, 1985), the internalisation of culture and its reproduction in social positioning, a form of 'imagined community' drawing individuals into a shared sense of history and entitlement based on culture rather than class (Anderson, 1991), a central process in state formation and nation building (Hobsbawm, 1983; Kaiwar, 2003; Rae, 2002), and a feeling or sense of belonging to a community, even if such a community is ill-defined (Ray, 2003). Ludden groups these into two approaches, 'essentialist' and 'constructivist' (2002a: 2). The essentialist approach assumes that individuals have a pre-existing, inherent identity as members of a group. Thus a social group 'expresses its essential character through the activities of its members, particularly of leaders who represent collective sentiments and interests publicly.' (Ludden, 2002a: 2) The constructivist approach assumes human identities are changeable and malleable, fluid and contextual. Powerful actors in society construct social identity and privilege some identities over others. Thus the constructivist approach posits that 'social identities are always available for redefinition and recombination because they are always unstable

products of social power in specific sites, under contestation as the various powers of identity-formation push and pull this way and that.’ (Ludden, 2002a: 2)

The approach taken in this thesis leans further towards the constructivist approach to identity, however I adopt a more flexible approach in line with Weiner’s assertion that,

...individuals everywhere have class or ethnic group identities or both, and these identities are often fluid and contested, but they do rest on something “real” or at least measurable and observable (e.g. occupation, income, language, religion), that these identities may or may not generate conflict, but are often the basis for political action, and that people unhappy with their lot may express their discontent by organising themselves (or being organised by others) along any one of these identities. (2001: 210)

In other words, while various agents are very influential in constructing identity, there are existing factors that underpin identity; whether these factors are material, political, social, or constitutive of some or all of these.

Colonising the frontier

Meghalaya was formed as a federal state in India in 1972. Between Partition in 1947 and 1972, the area that is now Meghalaya was part of the much larger state of Assam. During the colonial era the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were administered differently from the Garo Hills, and where this has significant implications for the present study it has been noted in the text. Thus the colonial history of Meghalaya needs to be viewed in conjunction with the history of Assam as the hills formed the southern periphery of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys and the northern periphery of Bengal. Before discussing the creation of ‘tribes’ and ‘hill tribes’, a brief introduction to colonial expansion in the Northeast will be given.

The Ahom, a Tai-speaking group thought to be migrants from the Shan lands of what is now eastern Myanmar, established a powerful trading kingdom in upper Assam from the 13th century, resisting Mughal incursions and remaining largely autonomous (S. Baruah,

1999: 24; Ludden, 2003: 9, 12; Saikia, 2004: 8).¹ By the 19th century, the Ahom Kingdom began to fall apart and Burmese forces invaded, encroaching further into Ahom territory eventually capturing the British trading post at Kolibar (Singh, 2004: 55). The British retaliated and the First Anglo-Burmese War began in 1824 (Ramachandra, 1978: 69-79). The Brahmaputra Valley, the bulk of present day Assam, came under British control following the first Anglo-Burmese War and signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 (Pearn, 1944; Ramachandra, 1978). As Ludden argues, ‘only then did Assam gain- for the first time in its history- a firm regional identity as a part of Indian imperial geography.’ (2003:13) From this point the colonisation of the Northeast began in earnest and since then, ‘the territory called Assam has changed shape inside the histories of imperialism and nationalism.’ (Ludden, 2003: 13) The hill areas that make up the rest of the present day Northeast region came under British control at different times in the subsequent decades.

As Assam was brought under colonial rule, the upland areas of Assam were transformed into large tea estates, and migrants arrived in enormous numbers (Piya Chatterjee, 2001: 56-58; Weiner, 1978: 88-91). As the colonial economy in Assam began to increase in value the British sought to subjugate the tribal groups in the surrounding hills as a ‘frontier’ to protect Assam (S. Baruah, 2005: 83-105; Robb, 1997: 250-3). The Khasi and Jaintia Hills that make up half of present day Meghalaya were brought under colonial control earlier than the hill areas north and east of the Brahmaputra Valley (present day Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland). The location of the Khasi Hills between the plains of Bengal and the Brahmaputra River drew the attention of David Scott, the British agent in the region, who wanted to create a mail route through the hills and, after he had visited the area, wanted to establish a hill-station and military cantonment (Barooah, 1969: 194; Giri, 1998: 39). The initial British post was at Cherrapunjee² from 1829 (Giri, 1998: 101). Shillong, the present day capital of Meghalaya, was developed as a hill-station from the 1860s, and was described to British residents and tourists variously as

¹ Although parts of the what is now western Assam were part of the kingdom of Koch, which was incorporated into the Mughal Empire in the early 1600s.

² Cherrapunjee is not a Khasi name, the town is known as Sohra in Khasi.

‘the Scotland of the East’, ‘like parts of Hampshire and Surrey’, or ‘(like) the Cotswold Hills’ (Giri, 1998: 2; Kennedy, 1996: 51).

The colonisation of the Northeast came late in British imperial expansion. In the context of the mid-19th century, it coincided with the expansion of the railways and shipping industries in the rest of India, the 1857 Rebellion and its aftermath, and the beginnings of colonisation in upper-Burma,³ as well as events in Europe; particularly the ascendancy of anthropology, ethnography and racist science (poly-genetics and phrenology) (Jahoda, 1999), the popularisation of exotica and fairs displaying colonised peoples (Maxwell, 1999), the growth in tourism to the colonies, and the growing influence of missionary activity in the colonies. These contextual factors form an important background to both the perceived need for the British to colonise the Northeast, and the ways in which anthropology, ethnography, and race were used to facilitate this process.

Tribals and non-tribals in colonial India

At the most basic level, identity in Northeast India today (including the Khasi Hills) depends upon a distinction between tribal and non-tribal. Colonial ethnography constituted tribes in several ways. First, they were outside or on the margins of the caste system (Béteille, 1986/1997: 71). Secondly, tribes were portrayed as practising ‘primitive’ forms of subsistence agriculture, predominantly shifting cultivation, known as *jhumming* in the eastern parts of India and Bangladesh (Pratap, 2000; van Schendel, 1992). Thirdly, tribes were seen as pre-modern, or anti-modern, preferring isolation rather than integration or assimilation (Elwin, 1959, 1969; Pels, 1999). Fourthly, this isolation was perceived to be a result of their primitiveness leading to ideas that tribes lived in harmony with, or were part of, nature, especially forests (Prasad, 2003). Lastly, tribes were portrayed as savages. There are several aspects to savagery, savages were seen as having primitive religious beliefs, ‘animism’ and ‘heathenism’ (Marriott, 2003: 146; Xaxa, 2005), ape-like physical features (Jahoda, 1999: 227-8; Marriott, 1999: 147; Pels, 1999: 82), and their sexuality was emphasised as both immoral and exotic (McClintock, 1995; van Schendel, 2002).

³ Burma was known as Ava at the time, ruled from the old capital near Mandalay.

There is little doubt that colonialism has had a profound impact on identity formation in the Northeast, but concentrating solely on colonialism overlooks the role that can be ascribed to other actors involved in the politics of South Asia throughout different periods. Sarkar argues ‘that while identities like caste [and tribe] are certainly not fixed, given or unchanging, neither can their construction be reduced to colonial discourses alone.’ (2002: 41) Van der Veer makes a similar argument, pointing out that ‘the reification of Indian cultures as a timeless and spaceless Brahmanical Sanskrit civilisation was, of course, not simply an invention of the orientalists ...orientalism feeds on an existing, dominant discourse carried by a Brahman elite.’ (1993: 26; see also Pollock, 1993: 108)

Saikia’s work on identity in Assam makes specific reference to the pre-colonial perceptions held by plains people regarding the tribes of the hills and frontiers in the Northeast,

...the colonial version of the savage frontiersmen was reinforced by previous fanciful descriptions of medieval travellers. Assumptions were also authenticated by the texts of Brahmanic Hindus that referred to these people as the *asuras* and *mlecchas*- the demons and outcaste groups- because they lived in the regions that were outside Aryavarta [Aryan-land]. Such a placement outside the lineage of Aryavamsi and the dismissal from the category of human, because according to Hindu concept they had no *jati* [a birth-based community], destined the “excluded” communities to be peoples without histories and thus without identities. (2004: 50-1)

Parasher-Sen argues that colonial ethnography and the creation of the ‘tribe’ category added new elements to existing identities, ‘thus obscuring the nature of contact between tribes and “civilisation” that had existed in Indian society before colonial intrusion.’ (2004a: 44) By drawing on a range of religious literature she gives details of the ways these groups were described in different periods; including suggestions of cannibalism, habitation of forests and mountain areas, dependence on forest products, primitive hunting methods, and barbarism (2004b: 296-300; see also Dhagamwar, 2006: 20-31). The relationships between tribals and non-tribals in pre-colonial India involved oppression and

subjugation. Colonial ethnography built on these existing relationships and depictions of tribal people to control the hilly frontier, placing a major emphasis on savagery (Dirks, 2006: 240-1).

Tribes as savages

To exert political control over newly colonised peoples of the Northeast and other frontier regions, the colonial authorities used anthropology, ethnography, and racism to justify exploitation, displacement, and violence. Colonial ethnography constructed 'hierarchies of power and status...created and reinforced through knowledge systems.' (Mayaram, 2003: 129) This 'had the effect of redirecting important indigenous practices in new directions, by putting different weights and values on existing conceptions of group identity, bodily distinctions, and agrarian productivity.' (Appadurai, 1993: 316) Surveys, censuses, ethnographies, and gazetteers were created in order to divide groups into classifications of 'those who were pliable and those who were resistant.' (Mayaram, 2003: 129) Appadurai links the classification of tribes and castes to enumeration through the colonial census. The production of census data created categories and a 'sense of a controllable indigenous reality.' (1993: 317) These categories led to the 'tribalisation' and 'ethnisation' of diverse and fluid groups and communities into singular identities that could be ranked and typecast.

Marriott argues that the institutionalisation of race and difference within Indian society legitimised deprivation, uneven development and the continuance of colonial rule, what he calls the 'racialisation' of India (2003: 144). He adds that the impact of ethnography was profound and 'consolidated and generalised racism into an ideology that shaped attitudes and policies towards every facet of Indian society.' (2003: 144) Robb points out that the classification of tribes (and castes) in colonial India was not a homogenous project and was undertaken in different ways in different parts of the Empire (1997: 246). Nevertheless the overall purpose was to increase the power of colonial rule.

Ethnography and anthropology were central to the production of ‘scientific’ knowledge of India in Europe. In Britain an important distinction was made between history, applied to Britain, and anthropology, applied to India,

History constructed a glorious version of the nation in which the present was the inevitable teleological frame; anthropology assumed a history that necessitated colonial rule. History told the story of a nation; anthropology explained why a nation had not yet emerged. (Dirks, 1999: 175)

Furthermore, the exoticisation of colonial subjects through travel writing and the commercialisation of savagery fed popular culture in Europe (Obeyesekere, 2005: 156-67). Specimens of different ‘savages’ and ‘varieties of mankind’ were brought to Europe for public exhibition in museums, fairgrounds, and even zoos (Jahoda, 1999: 208-213). Jahoda argues that these exhibitions became increasingly sensationalised and commercialised in the latter decades of the 19th century, exoticism and savagery being emphasised under the guise of science (1999: 212). Kaiwar points out the contradictions in this process, arguing that the production of scientific knowledge of India and other colonised peoples and places was essential in ‘upholding the triumphal imperialism that accompanied the formation of European modernity, and – momentarily and paradoxically- sustaining the romantic rejection of the bourgeois notion of progress.’ (2003: 13-14; see also Grove, 1995: 475-6) While it is difficult to know the extent to which scientific racism and exotica influenced the colonial authorities in the peripheries of India, it would be difficult to conclude that it had no impact at all.

Hill tribes: the most savage savages

The distinction of ‘hill tribes’ from ‘plains tribes’ and the rest of the Indian population is the major component of identity in contemporary Northeast India (S. Baruah, 1999: 37-8). When discussing hill tribes I will be referring to the hill tribes of Northeast India and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of present day Bangladesh, I acknowledge that this category has had enormous impacts on the identity and politics of hill communities in other parts of

central India, the Himalayas, and in British colonies in Malaya and Burma. However in order to keep this historical perspective focussed on the layers of identity in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya I will restrict this discussion to the hill tribes of colonial Assam. In very simple terms, hill tribes were classified as being more backward, more violent, more savage, and more endangered than other tribes and ethnic groups in India (Baruah, 1999: 32-3; 2005: 102-3; Dube, 1972/1986: 30; Robb, 1997: 270-1; Roy Burman, 1972/1986: 81-9; van Schendel, 1992: 101-106; Xaxa, 1999, 2001, 2005). The hills and mountains of colonial India were the last frontiers to be colonised, and many of the peoples of the hill areas violently resisted colonisation (Reetz, 1997). Thus the need to classify the hill peoples separately was closely tied to the need to subjugate these same people, often with very high levels of violence.

As with the broader categorisation of tribal discussed above, the designation of hill tribes as 'backward' was used to justify the extension of the colonial state to the frontier land. As the area came under increased control, classifications were needed to create groups that could be organised by local headmen, taxed, and settled on permanent lands (Chakravorty, 1964: 26-7; Robb, 1997: 261). Robb argues that in order to define the frontiers of British territory and defend it, the need developed to 'identify the peoples who were to be treated as British subjects.' (1997: 262) These groups needed names, defined territories, rulers, and characteristics that warranted interference by the colonial authorities. Ethnographers worked hard to create identities such as 'Naga', 'Khasi', and 'Garo'; all specific administrative projects to bring diverse groups into singular identities and subjugate them to a local ruler, and frequently a local revenue collector (see Jacobs et al, 1990: 23 cited in S. Baruah, 2005: 103). In the Khasi Hills, the role of the *Syiem*, or 'chief', was emphasised and given increased importance and uniformity by the British in order to appoint a loyal local ruler, despite the different systems of authority in different parts of the Khasi Hills (Sharma, 2004: 9-11).

British accounts of the hill areas emphasised the savagery and unpredictable violence of the hill tribes. Henry Spry, a medical officer in Bengal wrote in 1837 that the Kukis, a hill tribal group scattered across the present day states of Manipur, Tripura, and Assam, lived

in trees, were cannibals, and held ‘no similarity...even to the most degraded beings of the human race.’ (Spry, 1837: 17, cited in Marriott, 2003: 147) Godwin-Austen, the Deputy Superintendent of the Topographical Survey of India, wrote that the Garos, now inhabiting present-day Meghalaya and the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh, practiced human sacrifice, ate all manner of animals, and wore indecent amounts of clothing (1873: 394). Godwin-Austen did not experience any of this first hand, and relied on reports from Captain Williamson, a member of the military working to subjugate the area, for his information on the Garos (Godwin-Austen, 1873: 394-5).

Another member of the military, Major C.R. MacGregor reported to the Royal Geographic Society in 1886 on his expedition from the Assam valley to the Irrawady River in present day Myanmar (MacGregor, 1887). MacGregor differentiates between tribes by what he perceives to be their level of civilisation. Thus the Kunnungs who manufactured swords were regarded as ‘skilled’, the Kampti-Shans were seen as more civilised than their ‘semi-barbarous’ neighbours, and the valleys surrounding these groups, which MacGregor and his party did not visit, were inhabited by ‘various specimens of barbarous tribes.’ (1887: 19-20). MacGregor’s account is interesting as his detailed descriptions of several tribes betray moments of respect and fascination. For example, his description of the Mishmis⁴ begins by stating that they were ‘small, active, and very dirty people, of a Mongolian type, flat noses, almond-shaped eyes...as is often the case among barbarous tribes, the men are much vainer than the women.’ (1887: 24) Yet he then goes on to describe in somewhat flattering terms Mishmi dress, trading skills and beautiful singing voices. There appears to be disjuncture between the first-hand experiences with hill tribes, and the need to describe them in a particular way for domestic consumption in Britain and for political purposes in India (see also Mackenzie, 1884/2001). This served to normalise the stereotypes of savagery and barbarity, stereotypes that have persisted in the postcolonial era. Writing in 1964, B.C. Chakravorty, head of the History Department at Char Chandra College in Calcutta referred to tribes of the Northeast as ‘wild tribes’, ‘dirty in habits’, and ‘turbulent and marauding’ (1964: 10, 125, 192).

⁴ An ethnic group in present day Arunachal Pradesh.

The British subjugated the hill tribes of the Northeast with startling levels of violence, especially in the Garo Hills and the Naga Hills, including the burning of villages, forced displacement, forced labour, and forced recruitment into the armed forces (Chakravorty, 1964: 30-6, 83-134; Robb, 1997: 262-4). During these campaigns the savagery of the hill tribes was emphasised in order to justify the violence. For example, the various Naga tribes were continually referred to as 'head-hunters', especially during the British military campaigns in these areas from the mid-1830s through until the 1880s (S. Baruah, 2005: 106-10). The more difficult the subjugation, the further savagery was emphasised. Again, Chakravorty repeated the same stereotype about the Nagas a century later, 'the toughest and most war-like of the tribes...the Nagas are widely known even today as head-hunters.' (1964: 13) It is no coincidence that Chakravorty was writing in 1964 during a crisis point in the war between the Indian Government and the Naga independence movement, employing the same tactics as the British; creating extreme otherness to justify violence and the need to assimilate a particular group into the national fold.

Tribes and production

There were also economic imperatives for the demarcation of 'tribes' and 'hill tribes'. Devalle makes a persuasive argument that the term 'tribe' was used by the colonial administration to 'preserve' a community of people at a subsistence level of survival so that they could be continually conscripted into the labour force to ensure capitalist surplus (1992: 71). There are several examples from colonial Assam that support this argument. The 'tea tribes', mostly Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, Kharias, Gonds, and other tribes from present-day Jharkhand, Orissa, and Bihar, were brought to the tea estates of Assam to make up for the alleged labour shortage. Many were indentured labourers and continue to live a marginal existence in present-day Assam (Piya Chatterjee, 2001: 69-73; Saikia, 2004: 77-113). In the Garo Hills of present-day Meghalaya, Garos were frequently conscripted into forced labour gangs constructing roads through the hills (Robb, 1997: 262). By being designated as tribal, their forced subjugation could be justified as part of

the civilising process by taking these groups away from their 'primitive' production methods.

Colonisation dramatically altered the production methods and production relations in the region, affecting demographics, ecology, and power relations between and among different groups. The first major change came through the massive migrations to the region. As the local labour force in Assam was small, labourers were imported from other parts of India (Weiner, 1978: 88). Saikia writes that from 1870 to 1900 the migrant population of Assam increased from 100,000 to 600,000 and the 'indigenous' population, including Ahoms and communities living in the hill areas, decreased in the same period (2004: 107). These changes led to the development of a rich planter class, mostly European, and a poor wage labour class, mostly 'tea tribes'; migrants from Bihar and the present day state of Jharkhand, though some hill tribals were brought from the hill areas to clear land for the plantations (Piya Chatterjee, 2001: 69-73; Saikia, 2004: 107). Both of these groups sent their remittances from the tea industry outside Assam, the planters to Europe, and the labourers back to other parts of India (Saikia, 2004: 108). The money that did stay in Assam was reinvested into the tea industry or into administration, both sectors employing migrants (Saikia, 2004: 108). Clerks and service personnel were brought from Bengal and Bengali became the official language of the bureaucracy (Weiner, 1978: 91-5). Furthermore the system of administration used in Bengal was imposed on Assam, making it difficult for non-Bengalis to gain positions in the administration (Weiner, 1978: 93). Marwaris, traders from Rajasthan, held a monopoly on the trade in imports and exports (Saikia, 2004: 108).

The timber industry in the Northeast expanded to meet the demands for wood in the railways and shipping industries in other parts of India and the population increase in Assam raised the local demand for timber as fuel and construction materials (Saikia, 2005: 154-186, 196-200; see also Nongbri, 2003: 121-161). Large tracts of forests were cleared to make way for the tea plantations, and the timber industry grew rapidly in the 1880s (Saikia, 2005: 53). This affected the ability of many tribal peasants to sustain their livelihoods; many of the tribal groups in Assam were evicted from forests, and common

land was privatised to increase tax and timber revenues (Saikia, 2005: 143-5). Darlong argues that *jhumming* was cast as wasteful and primitive by the authorities to discourage the practice in favour of settled cultivation (2004: 7; Ludden, 2003: 17). *Jhumias* were seen as wasting valuable forest resources that could generate revenue through commercial forestry, and *jhumming* communities were mobile making them difficult to tax, count, and conscript into labour gangs (Malik, 2003: 291; Robb, 1997: 261).

Oil was discovered in upper Assam near Moran, Digboi, and Makum. The British Burmah Oil Company was given a ninety-nine year lease on the oil fields from 1889 (S. Baruah, 1999: 45; Saikia, 2004: 109). Coal was discovered in upper Assam at Makum in 1865 and at Ledo in 1882, which accelerated the development of the tea industry as coal was used to fuel the tea processing factories (Saikia, 2004: 109; Saikia, 2005: 197-8). A railway was built between the oil fields, coalmines, and tea plantations in Upper Assam and the Brahmaputra River in 1885 (Saikia, 2004: 109). During the same period, the colonial authorities sought to control the opium crops in Assam by expanding the cultivation of the crop and introducing manufactured opium into the markets; by 1860 opium was a government monopoly (Saikia, 2004: 99-101).

Within a short period of time production relations in Assam had transformed. The hill communities surviving from *jhumming*, opium cultivation, and secondary forest produce saw their sources of livelihood privatised and prices controlled by the colonial authorities. The tea estates imported labourers and managers from other parts of India, the authorities restricted access to forests, and the expansion of the Empire was presided over by Europeans with a hierarchy of Bengali administrators and clerks, Marwari traders, and migrant labourers underneath. The classification of 'tribal' was used to justify the exclusion of marginalised peoples from this hierarchy.

Migration into Meghalaya

The Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills that now form the state of Meghalaya were brought under British control earlier than the other hill areas in the Northeast. As mentioned above,

David Scott, the British agent in the region, visited the hills to investigate a mail route and decided that the climate would make it an ideal for a retreat for Europeans (Giri, 1998: 39). Scott began the process of gaining concessions from the *Syiems*, the Khasi 'chiefs', in the period between 1824 and 1828, often pitting one *Syiem* against another to gain their loyalty (Barooah, 1969: 195-9). There were several small *Syiem*-ships that resisted colonial incursions and others that bargained for land in the plains in return for hill land (Barooah, 1969: 200-1). Violence accompanied resistance, led most notably by Tirot Singh, who is still a symbol of Khasi pride in contemporary Khasi society (Giri, 1998: 63-100).

After different treaties were concluded in latter half of the 19th Century, the *Syiems* and the *dorbars*, the Khasi village councils, were recognised as legitimate rulers and privileged in all relations with the British (Rataan, 2003: 196). The British claimed the *Syiems* were the legitimate and 'traditional' sources of authority in the Khasi Hills, and thus their authority was to be preserved, and in some cases extended, to suit colonial ends (Sharma, 2004). The British designated twenty-five Khasi states under Paramount power, meaning the British had sovereign authority and could install their choice of *Syiem*, but they did not have the authority to make internal laws for these states (Rao et al, 1984: 17).

Scott's campaign in the Khasi Hills led to the eventual establishment of a hill-station at Shillong, the present-day capital of Meghalaya. Shillong served as a summer capital and a military cantonment leading to a population boom following migrations into the area from traders, labourers, soldiers, and plantation owners (Kennedy, 1996: 190). Non-tribal peoples, particularly Bengali clerks and professionals, Nepali labourers and porters, Marwari merchants, Bihari traders and labourers, and Assamese made up half of Shillong's population by the end of the Nineteenth Century (Kennedy, 1996: 190). Kennedy notes that the population of Shillong quadrupled from 1878 to 1901, and 'what had been the home to a few dozen Khasi tribesmen at mid-century had become a crowded and remarkably cosmopolitan town by century's end.' (1996: 191)

Segregation

By 1891 the territories under British rule in the Northeast were divided into thirteen districts, known collectively as the Province of Assam, while Manipur and the Khasi Hills were feudatory states within Assam (Singh, 2004: 75). Once the hill regions came under British control they were largely neglected, the British imposing an 'Inner-Line Regulation' between the plains of Assam and the 'North Eastern Frontier' (Singh, 2004: 116-118). Plains people were not able to go into the hill areas; the domain of the 'backward' tribes, thus the development of the hill areas was minimal, while the plains became part of the colonial economy with links to the rest of British India by road and rail (S. Baruah, 2003a: 49). The Government of India Act 1919 ensured that any area declared 'backward' by the Governor General would be excluded from laws passed by the central and provincial authorities in the rest of India (S. Baruah, 1999: 36). The Government of India Act 1935 further divided the Northeast into 'excluded areas'⁵ and 'partially excluded areas'⁶; 'excluded' replaced 'backward' as the official classification of the areas outside ministerial jurisdiction (Das, 1989: 29). The hill areas remained isolated, with the exception of the Khasi Hills due to the importance of Shillong as a cantonment and administrative centre. At the same time, migration into Assam continued unabated.

Segregation not only impeded the development of the Northeast, but also formed the basis of the policies that the Indian Government adopted in the region after independence. The British claimed that the inner-line was put into place to protect the customs and land allocation practices of the various tribes, yet as Sanjib Baruah points out this was not a paternal measure,

...the idea of protection came only after a phase of enormous violence that was let loose on some of the same people... (and) the initial onslaught of colonial transformation had led to the massive

⁵ Including the Lushai Hills (Mizoram), Naga Hills (Nagaland), North Cachar Hills (Assam), and Northeastern Frontier Tracts (Arunachal Pradesh).

⁶ Including the Garo Hills (Meghalaya), Khasi/Jaintia Hills (Meghalaya), and Mikir Hills (Karbi Anglong in Assam).

dispossession and displacement of many of these people organised in pre-capitalist social formations. For many, whatever protection came was too little too late. (2003a: 49)

Tribes and missionaries

Missionaries have been instrumental in reproducing the construction of tribal identity, particularly among hill tribes. The advent of Christianity among large sections of the hill populations and its continued growth in present day India have embedded colonial classifications into the social, political, and economic relationships between the church, state, and civil society. The missionaries themselves had to develop knowledge of the tribes and tribal ethnography in order to transmit the gospel to tribal groups. Pels and Salemink argue that ‘the necessity to communicate in and teach a language made missionary education one of the major factors in the production and reification of (these) ethnicities.’ (1999: 31)

As missionaries increasingly came to rely on public support from Britain, Europe, and America to raise funds, they frequently emphasised the depravity, savageness, and barbarity of tribals and the need for their salvation (Marriott, 2003: 89-95; Pels, 1999: 99-103). Christian missionaries emphasised tribal identity as being different from, and threatened by, Hinduism and Islam and aimed to civilise tribals, but also preserve aspects of their culture before they disappeared (Downs, 2003: 388; Marriott, 2003: 195). Indeed the Northeast contains various examples of cultural practices such as dances, festivals, and ‘traditional dress’, being incorporated into Christian ceremonies (George, 1990). Missionaries emphasised safe elements of culture and discouraged others, constituting new identities among the hill tribes that depended on colonial constructions of the uniqueness and perishability of hill cultures. This created a discord between these new identities and pre-Christian forms of faith and social organisation.

Concern for the ‘dying’ tribes shows a shift away from construction of the violent and unruly savage, to the poor, unfortunate, and endangered cultural specimen. Several authors have argued that this reflects a shift in European society towards the welfare of the

innocent and primitive ‘child-like’ races of the periphery, influenced by the anti-slavery movement and evangelical humanitarianism (Jahoda, 1999: 228; Marriott, 2003: 130; Pels, 1999: 101). In the Northeast the shift led to an emphasis on the pre-modern, gullible, and good natured aspects of various tribes and their need for protection against the sly and economically advanced plains populations; embodied in the ‘excluded’ and ‘partially excluded’ administrative areas. This is a crucial part of contemporary tribal identity. The perception that tribal people are good natured, but gullible and lacking in entrepreneurial vision and merely awaiting exploitation by plains people, is reproduced at all levels in postcolonial politics and society in Northeast India and is one of the key aspects of the ‘outsiders’ discourse in Meghalaya, which will be discussed below.

Downs estimates that at least fifty tribal languages of the Northeast received their written forms from missionaries (2003: 389). As the development of written languages came from missionaries, the written histories of groups are bound to Christianity (Sharma, 2004: 11-13). Thus dominant accounts of historical and cultural aspects of Khasi tribes, for example, are filtered through Christianity. As schools spread throughout the hills, especially in places like Shillong, educated Christian men began to supplant the power of traditional elites. These new elites emphasised the civilising and redeeming influences of Christianity and the backwardness of their ancestors (Roy Burman, 1972/1986: 81). In the Khasi Hills a division of sorts was created between Christian Khasis and the followers of the pre-Christian Khasi religion.

3.2 The Persistence of Colonial Categories: state formation and the politicisation of identity

In recent decades authors have argued that colonial categories were not only maintained by the colonial authorities, but by the colonised themselves in both forms of resistance to colonialism and in nation-building after colonialism. As Venkatachalapathy argues using the case of Tamil Nadu, colonial constructions of history, race, and tribe, did not simply disappear with the end of the colonial era but continued in both hegemonic and counter-

hegemonic understandings of identity and nation (2003). In India this was not a simple process, as the attributes established through colonial knowledge empowered different groups and marginalised others. Those empowered through the colonial categories were in a position to reproduce these categories and hierarchies, while those marginalised by these categories had few choices but to continue to exist as defined (Reetz, 1997). Yet the distinctions were not always so clear. Many tribal elites, for example, accepted and reproduced categories of identity derived from colonial knowledge and its postcolonial reproduction, what Obeyesekere refers to as ‘self-primitivisation’ (2005: 266). The reproduction of colonial categories institutionalised identity in the Northeast and made it the basis of political, social, and economic life. This empowered certain actors in the region and certain discourses, privileging particular groups and marginalising others. This has had a major impact on civil society, not only as a result of the domination of particular groups and ideas, but as a result of the persistence of forms of knowledge about tribal peoples that cast communities as homogenous wholes devoid of inequalities based on class, ethnicity, and gender.

I have identified three aspects of the reproduction of colonial categories that have shaped identity in the Northeast: (i) the ‘tribal problem’ based on discussions between non-tribals about the role of tribal peoples in postcolonial India which drew upon the only understandings of tribal people available- colonial accounts, descriptions, and censuses, (ii) the reproduction of these categories by tribal leaders in the pan-tribal movements to create a separate hill-state within Assam in the 1960s and early 1970s, and (iii) the dissolution of the pan-tribal movement and the shift away from tribal and hill-tribal identity to focus on narrower versions of ethno-nationalism which is particularly evident after the formation of Meghalaya in 1972. These will be discussed in turn.

(i) Reproducing ‘tribe’: the so-called ‘tribal problem’

In the decades immediately after independence, debates over the loyalties, nationality, and role of the peoples of the Northeast drew almost exclusively on colonial categories and understandings of tribes. The constitutional provisions and political divisions that were

implemented in this period reflect both the segregation policies of the British and the paternal approach of the missionaries and advisors to the Indian Government, especially Verrier Elwin (Guha, 1999: 231). Debates raged over whether the peoples of the Northeast should be assimilated or protected. These debates continue, to a degree, in present conflicts between Hindu nationalists and the nascent movement to have tribes recognised as indigenous peoples (Xaxa, 1999).

In the lead up to Indian independence the future of the Northeast region was unclear. As partition drew closer the Muslim League argued for the inclusion of Assam into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) (Hazarika, 1995: 64).⁷ This proposal was defeated a month before Partition and Assam and most of the hill areas went to India (with the notable exception of the Chittagong Hill Tracts), the plains district of Sylhet on the southern side of the Khasi Hills voted to join East Pakistan (Chakrabarty, 2004: 176-189).⁸ Thus the international border between India and East Pakistan ran along the base of the Garo, Khasi, and Jaintia Hills of present day Meghalaya.

Partition had a major impact on the Northeast. The new political boundaries meant that the entire region was joined to the rest of India by a narrow tract of land between Bangladesh and Bhutan. Hill communities that had established trading relations with the plains communities of Bengal were now left straddling an international border. Other communities found that they were now divided along the new frontiers with East Pakistan and Myanmar; Nagas, Mizos, Chakmas, Khasis, Garos, and Jaintias had their communities dissected by the new borders. Access to ports, especially Chittagong and Khulna in present-day Bangladesh, was cut and access to markets was limited; the development of the Northeast was further stalled (Hazarika, 1995: 257-260). The established river and land routes that had facilitated trade and migration for centuries were closed, the Northeast was

⁷ The Land Settlement policy of 1941 allowed migrants from Bengal to settle on government land anywhere in Assam and thus the region contained a large Muslim population at the time of Partition.

⁸ There was also a failed proposal to create a Crown Colony of the Eastern Agency that would have been a British enclave/colony comprising of all the hills states between Assam and the Burmese plains and be administered directly from London.

landlocked and cut-off from the rest of India. Thus the tribal communities of the Northeast found themselves in the sensitive border areas of India, thus the means of securing their loyalty to preserve these borders became a subject of widespread debate.

As van Schendel argues, 'the political climate of the early post-Partition period was fiercely nationalist.' (2005: 87) Politicians and academics routinely questioned the loyalties of the tribal populations, especially after the border war with China in 1962, when the Indian mainstream suddenly became aware of the Northeast (Puri, 1972/1986: 102). In this context, debates on the 'tribal problem' reflected two positions, assimilationist and protectionist, embodied by G.S. Ghurye and Verrier Elwin respectively.

The idea of assimilation into the national fold was strongly pursued by G.S. Ghurye, professor of sociology at the University of Bombay, from the mid 1940s through to the 1980s (Guha, 1999: 157-71; Nongbri, 2003: 26-7). Ghurye's argument was that tribal and Hindu beliefs were so similar that tribals must have been a part of Hindu civilisation (Guha, 1999: 157). Furthermore, he argued that the distinctions made by colonial authorities were an attempt to weaken Indian nation-building (Puri, 1972/1986). Thus it was argued by many scholars and politicians in the years leading up to, and after, independence, that the 'tribal problem' could be solved by assimilating the various tribal groups into the Indian national mainstream, or according to Ghurye, re-assimilate them (see Puri, 1972/1986; Mankekar, 1972/1986).

At a conference held in Shimla in the western Himalayas in 1971, prominent Indian academics and administrators discussed the 'tribal problem' and possible solutions (Suresh Singh ed, 1972/1986). The proceedings were published a year later and provide valuable insights into the intellectual debates on tribal peoples at the time by Indian anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists and the ways in which colonial categories were reproduced in the Indian mainstream in the postcolonial era. These categories are still evident in contemporary academia. For example, G. C Rath, an academic with appointments in the Anthropological Survey of India and several Indian universities writes in 2006 that at the time of Partition in 1947, the tribes of the Northeast practiced 'head-

hunting, slavery, (and) kidnapping of children...' (2006: 71). Many of the academics at Shimla were key thinkers and policy advisors, yet only one of them was from the Northeast (M. Alemchiba, an Ao Naga). None were female. The following words from R.N. Haldipur at the Shimla conference sum up the assimilationist approach typical of the period,

...the tribe has to be interwoven into the fabric of society and made to realise that the distinction between tribals and non-tribals is an artificial one and their growth lies in the perception that they are an integral part of a large country with a rightful place and potentiality for growth, with far-reaching consequences for them and their posterity. (1972/1986: 313; see also Mankekar, 1972/1986: 110-112)

In the collection itself, Chattopadhyaya critiques the papers of his colleagues (1972/1986). He points out that understandings of tribal communities come from non-tribal academics trained in the British anthropological and ethnographic traditions. He argues that these depictions retain the 'backward' tribal image, but also maintain a level of paternal control,

I suspect that their attitude to tribals are somewhat like that of an elder brother towards his slightly retarded younger brother, who nonetheless has some unique gifts like being able to draw well, or is good at tinkering with faulty mechanisms of household gadgets and cars. Even if the younger brother is treated by the psychiatrist and cured, the elder brother must see that the cured younger brother retains his gift. Also, the elder brother must be able to retain his authority over the younger one. (1972/1986: 490)

Though much of Chattopadhyaya's contribution lacks subtlety, it is one of the few critiques of colonial knowledge of tribal people in this era.

The counter-argument was pursued by Verrier Elwin, the prominent anthropologist, missionary, and later advisor to Prime Minister Nehru on tribal affairs, who argued that the tribes needed protection and autonomy at the same time (Rath, 2006: 66-7). Advocates of protection of the tribes argued that the Indian state needed to ensure the welfare of tribal peoples and not disrupt their cultural practices or governance institutions (Guha, 1999:

105-6). Nearly all of the arguments for protection depended upon stereotypes that different tribal groups were homogenous, egalitarian, and were engaged in production practices that could not be brought into the national economy in any meaningful way. Elwin was particularly concerned that tribal communities would be forced into the caste system at the lowest level (Rath, 2006: 67).

Ghurye argued for decades that Elwin was an isolationist who wanted to keep the tribes living in a state of depravity (Nongbri, 2003: 27). Despite the support for Ghurye among some nationalists, Elwin's depictions of tribal peoples in India and his dialogues with Nehru continue to form the basis of arguments against assimilation (Guha, 1999: 231). Thus in the debate between protection and assimilation, protection won, at least in the first few decades after independence, and the twin ideals of preserving tribal independence (Elwin) and developing tribal regions (Nehru) were undertaken without much consideration of the potential for conflict and contradiction between the two.

Protection has resulted in several contradictory approaches being adopted by the Indian Government. First, the Sixth Schedule of the constitution was created giving power and legitimacy to traditional institutions, many of which date only to the colonial era, and reservations for tribal people in employment, education, and parliament. Secondly, the Indian Government has poured development money into the region propping up local elites and carving out loyal constituencies. Thirdly, the region has been completely militarised by both conventional and paramilitary forces with special legal powers. Fourthly, successive Indian Governments have encouraged cultural aspects of hill tribal identities, especially in their constant obsession to promote the Northeast as a tourist destination and the home of exotic and pre-modern peoples.⁹ Tribal groups of the Northeast continue to be regarded as peripheral groups, clearly demarcated from both the mainstream and other

⁹ For an example of these representations one only needs to look at the various websites for the Ministry of Tribal Affairs; <http://tribal.nic.in/index1.html>, the Department of Tourism's information on the Northeast; <http://northeastofindia.com/>, and the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region's arts and culture pages; <http://northeast.nic.in/index2.asp?sid=130>.

marginal groups; especially lower-caste groups. This perception has been internalised by the tribal groups in the Northeast and is an important part of identity politics.

(ii) Reproducing the 'hill tribe': the division of Assam

The Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution, which applies only to the hill areas of Assam, distinguishes hill-tribe identity from the other tribes of Assam, the tribes of Central India, and the non-tribal populations. Under the Sixth Schedule, district councils were established and given powers to allocate development funds, regulate customary law, and determine the occupation or use of land and the regulation of shifting cultivation (Rataan, 2003: 180-1). Village level institutions have been maintained as the legitimate brokers of authority at a local level. Reservations in public employment, educational institutions, and parliament are allocated depending upon Sixth Schedule status.

From the time of its inception in 1947 to the present, the Sixth Schedule has had an enormous bearing on the development and under-development of the Northeast economically, politically, and socially (see Karna et al eds, 1998). Not all tribal areas were included in the Sixth Schedule and those communities that were granted special privileges and rights have consistently attempted to exclude all 'others' from accessing these advantages. The Sixth Schedule, district councils, and the formalising of traditional institutions has created a complex over-lapping of formal and semi-formal institutions, spreading a concept of autonomy that has been used to justify ethnically exclusive 'homelands' to be fought for and preserved through political and also violent means (S. Baruah, 2003a: 47). The constitutional provisions in the Sixth Schedule have served as a form of affirmative action and have benefited many of the tribal communities in the region. However they have also embedded the category of 'hill tribe' into the political and economic institutions of the Northeast, and made tribal identity the key determinant of social, political, and economic status.

Dividing Assam

During the 1960s and 1970s, various political movements called for the establishment of separate states for hill tribes, based on the perceived neglect of the Indian and Assamese governments, and the attempts to make Assamese the official language of the hill areas. Assam was divided into seven separate states between 1971 and 1987 as a result of violent and non-violent agitations from different hill-tribal groups (Chadda, 2002: 50).¹⁰ As a result the Northeast is now a collection of seven small states within the Indian Union that are economically dependent on the central government.¹¹ The Legislative Assemblies of the new states are based upon the Sixth Schedule in that seats are reserved for members of Scheduled Tribes. In Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh there is only one seat available for non-tribal citizens and in Meghalaya there are only five (S. Baruah, 2003a: 52). Yet in Assam, Tripura, and Manipur the numbers of reserved seats are very low.

As the central government has fought insurgents militarily, it has also been ploughing money in to the Northeast to try to win over local populations and to develop the economies of the Northeast and integrate them into the national economy (Sachdeva, 2000). It is widely acknowledged that few ordinary people in the Northeast have benefited from development due mostly to rampant corruption, widening gaps between rich and poor, and the break up of the social fabric of different communities (Hazarika, 1995: 241). Economic development in the Northeast is orchestrated by the central government through the North Eastern Council (NEC) and the Department of Development of the North Eastern Region (DONER). The NEC was formed in 1971 and is administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs in Delhi. The Governors and Chief Ministers of all seven states in the Northeast and the small Himalayan state of Sikkim are members, and the Council ostensibly manages investment and development in the Northeast (S. Baruah, 2003b: 918). In 2001 DONER was established, though the NEC does not appear to have disbanded and

¹⁰ The state of Nagaland was formed earlier, in 1963, as an attempt to halt the insurgency and the push for complete independence from India.

¹¹ The Indian Government now includes the Himalayan state of Sikkim as part of the Northeast, bringing the total to eight federal states, but Sikkim is a very distinct political and social entity with few links to the rest of the Northeast and thus has not been considered as part of the Northeast in this thesis.

still has large offices in Shillong, thus both bodies seem to be coordinating development at the same time.

The division of Assam has been explained in different ways. Sanjib Baruah calls the division of Assam 'cosmetic federalism', and argues that the Northeast states were not formed to satisfy the desire for autonomy but to placate unstable border populations and reward loyal elites (2003b: 936). In contrast to Baruah's argument, Dasgupta argues that the ability of the Indian democratic system and the strength of political institutions and their 'cascaded autonomy' has allowed ethno-nationalist movements to be accommodated within the Indian Union without cessation (1997: 362-363). Dasgupta points out that the multi-layered governance structure has allowed moderate voices to emerge from the insurgency movements and for tribal communities to be incorporated into the federal structure (1997: 366-367).

Both these arguments tend to understate the role of civil society. Baruah's argument on 'cosmetic federalism' makes sense in the context of the Chinese threat and the national security focus of the India Government, and indeed the creation of small states that are dependent on the centre makes them easier to administer and control. However this argument plays down the role of civil society actors in demanding the formation of separate states. While it may have been in the best interests of the Indian Government to divide Assam and extend its development objectives to the Northeast to pre-empt against further insurgency and to create dependent units, the existence of movements for autonomy within civil society and the degree to which the Indian Government sought to accommodate and/or destroy these movements is an important variable in each case. Dasgupta's argument seems to suggest that the federal structure legitimises the 'moderate' elements and separates them from the 'extremist' elements. This assumes that the interests of all groups in the Northeast are focussed on autonomy and not necessarily other grievances related to government neglect in the spheres of development, land, environment, employment, education and health. What is important to recognise is that the division of Assam shows the importance of both powerful civil society actors and the

dominance of identity politics in the region. These are particularly salient when discussing the formation of Meghalaya.

(iii) The Hill State Movement

The movement for a separate hill state for the hill-tribes of the Northeast was largely non-violent, involved elites from different tribal communities and ethnic groups, and was a sustained campaign from different civil society actors over a period of forty years from the early 1930s until 1972. The result was the formation of Meghalaya in 1972. The movement began as a pan-tribal movement based on shared hill-tribe identity, yet it became dominated by a smaller group of elites, who were predominantly Khasi, and the pan-tribal aspects were eventually overtaken by narrower ethnic agendas. The movement served to establish both the power of the hill-tribe elite, and to normalise hill-tribe identity as the main form of political organisation in Meghalaya, and in other states as the movement splintered. This has had two effects; certain groups have been empowered by identity politics, while many of the causes of insecurity that do not correspond with identity politics have been concealed.

The movement for a hill state can be traced back to the formation of the Khasi National Dorbar (also spelt Durbar) in 1923 and the Federation of Khasi States movement in 1934, which Mathur describes as stimulating ‘political consciousness and the spirit of ardent nationalism.’ (1982: 184) Many of the elite in the Khasi Hills were not necessarily sympathetic to the Indian Nationalist movement, as they feared forced assimilation into the Indian mainstream (Rao et al, 1984: 27). The Khasi-Jaintia Federal National Conference¹² was very active in the negotiations between the colonial administration and various tribal elites for the formation of a Crown Colony. While this was eventually rejected, the groups of political elites continued to pursue cultural and political autonomy for the Khasi people as a separate political entity after Indian Independence.

¹² Also known as the Khasi Jaintia Political Association.

Sinha argues that the levels of political consciousness among the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo were much greater than among the other hill tribal communities in Assam, and thus the political elites from these communities took the lead in pursuing political autonomy for hill tribals (1972/1986: 342). Sen Gupta argues that it was the emergence of new social forces and social groups that led to the development of political consciousness (2005: 33; see also Rataan, 2003: 246). The gradual replacement of communal property with private property led to the emergence of landowners in the Khasi Hills during the colonial era, a process that has accelerated since then. During the Second World War many of the non-tribal business owners and shop-keepers fled the hills and these businesses were taken over by Khasis and other tribals, many of whom were able to accumulate large profits through these businesses and through war contracts (Sen Gupta, 2005: 35).

The first main pan-tribal movement after independence was the Khasi-Jaintia Federal States National Conference which eventually became part of the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU) in 1952 with the Garo National Council and the Mizo Union (Mathur, 1982: 191). The EITU formed a part of the coalition government in Assam in 1957, giving the hill state movement a popular mandate (Sen Gupta, 2005: 40). However, several key leaders defected from the government and the EITU when the Assamese state government announced the introduction of the Assam Language Bill in 1960, proposing Assamese as the official language of the state. The defecting leaders formed the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) (Mathur, 1982: 190; Sarkar, 1982: 225). What becomes clear during this period is a shift in power away from the traditional tribal elites, to the modern tribal elites, who were 'no longer satisfied with the existing safeguards provided by the Sixth Schedule, but (were) interested in sharing political power.' (Sen Gupta, 2005: 37)

The APHLC

When the Assam Language Bill was passed in late 1960 the APHLC decided to push for a separate hill state (Sinha, 1970: 38). The initial goal of the APHLC was to combat the 'Assamisation' of tribal culture (Sarkar, 1982: 225; Sinha, 1970: 38). Though as Sen Gupta points out, the issue was not merely cultural, but tied to ideas of economic and political

positioning in state structures, as one of the main concerns of the APHLC leaders was that the Language Bill would jeopardise their employment prospects in the civil service (Sen Gupta, 2005: 41). Prime Minister Nehru offered a plan for autonomy for the hill communities known as the Scottish Plan, which the APHLC rejected and they decided to contest the Third General Election campaigning on the hill state platform, winning 11 of 15 seats in hill areas (Sen Gupta, 2005: 41).

The defining moment of the hill state struggle came with the Sino-Indian border dispute in 1962 and the subsequent Chinese invasion. The APHLC chose to support the Indian Government gaining their trust and committing the APHLC to peaceful and orthodox political negotiation. The Mizo Union were hostile to the APHLC for cooperating with the Indian Government and left the organisation (Dommen, 1967). The movement was hit by further defections. Afraid of domination by the Khasis, the Karbi and Kachari parties left and decided to remain as part of Assam (Sarkar, 1982: 225; Sen Gupta, 2005: 42). Even within the remaining parties, anti-APHLC factions developed among the Jaintias and Garos (Pakem, 1976). Thus the APHLC lost most of its pan-tribal legitimacy, and became an organisation driven by the Khasi elite and thus representative of only a small number of the hill communities in the Northeast; the Khasi/Jaintia and Garo.

Nevertheless, in 1966 Indira Gandhi promised that Assam would be re-drawn to meet the political aspirations of the tribal people, but stressed that the cultural and political aspirations of the hill people ‘...should be consistent with some minimum and essential links of overall unity at the top.’ (Gandhi, 1966, cited by Sinha, 1970: 49) The original structure proposed by the central government in 1967 was for a functioning autonomous state within Assam with a legislative assembly and a council of ministers, but the head of the state would still be the Governor of Assam (Sinha, 1970: 65-67). The APHLC were not satisfied with the arrangement and continued to push for full statehood, which was eventually granted in 1971 (Sen Gupta, 2005: 43). By this time the APHLC had gone from a party of tribal elites from across the Northeast, to a reduced collective of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo elites, from a pan-ethnic movement to a virtual mono-ethnic movement, ‘ethnic identity assuming preponderance over regional identity.’ (Sen Gupta, 2005: 49) This

narrower ethnic identity has replaced ‘tribal’ and ‘hill tribal’ identity, yet the foundations of ethnic identity are clearly derived from these categories and localised into the politics of Meghalaya.

Since the formation of Meghalaya, violence against non-tribals and non-Khasis has dramatically increased in the Khasi Hills mostly taking place in Shillong, the state capital (A. Baruah, 2004). Resisting the influx of non-tribals into the state has become the dominant discourse in civil society since the late 1970s. Civil society actors such as the Khasi Students Union (KSU), the Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo Peoples (FKJGP), and the Hynniewtrep Youth Front (HYF), have opposed migration, often violently (Malngiang, 2002: 177). Furthermore, violence and intimidation has been directed at non-tribal residents of Shillong and some other towns in Meghalaya, despite many of these residents being part of families that have lived in Meghalaya for generations (Malngiang, 2002: 187-8).

The current President of the Khasi Student Union argues that ‘outsiders’ from Nepal, Bangladesh, and ‘India’ must be stopped from coming to Meghalaya or the Khasi people ‘will become refugees in our own land.’¹³ This argument has given these organisations legitimacy in urban areas and increased their support base. Anti-foreigner riots in Shillong in 1979, 1987, 1992, 1997, and 1998 are testament to this sentiment (A. Baruah, 2004: 9). Armed insurgent groups began to emerge in the 1990s (Mukhim, 1996: 29-30).¹⁴ According to Mukhim, writing during the height of armed fighting in Meghalaya in the mid-1990s, much of the activity conducted by these insurgent groups is petty extortion (1996: 32). These events testify to the increased political saliency of ethnic identities in Meghalaya, drawn from colonial categories of tribe and hill-tribe and narrowed through

¹³ Samuel B. Jyrwa, President: Khasi Students Union, *Personal Interview*, 22 February 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

¹⁴ There is a movement in the Garo Hills for a separate Garo state within the Indian Union, driven by the Garo Students Union and the armed Achik National Volunteer Council. There is a similar movement in the Khasi Hills through the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council.

decades of political change. This has had a major impact on social, political, and economic life in Meghalaya and as a consequence on civil society and the contestation of insecurity.

3.3 The Hegemony of Identity in Meghalaya

Ethnic identity has become hegemonic in the Khasi Hills, supported by powerful state and civil society actors. The ‘outsiders’ discourse is the use of fear of non-tribals and non-Khasis for political ends. It can also be described as identity insecurity. In the following chapters I argue that identity insecurity has a major impact on the politicisation of certain causes of insecurity and the neglect of others in the Khasi Hills. This section discusses the causes of migration, or influx, and the main characteristics of the ‘outsiders’ discourse.

Causes of influx

Migration from Nepal and Bangladesh to the Northeast states is often explained in terms of over-population and environmental degradation in both these states that force landless peasants to take the risks involved with moving across international borders and settling in the Northeast (see Hazarika, 1995: 10-40; 2000; Homer-Dixon, 1994: 21-22; Swain, 1996: 189-204). Population density in Bangladesh is over 900 people per square kilometre. The population density in Meghalaya is 103 persons per square kilometre and in the West Khasi Hills the population density is 42 persons per square kilometre (Thomas, 2004: 27). The population of Bangladesh is estimated to double in the next 25 years and since nearly all the land has been exploited and over-cultivated already, landlessness continues to drive migration (Homer-Dixon, 1994: 22).

Bangladesh is flat and low and forms the floodplain for the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Barak rivers as they come down from the Himalayas (Hazarika, 1995: 18). Bangladesh floods annually and the situation has become worse since the Farakka Barrage was completed in 1975 to divert the Ganges into Kolkata harbour in India (Swain, 1996: 193). The flow of water decreases which leads to erosion of river banks, when the rains come and the water level is high, the banks cannot contain the flow and more and more land is

flooded or simply swallowed by the river (Swain, 1996: 193; Hazarika, 1995: 19-25; 2000: 100-120). Displaced and landless Bangladeshis often migrate to large cities within Bangladesh, but high levels of urban unemployment lead many to cross into India (Swain, 1996: 194). Gurung makes a similar point regarding Nepali migrants (2002: 149).

Sanjib Baruah argues that migrants are not only forced to leave Bangladesh and Nepal, but that many choose to come to the Northeast, driven by the prospect of work and opportunity provided by the development projects constantly being undertaken in the region.

Development projects, for instance, have actively sought to bring about a transition from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture and from the clan control of land to commodification of land, creating new opportunities for migrants. The priority attached to infrastructure building in order to link the economy (of the Northeast) to national and international markets and development projects that aim at the transformation of pre-capitalist economies, also generates economic niches attracting new migrants. (2003b: 930-931)

There are numerous attractions in Meghalaya. Land is an obvious attraction, but both the Sixth Schedule and the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act of 1972 prevent non-tribals from owning land. Yet this does not stop the lease of land from tribal owners to non-tribals, so-called *benami*, or 'nameless' transactions (S. Baruah, 2003b). Resources are another attraction. Marwari traders from Rajasthan have long been associated with the timber industry in Meghalaya, though in recent years Khasi landowners have started to log timber as well (Nathan, 2000). Coal has also been a major attraction and most of the coal areas have significant numbers of non-tribal workers and labourers (Gurung, 2002; S. Baruah, 2003b).

The construction industry in Shillong is perhaps the biggest attraction, yet statistics on migrant workers are non-existent, or at least unobtainable. Van Schendel argues that despite the rhetoric against 'outsiders' politically, there is a tacit acceptance among the elite that their lifestyle would not be possible without the migrant labour force (2005: 215; see also Singh, 1987: 155-60). The common understanding has been that non-tribals are prepared to do the work that tribal people won't do (Weiner, 1978: 128-30). This

argument is still popular in Meghalaya, reflecting the internalisation of the unproductive tribal stereotype, yet the actual composition of labour forces in the coal and construction industries reflects poverty far more than ethnicity. Landlessness and rural poverty have led to significant numbers of tribals from rural areas working in mines and construction sites.

The scale of influx

It is important to point out from the outset that there are no reliable figures on the number of non-tribals in Meghalaya or their origins. The numbers of migrants to Meghalaya from both the 1991 and 2001 census have not been released due to the political sensitivity of the figures, in previous years census figures have been the catalyst for violence against migrants (Thomas, 2004: 30). Data from the 1981 census puts the figure of migrants at 24% of the state's population (Thomas, 2004: 30). Even disregarding their age, these figures are a poor indication as the census figures are notoriously unreliable. As van Schendel points out, only 30 to 40% of births are registered in India, and only 12% in Bangladesh, most migrants from Bangladesh travel without identity cards, migrants coming from other parts of India are not detected as there is no political mileage to be gained from arresting and deporting Indian citizens, and it is not difficult for wealthier migrants from Bangladesh and Nepal to enrol as voters, acquire ration cards, and even passports (2005: 220-1). The problem is compounded by the fact that many migrants are constantly moving back and forth between Meghalaya and their home countries and states, and also using Meghalaya as a stopping off point to go further into Assam or head west to Delhi, where there are larger communities of migrants (Hazarika, 2000; van Schendel, 2005: 226-7). A significant proportion of the non-tribal population in Meghalaya are seasonal, the migrants working in particular development projects, fishing, or agriculture (Weiner, 1978: 86). Others are in Meghalaya on their way to other places, such as Assam or North India (van Schendel, 2005: 191-255).

The Northeast region has experienced rapid population growth over the last century and a half and much of this growth has been due to migration. Again, the figures are most likely to be unreliable but do give some indication of population growth. Meghalaya's annual

average population growth rate is 2.65% for the period 1991-2001 (Planning Commission, 2001: 266). This is well above the Indian national average of 1.95% (Planning Commission, 2001: 266). Decadal population growth from 1991 to 2001 was 29.94 percent; also well above the national average (Census of India, 2001).¹⁵ Population density is well *below* the national average but has increased from 60 persons per square kilometre in 1981 to 103 persons per square kilometre in 2001 (Planning Commission, 2001: 266). The average is misleading in a state where only 10-15% of the land is cultivatable, thus population density is heavily concentrated in fertile areas (Lahiri, 2000: 336; Tyagi, 2000: 163).

Perceptions and narratives of influx

The actual numbers of migrants into Meghalaya is not important for the ‘outsiders’ discourse. The hegemony of the discourse is maintained through the perceptions of influx. Perceptions of influx have evolved into narratives reproduced in the ‘outsiders’ discourse. I have identified six of the most common aspects of these narratives from literature, interviews, and informal conversations and observations during visits to the Khasi Hills. This compilation is by no means exhaustive, but it does capture the main tenets that continue to be reproduced in the Khasi Hills and that are reflected in other parts of the Northeast.

i) Hegemony of non-tribal culture

The fear of being dominated by ‘plains culture’ through the influx of ‘outsiders’ rests on the belief that the culture of non-tribals will dominate tribal culture and make it extinct. This is an understandable fear; the tribal communities of Meghalaya are small, at around one million for the Khasi and slightly less for the Garo. Despite being the overwhelming majority in Meghalaya, the weight of over a billion ‘Indians’ and the large populations in

¹⁵ Five states in the Northeast registered a decadal growth rate higher than the national average of 21.34 per cent between 1991 and 2001. Nagaland was the highest (64.41 per cent), followed by Manipur (30.02 per cent), Meghalaya (29.94 per cent), Mizoram (29.18 per cent) and Arunachal Pradesh (26.21 per cent).

Bangladesh and Nepal leads to a fear among tribal communities of assimilation and domination by these cultural communities. This fear is based on a clear and unchangeable distinction between 'hill people' and 'plains people'. The problem with this distinction is that it presumes that there is a unified 'plains' culture and similarly a unified 'hill' culture, or even unified Khasi culture. Indeed even today, the classification of 'Khasi' appears an awkward fit for a very diverse set of communities with multiple dialects, folklores, histories, and experiences with development.

The minority-majority issue also needs to be addressed; while the Khasi and Garo are national minorities they are the clear majority in Meghalaya. The tribal population of the state is 80% and the Sixth Schedule ensures reservations for tribals at all levels of politics and public sector employment. The visibility of non-tribals in towns like Shillong where they run businesses and sell goods, speaking their own language, existing in their own social networks, and practising other religions adds to the fear of domination. Singh points out that few non-tribals make any effort to learn tribal languages and they send their children to separate schools (1987: 155-9).

This is coupled with the perceived vulnerability of tribal cultures. Among the tribal communities of Meghalaya there are few cultural outlets apart from staged 'traditional' dances at festivals and folk songs sung at the State Library on the anniversary of the state's founding. There are several Khasi singers and bands, most of which sing hymns, though there are some who sing about social issues and folklore. This is very insignificant compared to the onslaught of American and Hindi television, especially through Star Television (Butcher, 2003). Star Television has become very popular in Meghalaya, especially in Shillong. The television stations are in English and Hindi, and as few Khasis speak Hindi and most Khasis who have attended some school speak English, American programming is very popular. There is a local Khasi language television station, though it is only aired at certain times of the day and the production quality is usually very poor. Television and the widespread use of English has meant that hill culture is being closely associated with Western modernity while the 'plains culture' is looked upon as being heavily bound in caste politics; something from which hill communities are quick to

disassociate themselves. The important point to note is that the fear of non-tribal culture is reflected in the fear of domination by mainstream Indian culture epitomised by Hindi language, films, and the caste system.

ii) Religious differences

Christianity has played a very important role in the Khasi Hills because it gave the Khasis a written language, a common language, and the majority of the educational institutions were established through church missions (Downs, 2003; Jala and Mukhim, 1990). The power of the church has grown in the post-independence era, as have the numbers of conversions. Downs argues that the increases in conversions in recent decades are a 'defence against the greater threat of dominance by and absorption into the more advanced plains Hindu community.' (2003: 392)

Some foreign and tribal missionaries have argued that hill tribals do not want to remain 'uncivilised primitives', and far from being advanced, Hinduism is another form of primitivism (Fuches, 1990). They argue that a civilised social order must be adopted, and those who choose Hinduism risk choosing

...a conservative and rather antiquated Hinduism which goes together with child marriage and the prohibition of remarriage of widows, with the traditional innumerable food tabus [sic], prohibition of animal food or at least beef...the caste system, untouchability and so on...How many of the old traditional values of their original tribal culture they will be able to retain is the question. (Fuches, 1990: pages not numbered)

Christianity has become an important part of civil society and party politics; as an indication there are 3204 registered religious organisations in Meghalaya, the majority of which are Christian (PRIA, 2003: 27). Thus the migration narratives designate migrants from the plains, Nepal, and Bangladesh as the harbingers of Hinduism and Islam. Every year in the Khasi Hills there is violence and protests during Hindu religious festivals and further debates in civil society about the rights of Hindus to observe these festivals (A. Baruah, 2004: 3-4; Hazarika, 1995: 128). More recently Bangladeshi migrants have been

portrayed as Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists (Bhushan, 2004; Gopal, 2004; Jindal, 2004). In response to the rise of Hindutva and the anti-Islamic rhetoric of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the party has gained support in Meghalaya, as it was seen as an anti-Muslim and anti-Bangladeshi party, intent on evicting 'outsiders' from India, which is ironic considering the anti-Christian rhetoric that emanates from sections of the same party (van Schendel, 2005: 218-26).

One of the problems in viewing the role of religion in the 'outsiders' discourse is the tendency to think of all the hill communities as Christian, and all the plains communities as Hindu or Muslim. First, the resistance to conversion among some of the Khasi tribes has a long history, and is still continuing through the influence of various civil society organisations, especially the Seng Khasi (Jaswal, 1982; Sinha, 1972/1986). However, as urban migration continues and as development organisations in civil society continue to be dominated by religious organisations, conversions are increasing. One of the main reasons for this is the continued perception by Christian Khasis that non-Christian Khasis are primitive, while Christian Khasis are modern. Without alternative modernities Christianity has come to symbolise progress towards materialism, consumerism, and urban life in the Khasi Hills. The village, indigenous beliefs, and subsistence agriculture are associated with primitivism. Secondly, the issue is complicated by the assumption that all non-tribals are Hindu or Muslim, ignoring the fact that many non-tribals from all over India are Christian, Buddhist, and Jain (Webster, 2003).

Fear of religious otherness is closely associated with fear of cultural otherness, and both are informed by the idea that the hill communities are precarious minorities, culturally and religiously, vis-and-vis the plains communities. Migration would swamp their cultural and religious institutions and identities. The impact of Christianity and the breakdown of various aspects of Khasi social and economic practices, most notably the matrilineal inheritance system, will be discussed in Chapter 5, however it is important to note that these processes of change driven by Christianity have been seen predominantly as a way of affirming hill tribal identity in the face of the plains population rather than eroding it.

iii) Economic domination

The fear of economic domination has three main facets: the domination of commerce by non-tribals, the development process favouring non-tribals over tribals, and the stereotypes of the gullible tribal being exploited by the sly non-tribal. Fear of loss of land is also closely related to this, but I will discuss it separately below. The fear of domination by non-tribals in commerce has its origins in the colonial era and the migrations of clerks and business owners from Bengal and the Marwari traders from Rajasthan to Assam and Shillong. Indeed, the fear has foundations. For example, non-tribals own all of the major hotels in Shillong, most of the retail businesses in the central district, and most of the long distance transport businesses. There are several colonial era laws that facilitate this, for example the zoning of certain areas of central Shillong mean that trading licences are permitted for non-tribals in these areas only and most of these zones are in the central business district. The Sixth Schedule and the creation of Meghalaya, with its parliament, and its various public works and civil service departments have abated this to some extent, as reservations for tribals have meant economic mobility (Sen Gupta, 2005: 69-74). As Weiner demonstrates with Assam, this led to calls by tribals to expand the public sector rather than encourage the private sector (1978: 132-3). This is also the case in Meghalaya where civil society organisations are quick to oppose any reduction in the size of government departments or reduction in government employment. The formation of Meghalaya as a state with its own public sector has helped to create a sense of entitlement for tribals to these positions, thus the economy is separated into a private sector/non-tribal and public sector/tribal distinctions. However, the actual situation is far more complex.

The second factor is the belief that the development process itself benefits non-tribals far more than Khasis. Singh argues that ‘the words “development”, “industrialisation”, and “urbanisation” are considered in several quarters in the region to be ways of favouring ‘outsiders’.’ (1987: 169) Singh’s argument does have merit. Development has provided few benefits to most of the Khasi population. The Indian Government has been preoccupied with placating separatism through development projects, many of which are poorly considered and prone to corruption (Dolshi, 1972/1986; Nongbri, 2003). Nongbri argues that the development process brought the bureaucracy to regions previously un-

administered by the modern state, and this led to tensions and conflict as the bureaucracy was seen as bringing in rules and regulations that favoured non-tribals (2003: 79). In Meghalaya, pressure groups and ethno-nationalist civil society actors oppose development because they see large infrastructure projects like dams, mines, and railways as opening up their state to 'outsiders' and migrant workers. This will be discussed further in Chapter 4, however the association is clear, development is akin to an influx of labourers who will work for lower wages than Khasis and take jobs that could and should have been given to locals. Thus 'outsiders' are seen as both economically more powerful and favoured by development projects.

Thirdly, stereotypes moored in ethnography, administration, and popular discourse construct tribals as 'simple', 'backward', and 'honest' people in contrast to the 'scheming', 'tricky', and 'manipulative' non-tribals. This is also reflected in post-independence governance and academia. Some descriptions of the Khasis in academic texts include the following: 'they are amiable and jolly, peaceful and social,' (Chakravorty, 1964: 14) and 'the people are of cheerful nature, fond of music, good humoured, good tempered, loving outdoor life...capable of hard labour...enamoured of betels and betel nuts, and inveterate gamblers' (Bahadur, 1977: 10). In the social history of the Khasi Hills the devious and business-minded non-tribal has been epitomised by the images of the Bengali accountant and the Marwari trader (Barooah, 1969: 191; Sinha, 1970: 22; Weiner, 1978: 124-36). This perception is not only reproduced in the writings of non-tribal scholars, but often among tribal scholars themselves. Giri, a Khasi historian, writes, '...the honest nature of the Khasis could not bear the cunning and underhand means of some of the plains people of Sylhet then and hence, the hillmen and the plains people could not come to a compromise.' (1998: 35) While the point Giri is making is clear, it reflects the stereotype that tribal people are incapable of ingenuity, casting them solely as naïve victims of plains trickery. However, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, the pervasiveness of this perception blinds many actors in civil society to the capture and domination of certain sectors of the economy by the tribal elite. This is not to deny the very real history of exclusion from the economic sphere and a history of domination of commerce by non-tribals. However, the degree to which this is due to an intrinsic gullibility versus an intrinsic deviousness is

highly debateable. The more likely cause is the process of colonisation and development itself, as well as the enormous discrepancies of power and material resources between plains and hill communities. Nevertheless the point being made is that these stereotypes are a very important part of the ‘outsiders’ discourse.

iv) Land

Fear of land loss is crucial to the ‘outsiders’ discourse. Land will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. In the Khasi Hills, land ownership has undergone a number of changes since the colonial era, and in some parts, especially in the Jaintia Hills district these changes began taking place before the colonial era (Thomas, 2004: 54-9). The general trend is a shift away from community land, *ri raid*, to private land holdings, *ri kynthi*, and absentee landlordism (Lahiri, 2000: 337). While non-tribals cannot own land by law in the Khasi or Jaintia Hills, except in certain areas of Shillong, the capture of land by individuals and the conversion of that land into *ri kynthi* means this private land can be leased to non-tribals (Nongbri, 2003: 259-60). These are known as *benami*, or nameless transactions, ‘in which non-tribal businessmen (use) tribal men and women as fronts to secure licences, permits and other benefits to further their economic interests.’ (Nongbri, 2003: 259)

Sanjib Baruah sees this as a consequence of the decline of *jhumming* agriculture and the Sixth Schedule,

As shifting cultivation declines, largely as a result of official policy discouraging it, the shifting cultivators of yesterday can hardly be expected to transform themselves overnight into viable settled cultivators without sustained assistance. Under these circumstances selling land is the obvious option. But since the protective discrimination regime restricts selling of land to denizens (non-tribals), the cash-starved former shifting cultivator tends to turn actual control of his [sic] land to migrant denizens- Nepalis and Biharis in this case- in exchange for cash. These denizens typically are better adapted to cultivate these lands because they bring with them some cash, agricultural implements, and their prior experience in settled cultivation. (2003a: 54)

The perception in the Khasi Hills is that Bangladesh, Nepal, and other parts of India like Bihar and Orissa, contain masses of land-hungry farmers and businesspersons waiting to take advantage of cash-poor tribals. The well-documented capture of large tracts of agricultural land by Bengalis in Tripura, Assam and the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, and by Nepalis in Sikkim reinforces this fear (Foning, 1987/2003: 288-313; Weiner, 1978: 95-102). However, the problem of land in the Khasi Hills is far more complex, and the loss of community land is mostly being undertaken from within the tribal population with the complicity of the *dorbars* (Lahiri, 2000: 340-1). Yet the primacy of the ‘outsiders’ discourse means that there is very little scope to frame the issue in those terms as local politics and civil society organisations continue to blame ‘outsiders’ for the land situation (van Schendel, 2005: 195-6).

v) The ‘Tripura Syndrome’

During fieldwork in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, nearly every time discussions turned to ‘outsiders’ and ‘influx’, the tiny state of Tripura was mentioned as an example of what could happen if influx was not opposed, often violently opposed. Tripura is a small state, almost completely surrounded by Bangladesh. When violence against Hindus in what was then East Pakistan began in the 1950s, thousands and thousands fled to Tripura (Hazarika, 2000: 54). The fate of the tribal population of Tripura is a powerful symbol in the ‘outsiders’ discourse simply because the tribal population has been completely overrun by ‘outsiders’. The tribal population of Tripura as a percentage of the overall population decreased from 93% in 1947 to 28% in 1981 (Hazarika, 1995: 123).

Sanjib Baruah discusses the image of Tripura in the Assamese cultural revival movements of the 1970s and he cites the portrait of Tripura in the lyrics of a famous Assamese singer, who laments the loss of Tripura to the ‘enemy’ (1999: 112). He makes strong linkages between this cultural revival through music and literature, and the anti-migration movement in Assamese civil society during the 1970s (1999: 144-72). A similar sentiment has developed in Meghalaya. The fate of Tripura is taken as a precursor to the eventual fate

of Meghalaya.¹⁶ Reports of internally displaced persons and extreme levels of violence in Tripura fuel these fears. In addition, the capture of political power by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)] in Tripura in the late 1970s has solidified the image of Tripura as a Bengali state (Hazarika, 2000: 168). The CPI (M) has been a strong advocate of tribal rights and supported the hill state movement long before the Congress Party, however the party is strongly associated with Bengalis, and with the weakening of the power of religious institutions, thus in the Khasi Hills where the nexus between the church and political parties is strong, the fear of Bengalis is closely associated to the fear of the CPI (M) (Sen Gupta, 2005: 79-81).

vi) Bangladesh: the Malthusian nightmare

Bangladesh is constructed in the ‘outsiders’ discourse as a poor, overpopulated, and underdeveloped state. There are several aspects to this. First, the stereotype of Muslims having high birth rates fuels fears of a continued increase in the population of Bangladesh that will inevitably spill over into the Khasi Hills and the rest of Meghalaya (Singh, 1987: 160). Secondly, Bangladesh itself is portrayed as a neo-Malthusian trap that will continue to spill out of its crowded and porous borders. Geography is a very influential part of the narrative. If one stands in any of the villages along the southern edge of the Khasi Hills and looks south Bangladesh stretches into the horizon. The huge rivers are visible at any time of the year, in the wet season it is difficult to spot land. This visual image helps to construct the idea of desperate, land-hungry, Bengalis who will do anything to settle across the border; including work for miniscule wages, marry into a tribal family (see Chapter 5), negotiate *benami* transactions, or simply dwell in urban areas waiting for work.

¹⁶ The image of Sikkim is much less influential in the ‘outsiders’ discourse than Tripura, yet it still plays a role. There are several reasons for Sikkim’s secondary importance. The inhabitants of Sikkim are not tribals as defined by the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, and there is little knowledge of Sikkim among the people of the Khasi Hills, simply because it is further away and has only been considered part of the Northeast region very recently. In Sikkim, the migrants are Nepalis who have displaced the Bhutia-Lepchas and now constitute the majority in the state.

Desperation is seen as leading to irrationality: crime, rape, bonded labour; all things depicted as foreign to tribal society.

3.4 Identity, Power and Inequality

The ‘outsiders’ discourse has empowered particular groups and marginalised others, which has a major impact on the functioning of civil society and in determining which causes of insecurity are politicised. This section discusses which groups are empowered by the dominance of identity politics in the Khasi Hills. I have identified five groups: tribal elites, the urban middle class, the bureaucracy, ‘approved’ NGOs, and ethno-nationalist civil society organisations.

i) Tribal elite

Since the formation of Meghalaya in 1972, tribal elites have consolidated their power in the society through the expansion of the public sector, reserved seats in parliament, and the capture of development funds allocated to the region from the central government (Sen Gupta, 2005: 69-74). This is not to devalue the hill state movement, as it is highly doubtful that hill tribe communities would have been able to gain any significant political role in an undivided Assam and the potential for further marginalisation within Assam would have been far greater. However, political and economic power and the continuation of that power rest upon the politicisation of ethnicity.

Large funds earmarked for development continue to be sent to Meghalaya, yet the projects are seldom beneficial to rural communities. The most common argument put forth to explain this is that the tribal elite have been able to capture development funds from the central government and the same elite maintain a close nexus with non-tribal contractors, developers, and business people (Nongbri, 2003: 158; see also Sachdeva, 2000). Khasis make up 97 to 99 percent of the construction contractors in the state and public works contracts are a very rich source of government procurement from development funds (Sen Gupta, 2005: 71). While the tribal contractors make money from government contracting,

they are fuelling migration, which strengthens the ‘outsiders’ discourse in public, and conceals corruption, land capture, and environmental degradation from within the society, all of which serve to consolidate the power of the tribal elite and their non-tribal business associates (Lahiri, 2000; Nathan, 2000; Ramnath, 2000; Sen Gupta, 2005: 100).

Tribal elites have been the main catalysts and beneficiaries in the privatisation of land and the control of natural resources (Nongbri, 2003: 158). As will be argued in Chapters 4 and 5, this has led to the heightening of divisions within the Khasi society between urban and rural communities, men and women, and rich and poor. The ‘outsiders’ discourse serves the status quo as it directs public and political attention away from insecurity generated from within Khasi society and blames migrants. Nongbri discusses the role of the tribal elite in arguing against any type of land reforms,

...it is also this particular class which corners the benefits of development and amass large areas of land by investing their ill-gotten wealth in landed property. Paradoxically it is the same class which is most vocal in expressing their concern about the influx of ‘outsiders’ and the fear that if land reforms are introduced they would be dispossessed of their rights and cultural identity. (2003: 158)

This has consequences for civil society as it strongly influences which actors are able to contest causes of insecurity, and which issues will be contested.

ii) Urban middle class

The rise of the tribal elite has been accompanied by a rise in the urban middle class in Meghalaya. Many members of the middle class are beneficiaries of the Sixth Schedule, and thus their status is dependent on their ethnicity. However the economy has been unable to absorb all of the educated tribal youth, creating resentment at the non-tribal population perceived to be taking jobs that should belong to tribals, and undercutting the wage market. Singh argues that the interests of the middle class have converged with the interests of the tribal elite and their strength comes through the politicisation of ethnic ties (1987: 70; see also Phukon, 2003). He argues that there have not been any significant social and political

movements from below in the hill states of the Northeast, and that most of the social reformers and insurgent leaders come from the middle class/elite class (1987: 71). Thus for Singh, the absence of class conflicts and a period of social upheaval, has meant that the 'ethnic' group, rather than class groups, has been transformed into the political group (1987: 71). Ethnicity rather than class has become the basis of politics in Meghalaya and other states of the Northeast.

The consolidation of power by the tribal elite and the tribal middle class has been heavily confined to urban areas. Levels of income in rural areas have increased but the proportion of people living below the poverty line has stayed relatively stable, and the actual number of people living below the poverty line has increased along with an increase in population. The statistics available in the *National Human Development Report* are instructive on this point. The number of people living below the poverty line¹⁷ in urban areas of Meghalaya has been reduced from 21.73% in 1983, to 7.47% in 1999/2000, despite an overall increase in the urban population (Planning Commission, 2001: 165). In rural areas the percentage living below the poverty line *increased* between 1983 and 1993/4, from 42.60% to 45.01% and decreased to 40.04% in 1999/2000. The overall number of people living below the poverty line has increased from 504,000 in 1983 to 789,000 in 1999/2000 (Planning Commission, 2001: 165). These percentages are far higher than the Indian national average of 27.09% of people under the poverty line in rural areas in 1999/2000 (Planning Commission, 2001: 165).¹⁸

These statistics do not take into account several other factors, such as the precarious nature of livelihoods, health indicators, high school drop-out rates in rural areas, declining land quality, increasing land privatisation, urban migration, and the impact of environmental

¹⁷ The poverty lines indicators used by the Planning Commission are adjusted for increases in income and inflation. It is also a different amount in urban and rural areas and in different states in India. For example, the poverty line in Rural Meghalaya in 1981 was set at 98 rupees per month; this was increased to 232 rupees per month in 1991, and 365 per month in 2001. See Planning Commission, 2001: 164-6.

¹⁸ Comparing overall numbers is not useful as the population of Meghalaya is very low compared to most other Indian states, bar some of the smaller states and union territories.

degradation (see Lahiri, 2000; Nongkynrih, 2002; 2003, Thomas, 2004). However, the overall trend of a growing gap between urban and rural livelihoods is clear. Despite this there have been few voices of dissent from rural areas.

iii) Bureaucracy

The growing power of the bureaucracy and the links between bureaucrats at different levels has exacerbated inequalities along class, gender, ethnic, and urban-rural lines. Access to political spaces is being concentrated among a network of bureaucrats and governance is moving further away from ordinary people and marginalised groups (Rataan, 2003: 242-3). The formation of Meghalaya resulted in another layer of institutions being created on top of the Sixth Schedule institutions and the various levels of *dorbars*. As a result the legal and bureaucratic systems have become extremely complex, while at the same time the bureaucracy has extended its reach over more and more aspects of social, political, and economic life.

Meghalaya's state assembly has only one house with 60 seats, 55 of which are reserved for tribals. Beneath the state assembly are the district councils, created through the Sixth Schedule to give authority to hill districts within Assam. When Meghalaya was formed the district councils were not disbanded though their function has become ambiguous, serving neither state nor village-level functions (Changsan, 1998; Jyrwa, 1998; Sethi, 2004: 46-52). Nongbri argues that the district councils have 'joined hands with the exploitative class', and have been instrumental in land acquisition and exploitation (2003: 145). Underneath the Meghalaya Government and the district councils are the *dorbars*. In some areas of the Khasi Hills, the *dorbars* can have as many as five different tiers: clan level, village level, cluster level, 'thirty villages' level, and executive level.¹⁹ There is not always

¹⁹ At the clan level there is the *Dorbar Kur*, or clan council, which looks after clan lands and settles disputes among clan members. All male members of the clan are sent to the *Dorbar Kur* as representatives. Above this is the *Dorbar Shnong*, or village council, which are the most common *dorbars* and the one that meets most frequently. The Rangbah Shnong, village headman, heads the *Dorbar Shnong*. The *Dorbar Shnong* has administrative, financial, and customary legal jurisdiction over the village and its members. It also receives

a clear distinction between the functions and jurisdiction of the *dorbars* at each level, and to make the situation more complex the different tiers vary among the different localities in the Khasi Hills. The *dorbars* continue to preserve the power of particular rural power brokers and clans, though after state formation the *dorbars* have become closely linked to the urban elite, especially as the *dorbars* have power over land distribution and the issuing of trading licences (A. Baruah, 2004; Sharma, 2004). As Apurba Baruah argues, the *dorbars* have evolved into modern political institutions but are still represented as ‘traditional’, preventing critical review or constitutional reform (2004:15). Crucially, the exclusion of women and non-Khasis from *dorbars* raises serious questions over their perceived democratic credentials; this will be discussed at length in Chapter 5 (A. Baruah, 2003, 2004; Rataan, 2004; Sharma, 2004).

The *dorbars* influence civil society, especially in rural areas. If a member of a civil society organisation wants to enter a village to gather information or to implement a program it must gain the permission of the village chief and the *dorbar*. As several interview respondents pointed out, civil society actors who challenge the power of the *dorbars*, especially on issues of land, can have a very difficult time trying to address the causes of insecurity at a village level.²⁰ It is important to recognise the potential constraints and limitations *dorbars* may pose to rural voices being articulated in civil society. The interests

development funding from the district councils and state government. Only adult males are allowed to sit on the council and women are barred from speaking in *dorbar* meetings. Above the village level *dorbar* is the *Ka Dorbar Pyllum*, which is a council formed from a group or cluster of villages. Above this is the *Ka Dorbar Raid*, which usually translates to the council of 30 villages, though there may be more or fewer than 30 villages in the actual *Dorbar Raid*. All of the headmen from each village level *dorbar* are representatives in the *Dorbar Raid* and they elect the Rangbah Raid, as the chief executive of the entire area. The *Dorbar Raid* supervises markets, market levies, road building, and land allocation. The *Dorbar Hima* is above the *Dorbar Raid* and brings together different Raids as a sort of Supreme Court or executive body for the 25 Syiemships of the Khasi Hills.

²⁰ Iasaid Khongjee, President: Khatar Shnong Socio-Organisation, *Personal Interview*, 19 February 2005, Sohra, Meghalaya, India; Chibait Lhuid, Secretary: Mar Chaphrang Development Society, *Personal Interview*, 8 April 2005, Jowai, Meghalaya, India; Rangsan Sohmat, Founder and Head: Iai-treilang Multi Purpose Cooperative Society ITMCS, *Personal Interview*, 6 April 2005, Phlangwanbroi, Meghalaya, India.

of the headmen and the *dorbars* may be vastly different to the people living within their jurisdiction. This is very clear when one examines land issues, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

iv) Approved NGOs

As development monies have flowed into the Northeast, NGOs that are well connected are also well funded and able to decide what ‘counts’ as a problem. Ray and Katzenstein describe state-NGO relations in India in the 1990s as being characterised by a shift from social movements and protest to service provision and sub-contracting (2005: 26). This describes the relations between the state and NGOs in Meghalaya quite accurately, yet in Meghalaya, and other parts of the Northeast, the government is able to invoke national security measures against civil society actors they consider to be uncooperative or critical. The Meghalaya Government has continually harassed, denounced, and banned organisations, while the Indian Government has blacklisted 300 civil society organisations in Meghalaya (Bhaumik, 2003b). The state government has devised a complex system of registration and financial reporting for civil society organisations; organisations must be registered under one of five acts in order to be eligible for funding and must curb their criticism of the Government in order to survive financially.²¹ An examination of the Meghalaya Government’s list of ‘approved NGOs’ gives some indication of the type of organisations deemed acceptable. The list contains sixty-two entries, the vast majority of which are religious mission homes and orphanages and organisations connected to international donors dealing with depoliticised versions of development and philanthropy (Government of Meghalaya, 2005). The space remaining is very small.

²¹ Meghalaya Societies Registration Act 1976; The Central Cooperatives Societies Act 1904, The Indian Trusts Act 1882; The Trade Union Act 1926; and Section 25 of the Indian Companies Act 1956. For conditions required for funding, see *Financial Assistance to VA/NGOs* on the Government of Meghalaya website <http://meghalaya.nic.in/fango.pdf>, last accessed 8 August 2006.

v) *Ethno-nationalist organisations*

The ‘outsiders’ discourse and the hegemony of identity politics have empowered ethno-nationalist civil society actors, known as ‘pressure groups’ in Meghalaya, but are better described as ethno-nationalist organisations, as not all pressure groups have ethnic aspects. The main ethno-nationalist organisations in the Khasi Hills are the Khasi Students Union (KSU), the Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo Peoples (FKJGP), the Synjuk Seng Samla Shnong (SSSS), and the Hyinñiewtrep Youth Front (HYF). They are very influential political actors and several of the leaders of these organisations go on to become mainstream politicians. Their means can be dubious, and members are often arrested and detained by the police or armed forces (Malngiang, 2002: 177). The boundaries between these groups and insurgent organisations are blurred, as are the boundaries between some of these groups and certain regional political parties. In contrast to ‘approved NGOs’ discussed above, they continually oppose the government and are very active in pursuing ethno-nationalist agendas. These organisations dominate civil society in the Khasi Hills, and their continued emphasis on ethnicity ensures that other issues are difficult to contest.

The most influential organisations are the KSU and the FKJGP. The KSU was formed in 1978. The motto of the KSU was originally ‘welfare of the state and the community’ but this changed in 1993 to distinguish the Khasi ethnicity, ‘*Mait Shaprang Khlur ka Ri*’ – ‘Strive ahead children of the soil’ (Malngiang, 1995: 51). The year after the formation of the KSU was the beginning of the now regular riots and violence directed at non-tribals (A. Baruah, 2004: 3-4). Research by Apurba Baruah indicates that the KSU have been involved in subsequent violence against Nepalis and Bengalis in Shillong, especially in 1987, 1992, and 1997 (2004: 9-10).

The KSU is membership-based and any Khasi undertaking formal education is eligible to join. Each education institution and residential location has their own unit, and each unit sends two members to the Central Executive Committee (Kumar and Nongkynrih, 1995). Only males can occupy president, general secretary, treasurer, and all other secretarial posts of the KSU. Though they have made provisions for females by adding ‘she’ to constitution, critics see it as a tool to mobilise support and not a sincere effort to involve

women in the organisation (Borgohain and Laitflang, 1995: 46-7). The KSU has a very close relationship with the *dorbars* and in particular with the Seng Samla, the youth wing of the *dorbars*. Both organisations are well coordinated and well organised in different locations, especially in urban areas, and both are open only to Khasis (Kumar and Nongkynrih, 1995: 198-9).

During fieldwork I interviewed the current President of the KSU, Samuel Jyrwa. Jyrwa made some general points about the organisation that are worth noting. First the KSU sees itself as a permanent opposition to the government, or as Jyrwa puts it, the 'KSU is like a parallel government...the KSU is one of the most vocal organisations and the government fears only the KSU, not other organisations.'²² The KSU has been well known for its agitations and Jyrwa argues that this comes from a lack of responsiveness from successive governments in Meghalaya and Delhi,

...the central government and even the state government don't understand things if you talk to them nicely. They understand only if there is violence, if there is killing, if there is shooting, then they will give you attention...if you express in a democratic way they don't pay you attention, they don't listen to your demands.

Despite the rhetoric against the government, the KSU has spawned a political party known as the Khun Hyinñiewtrep National Awakening Movement (KHNAM), which is part of the current Meghalaya Government. The current Meghalaya Government is a delicate Congress-led multiparty coalition and KHNAM members hold two of these seats. As the government cannot afford any defections from the coalition, the influence of the KSU in parliament has been strengthened.

The FKJGP is also a membership organisation with around 10,000 members, yet it is not an exclusively Khasi organisation and aims to fight for the rights of all the tribal people of Meghalaya. Many of the issues taken up by the organisation are shared with the KSU,

²² Samuel B. Jyrwa, President: Khasi Students Union, *Personal Interview*, 22 February 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

especially anti-migration (Malngiang, 2002: 187). The key issue associated with the FKJGP is the monitoring of trading licences (Malngiang, 2002: 188). There are only certain zones in Shillong where non-tribals are allowed to own businesses and trade, in all other areas of the state non-tribal traders must gain a licence from the district council. If the business activity can be done equally well by a tribal, the non-tribal is not able to gain a license (Malngiang, 2002: 188). However, many non-tribals have paid the district council members enormous fees to gain trading licences. The President of the FKJGP argues that some non-tribals will pay 50,000 rupees for the 500-rupee license.²³ In addition, tribal traders are leasing their stores in the main market to non-tribals for high rates, effectively increasing the number of non-tribal traders in Shillong (Malngiang, 2002: 189). Apurba Baruah argues that the *dorbars* continue to extort money from non-tribal traders, thus creating further ethnic tensions and perpetuating a system of corruption enriching tribals in positions of power while making it difficult for tribal traders to compete (2004: 18). The FKJGP uses volunteers to physically evict non-tribal traders, escalating tensions between groups and often leading to sporadic violence. The FKJGP even has a special division for monitoring trading licences.

During my interview with the current president of the FKJGP, Bah Lyttan, he too pointed out that the lack of responsiveness from the government can lead to violence, ‘we have a very diverse organisation and as members get more frustrated with this (the government) they are likely to take up arms. So what do they do? They form this militant group, something like that. So they are doing it against the government but we are above the ground.’²⁴ This comment is indicative of the nature of the links between ethno-nationalist organisations and armed organisations. The line between the two is blurred. As Lyttan points out, an organisation with 10,000 members may have members who take up arms, but the organisation itself does not explicitly condone this.

²³ Bah Lyttan, President: Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo Peoples, *Personal Interview*, 5 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an historical account of Meghalaya from the colonisation of Assam by the British, to the development of the Sixth Schedule in the postcolonial era, and the formation of Meghalaya as a separate hill state in 1972. In this context ethnic identity, predicated on colonial categories of tribe and hill tribe and institutionalised into the postcolonial Indian state, has become the basis of social, political, and economic life. The persistence of colonial categories is manifested in both the Indian national context, and the local context in Meghalaya. The construction of Meghalaya in the Indian national context reflects the colonial classifications described above, casting tribal majority areas as a largely egalitarian and homogenous societies, without major disparities based on class, caste, or gender. This construction is paramount in the way the Indian mainstream approaches Meghalaya, and this will be demonstrated in the following chapters. In the local context, colonial categories have been the basis of identity for many ethnic groups seeking to distinguish themselves from the larger and more culturally dominant communities surrounding them, and increasingly narrow forms of identity have been used to distinguish between neighbouring groups.

Yet in the Khasi Hills, ethnic identity is insecure. This insecurity is articulated in the ‘outsiders’ discourse described above, and is derived from both a genuine feeling of insecurity prevalent in Khasi society and the manipulation of this insecurity for political ends. Thus the ‘outsiders’ discourse has come to dominate social, political, and economic life in the Khasi Hills; empowering those who can manipulate it, and marginalising actors and insecurities that fall outside of it or challenge it. As will be discussed in the following chapters, the ability of civil society actors to contest the causes of insecurity faced by different groups in the Khasi Hills is subject to the ‘outsiders’ discourse and the power of its main proponents.

As this chapter demonstrates, the history of Assam and later Meghalaya has empowered certain actors and groups. I have identified these as: tribal elites, the urban middle class, the bureaucracy, ‘approved’ NGOs, and ethno-nationalist civil society organisations. These

actors are not aligned politically, but all benefit from the hegemony of identity politics, reinforcing the dominance of the 'outsiders' discourse. This is a major constraint on civil society, as any challenge to identity politics may threaten the positions of those with the most interest in maintaining the status quo. This is increasingly important for civil society actors, as many of the causes of insecurity in the Khasi Hills are caused by the actions and/or inaction of these powerful groups. As long as the 'outsiders' discourse is dominant, other causes of insecurity remain unseen and very difficult to contest as they depend upon exposing the inequalities within Khasi society, challenging both national constructions of tribal people and local constructions of identity. In other words, the 'outsiders' discourse empowers particular actors and these actors are able to set the agenda in civil society. Actors attempting to address causes of insecurity that have little relevance to this discourse, or that challenge the power of those who depend upon the discourse, operate in a greatly reduced political space.

As particular actors and groups have become empowered through state formation in Meghalaya, others have become disempowered. As discussed above, the Sixth Schedule protects Khasi lands and provides reservations in employment, education, and politics for Khasis. However, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters, inequalities within Khasi society are increasing dramatically, causing insecurity for vast numbers of the population. Yet the construction of Meghalaya in the national context as homogenous and egalitarian with community controlled resources prevents these inequalities, and the insecurities caused by these inequalities, from being *seen* by civil society actors in other parts of India, leaving few avenues for local civil society actors to circumvent the 'outsiders' discourse. At a local level, the dominance of the 'outsiders' discourse ensures all causes of insecurity are blamed on outsiders, preventing critical introspection on the growing inequalities within Khasi society. Thus not only are the causes of insecurity invisible in a national and local context, but the power of certain actors and groups perpetuates these inequalities behind a veil of insecurity articulated in the 'outsiders' discourse.

In order for civil society actors to contest the causes of insecurity close attention must be given to the ways identity, power, and inequalities are manifested in the local sphere. The following two chapters that make up Part II of this thesis use empirical case studies of environmental insecurity and gender-based insecurity to examine the constraints on contestation and the possibilities of transcending these constraints. Chapter 4 examines environmental insecurity and demonstrates the way that environmental degradation has been completely coopted into the ‘outsiders’ discourse, leaving the causes of insecurity generated from within Khasi society unaddressed. Civil society actors have been largely unsuccessful in challenging and transcending these constraints. Chapter 5 examines gender-based insecurity and argues that despite the severity of gender-based insecurity, civil society actors attempting to address them face the double constraint that the causes of insecurity have no currency in the ‘outsiders’ discourse, and the contestation of these insecurities challenges the constructions of ethnic identity that are central *to* the ‘outsiders’ discourse. However, gender-based civil society actors have found ways to transcend these constraints by challenging constructions of ethnic identity. These comparative examples lead into Part III, where the possibilities of transcendence will be critically examined.

Part II- Marginality and Voice: the insecurity of civil society

Chapter 4- Constructing Environmental Insecurity: the politics of degradation and identity

The idioms of the local, or the indigenous, or the community, opposed to the global, the outsider, or the state/market, can prove fruitful for rallying support. But support for these causes as they have hitherto been constructed, also simultaneously requires that internal differences be glossed over and erased...there are no conceptual categories that endure in the same way or mean the same thing to all people. Especially when they take the form of politically changed binaries, categories can assume a phenomenological life of their own...

- Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan, 2001: 12

...if development was the God that failed, it was never an adivasi (tribal) God...there could be no disillusionment when people had no illusions in the first place...the present theoretical treatment of adivasis reifies “the grassroots”, and is an idealisation of people’s actual life, a representation that is vulnerable to refutation. Their low impact use of nature was probably as much adventitious as it may have been deliberate...it becomes hard to say whether their “traditions” can be uncritically extolled as epitomising sustainability, and what potential they hold as an ideal in the present, vastly changed context.

- Baviskar, 1995: 241

Last time I talked to the (head of the) DC (district council), I asked, “How do you value the indigenous institutions?” He could not answer. Then he said, “I am afraid of you.” (I replied) “You are afraid of me who asks you questions? What about those people who cannot ask questions? You do whatever you want to them because they don’t ask questions!”

- Iasaïd Khongjee, President Khatar Shnong Socio Organisation, Personal Interview, Sohra, February 2005

4.0 Introduction

This chapter begins Part II of the thesis. The content of this and the following chapter is primarily drawn from empirical research conducted in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya between January and June 2005, though existing literature is also used. The purpose of these two chapters is to examine the impact of identity, power, and inequalities on civil

society and the consequences for human security. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the main causes of environmental insecurity in Meghalaya and the response of civil society actors. It must be stated from the outset that environmental insecurity is chronic in the Khasi Hills, derived from various types of environmental degradation. The causes of these insecurities are 'real' in that they are clearly observable throughout the different districts. Yet despite the severity of this degradation, civil society actors have only politicised the proposed uranium mine in the West Khasi Hills Districts, while other causes of degradation, most notably the impacts of coal mining, remain unaddressed leaving those suffering from their impacts unable to contest the causes of their insecurity, impeding the search for human security. This raises two distinct but linked issues of major significance to the central concerns of this thesis. First, the politicisation of certain types of insecurity and the neglect of others indicates that identity politics, the power of certain actors and discourses, and existing inequalities impact upon which issues are politicised in civil society and the ways in which they are politicised. Secondly, the existence of competing constructions of insecurity indicates that conflict exists over defining exactly what constitutes insecurity in different contexts; in this case the conflict is between environmental insecurity, identity insecurity, and economic insecurity. These two issues are linked. Those actors able to set the agenda in civil society have the greatest capacity to politicise certain causes of insecurity, yet certain forms of insecurity, particularly identity insecurity have the effect of empowering different actors and disempowering others.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the concept of environmental insecurity and the ways in which civil society actors have addressed environmental issues in other parts of India. I argue that despite the existence of influential environmental movements in India, the construction of Meghalaya and its people in the Indian national context has left Meghalaya isolated from these movements, intensifying local circumstances. The second section outlines the main types of environmental degradation in the Khasi Hills: changes in land ownership and usage, deforestation, changes in *jhumming* agriculture, and mining. This section demonstrates that the impacts of environmental degradation are felt most intensely in rural areas, where the majority of people in Meghalaya live. The third section focuses specifically on the impact of uranium

mining and coal mining in the Khasi Hills. Both of these forms of mining have caused severe environmental insecurity yet civil society actors have focussed on opposing uranium mining as a threat to the Khasi people, primarily because it will encourage further migration into the area. Coal mining, despite the damage it has caused to the environment, has not been opposed in any meaningful way. The fourth section examines why uranium has been politicised and not coal, and by extension, why uranium and not deforestation or landlessness. I argue that there are four reasons: uranium fits the ‘outsiders’ discourse and coal does not, the profits from coal stay in Meghalaya while the majority of profits from uranium would leave, those facing the most severe forms of degradation have no voice to contest these insecurities, and the construction of Meghalaya in the Indian national context leaves civil society isolated and prevents local power relations from being circumvented. The conclusion discusses what this means for the central concerns of this thesis, namely civil society, human security, and the relationship between the two. I conclude by arguing that transcendence appears distant on environmental issues in the Khasi Hills as identity, power, and inequalities are heavily embedded.

4.1 Approaching environmental insecurity

Environmental insecurity is primarily caused by environmental degradation. Environmental degradation is ‘real’ in the Khasi Hills, in that it can be seen and analysed; it places serious constraints on the ability of different groups of people to pursue livelihoods, to interact with the environment in a sustainable manner, and to control their lives. Despite the numerous causes of degradation only some have been politicised by civil society actors, making them visible and part of the political agenda. Thus in the political conflict over the environment some of the effects of degradation are made visible while others are invisible. Invisible insecurity is no less severe; rather it reflects the power of particular actors and discourses in civil society and the ways in which insecurity is politicised by these actors. Conflict over the environment in the Khasi Hills is predominantly conflict over political and economic power. Those with the power to exploit resources produce environmental insecurity and those suffering most from the causes of insecurity have little power to contest them. Civil society actors have opposed the types of

environmental degradation that reflect dominant discourses in Meghalayan politics and their own political interests, and thus only particular causes of insecurity have become politicised while others have not.

Degradation and insecurity

In keeping with the human security framework deployed in this thesis, this chapter will use the concept of environmental security, and its absence, to analyse the impacts of environmental degradation on different groups of people in the Khasi Hills. Environmental security is concerned with the insecurities suffered by humans as a result of environmental degradation (Dyer, 2001; Græger, 1996). Thus the absence of environmental security, environmental insecurity, can be thought of as a form of insecurity with multiple causes emanating from environmental degradation or change. There are two main approaches to environmental insecurity, the instrumentalist/conflict approach embodied by Homer-Dixon (1994) and Kaplan (1994/1998) and the constructivist approach derived from authors writing from a sociological perspective such as Hannigan (1995) and Martell (1994). These will be briefly discussed before the approach adopted in this chapter is explained.

The instrumentalist/conflict approach is advocated by those who see the causes of environmental insecurity as catalysts for other forms of insecurity, especially violent conflict between states or between ethnic groups (Hazarika, 2000; Homer-Dixon, 1994; Kaplan, 1994/1998). Homer-Dixon (1994) argues that conflicts over scarce resources between states and ethnic groups will be, and are being, driven by environmental degradation. Kaplan (1994/1998) argues a similar point linking the threats from resource scarcity and environmental destruction to militarisation and violence. This theme is common throughout much of the literature on insurgency and politics in Northeast India (S. Baruah, 2003a; 2003b; Chadda, 2002; Hazarika, 1995; Singh, 2004).

This approach is problematic for a number of reasons. First, as Barnett points out, the environmental conflict thesis takes the complex politics surrounding the environment, identity, nationality, and geography and squeezes them into statist frameworks (2001: 64-

6). This implies that environmental degradation causes insecurity *only* when it leads to violent conflict, especially between peoples from different states and/or nationalities, and especially in the developing world. Secondly, this perspective excludes the more common causes of insecurity caused by environmental degradation that may not ever lead to violent conflict. Thirdly, the environmental conflict thesis rests on assumptions that those facing environmental degradation and resource scarcity, especially in the Third World, will start trying to kill each other.

The constructivist approach is advocated by authors who use social constructivism as their primary method for analysing the ways different causes of environmental degradation become security issues, social issues, and political issues. Several of these argue that causes of environmental degradation are socially constructed by different actors and when successfully framed they become 'issues' (Hannigan, 1995: 55). Environmental issues only gain meaning when they are successfully framed by these actors, whether civil society organisations, international organisations, scientific networks, or epistemic communities (Haas, 1989; Hajer, 1995; Hannigan, 1995; Martell, 1994). Environmental issues that are not framed are neglected and remain either unaddressed or without meaning. Scholars adopting critical approaches to security have argued that the securitisation of the environment moves environmental degradation into mainstream politics, especially in international institutions (Dalby, 1997; Dyer, 2001; Krause, 1998; McDonald, 2002, 2003). Framing is important as determining what counts as a cause of environmental insecurity should not be judged by the possibilities of conflict, '...but by whether it is defined as a security threat by the group in question.' (Krause, 1998: 124) For McDonald the framing of environmental degradation as a security threat gives environmental issues urgency and priority in policy making, yet he argues that this ignores the existence of particular normative contexts which can vary greatly in different locations, altering the ways in which environmental degradation is perceived and prioritised (2002: 278).

While the constructivist approach certainly has validity, it is not without its problems. First, it is clear that there is a need for those affected by degradation to identify and define the causes of insecurity that have an impact upon their lives, yet there is very little analysis

of the *ability* of those most affected to do so. This chapter aims to go some way towards addressing this problem. Secondly, in emphasising the ways in which causes of environmental insecurity are constructed by different actors there is a tendency to view the causes of environmental insecurity that are not successfully constructed as less severe, less important, or non-existent. In other words, there are causes of environmental insecurity that are not successfully constructed or even framed as problems, yet this does not make these causes less ‘real’ or less severe (Martinez-Alier, 2004: 70).

The approach adopted in this chapter recognises the validity of the constructivist approach but is also concerned with the material impacts of environmental degradation and their contribution to insecurity. Thus the focus here is on how and why particular types of degradation are politicised and constructed as insecurity and not others? How does this politicisation reflect struggles over identity, power, and inequalities in civil society? What does this mean for civil society, human security, and the relationship between the two?

Environmentalism in national and local contexts

India has a rich history of environmental activism, symbolised by campaigns such as the fight to save the Narmada River and the Chipko movement against deforestation in the Himalayas (Baviskar, 2005; Palit, 2003; Rangan, 2001, 2004; Roy, 1999). Similarly, there is a substantial and influential body of literature on Indian environmental history and the impacts of colonial and postcolonial capitalist expansion on the relations between humans and nature (Gadgil and Guha, 1992, 1995; Shiva, 1989, 1993). It is important to state at the outset of this chapter that existing literature on the environment in India and debates on the environmental history of India have largely neglected the study of the environment in Meghalaya. Yet this literature does offer important insights into the way environmental issues in Meghalaya, and the Northeast as a whole, are perceived in ‘mainstream’ environmental debates in India and how this affects the linkages between environmental actors in Meghalaya and those in other parts of India.

The focus of Indian environmental histories has been on the disjuncture brought about through colonisation and continuation of capitalist expansion in the postcolonial era. For example, in their seminal work on India's ecological history, Gadgil and Guha (1992) distinguish between pre-colonial ecological harmony, colonial ecological destruction, and postcolonial ecological apocalypse. They see pre-colonial India as a sustainable society of unchanging relations between humans and the environment. Despite the existence of inequalities, there was a balance in society, with limited disturbances and upheavals, and sustainability in the relationships between humans and nature (1992: 112). The coming of the British was an 'ecological watershed', destroying cultural traditions of production and livelihood (1992: 116). Shiva's work on ecology, development, and bio-piracy makes similar arguments. She argues that the colonisation of India began with the colonisation of forests and the privileging of scientific management of nature (1989: 61-3). She argues that the form of knowledge embodied in European colonialism extended the factory system to forests (1993: 17). For Shiva this was the beginning of the concentration of power over nature in the hands of the authorities by creating a false distinction between forests and agriculture.

These authors indicate that tribal people are the carriers of pre-colonial forms of environmental management, especially, though not exclusively *jhumming* (Prasad, 2003: xviii). As tribal people have been isolated from the centres of the colonial and postcolonial economic expansion, especially in hill areas, these forms of environmental management have remained relatively unchanged (Sharma, 2002). In these environmental histories tribal communities are mostly viewed as homogenous wholes with a particular relationship with the environment based on a heightened sense of ecological awareness embedded in their pre-modern social structures (Subramanian, 2002). The result is a singular, static, and closed category of tribal people and their relationships with the environment, meaning that in parts of India where tribal people constitute the majority and especially where they have constitutional control over their land as is the case in Meghalaya, there is an assumption that environmental degradation will be minimal, and furthermore if environmental degradation does occur it will be caused by 'outsiders'.

In contemporary India, civil society actors have increasingly drawn upon environmental arguments to contest development projects. Within these movements tribal peoples have been seen as key actors in resisting development projects and often modernity itself. The icons of Indian environmental activism, the fight to save the Narmada River and the Chipko movement, are often used as examples to make this point (Baviskar, 2005: 165-9; Rangan, 2004: 375-6). As Baviskar argues, these representations of tribal people and their relationships with the environment ‘valorise’ certain communities and ignore the complexities of the impact of environmental degradation on diverse populations (2005: 172). In her earlier study of the involvement of Bhilala communities in resisting the Narmada Dam in Madhya Pradesh, Baviskar argues that these assumptions coopt tribal communities into particular political causes and ignore the discord between peoples own perceptions of what they are fighting for and ‘the claims made by intellectuals who postulate that “indigenous” resistance is a comprehensive critique of development.’ (1995: 233) She argues that many tribal communities are fighting against the dam, but they are doing so for a variety of reasons and that the championing by outside commentators and activists has ‘tended to obscure some of the difficulties that *adivasis* (tribals) encounter in their attempted resistance.’ (1995: 238)

Critical approaches to both the portrayal of tribal people in environmental histories and the ways they have been integrated into contemporary environmental movements do not doubt the impact of colonialism on the destruction of the environment, but consider a range of factors that have influenced attitudes towards nature and environmental degradation in India throughout pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods, recognising the inequalities that exist within particular ethnic groups and communities (Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan, 2001 and Grove et al, 1998). For example, Sumit Guha has challenged the claim that conservationist ethics existed in the autonomous pre-modern, pre-colonial Indian village, and he points out that there were numerous conflicts over resources based on various inequalities and access to resources (2001: 138-9). Prasad is particularly critical of the romanticisation of pre-colonial ecology, arguing that it ignores inequalities and is in danger ‘of defending the pre-colonial feudal structures as being just and egalitarian.’ (2004: 27) She argues that in working for its own interests the colonial government

allowed areas with feudal and semi-feudal structures to survive (2004: 17). This served the interests of capital and unequal exchange, and thus these power relations within communities were allowed to persist and many have survived the colonial era intact (Malik, 2003: 299-301; Prasad, 2004: 17-18).

Yet despite these critiques, the links between tribal people and environmental sustainability are very strong in Indian environmentalism and among civil society actors. As Meghalaya is a tribal majority state and tribal people control the distribution and use of land, the egalitarian assumptions about tribal societies and their sustainable use of the environment are central to the way Meghalaya is constructed in the rest of India. The lack of knowledge about Meghalaya, its people, and the Northeast region in general compounds this perception. As Sinha argues, there have been calls across India to take control of environmental resources, especially forests, away from the state and give it back to communities. Yet in the Northeast, the majority of forests *are* controlled by communities, thus despite the high levels of degradation, places like Meghalaya are mostly ignored in favour of concentrating on regaining community control in areas where it is minimal (1993: 7-11). Krishna makes a similar point on the Northeast as a whole, ‘unlike the position elsewhere in India, the government’s control over land use is limited...[and] the people’s perception is that the Constitutional provisions [Sixth Schedule] effectively protect the village community’s customary rights over the use of forestland and the extraction of forest-based resources.’ (2004b: 378)

This construction has two impacts that are of concern to the present study: isolation, and an intensification of local circumstances. First, Meghalaya is isolated from Indian environmental movements and organisations. This can be seen in the relative absence of environmental organisations from other countries or other parts of India operating in Meghalaya, with the exception of some international development organisations such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), but the concern of these organisations is not environmental degradation as such but on livelihood generation and resource management (IFAD, 2002, 2004). As Karlsson points out, the dominant perception in India is that provided communities control resources then there is no need for

concern over environmental degradation (2004:9). As long as this perception prevails, civil society actors will focus on locations in India that are completely devoid of community control of resources before they will focus on the Northeast. This leads to the second impact, the intensification of local politics. Without the input of national environmental movements, local politics becomes even more influential in the politicisation of particular environmental insecurities. Without the influence of external civil society actors to provide an alternative framework the dominance of the ‘outsiders’ discourse in local politics is heightened, and those empowered by the ‘outsiders discourse’ have the power to set the political agenda preventing contestation of the causes of environmental degradation from within the ethnic group, and preventing external scrutiny from environmental movements in other parts of India, leaving dominant constructions of environmental insecurity uncontested.

4.2 Environmental Degradation in Meghalaya

Environmental degradation in the Khasi Hills has an immediate impact on agrarian livelihoods. The study of the environment and agrarian societies have often been separated, but as Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan argue, to understand the issues facing rural communities in India agrarian and environmental politics must be linked (2001: 14). This is helpful for understanding the impacts of environmental degradation in the Khasi Hills as over 80% of people in Meghalaya live in rural areas (Planning Commission, 2001: 264). There are four main causes of environmental degradation in the Khasi Hills. These forms of degradation are ‘real’ in that they are visible, their impacts observable, and their status as threats to human security is indisputable. These are: i) changes to land ownership and usage, ii) deforestation, iii) changes to *jhumming* agriculture, and iv) mining. They have an adverse impact on the ability of the poor, who constitute the vast majority of Meghalaya’s population, to generate any kind of sustainable livelihood. These causes of degradation will be discussed in turn below, however, mining will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, which asks why one cause of environmental degradation is politicised and others are not.

i) Changes in land ownership and usage

Changes in land ownership constitute both a major cause of environmental degradation and a catalyst for further insecurity. In an agrarian society such as Meghalaya, access to land, land quality, and the ability of the land to regenerate are crucial for human security. The major change in the Khasi Hills is an increased shift from common land, *ri raid*, to private land, *ri kynthi*, jeopardising access for those who do not own land and increasing the power and influence of those who do. As a result a new class of landowners, many of them from urban areas, are becoming increasingly wealthy and powerful with close links to the *dorbars* (village councils) and district councils, and a growing class of landless agricultural labourers and urban migrants are living ever more precarious livelihoods.

The actual land system in the Khasi Hills is poorly researched and poorly understood and Nongkynrih admits that it is very difficult to determine when this classification system came into existence (2002: 49). This is further complicated by differences in land ownership in different parts of the Khasi Hills (Lahiri, 2000: 336). However, the basic principles across the Khasi Hills depend on the distinction between common land and private land. Common land is allocated by the *dorbars* for use by members of the village. Users have no property rights over this type of land, nor can they transfer the land to their children or relatives. Private land is under direct control of the owner, who has proprietary, heritable, and transferable rights (Nongbri, 2003: 126). This land may belong to either an individual or a clan. As Nongkynrih points out, private land includes both inherited land and self-acquired land (2002: 107).

There are several ways that common land can become private land. Usually, if the occupier and/or cultivator of the common land can show that they have improved the land over a period of three years they are entitled to claim ownership at the discretion of the *dorbars*. If the cultivator or occupier cannot show that they have improved the land they lose access to it and the *dorbar* allows someone else to use it (Nongkynrih, 2002: 108). Thus building a dwelling, clearing the land of trees and other vegetation, or producing a good harvest

from the land, give the occupier the right to transfer common land into private land and claim ownership. Once common land becomes private land, it can be leased to others for cultivation, logging, or sold altogether (Nongkynrih, 2002: 108). As *dorbars* allocate land to occupiers, those who can persuade the *dorbars* to allow them to occupy land for a period of three years can then develop the land and claim ownership, and then lease the land to commercial interests. Increasingly *dorbars* are allocating land to people from outside the village or district, though often they are people who have roots in these locations from previous generations.²⁵ As discussed in Chapter 3, the Sixth Schedule prevents non-Khasis from owning land in the Khasi Hills, yet it does not prevent the leasing of this land to non-tribals, an arrangement known as ‘*benami* transactions’.

Landlessness has increased as the transfer of land from common land to private land has become more widespread. There are debates as to when and why this process has accelerated. Some argue that the present situation is a continuation of the process started by the British who elevated the *Syiem*, or chief, to a type of landlord and introduced land taxes (Nathan, 2000). Whether land relations were strictly feudal in the Khasi Hills is contestable, however it needs to be acknowledged that at the very least land relations were affected by the power inequalities between families. Journalist and social activist Patricia Mukhim argues that land distribution was based on clan power.²⁶ She argues that the conversion from common to private land has been an arbitrary process,

...this whole area of Nongthymmai (an area of Shillong) used to belong to one clan and at that time this was all jungle...families would come and we had this thing called *skut*. *Skut* means I would say from here (gesturing to tree line) to wherever I want, that is my land and if I can show the boundary that's my land. And nobody could say anything. And therefore one clan then became very powerful when that land could be converted into money.

²⁵ This point made by Iasaid Khongjee, President: Khatar Shnong Socio-Organisation, *Personal Interview*, 19 February 2005, Sohra, Meghalaya, India

²⁶ Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Social Activist, *Personal Interview*, 23 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

Others argue that the privatisation of land has accelerated since Indian independence. Apurba Baruah argues that it is the allocation of modern political functions and land distribution powers to the *dorbars* through the Sixth Schedule that has allowed elites to capture private land (2004: 2). He argues that the links between the *dorbars*, the district councils, and business peoples, both Khasi and non-Khasi, have allowed some *dorbars* to act as land brokers.

While the origins are disputable, the continuing privatisation of land and the increased numbers of landless people in the Khasi Hills migrating to cities and towns, working as agricultural labourers and miners, leasing land with ever diminishing returns, are all clear indications that the situation is getting worse. The existence of common land has been the social safety net in Khasi society, yet the safety net is disappearing completely. With no access to capital and declining returns from over-cultivated land, many rural Khasis have gone from cultivators and agricultural producers to travelling wage labourers (Nongbri, 2003: 127). Landlessness and absentee landlordism are both increasing, as wealthier Khasis have the resources to develop land and privatise it, while poor Khasis have difficulty accessing credit to do the same. Very few rural Khasis have deeds or evidence of land ownership making it difficult to obtain loans, while urban Khasis with civil service jobs, houses, and inherited land have an easier time accessing loans through which they can purchase land and start up plantations and other agribusiness (Lahiri, 2000: 338). Lahiri argues that feudalism is becoming a feature of land ownership in the Khasi Hills as ‘customary law is being violated by a richer section of the tribal people.’ (2000: 341)

There are no reliable surveys of land ownership encompassing the entire state or even all of the Khasi Hills districts. Nongbri has noted that since the formation of Meghalaya all official attempts to conduct a study of land and land-based relations, have been aborted due to resistance from the *dorbars*, which ‘have a vested interest in continuing with the traditional pattern as a means to retain control over their traditional power base.’ (Nongbri, 2003: 156) However some smaller surveys have been carried out in the Khatar Shnong area of the East Khasi Hills District that gives some indication to the severity of landlessness. The Khatar Shnong Socio Organisation (KSO) studied land ownership and

poverty in the Khatar Shnong area in 1999 and found that from a population of over 1200 households in 40 villages, over 56% of households were landless and only a quarter of villages had common lands (cited in Nongkynrih, 2003: 50-51). A further study conducted by the KSO in 2003 of seven villages, each in different districts of the Khasi Hills, found that landlessness was increasing, the price of land was increasing to lease and buy, and these factors were affecting the rate of deforestation (KSO, 2004: 7-8).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the fear of land loss to migrants is a powerful narrative in the 'outsiders' discourse and in this narrative migrants are responsible. However, as non-Khasis are prevented from owning land, 'outsiders' are only able to gain access to land through the collusion of Khasi landowners and *dorbars*. In other words, the Sixth Schedule protects Khasis from loss of land to 'outsiders' but it does not protect them from loss of land to 'insiders'.

ii) Deforestation

Deforestation is a major cause of insecurity due to its impacts on erosion, water retention, sustainable livelihoods, and access to secondary forest produce. There are three aspects to this: commercial logging, rural poverty, and lack of access to forests. These will be discussed in turn. Logging persists along two scales: on a large-scale by landowners selling timber to commercial traders from outside the Khasi Hills, and on a small scale by farmers and landless Khasis selling timber for firewood, charcoal, or clearing land for farming. As a region, the Northeast contains between one third and one quarter of India's remaining forest reserves, thus the regions is coveted by timber traders and investors from India and across Asia (Karlsson, 2004: 5; Nathan, 2000). Deforestation is increasing in the Khasi Hills, though the figures are disputed (Karlsson, 2004: 7-8; Nongbri, 2003: 164; Pandey, 2000: 181). The differences are mainly attributed to the method of information gathering. In the case of Meghalaya, the percentage of forest cover in 1997 from satellite images was recorded at nearly 70%, while the physical survey on the ground recorded only 42%, and the Khasi Student Union claim the figure is as low as 18% (Karlsson, 2004: 13; Nongbri, 2003: 164). Karlsson argues that further problems arise out of the definition of forests and

that satellite images tend to show wastelands and grasslands as forest (2004: 7). The timber trade in the Khasi Hills boomed in the 1980s and 1990s. As a result the Indian Supreme Court extended a ban on timber felling to Meghalaya. The ban had originally been instated in Jammu and Kashmir and Tamil Nadu, but was extended to Meghalaya even though there was little pressure by civil society actors or the Meghalaya Government to halt deforestation (Karlsson, 2004: 12; Nongbri, 2001).

The timber ban has polarised civil society actors in Meghalaya. One of the main grievances opponents have with the ban is that it overrides the authority granted to *dorbars* and district councils through the Sixth Schedule (Nongbri, 2001). Much of the opposition to the ban appears to be fear of the control of natural resources being taken away from communities and given to the state (Karlsson, 2004: 19). These claims are certainly valid. However as Karlsson has pointed out, these claims are predominantly concerned with the control of forests, not with the conditions of forests (2004: 19-20).

The Sixth Schedule prevents non-tribals from owning land and the timber ban prevents logging on common land. However this does not prevent logging on private land nor does it prevent Khasi landowners leasing private land to commercial loggers and contractors. Thus the privatisation of land has led to an increase in deforestation (Karlsson, 2004: 10). This could not take place without the collusion of the *dorbars* and district councils, and as Karlsson argues, those with power in rural communities and traditional institutions are using 'customary' practices as a pretext to lease enormous tracts of land for deforestation (2004: 9). Nongbri argues that the forests are being exploited by a 'close nexus between the powerful section of the tribal society and the non-tribal exploiters from the outside.' (2003: 158) Karlsson agrees, arguing that the role of the tribal elite is often masked by a focus on the exploitation of forests by 'outsiders' (2004: 25). As a result of this the political influence of Khasi landowners and timber traders is growing, making it more difficult for those experiencing the affects of rapid deforestation to contest the issue.

Growing rural poverty is also accelerating deforestation. Landlessness has meant that many of the rural poor have turned to selling charcoal and firewood to try to make a living (KSO, 2004: 7). The grassroots development organisation KSO has argued that there is a

diminishing sense of responsibility for common land, and that those who have been allocated the land often clear it of forest and remain unconcerned about erosion and destruction of forest commons as it is unlikely they will be using the same plot of land in the next season (2004; see also Nongkynrih, 2003: 60-1). In order to transfer common land into private land, the land itself needs to be improved, and in a lot of cases this involves clearing the land and cultivating it, or turning it into plantations. Travelling through rural areas in the Khasi Hills the effects of deforestation are very visible regardless of scale: hillsides are stripped of forest cover, stacks of timber are sold along the main roads, the creation of new settlements around mining areas has meant substantial tree clearing, there are places where the sides of hills have slid away, and during the wet season erosion is widespread often displacing entire villages. These landslides are becoming more frequent and entire villages have been moved to new locations further from roads, markets, and services (Nongkynrih, 2004: 17). These new villages require further materials for building leading to more deforestation.

Access to forests and secondary forest produce is essential for the livelihoods of many rural people and thus the denial of access through the creation and policing of reserved forests causes insecurity for those living from secondary forest produce or using it to supplement their incomes. The creation of forest reserves in the Northeast by the colonial authorities and their expansion by the Indian Government in the postcolonial era has had a continuing impact on insecurity.²⁷ Thus the designation of large tracts of forest as reserves and the privatisation and subsequent logging of vast swathes of the remaining common land has compounded environmental insecurity in the Khasi Hills.

iii) Jhumming

The third cause of environmental insecurity comes from the changes to *jhumming* or shifting cultivation. As land privatisation has accelerated, the land available for *jhumming* has declined in area and in quality. Thus those making a living from *jhumming* face

²⁷ Reserves were created through several key acts; the Bengal Forest Act 1865; Garo Hills Regulation Act 1876; Indian Forest Act 1878; Assam Forest Regulation 1891; and the Indian Forest Act 1927.

diminishing returns from the land, and the added insecurity of having to lease land from private landowners from season to season. Often this land is of poor quality and a great distance from villages, roads, and markets. There are two main perspectives on *jhumming* in Meghalaya. The first casts *jhumming* as primitive and wasteful. This position was adopted by the colonial authorities and later by the Indian Government and the Meghalaya Government, all of whom have tried to settle shifting cultivators on private lands and encourage alternative livelihoods (Malik, 2003: 303-304). The second perspective is almost a direct counter-argument, positing that *jhumming* is environmentally sustainable, an alternative to modern agricultural practices, egalitarian (i.e. land is common not private), and deeply embedded in the cultural and social life of *jhumming* societies (Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Shiva, 1993). Yet neither of these perspectives addresses the insecurities emanating from contemporary agrarian life in the Khasi Hills.

As the quality of land degrades from overuse, deforestation, erosion, and the conversion of high-yielding land from common to private ownership, those continuing to depend on *jhumming* for their livelihoods are faced with chronic levels of insecurity. The number of people involved in *jhumming* in Meghalaya is unknown as no actual survey of the whole of the state has been carried out. There are some oft-cited studies, but these are based primarily on estimates and tend to ignore the role of *jhumming* to supplement other forms of income, especially when undertaken by women while their male partners work in other areas (Darlong, 2004: 75). A study by the Meghalaya State Government cited by Nongbri estimates that 19.4% of people in Meghalaya depend on *jhumming* for their livelihoods (2003: 141). Darlong cites a Government of India study, which reports that 52, 290 families in Meghalaya are dependent on *jhumming* (2004: 9). Although gaining any sense of what this actually means is difficult. What is clear is that *jhumming* is still an important part of rural life and livelihood production, despite attempts to curtail and reform it.

Jhumming has been cast as ecologically damaging since the colonial era. Gadgil and Guha argue that the British saw *jhumming* as ‘a primitive and unremunerative form of agriculture in comparison with plough cultivation.’ (1992: 151) This attitude has prevailed and successive Indian Governments and state governments have actively discouraged

jhumming pressuring *jhummi*as to take up settled agriculture (Darlong, 2004: 4; Saikia, 2005: 248-249). However there has been a re-evaluation of *jhumming* in the last decade. *Jhumming* is frequently being viewed as an environmentally sustainable form of agriculture and a more egalitarian form of land distribution (Chakraborty, 2005: 24-6; Prasad, 2004: 44). Ecologists and eco-historians have re-assessed *jhumming* as a form of marginalised knowledge that has been ignored and thus embodies a purer form of traditional agriculture and social organisation (Pratap, 2000). This ‘romanticisation’ of *jhumming* has itself been critiqued, most notably by Agarwal (1994), Baviskar (1995), Guha (2001), Prasad (2003, 2004) and Rangan (2004). These authors argue that the dichotomy created between modernity and tradition is largely false, and that agrarian relations are far more complex.

The important point for examining environmental insecurity in the Khasi Hills is not whether *jhumming* is destructive or whether it is sustainable, but how the practice itself is changing. Poorer and more remote areas depend on *jhumming*, as they are generally areas with few other resources, little infrastructure, and poor quality land (Chakraborty, 2005: 25). Only 15% of land in Meghalaya can be used for cultivation and as the best land becomes privatised *jhumming* is being practiced on smaller and smaller tracts of common land and by those with no means to take up other forms of agriculture (Lahiri, 2000: 336). The problem in the Khasi Hills is not *jhumming* as a mode of production, but the reduction in the areas for *jhumming* and the shortening of the *jhum* cycle – from between 20 and 30 years down to 3 to 7 years (Darlong, 2004: 21). As *jhumming* does not use terraces, but cultivates on the steep slopes, the heavy rainfall in the Khasi Hills during the monsoon washes away much of the topsoil. Deforestation has exacerbated this, and the soil that is washed away is also silting rivers and streams.

*Jhummi*as have few alternatives, and this perpetuates the most acute forms of insecurity. The privatisation of land discussed above means less common land for *jhumming*, and without capital to buy land for settled cultivation most *jhummi*as are reduced to sharecropping, leasing, labouring, or turning to cash crops. These livelihoods are very

precarious and there are no safety nets provided at any level, from *dorbars* to the Meghalaya Government. As Chakraborty argues,

...there are no appropriate policy initiatives to address the concerns of the *jhumias*, except for a bunch of prohibitory (sic) and adverse legislations formulated on the basis of ill-informed knowledge about the age-old farming practices of the hill communities that undermine their real needs. (2005: 25)

Jhumias are turning to the cultivation of broomstick grass as a cash crop to make up for falling yields (Nongkynrih, 2003: 52). Nongkynrih argues that the cultivation of broomsticks has destroyed soil and villagers are becoming concerned that soon much of the cultivatable land will be unusable (2003: 52). Eight to ten of the broomstick grass stems are tied together to make a broom handle and the soft ends form a type of brush. These are sold throughout the state and exported to other parts of India. The broomsticks are easy to grow and grow wild in some parts of the Khasi Hills; however after harvesting the soil does not replenish (Nongkynrih, 2003: 52). The prices for broomsticks are controlled by traders from urban areas and can range from 6 to 25 rupees per kilogram (Nongkynrih, 2003: 56). In contrast the average rate for a day labourer is around 50 rupees a day for a male and 25 rupees a day for a female (Nongkynrih, 2003: 56). During my fieldwork in 2005, the price for broomsticks was 8 rupees per kilogram, though most villagers expected this to go down as the season went on and more and more broomsticks were harvested. Income from selling broomsticks and other crops from *jhumming* depends on the distance to the market, the weather, and the amount sold. As many males in rural areas have moved into coal mining areas to earn a living, women are being burdened with more and more of the responsibilities for *jhum* production, leading to increased gender-based insecurity in addition to environmental insecurity (Darlong, 2004: 91). This will be discussed in the following chapter.

iv) Mining

Meghalaya is rich in minerals and governments at the state and national level are keen to promote Meghalaya and other parts of the Northeast as resource rich areas ready for

national and foreign direct investment. There are two main forms of mining in Meghalaya, uranium mining and coal mining; one has been politicised the other has not. Before this is analysed a brief background on the relations between the central government and the Northeast on the issue of resource extraction and investment will be given.

India has been discussing closer economic ties with China and Southeast Asian states since the implementation of the 'Look East' policy in 1991 (S. Baruah, 2005: 222). Part of this policy has been the Kunming Initiative of 1999, which proposed that Kunming in the Yunnan province of China be developed as the economic hub for Northeast India, South-western China, and Southeast Asia (S. Baruah, 2005: 222). The Northeast provides a resource corridor between India and China, as well as India and Myanmar, and thus it is central to this initiative. Aside from timber and minerals, the hydropower potential of the region has brought increased national investment in a large number of dams; 168 dam projects have been planned for the region, many in areas plagued by insurgency (Thakkur, 2004: 8). There is a very visible campaign by the North East Council (NEC), the body set up by the Indian Government to coordinate the development of the Northeast (as mentioned in Chapter 3), to attract investment into the region. During my last visit to Meghalaya in 2005, the NEC was proclaiming the benefits of hydropower and mineral investments in full-page advertisements in magazines and newspapers. The states of the Northeast are small and dependent on the central government for income. The push towards investment in the area appears to have two goals; the first is to alleviate the economic burden of the region on the central government and the second is to placate many of the insurgent and separatist movements in the region through further integration into the national economy. It is in this context that mining in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya needs to be considered.

The state government encourages investment in the mineral sector, emphasising the enormous potential of the vast, untapped resources. The mineral sector is still largely undeveloped; however, conflicts over mineral wealth and extraction of resources are already taking place. In the Khasi Hills the main forms of mineral extraction are coal mining and uranium mining. The environmental impacts of coal mining have been severe:

ruined land, erosion, pollution, deforestation. Uranium mining has not yet started, aside from exploratory digging and surveying, yet the potential for environmental damage from radiation (the mining will be open-pit), polluted land, polluted watercourses, displacement, and poor waste disposal is very high. Civil society actors have opposed the uranium mine, yet there has been no opposition to coal mining despite its role in environmental degradation. The following section compares the issues of uranium mining and coal mining and asks why one cause of environmental degradation has been politicised, uranium, while the other, coal, has not. The answers reveal two linked but analytically separate issues that relate to the central concerns of this thesis. The first shows the impact of identity, power, and inequalities on civil society, and the second shows the ways in which different forms of insecurity in conflict with each other, in this case identity insecurity and economic insecurity, marginalise environmental insecurity. These two issues are distinct but linked, providing valuable insights into the relationship between civil society and insecurity.

4.3 Uranium Mining, Coal Mining, and ‘outsiders’

The question that led to this comparison being drawn is a question I was asked, and that I asked myself, many times during visits and fieldwork in the Khasi Hills in the years 2003 to 2005. The question seemed obvious; why did civil society actors continue to contest the uranium mine but not the coalmines? In other words, why was uranium politicised and coal ignored? In many of the main towns of the Khasi Hills it was impossible to ignore the proposed uranium mine, especially during 2005. There were posters opposing the mine everywhere, and in the capital there were frequent rallies and strikes (*bandhs*).²⁸ As I began to interview civil society actors and spend longer time in rural areas I began to understand the main arguments of the mine proponents and opponents. During these months I also spent long periods in areas that have been dramatically affected by coal mining. The environmental impact has been severe and in most cases irreversible. The land is now unfit

²⁸ See Appendix C.

for cultivation and water courses and soils are polluted. So why was one being politicised by civil society and not the other? Indeed the question could be extended to ask why uranium and not landlessness, deforestation, or *jhumming*?

The answers reveal two key issues of major importance to the central concerns of this thesis. The first issue regards the impacts of identity, power, and inequalities on civil society. In terms of identity, the politicisation of uranium and not coal shows the dominance of the ‘outsiders discourse’ in civil society as the opponents of the uranium mine have opposed it on the grounds that it will encourage the influx of ‘outsiders’ into the state. In terms of power, the politicisation of uranium illustrates which state and non-state actors have power in the Khasi Hills: power to set the agenda in civil society, power to access civil society, and the power that comes from close relationships between civil society actors and influential elites at the local level which has various implications for the distribution of profits from the different types of mining. In terms of inequalities, the politicisation of uranium reveals the inequalities between those able to set the agenda in civil society and those unable to contest the causes of insecurity that affect their lives. It also reveals how existing inequalities in terms of land ownership, class, income, and location heighten particular causes of insecurity and indicates that those facing the most acute causes of environmental insecurity are those least able to contest these causes.

The second issue reveals some crucial complexities in the way human security is conceptualised. The causes of environmental insecurity embodied in both uranium and coal mining are marginalised by the invoking of identity insecurity by the mine opponents and economic insecurity by the mine proponents. Here we can clearly see the existence of competing constructions of insecurity, and the constructions that come to dominate civil society are those articulated by actors with the power to set the political agenda. The two issues are linked in that the power inequalities in civil society allow certain causes of insecurity to be politicised and not others. Similarly certain insecurities, particularly identity insecurity and economic insecurity, empower certain civil society actors and certain discourses. This section examines uranium mining and coal mining, the insecurities each causes, and the responses of civil society and the state.

Uranium in the West Khasi Hills

Uranium was detected in Meghalaya in 1984 and exploration by the Indian Government's state-owned nuclear corporation, the Uranium Corporation of India (UCIL) began in 1992 (Thakuria, 2003). The uranium has been found in the area of Domiasiat in the West Khasi Hills District. It is spread over an area of approximately ten square kilometres and the site is estimated to be holding between 9500 and 10 000 tonnes of uranium, or 16% of India's uranium reserves (Nongbri, 2003: 154; Thakuria, 2003). As an emerging nuclear power, a new supply of uranium is crucial to the Indian Government, both from a national security perspective, and in terms of national identity. Varadarjan (2004) has argued that in the last 15 years, India's national identity has emphasised the importance of the state's ability to provide security through nuclear weapons and to be recognised as a legitimate world power. In 2006 the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed a nuclear deal with US President Bush, increasing India's demand for uranium. Furthermore, in order to meet growing energy needs, the Indian Government has set high targets for nuclear power generation by 2020 and has eight nuclear reactors currently under construction (Subramanian and Chattopadhyay, 2006a). The proposed mine in the West Khasi Hills is an integral part of this and UCIL and the Indian Government have been relentless in searching for new sources of uranium and extracting it with little or no compensation or consideration for local communities (Subramanian and Chattopadhyay, 2006a, 2006b).

The uranium in Domiasiat is between eight and 47 metres beneath the surface, thus extraction will be through open-pit mining, which has the potential to cause serious environmental degradation. The primary causes of degradation will be from the displacement of the villagers living in the mine site, poor waste disposal, and the risks of radiation in the soil and water from tailing ponds (Subramanian et al, 2006a). Tailing ponds are large pools located within one or two kilometres of the mine site where the radioactive waste generated from uranium processing is neutralised with lime and then decanted. The water remaining after the decanting process is then taken away but the tailings remain in the soil; there are no guarantees that the tailings will be safely disposed

of, or that the remaining tailings in the soil will not spread contamination. With the high levels of rainfall in Meghalaya there is potential for these tailings to be carried into other fields and nearby rivers. UCIL has a poor record of safely disposing of tailings, most notoriously in the uranium mine at Jadugoda in the state of Jharkhand where radiation and incidences of cancer became common in surrounding villages, allegedly from contaminated soil (Subramanian et al., 2006a). Yet there are further causes of degradation associated with the uranium mine. The roads that will need to be built into the area will lead to further deforestation in one of the last areas of dense forest in Meghalaya, jeopardising livelihoods directly through lack of access to forests and indirectly through erosion as discussed above. There is a major risk to the rivers that run through the Domiasiat area, not just from carrying polluted soil, but from the pollution generated by an enlarged settlement at the mine site and silting from increased erosion and the disposal of debris. Remaining common land in the area will be lost to the mine site, roads, and living quarters for UCIL staff and mine operators. Uranium mines generally last for no more than 50 years, and thus the long-term sustainability of the Domiasiat area after the mine has closed down, the land is unfit for farming, and the jobs are no longer available, is a further cause of insecurity (Subramanian and Chattopadhyay, 2006c). The extraction of uranium from Domiasiat will be expensive due to the remoteness of the location of the mine from other parts of Meghalaya and the difficulties transporting uranium from Meghalaya to other parts of India, thus the questionable long-term economic viability of the mine may result in an even shorter operating life.

In Meghalaya, the Sixth Schedule means that both the Meghalaya Government and the Indian Government must obtain consent from the West Khasi Hills District Council and the local village *dorbars* to mine the land. The Meghalaya Government must then issue a 'no-objection certificate' to the Indian Government, its Atomic Energy Commission, and UCIL. Initially the Indian Government tried to obtain the land without consent and the early stages of exploration between 1992 and 1996 were done without consultation (Nongbri, 2003: 154). As Nongbri points out, because of this lack of consultation the initial response to the mine by the local people was hostile (2003: 154). Since then the

Meghalaya Government has been continually trying to negotiate consent from the local *dorbars*, landowners, and the district council responsible for the mine site.

Opponents and proponents: identity insecurity and economic insecurity

Several civil society organisations have been involved in the fight against the mine at various times, however many of them have fallen away over time, or ceased to exist. The Khasi Student Union (KSU) has been the mine's most sustained and vocal critic and the organisation has also been a strong advocate of the 'outsiders' discourse as described in Chapter 3. During my interview with, KSU president Samuel Jyrwa in February 2005, he gave three reasons for opposing the mine '...our main issue (opposition) is on three grounds, one is the health hazard, number two is the influx of 'outsiders' to the area, and number three is the alienation of our land.'²⁹ Jyrwa also argues that the mine will take revenue out of Meghalaya to the central government,

...the central government don't treat our problems as national problems, but they treat our natural resources as national resources. That is the problem that we are facing, that is the problem that Assam is facing and they are getting peanuts out of the oil they have extracted in Assam, and the same would happen in Meghalaya if they allow uranium mining.³⁰

The former KSU President, and now member of the state legislature, Paul Lyngdoh, gave a similar argument in 2003, arguing that the Khasis 'should not have to suffer because India wants our uranium.' (quoted in Bhaumik, 2003a)

Aside from the KSU, there have been other civil society actors involved in the opposition to the mine, though often playing minor roles. The Meghalaya People's Human Rights Council (MPHRC) was formed in 1996, and although it claims to represent the 'Meghalaya people', it positions itself publicly as a tribal rights organisation. In other

²⁹ Samuel B. Jyrwa, President: Khasi Students Union, *Personal Interview*, 22 February 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

³⁰ Ibid.

words, the MPHRC is not interested in the rights of non-tribal citizens of Meghalaya and actively works to undermine these rights. Furthermore it does not appear to have any programs intended for, or interest in the tribal people of the Garo Hills, nor the large numbers of Mikir/Karbis in Meghalaya, and functions as a Khasi organisation in practical terms. In contrast to the KSU which claims to have a membership close to 10 000, the MPHRC has a small membership of 26 people, though ostensibly the organisation revolves around its founder and General Secretary.³¹ As the conflict over the mine has intensified the MPHRC and the KSU have joined forces and adopted the same strategies, increasing the profile of the MPHRC and its head.

The Hill State Peoples Democratic Party (HSPDP) has been opposed to the mine since 1996. The HSPDP is a political party that claims a state-wide mandate, though it has made little headway in the Garo Hills, and remains largely a Khasi party (Sen Gupta, 2005: 44). The HSPDP is at the extreme end of tribal politics, and is strongly opposed to any national integration (Sen Gupta, 2005: 91). The party appears to serve as a personal platform for its founder Hoping Stone Lyngdoh, who is part of the Congress-led Democratic Alliance Government in Meghalaya. The HSPDP treads a familiar line to the KSU, arguing that tribals are at the risk of exploitation by ‘outsiders’, and that the party aims to uplift the Khasi people from poverty, though as Sen Gupta points out, they have remained silent on the exploitation of tribals by tribals (2005: 99). She adds that ‘by raising chauvinistic demands of territorial expansion, the HSPDP seems to have evoked the support of a militant section of tribal youth.’ (Sen Gupta, 2005: 147) Hoping Stone Lyngdoh has repeatedly and openly opposed the mine. During the 1990s he was quoted as saying that he would physically evict workers from the mine site (Indian Express, 27 March 2005).

The mine opponents articulate their opposition to the mine in the language of the ‘outsiders’ discourse, this can be understood as a derivative of identity insecurity. This has two aspects. First, the fear of an influx of ‘outsiders’ into the state does reflect a genuine

³¹ I had several conversations with the General Secretary of the MPHRC, though he declined a formal interview, thus has not been identified by name.

sense of insecurity derived from Meghalaya's small population when compared to Bangladesh, Nepal, and the rest of India, the fear of religious, economic, and cultural domination, and the fear of the loss of land to non-tribals. These fears are outlined in more detail in the previous chapter. Secondly, identity insecurity is used by certain actors to increase their legitimacy and political power. The KSU in particular gains its legitimacy by identifying itself as a defender of the Khasi people by protecting them against 'outsiders'. Similar observations could be made of the MPHRC and the HSPDP. Yet it is difficult to separate the genuine feeling of identity insecurity from its use for the advancement of individual careers and political power. One could assume that the leadership of these organisations manipulate the genuine sense of identity insecurity embedded in Meghalayan politics to increase their personal political power. In other words, as the 'outsiders' discourse dominates political, social, and economic life in the Khasi Hills it could be assumed that both the supporters of organisations like the KSU and its rank and file members feel a genuine sense of insecurity and this is manipulated by the leadership to achieve their political ends. Yet this distinction is not clear and may underestimate the convictions of the leadership of these organisations and perhaps overestimate the convictions of their supporters. What is clear is that identity insecurity drives the 'outsiders' discourse and the opposition to the uranium mine, and that this identity insecurity is derived from both a genuine fear of 'outsiders' and the political gains that can be made by evoking this fear.

The mine proponents, primarily UCIL, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Indian Government, and the Meghalaya Government, have campaigned relentlessly in order to gain consent and in doing so they have pursued two strategies. First, they have focussed on marginalising the anti-mine movement and accusing it of being in league with foreign activists who want to see India fail (Meghalaya Guardian, 15 July 2004). Curiously they appear to be calling on the same sense of xenophobia that the mine opponents are manipulating. The second strategy has been to frame the mine as a provider of 'development' and an end to poverty and 'backward' ways. UCIL has consistently argued that the mine will bring prosperity to the Domiasiat area (Shillong Times, 10 November 2004). A social activist from Shillong explained that many village headmen in the area

want the mine to go ahead as they see it as an opportunity for jobs, schools, health facilities and roads to the area.³² As more economic opportunities have been promised by the mine proponents, pro-mine civil society groups have emerged in the West Khasi Hills, most notably the Langrin War-San Lyngdoh Development Organisation. They have held their own pro-mine rallies and urged consent to be granted. A landowner from the region was quoted in the national magazine *Frontline* as saying, ‘development of the region can take place only when UCIL starts mining here.’ (Subramanian et al, 2006b) Another landowner was quoted as saying that the mine would ‘open the floodgates to development.’ (Subramanian et al, 2006b)

The mine proponents are using the extreme poverty of the area to urge local people to grant consent for the mine. They are appealing to the economic insecurity of the people in one of the poorest parts of Meghalaya by promising jobs and ‘development’. These appeals to economic insecurity depend upon the view that tribal production methods and livelihoods in remote areas like Domiasiat are ‘backward’ and that the uranium mine represents an end to the insecurities caused by poverty by providing regular wages, roads, and possibly schools and health care facilities. This prospect is appealing to landowners as they stand to profit from the sale of their land and potential compensation payouts, yet it also holds some appeal for those in the area facing insecurity from landlessness and declining *jhum* yields as the promise of waged employment would offset the insecurity of season to season land leasing. Thus the original opposition to the mine from the people in the mine area has subsided as appeals to economic insecurity have continued. It is interesting to note that all those quoted in the media as welcoming the mine and those involved in the Langrin War-San Lyngdoh Development Organisation are landowners and headmen, who stand to gain the most from the sale of land. The benefits for other people in the area who do not own land and do not have connections that will lead to jobs on the mine site are not assured.

³² Tarun Bhartiya, Social Activist; The Freedom Project, *Personal Interview*, 19 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

Towards final approval

A chronological account of the entire saga over the mine would be well beyond the scope and needs of this chapter, yet the key events in the campaign over the last 5 years will be briefly detailed below. Consent for the mine was announced in 2000, but Paul Lyngdoh, then KSU President, managed to persuade the *Syiem* (chief) of Domiasiat to renege on the deal (Reuters, 27 November 2000). The mine proponents promised to gain further information about the impacts of the mine to alleviate public fears. In early 2004, a study being carried out by the North Eastern Hill University on the social and environmental impact of the mine was declared biased by the KSU and MPHRC (Telegraph, 29 April 2004). This assertion has been made repeatedly, and the KSU argues that any study of the impacts of uranium mining cannot be impartial if commissioned by the mine proponents.

In mid-2004 during a visit from the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, D.D. Lapang, announced that the mine would go ahead ‘irrespective of opposition from certain NGOs.’ (Assam Tribune, 6 June 2004) The Atomic Energy Commission chairman reported that he had ‘received a very positive response from the people of the area’ (Assam Tribune, 6 June 2004). Three days later the *Assam Tribune* reported that UCIL had announced that consent had been obtained ‘in principle’ from ‘landowners’ (Assam Tribune, 10 June 2004). The mine opponents managed to gain a moratorium on the deal by arguing that part of the land UCIL wanted to mine was owned by an elderly lady and she refused to sell it. In October 2004, the local advisor to UCIL in Shillong received threats from a ‘militant group’ and resigned from his post (Shillong Times, 18 October 2004). In the same month, the central government identified six new areas of uranium deposits in the Northeast, three of which are in Meghalaya, two of them in the West Khasi Hills (Telegraph, 2 October 2004; Subramanian and Chattopadhyay, 2006a). This increased the momentum of the mine proponents and the prospect of a minerals boom in Meghalaya began to alter opinions of many people towards the mine.

As support for the mine was growing in the mine area itself, the mine opponents grew increasingly frustrated, and in March 2004 a letter from the KSU and the MPHRC to Chief Minister Lapang claimed that the people from the area supporting the mine had been

‘hypnotised’ by the false claims of the Indian and Meghalayan Governments (Telegraph, 19 March 2004). In the same letter the KSU and the MPHRC stated that ‘we stick to our position that we shall continue to oppose uranium mining and will not part with even an inch of our ancestral land to the foreigners who we consider to be our enemies.’ (Telegraph, 19 March 2004) Things remained quiet for several months, and then a development organisation from the region around the mine site came forth publicly and asked the district council and the Meghalaya Government to endorse the mine as soon as possible (Shillong Times, 10 November 2005). The Langrin War-San Lyngdoh Development Organisation, a group made up of local headmen from 25 villages, has held its own rallies in the mine area and urged consent to be granted in order to develop the area (Shillong Times, 10 November 2004).

It is here that we can see economic insecurity becoming more prominent in the debate over the mine. As the promise of development has gained further acceptance from the groups living in the mine area, other influential civil society actors such as the Synjuk Seng Samla Shnong (SSSS) and the Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo Peoples (FKJGP) have begun to reconsider the mine. This is a shift of major significance. Both the SSSS and the FKJGP have operated on shared platforms with the KSU in the past, especially on issues concerning ‘outsiders’, yet both of these organisations have reconsidered the mine if it will alleviate some of the causes of economic insecurity faced by people in the region, and implicitly, by Meghalaya as a whole. During my interview with Jimino Mawto, former head of the SSSS, the umbrella organisation of the youth wing of all the Khasi *dorbars*, he admitted that the project is risky, but that if the mine benefits the people of a very poor area, it should not be opposed.³³ Bah Lyttan from the FKJGP, an influential ethno-nationalist pressure group discussed in Chapter 3, agrees. During our interview he argued that if the local people of the area could be guaranteed to benefit from the mine then there is no reason to oppose it.³⁴

³³ Jimino Mawto, former President: Synjuk Seng Samla Shnong, *Personal Interview*, 21 February 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

³⁴ Bah Lyttan, President: Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo Peoples, *Personal Interview*, 5 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

On March 27 2005, the *Indian Express* newspaper reported that UCIL would begin mining in Domiasiat as soon as the district council issues a ‘no objection’ certificate (Indian Express, 27 March 2005). Chief Minister Lapang, in turn, announced the certificate would be issued ‘soon’ (Indian Express, 27 March 2005). In May 2005, the Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, announced in the Federal Parliament that permission to mine the site had been given (The Telegraph, 6 May 2005). In response the KSU led further protests in Shillong and called for *bandh*, or strike, blocking access to government buildings and setting up road blockages on the main roads in and out of the state capital. Once again the onus was on the Meghalaya Government to smooth things over locally and it decided to bring in another panel of scientists from the pro-mining lobby and held a discussion with the opposing organisations, delaying final approval.

During my fieldwork in the first half of 2005 the uranium issue was discussed continually in Shillong. During April and May 2005 the mine opponents began travelling to some of the larger market towns and holding meetings and public information sessions on the uranium issue. In many of the market towns posters warned against the mine. One poster from Sohra (Cherrapunjee) market reads ‘We demand a Nuclear Free Zone in our Homeland’ and underneath ‘Join this campaign for the survival of the Hyinñiewtrep³⁵ People’.³⁶ Meanwhile, arguments about the mine were becoming more common in day-to-day conversations and interviews; the issue had consumed social and political life in the Khasi Hills.

During the second half of 2005, the civil society actors opposing the mine and other pressure groups turned their attention to a crisis that threatened to split Meghalaya into two states, temporarily stalling the uranium issue, yet strengthening the ‘outsiders’ discourse. The crisis started with a debacle over university entrance exams and accelerated into a campaign by various pressure groups from the Khasi Hills against the Meghalaya

³⁵ Another name for Khasi. See Appendix D.

³⁶ A photograph of this sign appears in Appendix C.

Government and against Garos, the other main tribal group in Meghalaya (Telegraph Calcutta, 21 June 2005). Ethno-nationalist Khasi organisations led by the KSU argued that Garos are favoured by the Meghalaya Government and called for the balance of reservations in employment, government, and educational institutions to be altered to reflect population ratios rather than be distributed evenly between Khasis and Garos. Ethno-nationalist groups in the Garo Hills seized on this opportunity and rekindled on-going demands for a separate Garo state (Telegraph Calcutta, 25 June 2005). Social and political life in the main towns and especially in Shillong was consumed by this issue. There were incidents of violence, curfews, road blockades, strikes, and arrests of civil society activists. The KSU and the Garo Student Union were brought into direct confrontation. In December, the KSU physically intervened to block a Garo Student Union hunger strike in Shillong, the President of the KSU stated 'Shillong may be the state capital but it is our land and we have to prevent anyone from creating disturbances in our house.' (Telegraph Calcutta, 6 December 2005) The issue demonstrates the persistence of identity insecurity and the ways it has evolved from being directed predominantly at non-tribals, to being directed at all non-Khasis, especially Garos. While uranium was forgotten while the crisis continued, the crisis emphasised the power of identity insecurity and of the civil society actors involved.

By the start of 2006 the situation had settled down enough to allow curfews to be lifted and uranium was back on the political agenda. This time around it was politicised in the context of pursuing separate Khasi and Garo states, heightening both the salience of identity insecurity (i.e. Khasi land for Khasis), and of economic insecurity (i.e. the mineral wealth of the Khasi Hills should not be shared with Garos). The Indian Government and UCIL renewed pressure on the Meghalaya Government to grant a no-objection certificate for the uranium mine and by August 2006 the Indian Government were demanding a final answer. Unsurprisingly considering the unrest of 2005, a successful no-confidence motion against the Chief Minister, and a volatile political environment that threatened to destroy Meghalaya, the Meghalaya Government asked for more time (Shillong Times, 14 August 2006). By December 2006 consent had still not been granted.

Coal mining

Coal mining has been taking place in Meghalaya since the 1840s, but production only reached significant levels in the 1980s and has been accelerating ever since (Madhavan, 2005: 7). The mines themselves are relatively small but widespread. The mines are known as ‘rat-hole’ mines; pits are simply dug down from the surface to reach the coal and tunnels are dug in from the sides. These mines are spread throughout Meghalaya, but are most heavily concentrated in the Jaintia Hills, the Khatar Shnong area in the East Khasi Hills, and the area around Nongjri in the West Khasi Hills. The mining takes place on Sixth Schedule land, the majority of coalmine owners are Khasis, and the landowners are free to grant leases under their own terms and conditions for coal mining (Madhavan, 2005: 7).

The coal boom in Meghalaya has seen production rise from 39,000 tonnes in 1979 to four million tonnes in 2001 (Madhavan, 2001: 7). Thus established landowners and those able to use the *dorbars* to privatise land in these coal rich areas have become very wealthy, exacerbating the divisions between rich and poor, between those who own land and those who do not. This is evident in the area around the villages of Laitryngew, Laitmawsiang, and Sohra in the Khatar Shnong area of the East Khasi Hills, where the impacts of coal mining are striking. Half finished palatial houses stand next to corrugated iron shacks along the main road. The land along the cliff tops is like a lunar landscape; rubble-strewn holes and abandoned wooden trolleys mark the entrances to the old mines. While coal brought quick money it ruined the land. Many of the mines are no longer economically viable as the coal is now up to two kilometres deep and people who left the land to work in the mines are finding their land even more difficult to farm upon returning. Furthermore, only a few landowners got rich, and many of those who did were not aware that their sudden wealth would run out quickly.

The impacts of coal mining have contributed to widespread environmental degradation seriously jeopardising livelihoods, land quality and leading to increased inequalities between different groups. The most important impact is on the land itself. In areas like Khatar Shnong landslides have increased as the mines have been dug deeper into the

hillsides, soil erosion has increased as the structure of the soil is undermined by the clearance of vegetation and the number of mines being dug, piles of coal dust and other debris from mining operations are carried by wind and rain into fields damaging soil and crops, and much of the land that has been mined and abandoned is marked by craters and is thus unable to be cultivated (KSO, 2004: 4, 13). Thus in the context of growing insecurity from landlessness, declining returns from *jhumming*, and deforestation, the loss of more arable land and forests from mining has an immediate and very visible impact.

Secondly, coal mining has a major impact on rivers and watercourses. As discussed above, water is scarce in the Khasi Hills due to the steep terrain and the problem of water retention. The water courses that flow through the valleys are vital for the supply of water to villages for cooking, washing, and farming, but coal mining has polluted many of the main water courses running through rural areas. A study carried out on the rivers flowing from the coal mining areas in the Jaintia Hills Districts by the North Eastern Hill University in 2003 found that the water has become highly acidic, contains high concentrations of heavy metals and sulphates, is prone to silting from erosion and coal dust, and is unfit for consumption (cited in Grassroots Options, 2003: 21).

The third main impact has been on the miners themselves. Most of those working on the coal mines live in shantytowns or camps at the mine sites with no sanitation, poor shelters that cannot sustain the volume of rain in the wet season, and have to pay very high prices for food from the merchants with a captive market at the more remote sites. The conditions in the coal mines are very poor. The mining is done in low and narrow shafts often kilometres below the surface. Miners suffer from the effects of poor ventilation, silicosis from coal dust inhalation, all kinds of bodily complaints, and the risk of mine collapse (Madhavan, 2005: 8). Furthermore the pay is very low, between 300 and 500 rupees (7-12 US Dollars) per tonne of coal, often shared between several miners. Madhavan reports that mine owners in the coal areas prefer migrant labourers from Nepal, Bangladesh and Assam as they do not leave their work to return to their villages, and live at the mine sites (2005: 8). There are an estimated 150 000 Nepalis working in the coal areas of the Jaintia Hills (Madhavan, 2005: 8). One respondent from a local development NGO told me, on

condition of anonymity, that migrant workers were favoured because they would work for less and they work 'harder' than tribals. During fieldwork I spent time in the major mining areas throughout Meghalaya and in villages and towns where many people have left to go and work in the mines, and despite the belief that 'outsiders' constitute the majority of labourers in the mines, in various coal mining areas it is clear that the mining is done by both 'outsiders' and Khasis. In the mines around Nongjri in the West Khasi Hills for example, Nepalis, Bodos from Assam, Bengalis, and a large number of Khasis from the Ri Bhoi district live and work in the mine site. Ri Bhoi is the district in the Khasi Hills where landlessness is reported to be the highest and thus there seems to be a relationship between the frequency of landlessness in a particular area and the number of migrants from that area migrating to the coal mines. Landless labourers from nearby villages also work in the mines from time to time, but many cultivate crops as well. In all of the coal areas I visited I heard stories of collapsed mines killing miners, though these stories are very difficult to verify as most of these cases go unreported.

There is a fourth impact from coal mining that is more indirect. As the cause of environmental degradation across the Khasi Hills increase and intensify, many rural people migrate in search of other work, whether in Shillong and other big towns or in the coal mining areas. Many of the men from rural areas end up in the coal mining areas while many of the women either stay in the villages and work as agricultural labourers or lease fields for *jhumming*. Some women migrate to Shillong and other towns to work as hawkers, but as Darilyn Syiem of the gender-based NGO North East Network points out, women are far less mobile than men in the Khasi society, and many of them take on the full burden of agricultural production in rural areas.³⁷ This is changing the gendered division of labour in rural areas and gendering different causes of environmental insecurity. This will be discussed further in the following chapter, but it is an important and neglected side effect of coal mining and other causes of environmental insecurity in Meghalaya.

³⁷ Darilyn Syiem, Coordinator: North East Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

Controlling coal profits

Those who profit from coal mining are Khasis and thus the money from coal mining stays in Meghalaya and among the Khasi ethnic group. Not only do the Khasi landowners' profit but also the district council takes a large share of royalties from road taxes, sales taxes, weighing bridge commissions, and other informal taxes and bribes (Madhavan, 2005: 9). Thus the profits from coal mining stay in the Khasi Hills among the landowners and bureaucrats. Under the Sixth Schedule, land is allocated by the *dorbars*, and thus those with connections in the *dorbars* and capital to start mines have made money very quickly. Furthermore, Khasis able to negotiate the purchase of land in various parts of the state have been able to open mines as absentee landlords and amass large profits. Often these landowners will lease these lands to non-tribals to run coal mines and thus the links between the tribal elite, bureaucrats, and wealthy investors from urban areas and even outside Meghalaya are making large profits from coal. There are no 'outsiders' to blame for this, the mine owners, the landowners, and the intermediaries in the sale and transport of coal, are all from within the Khasi ethnic group. There may be some investment from non-Khasi/non-tribal entrepreneurs, but their use of the land and the mines depends upon collusion with the *dorbars*, the district councils, and landowners.

In this sense coalmining is very similar to changes in land ownership, deforestation, and *jhumming*, all discussed in the previous section; there is no identity insecurity associated with the extraction of coal. The catalysts of insecurity are 'insiders', thus despite the severity of insecurities generated, powerful civil society actors have not opposed coal mining. Furthermore, as the state government is satisfied to extract profits from taxes and commissions, they have no need to 'develop' the coal areas or address the economic insecurity of the people affected by coal mining. Those facing the most acute insecurities have no power to contest their insecurity. This will be discussed further in the next section.

4.4 Mining, Power and Contestation

Why have civil society actors politicised one cause of environmental insecurity in the form of the uranium mine, and not another, in the form of the coalmines? I argue that there are four reasons, and they reveal several key issues for the study of civil society, human security, and the relationship between the two. First, uranium fits the ‘outsiders’ discourse while coal does not. Secondly, revenue from coal stays in the Khasi Hills and (mostly) among Khasis, while revenue from uranium would be transferred out of the Meghalaya to the Indian Government. Thirdly, those suffering most from the causes of environmental insecurity have no voice to contest the causes of insecurity due to the effects of existing inequalities within Khasi society and their relative powerlessness when compared to dominant civil society actors and the power of the ‘outsiders’ discourse. Specifically this refers to those who have lost land or lost access to common land due to the actions of Khasi elites, those whose land and livelihoods have been destroyed by coal mining and deforestation, and those who face losing land and livelihoods from the proposed uranium mine. As discussed in the previous chapter and in Chapter 6, there has been virtually no past history of rural or peasant collective action in Meghalaya, and civil society continues to be dominated by urban elites. Finally, the construction of Meghalaya in the Indian national context and the resultant isolation of civil society in Meghalaya from national and transnational spaces compounds these inequalities, denying the possibilities of those affected by the causes of environmental degradation to circumvent the local circumstances by making linkages with other actors. These will be examined in turn below and the implications for civil society and human security will be summarised in the chapter’s conclusion.

i) The ‘outsiders’ discourse

The first and most important reason is that the uranium mine fits into the ‘outsiders discourse’, advancing the discourse further and empowering those that advocate it. Civil society actors such as the KSU and MPHRC have politicised the uranium mine in ethno-nationalist terms and the mine has been ‘ethnicised’ as a cause of identity insecurity rather

than a cause of environmental insecurity. By 'ethnicising' causes of environmental insecurity, the environment itself becomes 'owned' by the Khasi ethnic group and any threats to the environment by non-Khasi groups constitutes a threat to Khasi identity, regardless of the gravity of the issue itself. Conversely, environmental issues that *may* have a much greater impact on the lives of different Khasi communities are not part of the political agenda if they do not fit into the 'outsiders' discourse. As discussed above, landlessness, deforestation, and coal mining pose serious threats to environmental security; however as the catalysts and the profiteers from this insecurity come from within the Khasi ethnic group these insecurities are marginalised. Here a conflict between identity insecurity and environmental insecurity can clearly be seen.

Migrants are the targets of the civil society actors opposing the uranium mine and they are the main targets in identity politics in Meghalaya. The mine opponents gain legitimacy and power as the defenders of the Khasi people by framing the mine as a 'pull factor' bringing migrants into the Khasi Hills. This also resonates with the general sense of identity insecurity in Khasi society. The mine proponents, the Indian and Meghalayan Governments and UCIL, have countered this by promising that jobs at the uranium mine would be reserved for locals not 'outsiders' and that development would be brought to the area. The government's argument is firmly couched in the terms of the 'outsiders' discourse too, their response to the anti-mine argument is to make assurances that no migrants will be employed on the mine. As these debates continue, the causes of environmental insecurity from the mine remain unaddressed.

In contrast, coal mining does not appear to offer any gains in the 'outsiders' discourse to either civil society actors or the state. To contest coal mining is to contest the financial gains of the tribal elite, and the powerbrokers in the *dorbars* and district councils. Civil society actors are not prepared, or interested, in politicising and contesting insecurities that are caused by the actions of members, especially wealthy members, of their ethnic group. Indeed the attention given to coal mining by civil society actors, whether ethno-nationalist groups or development organisations, has been minimal and this was evident during fieldwork. Journalist and social activist Patricia Mukhim has spent long periods in the coal

mining areas and argues that the only attention civil society actors have paid to coal mining has been by some the church organisations concerned with the rise in drug addiction among youths from suddenly wealthy Khasi mine-owning families. She argues that despite the severity of the environmental situation ‘nobody is actually blowing the whistle on anyone. Even the Government thinks that (as) that is private land, I have nothing to do (with it).’³⁸ During fieldwork a respondent from a grassroots development group in the Jaintia Hills agreed that the impacts of environmental degradation from coal mining were serious but stressed that the organisation was more worried about the mixed marriages between local women and migrants who come to work on the mines.³⁹

The KSU and other civil society actors oppose uranium mining on account of the influx of ‘outsiders’, but have not contested the influx of ‘outsiders’ generating huge profits for the tribal elite in the coalfields. Similarly the KSU claims to oppose displacement from land, but has done nothing to contest absentee landlordism and feudalism when the perpetrators are Khasis. The government, for obvious reasons, does not oppose coal mining, nor restrict it in any sense, as it is one of the major forms of revenue and taxation in the state. Thus environmental degradation from within the Khasi ethnic group goes unchallenged by civil society.

ii) Control of profits

The second reason uranium is politicised and not coal centres on the control of profits. Uranium is contested because the majority of profits will go to the Indian Government. In contrast, the money from coal mining stays in Meghalaya among Khasis.⁴⁰ Powerful civil society actors are concerned with the control of mining profits, not the environmental

³⁸ Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Social Activist, *Personal Interview*, 23 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

³⁹ Chibait Lhuid, Secretary: Mar Chaphrang Development Society, *Personal Interview*, 8 April 2005, Jowai, Meghalaya, India.

⁴⁰ The exception being the very low wages miners from other areas will take out of the state. However most of them spend at least a proportion of their pay locally.

degradation caused by either form of mining or the resultant insecurities. As discussed above, the KSU has argued against the uranium mine by claiming that it will threaten the survival of the Khasi people, this is evident in both the statements of the KSU president and from the posters and banners being used in the campaign.⁴¹ In the Khasi Hills the civil society actors opposing the uranium mine are not pro-environment or anti-development; if this was the case then surely they would be opposing coal mining and other causes of environmental insecurity. Rather, they want to keep profits within the ethnic group, disregarding the concentration of these profits among a small group and the insecurities generated from the accumulation of these profits.

As discussed above, as the debate over the uranium mine has continued several civil society actors not directly involved with the conflict, but influential nonetheless have shifted their position and begun to support the uranium mine. Organisations such as the SSSS and the FKJGP have argued that if uranium mining were to benefit the people of the area then they would not oppose it. This reflects the power of economic insecurity; if a significant portion of the profits from uranium mining could remain in Meghalaya then these civil society actors would support it. In other words, it does not matter that open pit uranium mining may be severely damaging to the environment and the local population, if some economic benefits stay in Khasi hands, they will not oppose it. This will not change the impact of the uranium mine itself, its impact on environmental insecurity, livelihoods in the area, and health; but once the ‘outsiders’ element is removed the debate changes profoundly. The uranium mine is politicised and thus contested because the control of profits will be held by the central government and the power over resources will be taken away from the Khasi ethnic group. Coal mining is almost the complete opposite, power over this resource stays within the Khasi ethnic group, albeit among a small few. Even the power of identity insecurity and its influence on the politicisation of resources can be placated if the control of profits stays within the ethnic group. The presence of ‘outsiders’ in the coal mining areas matters little if they are generating profits for wealthy Khasis, and

⁴¹ See Appendix C.

organisations expected to oppose the uranium mine have changed their position when there is the possibility of an increased share of profits staying within the ethnic group.

iii) Lack of voice

The third reason why uranium is politicised as a security issue and coal is not relates to the ability of certain actors to access civil society and the inability, or reduced ability, of those experiencing insecurities to do the same. Without access to civil society from both other parts of India and transnational spaces, and with a very limited capacity to bypass the power structures in local civil society, it is very difficult for those facing the most acute causes of environmental insecurity to politicise these problems, contest them, and put them on the political agenda; i.e. they are denied a voice. The result is that causes of degradation such as uranium are politicised while changes in land ownership, deforestation, changes to *jhumming*, and the impacts of coal mining are ignored, and those experiencing insecurity are unable to contest its causes. There are several aspects to this and these will be discussed below.

First, those facing the most severe forms of degradation are in rural areas and thus have difficulties accessing civil society. Urban actors that have access to technology, that are close to the offices of the state government, and have a high level of education are able to decide which causes of degradation to contest and how they will be contested. Both the mine opponents and proponents have formulated their cases against and in favour of the mine in Shillong and Delhi. The people living in the uranium mine area have the choice between one side and the other. Access to civil society and the ability to organise and associate is constrained by restrictions on movement, both financial and social. With the exception of market days, there is little contact between people from different areas of the Khasi Hills. The roads are poor and the costs of travel into the urban centres high, especially if only for a meeting. Members of agrarian communities also have to forego income to go to urban areas. To go to the city simply for a meeting means a day travelling in both directions, three days in total. Villagers need to stay somewhere in the towns and if they have no relatives this can be difficult. Meetings on village issues take place in the

village *dorbars*, but women are not allowed to contribute, and the *dorbars* are not necessarily capable or willing to institute the kind of change needed to enhance the human security of rural people. Thus rural Khasis have little opportunity to access civil society; instead they are represented by civil society actors made up of people with little experience or understanding of the insecurities they face.

This is a problem of representation. Those with the power to set the political agenda decide what counts as a problem. This point is well made by journalist and social activist Patricia Mukhim,

Their voices are suppressed because they are not supposed to be speaking. They are being shown to, they are being told that we represent your case because we know better; we can speak better on your behalf. I don't believe in that. I am a firm believer that if anything is wrong in the Jaintia Hills for example, leadership has to emerge from there; they have to speak for themselves.⁴²

Mukhim's point is important because it shows that not only are the voices of rural people and the powerless marginalised by those actors pursuing their own interests and further legitimacy, but that civil society actors pursuing progressive changes in Meghalaya are at best assuming what causes insecurity in rural areas, and at worst not even interested in the empirical realities of insecurity but prefer to concentrate on the insecurities that will bring in funding. This will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

However, a simple urban-rural dichotomy in which urban actors shape discourse and rural actors remain silent is misleading, since there are restrictions on participation in civil society in urban areas as well. Shillong is a city of civil servants and many of them do not want to risk their jobs by speaking out against the government, against powerful civil society actors, against traditional institutions, or against ethno-nationalist discourses. In other words, the costs of meaningful participation in civil society are high. The space remaining for dissent is limited and populist groups who draw strongly on identity

⁴² Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Social Activist, *Personal Interview*, 23 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

insecurity to maintain their legitimacy and their power base dominate the small space that does exist. Voices that articulate issues that are not attached to the 'outsiders' discourse find it very difficult to gain access to civil society. If they do manage to frame issues their voices are quickly co-opted by the dominant civil society actors, as seen in the initial stages of the opposition to the uranium mine. This lack of access is not merely a case of urban and rural distinctions but of power and inequalities. Those with power in both urban and rural spaces set the agenda in civil society, they structure the dominant discourse, and they reproduce it.

iv) Construction of Meghalaya

The fourth reason why the uranium mine has been politicised and not coal mining relates to the way Meghalaya has been constructed in the Indian national context. As discussed above and in the previous chapter, the Northeast region, the hill states including Meghalaya, and the classification of the people of the region as 'tribal' during the colonial and postcolonial eras, has constructed a particular view of tribal people and their relationship to the environment. As discussed earlier in this chapter, throughout India there are calls to give control of land and forests back to communities. In Meghalaya control of land by the 'tribal community' has existed since the end of colonialism through the Sixth Schedule and since the formation of Meghalaya in 1972 through the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act, preventing non-tribals from owning land. Thus Meghalaya represents the realisation of self-determination for tribal peoples in governing the environment. It represents that which other peoples in India, particularly ethnic minorities and those dependent on a sustainable environment for their livelihoods, are striving for. This has the effect of compartmentalising the environment in Meghalaya as a closed issue; as tribal people already control the use of the land there is no need to examine the causes of environmental insecurity being generated from within the tribal community.

According to this construction, environmental degradation in tribal areas only makes sense if the degradation comes from the outside. Thus the uranium mine fits not only the 'outsiders discourse' in Meghalaya but also the discourses about tribes and minority

peoples in mainstream Indian environmentalism. As the communities control land and the natural resources by law in Meghalaya, civil society actors in other parts of India have not taken an interest in the environmental situation in the state. The assumption is that on community controlled land equity and sustainability will be observed. Furthermore, there is no single cause or easily definable catalyst for other causes of environmental degradation in the Khasi Hills. The causes are multiple and gradual, so civil society actors from outside the region have no clear entry point and no clear enemy. Thus local circumstances cannot be easily circumvented by those facing the most severe causes of environmental degradation.

4.5 Conclusion

Despite the multiple causes of environmental degradation in the Khasi Hills only one cause has been politicised by civil society. By comparing the uranium mine with coal mining I have argued that there are four reasons why the uranium mine has been politicised and coal has not: uranium fits into the ‘outsiders’ discourse that dominates civil society while coal does not, the profits from uranium would leave Meghalaya while the profits from coal stay amongst the Khasi ethnic group, those facing the causes of degradation have no voice to contest these causes, and the construction of Meghalaya in the Indian national context has closed the possibilities of critical enquiry into the causes of environmental degradation in the state placing an increased emphasis on local power inequalities in civil society. Yet what does this mean for civil society and human security and the relationship between the two? I will conclude this chapter by discussing each part of this question in turn.

First, this means that identity, power, and access are major determinant on the functioning of civil society. The influence of identity can clearly be seen in the case of the uranium mine. Environmental concerns have only become part of political debate because the threats to the environment in this case come from the ‘enemies’ of the Khasi people; i.e. ‘outsiders’ and the Indian state. In other words, the uranium mine has become an issue in local and national politics and in dialogues between the Indian Government, the

Meghalaya Government, and civil society actors *because* it is ethnicised, not because it threatens the environment and perpetuates insecurity. While the uranium mine opponents have mentioned the degradation of the environment from the mine as part of their campaign, they have done very little to halt the damage to the environment and the loss of land that are much more serious threats to environmental security taking place in other parts of the Khasi Hills. It is not only the KSU and other pressure groups that have been silent on these insecurities, but the majority of civil society actors in the Khasi Hills have chosen to ignore the causes of degradation that cannot be easily attributed to ‘outsiders’ or the state. Power is reflected in the ability of certain civil society actors to shape the agenda in civil society and politicise the uranium mine, and in the lack of ability for those facing other causes of degradation to do the same. The KSU and other mine opponents have the power and legitimacy to shape the discourse on civil society and to use identity insecurity to garner support. However, power is also evident in the mine proponents, especially in their ability to use economic insecurity to convince many people from the mine area to support the uranium mine and to shift the opinion of other influential civil society organisations such as the SSSS and the FKJGP. Inequalities affect civil society in different ways and are evident in the two points immediately above. Inequalities between those who have the ability to shape the political agenda and those who do not, between those who own land and those who do not, between those who have close ties to the bureaucracy and those who do not, all affect which issues are put on the political agenda and which will be contested and eventually addressed. Thus inequalities within the ethnic group are an important factor in which causes of degradation are politicised and the ways they are politicised.

Secondly, it is clear that forms of insecurity compete with each other, and as can be seen in the above example, this has the effect of increasing insecurity and compromising the search for human security. In the case of the uranium mine, the mine opponents manipulated identity insecurity and the mine proponents manipulated economic insecurity to push their claims against and for uranium mining, marginalising environmental insecurity. This is not to say that the identity insecurity or economic insecurity will *always* leave environmental insecurity subjugated by identity politics or economic arguments, but

what it does suggest is that the context in which environmental degradation occurs must be given detailed empirical study. Once the environment becomes 'ethnicised', the challenge for opposed parties is to present their case in an acceptable ethnic guise. The dangers in 'ethnicising' the environment are that the impacts of projects and practices that degrade the environment can be lost or dismissed when these are repackaged in an inclusive ethnic form. The coal mines support this point, they are causing widespread degradation, but members of the dominant ethnic group profit, so the visibility of this degradation is limited. This would appear to have relevance in other cases. The placation of opponents with jobs, roads, and the promise of 'development' is easier when the provision of these incentives is delivered in ethno-nationalist terms; 'the uplifting of the community' for example. Thus the 'ethnicisation' of the environment has two effects. First, it can give a movement against degradation wider appeal, and essentially make environmental issues identity issues. Secondly, and conversely, if the proponents of damaging environmental projects and practices solve the ethno-political aspects of the conflict, in the cases given above they removed the 'outsiders' element, then projects and practices causing degradation risk being accepted without the environmental costs being taken into account or compensated.

Thirdly, the relationship between civil society and human security is evident in the above case study. The marginalisation of the causes of environmental degradation is the result of the impact of identity, power, and inequalities on the functioning of civil society. A small group of actors are able to shape the agenda in civil society resulting in certain insecurities dominating social, political, and economic life. Similarly the persistence of identity insecurity, derived from both a genuine sense of insecurity felt by many people in Khasi society and from the use of this insecurity for political legitimacy, empowers certain actors in civil society and marginalises others. A similar point can be made on economic insecurity, those facing the most severe forms of insecurity have little capacity to access or participate in civil society, and thus the dominant discourses in civil society reflect the interests of those with the power to shape the political agenda.

Unless those threatened by environmental degradation can contest the causes of degradation then it is difficult to see how environmental insecurity can be addressed. In the case discussed above, environmental insecurity cannot compete with identity insecurity and economic insecurity in the present context. In Meghalaya, the ability of those most affected by environmental degradation to voice their insecurity appears to be a long way off. This is even more striking considering both the success of environmental movements in other parts of India and the severity of environmental degradation in the Khasi Hills. It may be possible for civil society actors in the Khasi Hills to contest the primacy of identity politics by making linkages with other actors outside the local context. However, linkages from within the local context are important too. In the Khasi Hills gender based organisations have been successful in contesting the 'outsiders' discourse by making linkages across ethnic groups within the local context. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5- The Myth of Empowerment: gender, insecurity, and identity

... my point is not so much that 'traditions' changed to accommodate new circumstances but that at a certain point they had to stop changing; once the 'traditions' relating to community identity and land rights were written down in court records and exposed to the criteria of the invented customary model, a new and unchanging body of tradition had been created.

- Ranger, 1983: 251

The enslavement of the wife where she is a mere chattel of the family of men has been the cause of the feminist movement in the world but in Khasi the woman is the glorified person, free to act, yet the partner of the man, and their separation is merely for the hardness of their hearts. From this Khasi idea of the women and his idea of marriage, we have the Khasi interpretation of the human race, as could be described from their matriarchal system.

- Roy, 1936: 382-3

(Matriliny) does create a false impression and it blinds the people themselves to real issues. If you say women in the Northeast are more egalitarian, they have more freedom of movement, then why is there violence? Why is violence increasing? Why? You see all these women, why do they come away from their own homes and their own village, at least there they have a hut and some land, why did they come here (to Shillong)? Why is poverty increasing? But people themselves...they say "No! We are not like mainstream India, we do not have dowry, we do not have the caste system." Fine, true- but there are other internal issues that are not discussed that they are turning a blind eye to, and that they feel are part and parcel of their lives.

- Darilyn Syiem, Head of north East Network Women's NGO, Personal Interview, 2005

5.0 Introduction

This chapter forms the second half of Part II of the thesis. As with the previous chapter, the content of this chapter is drawn from empirical research in the Khasi Hills between January and June 2005 and existing literature. There are multiple causes of gender-based

insecurity, and these have a major impact on the ability of women to pursue livelihoods, participate in social and political life, and be emancipated from different forms of oppression. Unlike environmental insecurity discussed in the previous chapter, there are civil society actors addressing gender-based insecurities in the Khasi Hills. However, the ability of women's organisations to contest the causes of insecurity is limited by the ways in which gender has been constructed in local and national contexts, the politicisation of gender by powerful civil society actors as part of the 'outsiders discourse', and the attempts by the state to coopt gender-based activism. As a result the causes of gender-based insecurities have been marginalised or only included on the political agenda in ways that serve powerful actors, exacerbating the condition of insecurity experienced by women. However there has been a strong challenge to the status quo by a network of women's organisations revealing some of the possible ways that the constraints on civil society may be transcended.

This chapter reinforces the two key issues related to the central concerns of this thesis discussed in the previous chapter. First, the ability of civil society actors to contest the causes of gender-based insecurity is constrained by the dominance of identity politics within the Khasi Hills, the persistence of largely false perceptions of Khasi gender relations in other parts of India, and women's lack of access to political spaces. Secondly, competing constructions of insecurity are again evident; the dominance of identity insecurity has been used to politicise gender in ways that serve the advocates of the 'outsiders' discourse and those that benefit from existing political structures. Again, the constitutive relationship between civil society and human security is clear, those with power in civil society can determine which causes of insecurity are politicised, and these empower particular actors. However, unlike the case study examined in the previous chapter, some of these constraints on contestation have been transcended in this case, providing several insights into how transcendence may occur in other circumstances; a key aspect of the critical approach adopted in this thesis.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section discusses gender and human security and the ways civil society actors have addressed gender-based insecurity in India

and in Meghalaya. I argue that the construction of Meghalaya in the Indian national context is based on several misleading assumptions about gender relations, rendering many of the causes of gender-based insecurity invisible to civil society actors. However, unlike in the previous chapter there are several local civil society actors working on gender issues in the Khasi Hills, most of which operate within existing structures though a small number challenge these structures. The second section outlines the main causes of gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills. These are: (i) the impacts of changes to land usage and deforestation, (ii) gendered poverty, and (iii) domestic violence. The third section analyses the constraints on civil society actors contesting the causes of gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills. I argue that there are three main constraints: (i) the assumptions about gender relations contained in the construction of Meghalaya in the national context and in the local context, (ii) the politicisation of gender into ethno-nationalist politics and the ‘outsiders’ discourse, and (iii) the exclusion of women from both traditional and modern political institutions and the local and national ramifications of this. The fourth section examines the ways in which civil society actors have challenged these constraints on the issue of domestic violence by linking women from different ethnic groups to contest the causes and the lack of responsiveness from the government on the issue. I argue that this nascent movement has opened up new spaces for civil society actors by contesting identity politics and the power of existing structures. The final section concludes the chapter by examining what this means for civil society, human security, and the relationship between the two. I argue that despite shortcomings in the movement it can provide some suggestions on how identity, power, and inequalities can be contested and transcended.

5.1 Approaching gender and insecurity

This section discusses the relationship between human security and gender and the ways in which civil society actors in India and in the Khasi Hills have approached gender-based insecurity.

Gender and insecurity

Insecurity is derived from the inability of groups and individuals to meet their material needs, participate in social and political life, and gain emancipation from forms of oppression (Thomas, 2000: 6). Thus a gender perspective on insecurity is concerned with the ways socially constructed gender roles create power inequalities between men and women in the public and private spheres. This manifests itself in domestic and organised violence directed at women, the type of work undertaken by women and their pay, the gendered impacts of poverty and economic change, bias in education, lack of access to healthcare and other services, and the lack of participation in political institutions. Thus a gendered perspective on insecurity recognises that women face different causes of insecurity and face different obstacles in contesting these causes. As Pettman points out, social constructions of gender are not experienced in isolation from other identities and social relations (2005: 672). Thus contextualisation is crucial in understanding what constitutes insecurity and the power struggles involved in contesting the causes of insecurity (Krishna, 2004a). This chapter focuses on the gendered impacts of changes to land use, gendered poverty, and domestic violence as the main causes of gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills.

It is important to recognise the distinction between sex and gender and the way they are used in the chapter. Momsen defines gender as ‘the socially acquired notions of masculinity and femininity by which women and men are identified.’ (2004: 2) Thus in talking about gender we are discussing the relationships between women and men and the relationship of both women and men to society. For Mukhopadhyay gender is most commonly realised in inter-personal relationships, which have ‘powerful social and economic implications.’ (2003: 5) These implications are easy to identify when they take the form of overt discrimination, however gender bias takes other forms that are more difficult to identify.

It is also important to note the heterogeneity of gender relations not only in different national settings, but also in different sub-national settings (Chowdhry, 1995; Krishna, 2004a; Ray, 1999). Other authors argue that despite the importance of local contexts there

are several universal factors that should not be completely discounted (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000: 8). Namely, women being the only sex that can bear children, and also women face disparities in income, in the type of work undertaken, and in political representation in developed and developing countries (Simmons, 1992/1997). The approach taken in this chapter is to recognise that general trends in gender bias against women exist at a global level, but in examining the extent of insecurity based on gender, and the role of civil society actors in addressing insecurity, local contextualisation is crucial.

Krishna argues that in order to understand gender contextually in the developing world, and South Asia in particular, one must ‘draw out the material and ideological dimensions of gender relations- the contestation and negotiation, the transformative pressures.’ (2004a: 51) These determine the ways in which agency is constrained and/or enabled. Krishna calls for a departure from simplistic ‘grand narratives’ of women’s subordination, to understand the diverse processes by which power is gendered, and to explore sites of resistance. (2004a: 54). This chapter adopts a similar approach, examining the ways in which identity, power, and inequalities produce gender-based insecurity and also constrain the contestation of insecurity jeopardising the search for human security.

A further aspect of gender-based insecurity that needs to be mentioned is the role of empowerment in contesting and alleviating the causes of insecurity. Empowerment has been an important normative concept in both feminist literature (Kabeer, 1994) and development literature (Sen, 1999), and is taken to mean the control over one’s life and the ability to change one’s circumstances. Young argues that for feminists empowerment goes beyond the material and ‘involves the radical alteration of the processes and structures which reproduce women’s subordinate position as a gender.’ (1997: 372) Sonpar and Kapur argue that as gender inequality is bound up in power relations at different levels then empowerment must also take place at different levels and in various spheres (2003: 41). Thus they argue that the complexities of power relations and the ways in which women of different ethnic, cultural, and class backgrounds negotiate and bargain with power inequalities in their everyday lives is essential to understanding the potential for

empowerment (2003: 42). In order to analyse the complexities of power, they argue that both conventional quantitative indicators and non-conventional qualitative indicators need to be used, as many of the causes of insecurity affecting women cannot be easily measured (2003: 56). This chapter uses a similar approach, using quantitative and qualitative material to examine the causes of insecurity and the attempts to contest these causes.

Gender and civil society in the national context

One of the main constraints on contesting gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills is the construction of Meghalaya in the Indian national context based on the misreading of the Khasi matrilineal inheritance system as a form of empowerment. As with the case of environmental insecurity discussed in the previous chapter, this has isolated Meghalaya from civil society networks in other parts of India and intensified local power inequalities, though as will be discussed later in this chapter, these have been challenged and transcended to a certain degree. Women's activism in India has a well-documented history. Katzenstein et al argue that women's activism in India has been concerned with both identity and material issues (2001: 254). John argues that while the first debates over women's rights took place in the context of demands for social reforms in the mid-19th century in Bengal and Maharashtra, it was the formation of women's organisations in the early decades of the 20th century and the involvement of women in other movements including the nationalist movement, communist movements, caste and tribal rights struggles, which more deeply involved women in political life (2005: 108; see also Sen, 2002).

The failure of state-led development in the 1970s saw a renewed oppositional stance by women and during this phase the movement began to diversify and become increasingly difficult to characterise (John, 2005: 110-111). Since then women's movements in India have been strongly linked to critiques of development, both state-led and market-led (Katzenstein et al, 2001: 247). In addition, women's organisations have been particularly active in campaigns against domestic violence, sex determination, dowry, rape, and reproductive health issues (Armstrong, 2004; Basu, 1992). Existing literature also focuses

on more specific gender issues addressed by civil society, including natural resource management (Banerjee, 2004; Jackson and Chattopadhyay, 2001; Marathe, 2004), micro-credit and self-help groups (Datar and Prakash, 2004; Nakro and Kikhi, 2006; Taylor, 1999), environmental issues (Agarwal, 1992), political participation (Narayan, 2002; Niranjana, 2002; Mayaram, 2002), gender inequalities within NGOs (O'Reilly, 2004), the impact of internal and external influences on the direction and form of movements in different locations (Ray, 1999), and the reactions of women's organisations to communal violence (Chandhoke, 2003; K. Sharma, 2002).

As is the case with environmental movements in India, civil society actors in Meghalaya are poorly integrated into civil society networks addressing gender issues.⁴³ The ways Meghalaya as a distinct space, and the gender relations that take place within that space, are constructed have a major impact on the proliferation of particular causes of insecurity and on the ability of civil society actors to contest these. As discussed in the previous chapter, this means that the local manifestations of identity, power, and access, have a major impact on the politics of gender in Meghalaya. There are three main contributions to this. First, the construction of the Northeast in the Indian national context, derived from a lack of knowledge and a dependence on colonial categories, ethnographies, and accounts of the region and its peoples has isolated Meghalaya from the Indian political mainstream, institutions, and national civil society actors. The example of the National Commission for Women (NCW) is instructive. The NCW was formed in 1992, and since that time it has visited various states in India to establish state-level commissions (NCW, 2005). It took 12 years until the commission visited Meghalaya, indicating that there was no sense of urgency in addressing gender issues in Meghalaya. This will be discussed further below.

Secondly, gender relations in the region have been represented in other parts of India as egalitarian, participatory, and empowering (Krishna, 2004b). This is particularly significant in constructions of Meghalaya by those living in other parts of India, a

⁴³ This point was made by several respondents in Meghalaya; Sister Judith Shadap, President and Founder; WISE, *Personal Interview*, 10 March, 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India; Darilyn Syiem, Coordinator: North East Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

construction based on simplistic and largely inaccurate understandings of the matrilineal inheritance system of both the Khasi and Garo ethnic groups. Therefore the causes of gender-based insecurity that affect women in other parts of India are assumed to be either non-existent in Meghalaya, or if they do exist they are thought to be less severe and able to be addressed by existing social and political structures. As will be demonstrated below, not only is this inaccurate, but this hides the causes of gender-based insecurity making them even more difficult to contest.

Thirdly, the construction of gender relations in the national context has been diffused into national policies on gender and development when they are applied to Meghalaya, meaning that reforms designed to alleviate gender-based insecurity applied to other parts of India, often the result of demands by civil society actors, are usually deemed unnecessary in Meghalaya and some other parts of the Northeast. This will be discussed further in the following sections.

Gender and civil society in the Khasi Hills

In contrast to environmental insecurity there are several organisations actively addressing gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills. These civil society actors in the Khasi Hills approach gender-based insecurity in different ways. At a superficial level a distinction can be made between NGOs providing services to women; mostly ‘approved NGOs’ registered and funded (to varying degrees) by the Meghalaya Government, and more ‘activist’ members of a nascent women’s movement, i.e. a broader collection of activists, individuals, and informal groups. This distinction is not always clear as some organisations perform multiple functions. For example, one particular organisation might run projects for employment generation among Khasi women, and may also organise protests and lobby to reform the male domination of political institutions. One of the best examples of this is the organisation North East Network (NEN), which undertakes development initiatives through training and self-help groups but has also been instrumental in mobilising protests on the issue of domestic violence. Furthermore, activists and individuals move between different organisations and address issues in different capacities, sometimes representing a

particular NGO and sometimes acting as an individual or part of a broader movement. A more effective way to divide civil society actors is into (a) those addressing insecurity *within* the existing structures of identity, power, and inequalities in the Khasi Hills, and (b) those *challenging* the power relations that underpin these structures. In other words, there is a difference between those actors addressing the affects of various gender issues, and those contesting the power relations that cause gender-based insecurity. Once again, this is not a perfect dividing criterion as some actors do both of these things, but it enables a distinction to be made between those civil society actors reproducing the status quo and those challenging it. These distinctions will be maintained for the time being in order to describe the Khasi Hills context in more detail.

a) Civil society actors operating within existing structures

The organisations working on gender-based insecurity within existing frameworks are themselves diverse. There are organisations that specifically identify themselves as women's organisations, such as Impulse NGO Network, NEN, Women for Integrated Sustainable Empowerment (WISE), and the Indigenous Women's Resource Centre. Yet there are also many other civil society actors addressing gender-based insecurity in conjunction with other activities. Many of the grassroots development organisations and church-based organisations in the Khasi Hills have components that deal specifically with welfare and employment for women, and as 'approved NGOs' they can access government funding. These organisations have worked as service providers and capacity builders, often in close relationships with the government.

During fieldwork in the Khasi Hills it was rare to speak to any civil society organisation large or small which did not mention the need to address women's issues. In a general sense it appears that norms about gender have become part of the language of civil society, especially among organisations broadly categorised as development organisations. However, many of the respondents gave only a vague explanation of what this meant. Additionally, unless the organisation was specifically designated as a women's organisation there were very few women employed or involved at a high level. During my

interviews with one particular organisation in a rural area I was introduced to a female fieldworker who was planning to start a branch of the organisation that focussed on women's issues. However during my interviews with the members of the organisation she did not contribute to the discussion and was asked to prepare tea and food at various intervals.⁴⁴ There were similar incidents when in other NGO offices.

Different organisations are linked to civil society networks in other parts of India to varying degrees; usually this depends upon the size of the organisation and the activities it undertakes. Furthermore, some organisations operate as part of networks on some issues and in a local context on others. For example, the NEN has branches in other parts of the Northeast and is linked to civil society actors in Delhi, Gujarat, and gains some funding from the Association for India's Development from the USA.⁴⁵ Interestingly these linkages are on specific projects, mostly capacity building projects and the marketing of handicrafts produced in the Northeast. The activist aspects of NEN, especially against domestic violence, take place on a local level without funding and without the involvement of linked actors. Generally these linkages to national and transnational networks are on less political issues without a strong local component, such as micro-credit, capacity building, sanitation, shelters, and anti-trafficking, and these linkages are mostly financial. Other organisations have similar linkages with national and international donors on mainstream gender issues, especially income generation and capacity building, particularly Impulse NGO Network and WISE. In other words, it appears civil society actors from the Khasi Hills can be part of networks from other parts of India and other countries on issues that are de-politicised and fit into norms of poverty reduction and grassroots development articulated by wider networks of civil society actors and donors.

Most 'approved NGOs' have established self-help groups (SHGs) and provide training in income generation activities. SHGs are a form of capacity building aimed at training

⁴⁴ It is possible this had something to do with hierarchy, as the male fieldworkers present did not contribute much to the discussion either; however none of them were asked to cook!

⁴⁵ Darilyn Syiem, Coordinator: North East Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

women in income generating activities and linking these products to markets. Discussing SHGs in India as a whole, Kapadia argues that they have become the norm in contemporary development discourse and are often used by governments to fill quotas and targets for poverty reduction (2002: 17). She argues that the focus of SHGs is very narrow and does not generate a critical gender perspective among women, thus 'problems with the structural constraints created by family and community, caste discrimination and class inequalities are totally ignored.' (2002: 17) In the Khasi Hills, both organisations with a specific focus on women and development organisations are involved in establishing SHGs and these have been quite effective at encouraging savings and generating extra income for rural women. However, for more embedded causes of gender-based insecurity they are of limited use, as they do not challenge the material and ideational structures that reproduce gender inequalities. The system of registration for civil society actors in Meghalaya has reduced the autonomy of NGOs and the formalisation of SHGs and their parent NGOs as service providers has removed much of their transformative potential and their ability to criticise the government, as most of them are dependent on the government to survive.

b) Civil society actors challenging existing structures

The second type of civil society actors, referred to above as 'activist', face far greater constraints as they challenge the power relations that reproduce gender-based insecurity and operate in a much more informal way outside the control of the government. They are fewer in number, generally less organised, and often much smaller in size. Many do not have full time staff or offices, though some, such as the Freedom Project, do. The difference between these actors and those addressing causes of insecurity within 'safe' frameworks provided by the government needs to be stressed. Some gender-based activism has been undertaken in an isolated sense on various issues. However the coming together of a whole coalition of civil society actors in a women's movement is only a recent occurrence. As discussed above, several civil society actors have taken on various 'women's issues', but attempts at challenging the structures had been fairly low key, often limited to the work of individuals or specific projects. These attempts did not involve a large section of the population of the Khasi Hills. They are mostly urban based, with little

participation from rural Khasis. However, this appeared to change during the movement against domestic violence when a broad social movement of civil society actors began to publicly dissent against the state and Meghalayan society, with the notable absence of some ‘approved NGOs’ close to the government.⁴⁶ This will be discussed further below.

5.2 Gender-Based Insecurity in the Khasi Hills

This section gives a description of the main causes of gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills. These are: i) the impacts of changes to land usage and deforestation, ii) gendered poverty, and iii) domestic violence.

i) Land, forests, and gender

The changes to land ownership described in Chapter 4 are having a major impact on women. There are three aspects to this and these are linked. First, the *dorbars* (village councils) determine the allocation and use of land, yet women are excluded from participating in the *dorbars* at all levels, thus women have no input into how land, resources, and the environment are used and distributed at a village level. In addition, as the *dorbars* have become increasingly powerful through land privatisations, logging concessions, and land leasing, the exclusion of women has led to their further marginalisation from political processes. Without political power or a presence in customary institutions, women cannot exercise rights over land. As Agarwal argues,

Customary institutions with jural power (such as the tribal and caste councils) were monopolised by men...this meant that despite men’s restricted access to property ownership, their rights (as a gender) of control over that property on the one hand, and their access to public bodies on the

⁴⁶ The Impulse NGO Network was a particularly conspicuous absentee. During my interview with the president of Impulse she explained that the organisation did not see the use of protesting against domestic violence and felt it more important to provide services for the victims. Though their close ties to the government may also have had an influence on their decision not to participate. Hasina Kharbhih, President; Impulse NGO Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

other (with links between the two domains), often enabled them to consolidate social prestige and political power. (1994: 151)

In addition, the shift from common land to private land has not only led to the formation of a wealthy tribal elite closely connected to the bureaucracy and non-tribal business persons, but it has also led to 'gender differentiation among the peasantry' (Agarwal, 1994: 165). Agarwal argues that this process of gender differentiation has been just as widespread as the process of class differentiation in Khasi society (1994: 165).

However, as women have customary rights over private land that is passed on through the matrilineal inheritance system, some do gain access to private land; yet they have little control over this land. Agarwal argues that there is a large disjuncture between property ownership and property control in Khasi society (1994: 150). She also points out that there is a link between the post-marital residence of women and their likelihood to inherit land (1994: 286). In Khasi villages, it was previously common for men to move to the village of their wife, ensuring she inherited land. However, as arable land in the steep hills and valleys is limited to begin with, existing arable land has become scarce due to a growing population, and large areas of previously fertile land have become ruined from erosion and deforestation, many women are no longer able to bring their husbands to their village and face the possibility of either moving to their husbands village or becoming landless labourers and/or urban migrants (Grassroots Options, 2002: 10-11).

Secondly, women in the Khasi Hills face extreme hardships related to growing landlessness and the changes to *jhum* agriculture. As women undertake the majority of the labour in the cultivation of common land, especially through *jhumming* (shifting cultivation), the privatisation of common land and the relegation of *jhumming* to poor-quality land has been a major cause of insecurity. As Krishna argues, 'women tend to lose status with the livelihood changes involved in the transformation from foraging/shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, communal to private ownership, and local to wider market interaction.' (2004b: 379) According to Darlong, head of IFAD's Natural Resource Management project in Northeast India, between 70 to 80% of the *jhum* workload is

undertaken by women, in conjunction with food and fuel gathering and child rearing.⁴⁷ The reduced role of women in the production process has been accelerated by the increase in commercial agriculture which involves dealing with non-tribal merchants and traders, a practice usually undertaken by men (Barbora and Fernandes, 2002: 131).

Thirdly, the rise and fall of the timber industry in Meghalaya has also caused gender-based insecurity. The debates surrounding the timber ban have been discussed in Chapter 4. Many authors argue that women from rural areas have felt the repercussions of this to a far greater extent than any other group (Nathan, 2000; Nongbri, 2001; Ramnath, 2002). As unemployment has increased among the men working in the timber industry, the burden of income generation and food production has fallen on women.⁴⁸ This has pushed women into other areas of the labour force, such as road construction, where they work for lower rates in order to undercut the surplus of male labour (Nongbri, 2001). In Meghalaya it is common to see small groups of women of various ages breaking piles of rocks by the side of the road to be used in road construction and repair.

This fairly abrupt poverty has led to a growing flow of people from former timber industry areas, such as the West Khasi Hills, to Shillong. Darilyn Syiem from the NEN points out that a large proportion of these urban migrants are women and many of them come to the towns and work as hawkers and domestic workers and large numbers of teenagers, especially girls, come to Shillong to work as domestic maids.⁴⁹ Hasina Kharbhih, whose organisation Impulse NGO Network has published a study on domestic workers in Shillong, argues that many domestic workers are from areas badly affected by the Timber Ban.⁵⁰ She adds that there has also been an increase in trafficking of young women from

⁴⁷ Vincent Darlong, NERCMP Project Coordinator, International Foundation for Agricultural Development, *Personal Interview*, 4 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

⁴⁸ Darilyn Syiem, Coordinator: North East Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Hasina Kharbhih, President; Impulse NGO Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

Meghalaya to other parts of India in the years since the ban, suggesting a link between the economic insecurity generated by the ban and the exploitation of that insecurity by organised crime. The situation is complex and contradictory. On the one hand deforestation is taking away livelihoods by denying access to secondary forest produce and by increasing erosion leading to poor *jhum* returns. On the other hand, the ban on timber has led to further impoverishment of rural communities, urban migration, and landless labourers.

ii) Gendered poverty

Poverty in the Khasi Hills is heavily gendered and there are several statistics that show this. The statistics used by both the Planning Commission and the National Family Health Survey are for Meghalaya as a whole and thus it is not possible to gain separate statistics for the Khasi Hills Districts alone. Furthermore, due to the almost complete absence of human development statistics correlated or made available by the Meghalaya Government, the national statistics are the only substitute. This means that the poverty indicators in different districts in the Khasi Hills, and even within districts and villages, cannot be ascertained quantitatively; however there are some key indicators from the state statistics which aid the present study.

Meghalaya, like most of the states of the Northeast, has a high level of female literacy; just over 60.41% of women are literate (Planning Commission, 2001: 186). However, female literacy is still lower than male literacy, which is recorded at 66% (Planning Commission, 2001: 186). Many other states have much higher rates of female literacy, including tribal majority states such as Mizoram which has the highest rate in India, and predominantly non-tribal states like Maharashtra and Punjab (Planning Commission, 2001: 187). Meghalaya makes an interesting comparison with Kerala, a state with a large proportion of the population also practising a form of matriliney. Meghalaya rates well behind Kerala in female literacy, 60.41% compared to over 87% (Planning Commission, 2001: 187). In Meghalaya's rural areas there is a big drop in female literacy to 54.2%, while the rate in Kerala drops only slightly 86.79%, still the highest in India. The comparison between rural

and urban women in Meghalaya is stark, 54% of rural women are literate compared to 84.3% of urban women (Planning Commission, 2001: 188). Thus despite the image of education and empowerment, women, and rural women in particular, are still behind in terms of education in Meghalaya, though the numbers of literate women are increasing.

Health indicators for women in Meghalaya are poor. The numbers of women with anaemia, a general measure used to indicate nutrition, is the second highest in India at 63.3% (Planning Commission, 2001: 246). In comparison, the national average is 51% and the rate in matrilineal Kerala is a national low at 22% (Planning Commission, 2001: 246). Meghalaya has the lowest rate of births attended by health professionals in all of India at 20.8% (Planning Commission, 2001: 247). In Kerala the rate is over 94% (Planning Commission, 2001: 247). The percentage of births delivered in a medical centre is very low, and at 17.5% ranks among the bottom four states in India (Planning Commission, 2001: 248). The percentage in Kerala is the highest at 93% (Planning Commission, 2001: 248). What is also interesting is that Meghalaya has the *highest* fertility rate in India; Kerala has the second lowest (National Family Health Survey, 2002: 90). It is also interesting to note that despite the notion that Khasi parents ‘pray for a girl’ (Nongkynrih, 2004: 30), only 16.9% of mothers interviewed by the National Family Health Survey wanted more girls than boys in their families, and 20.9% wanted more boys than girls, which may indicate that either the preference for girls is disappearing or that the preference for girls was overstated to begin with (National Family Health Survey, 2002: 122). However, over 90% wanted at least one daughter and at least one son.

iii) Domestic violence

While official statistics of domestic violence are difficult to obtain, most of the civil society organisations and social activists interviewed for this research identified domestic violence as widespread in Khasi society.⁵¹ The National Family Health Survey published

⁵¹ Tarun Bhartiya, Social Activist; The Freedom Project, *Personal Interview*, 19 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India; Hasina Kharbhih, President; Impulse NGO Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India; Sister Judith Shadap, President and Founder; WISE, *Personal Interview*, 10

by the Government of India does provide some insight into the extent of domestic violence, though it also has some limitations. The latest report published in 2002 reveals that Meghalaya has the highest levels of domestic violence among Northeast states, 31% of women report being beaten or physically mistreated (2002: 79). Perhaps what is even more striking is that the rate of violence against women in Meghalaya is *second overall* in India, behind Tamil Nadu and ahead of states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where dowry, caste, and widow murder are still prevalent and where the position of women in the society is perceived to be irreversibly dismal. The report does point out that comparisons between states are difficult due to the ‘cultural norms about revealing the experience of violence to strangers’ and the extent to which women perceive the violence they may be experiencing as ‘beatings or physical mistreatment’ (the words used to describe violence in the survey) (2002: 78). Thus some states may have a high incidence of underreporting.

Even without the comparative component, the 31% figure is very high. Furthermore, the judicial system in Meghalaya has been very poor at prosecuting perpetrators of domestic violence, even when the perpetrators have been identified, and even in cases where the perpetrators have confessed (Grassroots Options, 2002: 12). This figure, and the revelation that Meghalaya had the highest percentage in the entire Northeast region, has been a catalyst for action among civil society organisations, as will be discussed below. Darilyn Syiem from the NEN makes the further point that Khasi women also face other forms of violence not recorded in aggregate studies.⁵² She cites lack of mobility and psychological violence as having a particular impact on women’s lives. She adds that many Khasi women see violence as being part of their lives that must be accepted and tolerated.

March, 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India; Darilyn Syiem, Coordinator: North East Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

⁵² Darilyn Syiem, Coordinator: North East Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

5.3 Gender Politics in the Khasi Hills

If the causes of gender-based insecurity are so acute, why do they persist? Especially as there are established NGOs and other civil society actors dealing with gender issues. The answers to this question are complex but essentially they derive from the ways gender is politicised in Meghalaya. Gender relations are only politicised in particular ways by powerful actors, both state and non-state. Organisations seeking to address the causes of gender-based insecurity are only able to do so if they operate within the boundaries set by the government and powerful civil society actors. Thus organisations implementing micro-credit schemes, self-help groups, and capacity building programs are able to do so and to receive funding from the government. Yet civil society actors contesting causes of insecurity that have their roots in power inequalities, institutional gender-bias, and the ‘outsiders’ discourse face enormous constraints.

The following section identifies three main constraints that jeopardise the ability of civil society actors to contest the power relations at the root of gender-based insecurity and the structures and agents that perpetrate these relations. First, the misrepresentation of matrilineal inheritance as a form of empowerment for women makes contesting gender relations difficult for civil society actors in local spaces, and makes gender-based insecurity unseen to civil society actors from other parts of India. Secondly, powerful civil society actors have used this misrepresentation to coopt gender relations into the ‘outsiders’ discourse. The debate over changes to matrilineal inheritance has been used by ethno-nationalist groups to pressure the district councils into denying the benefits of the Sixth Schedule to Khasi women who marry non-Khasis and to their children. Thirdly, women are excluded from participation in the *dorbars* and have very minimal representation in other political institutions. Not only does this reduce political participation for women, but also it reflects the normalisation of exclusion and marginalisation of women from politics. Thus an examination of these constraints reveals the ways power is manifested in civil society in Meghalaya, the power to politicise certain issues and set the political agenda, the lack of power to contest the way gender is

politicised by influential actors, and the power embedded in particular institutions to control resources and access to political spaces. These three constraints will be discussed in turn below.

i) Misrepresenting matriliney

Gender relations in the Khasi Hills need to be understood in the context of the matrilineal inheritance system. Both the Khasi/Jaintia and the Garo tribes practise a form of matrilineal inheritance, though the degree to which this is still practiced is not known.⁵³ Both systems do vary considerably and the focus below will be on the Khasi system.⁵⁴ The prevalence of the matrilineal myth in discourses on gender both inside and outside the Khasi Hills has enabled a particular construction of gender relations to gain legitimacy, while it is only at the local level that these constructions are starting to be contested. I will focus on two aspects of the matrilineal system: the way matriliney has been framed in historical and contemporary contexts, followed by the ways in which this is being contested in the Khasi Hills.

Framing matriliney

One cannot speak of Khasi life without mentioning their women. Women amongst the Khasi enjoy a position of unusual dignity and importance. For students of the feminist movement, this District should afford an interesting field of study. For generations Khasi women have been the custodians of property. Their counsels carried weight with their male relatives and with them these women share the burden of life, but in spite of their responsibilities and duties they have lost none of the fascinating characteristics of their sex. (Roy, 1936: 381-2)

Matriliney has been framed as evidence that gender relations in Khasi society are egalitarian. It is argued that Khasi women are empowered and even that women have too

⁵³ In the Northeast there are two other matrilineal tribes, the Koch and the Lalung located in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

⁵⁴ Including the system of inheritance in the Jaintia Hills.

much power. This framework has created a powerful construction that has a major impact on how gender-based insecurities are understood and contested in national and local spaces. The framing of matriliney has its origins in colonial ethnography, the distortions to the gender roles brought by conversions to Christianity, and the use of matriliney as part of tribal identity vis-à-vis non-tribals. These will be discussed in turn after a brief outline of the conventional understanding of the matrilineal system is given.

In its most basic form, Khasi matriliney involves the passing of property and the continuation of clan lineage through female family members. When a family holds property the youngest daughter, *khadduh*, inherits customary rights over the house and land (Chacko, 1998: 3-6; Nongkynrih, 2002: 95; War, 1998: 19). In these cases the youngest daughter lives in the family house, the *Iing kur*, and raises her family there taking care of her parents and any unmarried siblings (War, 1998: 19).⁵⁵ In non-Christian households, the youngest daughter also has responsibility for preparing religious rites and rituals. Though as War stresses, the youngest daughter does not *perform* any religious rituals, and is only the ‘keeper’ of the religion (1998: 22-23). However with the conversion of the majority of Khasis to Christianity, women have largely lost this responsibility (I.M. Syiem, 1998).

In families with their own land the married daughters build their houses and raise their families on the same plot. The youngest daughter is the custodian of this property, but the actual management of the property is in the hands of the maternal uncles (War, 1998: 22). The eldest maternal uncle, the *kni*, plays a very important role in the family and is the link between his own maternal clan and his wife’s clan. Nongkynrih’s study of the Khasi society in the village of Kongthong, in a relatively isolated region of the Khasi Hills, suggests that the role of the *kni* is still very important in the lives of his sister’s children and in contrast he has very little involvement with raising his own children (2002: 53). Other authors argue that the role and power of the *kni* is changing and has mostly

⁵⁵ For the rulers of the pre-colonial *Syiem*-ships, the line of decent is slightly different. The son of the eldest daughter of the *Syiem*, the chief, claims leadership after the death of the ruling *Syiem*. This practice continues in contemporary Khasi society, though the function of the *Syiem* has changed in many ways.

disappeared in urban areas (Chacko, 1998: 6). In contemporary Khasi society the nuclear family unit is far more common, and it is only in remoter parts of Meghalaya that the *kni* still carries out his former functions.

The matrilineal system is important for the establishment of the *kur* or clan, as all Khasis related to the same female ancestor, *Ka ĩawbei Tynrai*, are members of the same clan (Nongkynrih, 2002: 34). When a Khasi woman gives birth, whether the father is Khasi or non-Khasi, the children become part of the mother's clan. Khasis take the name of their common female ancestor for their family name and marriage between members of the same clan is forbidden. Clan affiliations still have a major role in Khasi society, especially in politics and business. As Nongkynrih points out *Shi-kur*, 'the clan' or 'my clan' is the basic unit of identification in Khasi society (2002: 34).

It is important to point out that in practice clans are formed from both female and male lineages and, perhaps more crucially, this has meant that the Khasi ethnic group has absorbed non-Khasis relatively easily. There are certain clans in the Khasi Hills that have been formed from a Khasi father and a non-Khasi mother. The term *dkhar* is the name given to these clans, though each clan takes the prefix *Khar* and adds the mother's first name or occupation⁵⁶ to form the name of the new clan (Nongbri, 2003: 235). This has made the Khasi ethnic group very diverse, or as Nongbri puts it has 'rendered the ethnic boundary of the Khasis highly porous.' (2003: 235). Roy, an anthropologist writing in 1936, argues that in the 'Khasi world view' anyone, regardless of 'caste or creed, of colour or possessions' can be assimilated into the Khasi ethnic group through marriage (1936: 376). However in the current context this is changing as intolerance grows and the 'outsiders' discourse becomes more and more dominant.

As discussed in Chapter 3, ethnography and anthropology had a major impact on the production of tribal identities. The work of Major P.R.T. Gurdon in the early 20th century has played a major role in constructing matriliney during the colonial and postcolonial eras.

⁵⁶ For example, Kharbhih, Kharbuli, Kharujon.

Gurdon was the Deputy Commissioner for Assam and Eastern Bengal and the Superintendent of Ethnography in Assam. His book *The Khasis* describes matriliney as the direct inheritance of property by females and claims that men cannot own property, and that in Khasi society 'the man is nothing' (1907/1975: xxii-xxiii, 87; cited by Fane, 1975: 94). Gurdon's account of Khasi marriage was frequently cited in ethnographic and anthropological journals during the mid 20th century, often his understandings were accepted uncritically and this continues in the representations of matriliney in contemporary Meghalaya (see Ehrenfels, 1955; Fane, 1975; Roy, 1936).

Ethnographers and anthropologists misread the absence of severe forms of gender exclusion as gender empowerment. Krishna argues that the visibility and involvement of women in economic life in tribal societies, as is the case in Khasi society, as compared to upper-caste Hindu women, 'have contributed to the myth of gender equality created by British ethnographers and reinforced by Indian administrators.' (2004b: 385) Colonial anthropology and ethnography understood and represented these production relations as much more egalitarian form of social organisation (Roy, 1936: 382). Unnithan-Kumar argues that the perception of gender equality among tribes comes from discourses in post-independence India, which viewed caste and tribe as opposed social systems (2001: 13). She stresses that tribes are associated with 'a specific territory, with clan exogamy, and with few restrictions for women...as compared to caste endogamy and strict endogamy and rules relating to women.' (2001: 14) This is an important aspect for the framing of gender within tribal societies; the position of women is *relatively* better in tribal societies than in caste-based societies and this has prevented critical examination of gender issues in tribal societies by academia, policy makers, and much of civil society (Xaxa, 2004).

In much the same way as the British brought diverse groups of people into ethnic categories in order to administer them more effectively, they also generalised forms of matriliney undertaken by particular groups and applied them to all those in newly created ethnic categories. Agarwal points out that the form of matriliney now considered to be

typical among all Khasis was only practiced by the Khynriams and Pnar groups⁵⁷ at the beginning of the 20th century, the other Khasi sub-tribes had by that time lost matrilineal aspects of their culture due to their increased exposure to other social systems (Agarwal, 1994:105). Furthermore, it was important for the colonial administrators of the Khasi to continue to emphasise the differences between tribal social systems and those of Hindu and Muslim communities, and matriliney was the perfect cleavage upon which to emphasise difference.

In addition, colonial administrators and ethnographers thought that the youngest daughter was the *owner* of ancestral property rather than its guardian (Lyngdoh, 1998: 39). It is also possible that the matrilineal system of inheritance was only a practice of the wealthier clans who had land to pass on, but was generalised by Gurdon and others to apply to all the Khasis.

Christianity has affected matriliney by changing the social structures and trying to break the unity of the clans (Nongbri, 2003: 250; Chacko, 1998). Apurba Baruah argues,

From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Christian Khasi-Jaintias began to attack the system on the grounds that it renders the men totally powerless. That they might have been greatly influenced by the patriarchal and patrilineal values of Christianity and the Church need not be far wrong. Reports and writings published in *U Lurshai* (newspaper) in 1914-21, and quoted in the *Meghalaya Land Reforms Commission Report*, show that there was a determined effort on the part of the educated among the newly converted Khasi Christians to undo the perceived injustices men suffered under matriliney. (2004: 16)

Others disagree, I.M. Syiem argues that initial conversion to Christianity did not appear to affect matriliney, but the more recent conversions and the form of contemporary Christianity being practiced in the Khasi Hills, especially in urban areas, have led to the questioning of matriliney (1998: 50). Others have argued that Christianity improved matriliney. Snaitang, a theologian, argues that matriliney was defended by Christianity and

⁵⁷ These are Khasi/Jaintia sub tribes.

that the religion 'sought to modify some of its unhealthy elements for a more solidified family.' (1998: 69)

It is unclear to what extent Christianity changed matriliney, especially as missionary activity in the Khasi Hills took place at the same time as other social, economic, and political upheavals. However the decline of clan power and the mass conversions to Christianity weakened two of the central features of matriliney: the creation and maintenance of clan lineages and land holdings, and the religious rites performed by the youngest daughter. The point that is most important for understanding matriliney in the contemporary context is that matriliney was able to persist despite the influences of Christianity and modernity and thus the framing of matriliney in the colonial era has persisted through the postcolonial era and has come to represent gender relations in Meghalaya.

Contesting matriliney

Agarwal argues that there is a dramatic discord between the perceptions of matriliney and women's actual experience of it (Agarwal, 1994: 146, 151). Despite this discord the conventional view of matriliney persists in both national and local contexts. However, during fieldwork it became clear that as the discord becomes more dramatic the conventional view of matriliney is being contested. The conventional view of matriliney persists in several ways: not necessarily as a form of social organisation, but as a representation of empowered women, disempowered men, and as a unique, mysterious, and rather charming form of exotica (Stirn and van Ham, 2000: 153-6). This has normalised matriliney, and embedded it in internal and external reproductions of gender relations and ethnic identity in the Khasi Hills and in the institutions of the state.

Most crucially, matriliney is still viewed, or allegedly viewed, as the empowerment of women and discrimination against men in the Khasi Hills (A. Baruah, 2004: 16). Several activists interviewed argued that this is because matriliney has been mistakenly framed as

matriarchy.⁵⁸ In other words, rather than being viewed as a form of inheritance, matriliney is framed as female dominance in all aspects of Khasi life. The mythology is a major part of Khasi identity. Yet for those facing gender-based insecurities it means that matriliney acts as a curtain behind which these insecurities continue to spread. To question matriliney is to question the identity and traditions of the Khasi as an ethnic group at a time when identity politics is heightened over the issue of migration.

As Mukhim explains, the relative equality of Khasi women compared to caste societies has helped to perpetuate the mythology,

Khasi society is a matrilineal society with a very patriarchal mindset. Sometimes you find women themselves saying ‘we are a very well placed society, we have no dowry, we have no this, no that, we have freedom to move around’, but how much freedom do they have in decision-making? We haven’t ever considered that. They think ‘if I am able to decide something within my family’ that this is good enough. But there is such a thing as a political space, there is such a thing as a social space, and we cannot even be active participants in the *dorbar*. We are automatically excluded from the executive committee of the *dorbar*. I don’t see that we are empowered, I don’t see that.⁵⁹

There are several aspects of women’s experiences with matriliney that are often overlooked. Several respondents were quick to stress is that the rights bestowed upon the youngest daughter are customary not authoritative.⁶⁰ Darilyn Syiem from the NEN points out that the youngest daughter inherits property only if there is property to inherit and that in contemporary Khasi families there is often no property to give and furthermore even if there is land the youngest daughter cannot sell it, lease it, or use it to run a business

⁵⁸ Tarun Bhartiya, Social Activist; The Freedom Project, *Personal Interview*, 19 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India; Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Social Activist, *Personal Interview*, 23 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India; Darilyn Syiem, Coordinator: North East Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

⁵⁹ Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Social Activist, *Personal Interview*, 23 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

⁶⁰ Darilyn Syiem, Coordinator: North East Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

without the consent of male family members.⁶¹ Tarun Bhartiya, from a rights advocacy collective known as the Freedom Project, argues that the inheritance of property is becoming more and more unusual as landlessness increases.⁶² Furthermore, while the youngest daughter may be less dependent on their husbands if they have inherited land, *all other* daughters are heavily dependent on their husbands for material wellbeing (Agarwal, 1994: 147). Overall, the responsibilities far outweigh their privileges; men still make the decisions and women still bear the burden of caring for the extended family (Borgohain and Laitflang, 1995: 44).

Despite emerging contestation by activists and some academics, the conventional view of matriliney persists. Furthermore, in recent years matriliney has been framed as a form of discrimination against men (Nongbri, 2003: 204-5). Some civil society actors have reacted by trying to co-opt gender issues into the ‘outsiders’ discourse and to argue for changes to matriliney and more power for Khasi males. This will be discussed in the next section.

ii) Ethnicising Gender: the ‘outsiders’ discourse

The second aspect constraining the contestation of gender-based insecurities is the domination of the ‘outsiders’ discourse in civil society. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the ‘outsiders’ discourse dominates civil society, and contesting issues that do not fit this discourse is very difficult. Civil society actors contesting gender relations face the double constraint that gender issues have no currency in the ‘outsiders’ discourse, and contesting them challenges the constructions of ethnic identity that are central to the ‘outsiders’ discourse.

Ethno-nationalist civil society actors have politicised matriliney and constructed it as a cause of identity insecurity, arguing that Khasi women who marry and/or produce offspring with non-Khasi men, and especially non-tribal men, are jeopardising the future of

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Tarun Bhartiya, Social Activist; The Freedom Project, *Personal Interview*, 19 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

the Khasi people and encouraging the influx of ‘outsiders’ into the state (S. Baruah, 2003b; Krishna, 2004b: 286; Nongbri, 2003: 207- 211, 236-257). The issue became heavily politicised when the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council attempted to codify the matrilineal system into law, to heavy opposition from civil society actors, most notably the Ka Syngkong Rympei Thymmai (SRT- Association of New Hearths) and the Khasi Students Union (KSU).

The movement to change the inheritance system of the Khasi can be traced back to the now defunct Meghalaya Tribal Youth Organisation in 1978, who called for the suspension of all inheritance to all Khasi, Jaintia and Garo women married to non-tribals (Nongbri, 2003: 209). The year is also notable, 1978 was the year the KSU was formed and a year of intense ethnic tension that culminated in ‘anti-foreigner’ riots in 1979 (A. Baruah, 2004: 2-3). As ethnic tension has built during the following decades, spearheaded by ethno-nationalist civil society actors, the issue of inheritance and the rights of women in Khasi society has been latched onto the campaign against non-Khasi migrants.

The SRT has emerged as a specialist civil society organisation solely concerned with this issue. The SRT argues that authority over the children should be given to the father, that children be included into the clan of the father, that parents should be cared for and live with their sons, but most crucially; if a daughter marries a non-Khasi then she should lose her right to property and the children will not be considered as Khasis and therefore be unable to benefit from the Sixth Schedule and the reservations for tribals (Nongbri, 2003: 210). The SRT has gained popular attention in the media within India and in other parts of the world, portrayed for example, as the world’s ‘first and only men’s emancipation movement’ (Stirn and Ham, 2000: 155).

The debate has become more prominent since the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) has discussed codifying the matrilineal system into law through the Khasi Custom of Lineage Bill (S. Baruah, 2003b: 44; Nongbri, 2003: 236). The bill was passed in 1997, the KSU and SRT managed to delay it for eight years, but the Meghalaya Governor, M. M. Jacob finally approved it in March 2005. The bill attempts to come to a

legal definition of a Khasi and specifies that a child would qualify as a Khasi if both parents are Khasi, if the mother is Khasi, or if the father is a Khasi and the father is able to raise the child as a Khasi; i.e. observing the matrilineal system, speaking Khasi language, and not adopting a personal law in violation of Khasi social law (Nongbri, 2003: 238-239).

What is important to note is that children born with a Khasi mother and a non-Khasi father have to *prove* that their child follows the same definitions. The bill contends that any Khasi can be stripped of their status and *legal rights* as a Khasi if they fail to live up to the conditions stipulated in the definition (Nongbri, 2003: 240). Furthermore, the onus of proof would be on the accused and not the accuser, and the matter would not be delegated to civilian courts but to the *dorbars*, institutions in which women are forbidden from participating (Nongbri, 2003: 240). Essentially this means that any individual can accuse another individual of not being Khasi and it is up to the accused to prove it to the *dorbar*. This appears to be open to widespread abuse. If, for example, person A was in competition with person B for a reserved job or place in university, person A could accuse person B of not being a Khasi in order to take away their right to contest the position. However, despite these details, the bill was seen as a pro-matriliny move. Civil society organisations such as the Seng Khasi, the apex cultural organisations for non-Christian Khasis, supported the bill as a way to keep matriliney alive (Nongbri, 2003: 244).

The SRT and the KSU have opposed the bill arguing that rather than codifying the traditional system, a new system should be put into place that only recognises the lineage of the children of two Khasi parents; a Khasi mother and a Khasi father. The KSU and SRT argue that the matrilineal system allows too many people to be able to pass as Khasis and receive the benefits of the Sixth Schedule. The SRT argue that if the matrilineal system is allowed to continue then the Khasi tribe will be extinct in 10 to 15 years (S. Baruah, 2003a: 48). They have argued that allowing the children of a Khasi woman and non-Khasi man to be considered Khasi and part of the *kur*, the clan, will encourage inter-ethnic marriages which will compromise the economy, land, and the identity of Khasis. When I asked the President of the Khasi Student Union about their opposition to the bill he remarked,

...if we talk about gender, the males here are being deprived, not the women folk like in other states. So here it is the reverse. Because here even our surname we (take) from our mother, it is a matrilineal society, and even all the inheritance is given if there's a female or a daughter it always passes on to her, unless there is no daughter it passes on to the son. So even the inheritance side we are being deprived.⁶³

Matriliny has been politicised as a question of cultural survival. Relationships between Khasi women and non-Khasi men have been framed as a way for 'outsiders' to gain access to land, jobs, and political positions. This campaign raises serious issues about the rights and position of women in Khasi society. It also shows the way in which civil society actors have drawn on identity insecurity and manipulated the conventional view of matriliney to legitimise their power and push their ethno-nationalist agenda.

The debate questions the property, employment, and political rights of many people in Meghalaya who think of themselves as Khasi, and makes the situation even more difficult for non-Khasis who are not covered by the Sixth Schedule. Most significantly, the opposition to the bill jeopardises a Khasi woman's right to choose her partner (Behal and Warjri, 2003: 13). In Khasi society women have generally had the freedom to choose their husbands, though the *khadduh*, youngest daughter, has had some constraints (Agarwal, 1994: 147). It is a strange proposition, the self-proclaimed protectors of Khasi values and traditions, seek to reconstruct one of the most durable aspects of the culture. As Nongbri argues, the Khasi woman's body has become a battleground for identity politics (2003: 257). Women are being claimed for the tribe, for the ethnic group. In reference to the opposition to the bill, a female Khasi student was quoted in a local magazine as saying '...they (pressure groups) are telling us not to wear this but to wear that, they are telling us not to marry 'outsiders', they are telling us that women who marry 'outsiders' are traitors, and so on.' (quoted in Chhakchhuak, 2003: 9) Chhakchhuak argues that this is not only the

⁶³ Samuel B. Jyrwa, President: Khasi Students Union, *Personal Interview*, 22 February 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

case in the Khasi Hills but in other parts of the Northeast as identity politics penetrates further into political and social spaces (2003: 9).

This raises some questions about whether the ‘outsiders’ discourse itself is gendered. While not addressing the ‘outsiders’ discourse directly, Borgohain and Laitflang have discussed the gendered nature of the KSU and other ‘pressure groups’ in Meghalaya (1995). They argue that since different forms of student activism began in Meghalaya in the early 1950s, ‘women have either been passive members of an organisation or in most cases marginalised.’ (1995: 44) In the KSU, only males can occupy the roles of President, General Secretary, Treasurer and other secretarial postings. This is not to argue that identity and gender exclude each other, indeed women have been involved in many aspects of identity politics. For example, Krishna argues that women have been used instrumentally in movements for statehood and autonomy throughout the Northeast, but on the question of participation within political structures patriarchal values dominate (2004b: 390). This translates into a lack of meaningful voice in shaping identity politics and a denial of involvement in political institutions formalised and also created through movements for autonomy. As Chhakchhuak puts it, ‘women have no say in the process (of identity politics) except as some low down minions, as mere spectators supporting one side or the other.’ (2003: 9)

iii) Access to political spaces

The third major issue constraining the contestation of gender relations is the limitations on the participation of women in political institutions. This has local and national dimensions. In the local context, women are prohibited from participating in the *dorbars* on the grounds that it is against tradition. This perspective on the role of women in society is reflected in the very small number of women in other political institutions, especially the state legislature. In Meghalaya decisions over the nature of development, access to resources and land ownership have enormous implications for women and the majority of these decisions are made in institutions in which women have little or no representation and limited access. It is ironic that in a state where many claim that women are in a position of

dominance they are not involved in village-level political structures and have a very low level of representation in both the district councils and the state parliament. At present only three seats out of 60 in the state legislature are held by women (Government of Meghalaya, 2006b). In the national context, the construction of Meghalaya and the assumptions about gender relations contained within these constructions means that initiatives taken in other parts of India to redress the gender imbalance in political institutions have not been extended to Meghalaya. In other parts of India and in some parts of the Northeast, women have been given a guaranteed reservation of one third of all seats in the Panchayati Raj institutions of village-level governance through the 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution passed in 1992. However, the 73rd amendment does not apply to the Sixth Schedule areas of Northeast India; the customary institutions of the various tribes have been maintained. Political participation in local and national contexts will be discussed in turn below.

The local context- *dorbars*

Political decision making at a local level is carried out through the village-level and 'cluster'-level *dorbars*. As discussed in Chapter 3, the *dorbars* have a powerful position in Khasi society to regulate the distribution and use of land, in the privatisation of land, in the distribution of development funds, and to resolve certain disputes. Women cannot participate in the *dorbars* and neither can non-Khasis. Nongbri argues that men prevent women from participating in the *dorbars* to consolidate their position in political institutions and control over land and assets (2003: 204). She sites a popular saying in Khasi folklore: that 'when the hen (a woman) starts to crow the world will come to an end' to demonstrate the belief that the demonstration of political participation by women 'denotes an unnatural phenomenon, since according to the law of nature it is only the cock (male) that crows.' (2003: 204)

Apurba Baruah argues that few challenge this perception.

During our study we asked the individual men and women interviewed by us whether women should be allowed to participate in the *Dorbars*. Only 32.5% of the respondents said that women

should participate in *Dorbar* affairs. A large majority (67.5%) of the respondents were unwilling to comment on this issue. None of the respondents said that women should not be allowed to participate...the weight of tradition is such that, ordinary people, both Khasis and non-Khasis, seem to be diffident about expressing their opinion on this issue. We noticed that the residents...feel obliged to conform to a particular perception of tradition so far as the *Dorbar* is concerned. The perception held of the *Dorbar* by ordinary residents, as an arm of the State [sic], in which the bureaucracy appears to be ethnocentric, might have something to do with it. (2004: 11)

The problem is one of access. Khasi women have no way to influence decisions that are being made that affect their livelihoods and the directions of development in the Khasi Hills. In addition, non-Khasi women are even further marginalised as they cannot participate because of their gender *and* their ethnicity.

The *dorbars* were dramatically altered during the colonial era, making it difficult to distinguish which aspects of the system were old and which the colonial administrators themselves constructed, often in conjunction with local power brokers. As there was no uniform political system among the Khasis when the area was colonised, the current understanding of traditional institutions is based on a 'general approximation' (Das, 1998: 34). Sharma has traced the history of the *dorbars* and argues that their current form dates back to no earlier than the beginning of the 20th century (2004: 15). She argues that the *dorbars* come from the idea of an organised and democratic Khasi polity derived from P.R.T. Gurdon's aforementioned work in the early 1900s and the subsequent uncritical adoption of these descriptions by Khasi historians (2004: 15). She goes on to argue that there is little evidence of women's exclusion from village politics before the colonial era (2004: 16). If contemporary readings of the *dorbars* date back to a constructed institution then perhaps, as Sharma argues, the exclusion of women is also a modern practice, though perhaps exclusion is based on something older or something practiced in some parts of the Khasi Hills at the turn of the century. As she points out, it is very difficult to tell due to a lack of accurate historical information. Yet even if the exclusion of women is not traditional, the perception that *dorbars* are traditional, legitimate, unchanged, and

unchanging continues to dominate local politics, and it is this perception that civil society actors must confront.

In contemporary Khasi society the *dorbars* are difficult to challenge as they have evolved into powerful institutions, much removed from their original social functions (A. Baruah, 2003: 9-11). Apurba Baruah argues that since the formation of Meghalaya, elites have been able to extend their influence and control over the *dorbars* (2004: 13). Political parties nominate candidates for election as *Rangbah Shnong* (headman) in different *dorbars*, extending their influence at the grassroots and curbing the autonomy of *dorbars* to make decisions. In the conflict between tradition and modernity it appears that the modern political institutions have been able to co-opt and reconstitute the traditional, strengthening the power of the *dorbars* and making the issue of wider participation or lack of it, even more crucial. The *dorbars* continue to assume many of the functions formerly carried out by the state, from the issuing of trade licences to the distribution of land for cultivation. Yet tradition is still invoked to restrict the participation of women.

There is a further aspect to consider relating back to identity politics and identity insecurity; to challenge the *dorbars* is to challenge contemporary Khasi identity. Khasi traditions, real and invented, are used by powerful actors that have an interest in maintaining the status quo at a local level in order to maintain and extend their political power. These actors often have a close relationship with political parties, religious institutions, non-tribal elites, and the state parliament. Civil society actors seeking to redress the gender bias in politics must confront these power structures.

The national context- the 73rd Amendment

In other parts of India there has been a shift towards re-empowering village level governance with greater responsibilities and greater levels of representation, partly derived from the recognition that the post-independence bureaucracy had become ‘impenetrable’ to most people (Mitra, 2001: 108). The 73rd Amendment formalises the Panchayati Raj institutions in a three-tier system of governance at the village level, the intermediate level

(or cluster), and the district level (Das, 1998: 32). At all three levels the Panchayatis have reservations for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and at least one-third reservation for women, and all seats are contested through direct elections. This has been hailed as the portent of a more participatory democracy at a local level and recognition that other forms of governance, resource allocation, and development have excluded different groups based on caste, ethnicity, and most significantly gender.

It is important to note that despite the reservations for women several authors have criticised the Panchayatis on gender grounds. Using the example of Panchayati Raj institutions in the state of Tamil Nadu, Anandhi argues that the state-sponsored elevation of women into politics may not be enough to combat the social resentment and disempowerment women face in the village and in the home restricting their participation in politics (2002: 453). Niranjana argues that entrenched gender roles have made it difficult for women to exercise their voice in the Panchayati Raj despite being given seats (2002). Despite these difficulties, the 73rd Amendment is the beginning of an alternative normative framework for political participation and a voice in resource management and access, both crucial steps towards wider empowerment in different societies across India.

However, the 73rd Amendment does not apply to areas covered by the Sixth Schedule including Meghalaya. The primary reason given is that these areas have traditional village level institutions and also district level institutions provided by the Sixth Schedule. In 1996 the Bhuria Committee, headed by Shri Dilip Singh Bhuria, a tribal member of parliament from the state of Madhya Pradesh, was set up to examine whether the 73rd Amendment should be applied to tribal areas in India. The committee recommended that the 73rd Amendment should *not* be applied to the Sixth Schedule areas of the Northeast as they have their own customary institutions and are largely free from gender discrimination (Nongbri, 2003: 217). A second commission formed in 2001 came to the same conclusion (National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, 2001).

Nongbri has strongly critiqued the Bhuria Committee for completely ignoring gender issues (2003: 221). She points out that ‘not once in its 30-point summary of

recommendations did the Bhuria Committee report touch on the issue of women's representation.' (2003: 221) She argues that this reflects the continuing perception that women face no subordination in tribal societies. She extends this criticism to the Sixth Schedule itself, which she sees as being 'completely silent on the question of empowerment and development for women.' (2003: 221) Despite its shortcomings the Sixth Schedule is a ground-breaking recognition of tribal rights and autonomy. It has played a crucial role in the survival of the minority tribal communities in the Northeast, and thus it has been difficult for civil society actors to criticise the Sixth Schedule without being accused of undermining tribal rights. Nongbri, herself a Khasi, has been one of the few outspoken critics of the Sixth Schedule on gender grounds, 'the valorisation of and so-called concern for the indigenous tribal institutions cannot be used as a scapegoat to deny women equal political rights.' (2003: 224). Darilyn Syiem from the North East Network makes a similar point, arguing that to demand 33% reservations in the *dorbars* invites the response that this is 'against tradition'.⁶⁴ As Krishna argues, while the rest of India appears to be moving forward on gender empowerment, the Northeast appears to be moving backward (2004b: 386). Syiem agrees, 'they are trying to take away those rights that Khasi women have...and these are the rights that other women do not have and are advocating for...So why are we going back(-wards)?'⁶⁵ Contesting the cause of gender-based insecurity in civil society faces an enormous constraint in this regard.

The decision not to extend the 73rd Amendment to Meghalaya and other Sixth Schedule areas in the Northeast shows that the construction of Meghalaya in the national contexts perpetuate certain assumptions about gender-relations, and these assumptions are used to deny changes to political structures that could empower women and increase their ability to contest the causes of insecurity discussed in the previous section. Yet as the assumptions about egalitarian gender relations and women's empowerment in Meghalaya persist at a national level, the causes of insecurity perpetuate at a local level. As discussed above, the participation of women in local political institutions, both modern and traditional, is

⁶⁴ Darilyn Syiem, Coordinator: North East Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

constrained, leaving the causes of gender-based insecurity largely unaddressed. Thus the ability of women to contest the causes of insecurity depends upon the ability of civil society actors to politicise gender issues and contest their causes outside of existing power structures; challenging these structures in the process. This will be discussed in the following section.

5.4 Contesting Power: recovering agency

The constraints on civil society actors contesting the causes of gender-based insecurities clearly demonstrate the various manifestations of power in civil society. The persistence of the ‘outsiders’ discourse shows the power of identity insecurity and the power of the actors who use identity insecurity to set the political agenda. The lack of access to modern and traditional political institutions for women shows the power of existing actors and structures that benefit from these institutions, and the power of invoking tradition to preserve the status quo. The lack of access to political spaces reveals how inequalities within the Khasi ethnic group have a major impact on the ability to participate in civil society. Thus by analysing civil society it becomes clear which actors have power, which actors have access to political spaces, and how existing inequalities affect politics.

In the previous chapter, it was shown that those suffering most from the causes of environmental insecurity were unable to contest these causes or to shape the political agenda; agency was constrained. However, in this case there has been a recovery of agency on particular aspects of gender relations. Examining the ways in which a group of civil society actors have contested the causes of domestic violence in Meghalaya gives some indication of the ways in which the power structures constraining civil society actors may be transcended. This will be discussed below and the implications will be analysed more thoroughly in the following chapter.

Rally against domestic violence

On the 28th November 2003, hundreds of women marched through Shillong marking the start of the International Fortnight Protesting Violence Against Women. The rally was organised by individual activists and several informal organisations, though several ‘approved NGOs’ did participate. The rally was organised following the publication of the National Family and Health Survey in 2002 that revealed Meghalaya had the highest rate of domestic violence in the Northeast and the second highest rate in India overall (see above). The report was a major catalyst for an increased discussion of domestic violence among civil society actors and in the media. The momentum that developed through the early months of 2003 culminated in the rally in November. The rally had three aims: to openly protest violence against women in Meghalaya, to protest the tolerance of such violence, and to demand action from the state government (Freedom Project, 2005). There are several key aspects of the march to note. First, the protestors were mostly, though not exclusively, women and they were from the different ethnic groups living in Meghalaya. Street protests are not unusual in Shillong, the KSU and the FKJGP often hold rallies and call *bandhs*, strikes, yet these rallies are mostly headed by, and largely composed of, young Khasi males from ethno-nationalist civil society organisations. The rally against domestic violence was predominantly made up of women, with some children and men also participating. Most significantly, the participants were from many of the different ethnic groups inhabiting the state. The participants were both tribal and non-tribal: Khasis and Garos marched together, joined by Bengalis, Nepalis, Tibetans, Mizos, Karbis, and others. The rally was a symbolic rejection of the ‘outsiders’ discourse.

Secondly, the march challenged the perceptions that domestic violence is a private issue, and not a public concern.⁶⁶ The protestors marched through downtown Shillong accompanied by drums, placards and signs in English, Khasi, and Hindi were held up challenging the perpetrators of violence, the society that tolerates violence, and the inaction of all three tiers of government to do anything to address violence against women.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

The lead banner drawn out along the width of the protestors at the front of the rally read 'WE PROTEST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN' (Freedom Project, 2005).

Thirdly, the protestors demanded that the state government establish a State Women's Commission to address the causes of domestic violence. They demand a state level commission to be formed as a local component of the National Commission for Women (NCW). As mentioned above, the NCW was first established in 1992 and has been constituted four times (NCW, 2005). The National Commission reports directly to the central government on the issues of economic empowerment, political empowerment, prevention of violence and discrimination against women, and the 'prevention of indecent representation of women' (NCW, 2005). By the time of the protests in November 2003, 11 years after the formation of the NCW, a state-level commission had not yet been established. The civil society actors involved in the November rally demanded the formation of a state-level Commission *in consultation* with the broad spectrum of civil society actors working on gender and 'women's issues', and with the citizens of the state (Freedom Project, 2005; Grassroots Options, 2005: 15). Without access to village-level political institutions and with limited representation in the state legislature, a state women's commission would provide an institutional space where gender issues could be discussed and recommendations to the government could be made.

The State Women's Commission

A year after the rally, the state government had still not taken any steps towards forming a state-level commission. In October 2004, the NWC visited Shillong. On the 28th October, the night before the NWC arrived, the state government set up the Meghalaya State Commission for Women composed of handpicked appointees of loyal public servants and members of 'approved NGOs' (Grassroots Options, 2005: 15). Virtually all the civil society actors involved in the march of 2003 and any actors who had been critical of the government were excluded from the commission. A reception was organised for the NWC delegates by the Meghalaya State Department of Social Welfare at the exclusive Pinewood

Hotel to welcome the NWC and announce the formation of the local commission.

Invitations were extended to NGOs only and the general public were not allowed to attend.

Several of the activists excluded from the protests were able to attend the reception by virtue of their membership of particular 'approved NGOs' or by attending as members of the media. A group of them decided to protest the secretive formation of the commission, the blatant political patronage, and cooption of gender politics by the state. The film *Resistance in 3 Acts*, made by one of the civil society organisations interviewed for this research and heavily involved in both the 2003 march and the protests at the 2004 reception, shows the reception and also includes voiceover from some of the activists who attended the meeting (Freedom Project, 2005). During fieldwork in Meghalaya I was also able to interview some of these activists.⁶⁷ From the film footage and the interviews several aspects about the reception and the process of forming the commission are important to note.

First, the act of protest at an official reception is not commonplace in Meghalaya, largely because the invitees are well screened and official protocol is usually observed. Thus the decision to protest at the reception for the NCW was a powerful statement. Several civil society actors excluded from the commission planned to boycott the reception, while others decided to stage a protest when D.D. Lapang, the then Chief Minister of Meghalaya, spoke. When Lapang stood up to give the inaugural address, a small group of around 20 activists stood up and unfolded placards reading 'transparency', 'no political appointees', and 'consult the women's movement', among others. As one of these activists points out on the film, it was very unusual to stand up during a meeting with the government, and the delegates were clearly surprised. The activists walked out the front past the panel where the NCW members sat, submitted a memorandum, and continued past Lapang and out the door. Lapang continued speaking during the whole process, though clearly distracted.

⁶⁷ Tarun Bhartiya, Social Activist; The Freedom Project, *Personal Interview*, 19 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India; Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Social Activist, *Personal Interview*, 23 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

Many others followed the activists out into the foyer, including the national and local press, thus the incident was well documented. Meanwhile Lapang's speech continued inside. On the film an excerpt from his speech is shown. He says, 'I do not know how far we should empower them (women) but I believe they will not sopsit [sic] man's power [Laughs]. At least we will still see (that) men will not lose their identity in the long haul.' (quoted in Freedom Project, 2005) The words of Lapang give a clear indication of the embedded nature of constructed gender roles and matrilineal myths in the society.

The activists formed a cordon outside the venue. When the speeches were over and Lapang came out of the hotel, he marched up to the activists to confront them. It is a remarkable passage on the film; Lapang and several ministers and bodyguards walk over to the edge of the driveway to confront the activists and the standoff takes place for several minutes. Some of it is in Khasi language, but the majority is in English. The activists accuse Lapang of using political appointees and not consulting the women's movement, he responds by claiming it was transparent. Lapang becomes frustrated and begins to contradict himself. In the end he waves off the protests and is led into the waiting car. The group of activists begin to chant 'down with the commission' as the cars pull away. In the following days, the news emerged that even the appointed vice-chair of the Commission, Theilin Phanbuh, refused to take the position, due to a lack of consultation (Grassroots Options, 2005: 15). She was quickly replaced with Hasina Kharbhih, President of the Impulse NGO Network; an organisation with close ties to the Meghalaya Government.

The Meghalaya State Commission for Women Bill was presented and passed by the Legislative Assembly during April 2005 and received the assent of the Governor on the 29th April 2005. The Commission has no autonomy and was set up as a branch of the Department of Social Welfare. As a body it has been completely co-opted into the government and wholly de-politicised. None of the activists who protested in October 2004, nor any of the organisations that took part in the rally in November 2003, have been consulted or included into the commission.

What has been gained?

At the end of *Resistance in 3 Acts*, two of the activists speak about the experience. One expresses fear about what will happen to the movement and stresses that the government will try to co-opt the participants. The other expresses a feeling of empowerment at being able to dissent so openly, something she never thought she would be able to do. She said the rally and the walkout were an attempt to ‘reclaim democracy from lost spaces’ (Freedom Project, 2005). The movement might not have been able to dismantle the commission or to force its reconstitution as anything but another bureaucratic sub-department, but it does appear to have had several gains.

First, the distinction between the public and private has been challenged. The distinctions made in the civil society literature between public and private, between state, market, and civil society distort aspects of human security, especially regarding gender. The women who rallied took the ‘private’ issue of domestic violence into the public sphere. As Howell argues, dominant conceptions of civil society have failed to understand ‘how the family shapes norms and practices in the sphere of civil society and how gendered power relations pervade the spheres of state, market, civil society, and family.’ (2006: 48) The rally not only challenged the ways gender is constructed in civil society, but it challenged the spatial limitations of civil society itself. In other words the family, the home, the private, has been put on the public agenda. The state and Khasi society have been forced to reflect and engage on the causes of gender-based insecurity. Thus a space has been opened and the potential for shifting the normative ground on gender issues has emerged.

Secondly, the protest cut across ethnic lines and the distinctions made between different ethnic communities. The ethnic divisions in civil society have been challenged by the coming together of women from different ethnic groups; both tribal and non-tribal. Civil society actors contesting the causes of gender-based insecurity have sought to politicise these causes as threats to women regardless of ethnicity. Thus domestic violence has been framed in universal terms by the movement. The role of networks of civil society actors and individuals from different ethnic backgrounds has been crucial in this process.

Thirdly, a smaller group of protestors was able to directly challenge and humiliate the Meghalaya Government and its neglect of one of the main causes of gender-based insecurity. The government obviously felt sufficiently threatened by the march of 2003 and responded by seemingly addressing the demands of the protestors without relinquishing control of the created body. While the Meghalaya State Commission for Women has gone ahead and has been formed with no consultation and no autonomy, the precedent of co-option of civil society and activist movements into the government has been challenged. Whether this will prevent other acts of co-option is unclear at this stage. However, the existing commission has been severely discredited by the actions of the protestors.

It is important to note that it is yet unclear to what degree the march challenged the power of ethno-nationalist civil society actors seeking to alter the matrilineal system, and those using tradition to continue the exclusion of women from the *dorbars*. As discussed above, the KSU and the SRT, as well as other civil society actors pursuing ethno-nationalist agendas, have tried to manipulate matrilineality to serve the ‘outsiders’ discourse. Furthermore, and somewhat contradictorily, the differences between Khasis and non-Khasis are often articulated as being differences in gender relations; non-Khasis treat their women poorly, Khasis treat their women well, thus non-Khasis need to be prevented from infiltrating Khasi society or gender relations will be transformed. As ridiculous as this argument may sound in the context of widespread gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills, the argument is a part of the ‘outsiders’ discourse. It is difficult to gauge what impact the very public challenge to this perspective has had on these groups. By the time I interviewed the President of the KSU in February 2005 they were maintaining their position on changing the matrilineal system.⁶⁸

The role of networks

Despite the lack of sustained pressure and the constant threat of co-option into the government, the events of late 2003 and late 2004 are one of the few examples of civil

⁶⁸ Samuel B. Jyrwa, President: Khasi Students Union, *Personal Interview*, 22 February 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

society being able to transcend identity, power, and inequalities in the Khasi Hills, and indeed Meghalaya as a whole, even if momentarily. The ability of civil society actors to construct insecurity beyond ethnicity has been crucial. Linkages to other civil society organisations are very important in transcending local identity politics and universalising human security issues. Civil society actors in other parts of India have campaigned on domestic violence and violence against women,⁶⁹ and while these norms had some impact on the larger organisations in Meghalaya, particularly NEN and the Freedom Project, the linkages being made in the Khasi Hills in the protests of 2003 and 2004 were being made between groups *within* the local context: between organisations from the Khasi Hills and Garo Hills, between organisations from different parts of the Khasi Hills, between urban and rural women, between tribal and non-tribal women, between residents and migrants. These linkages are far more evident among actors attempting to address gender-based insecurity than those attempting to address environmental insecurity. This will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Varshney argues that when connections between different ethnic groups are weak, ethnic violence is likely (2001: 363). He also argues that the reverse is true as well, namely interethnic networks of civic engagement ‘...build bridges and manage tensions (and) are the agents of peace.’ (2001: 363) This level of engagement makes polarisation by ethno-nationalist civil society actors far more difficult. There is no pan-tribal or pan-ethnic environmental movement in the Northeast. There is no *jhumia* movement, or peasant movement, or land reform movement. However there does appear to be a nascent women’s movement that is transcending identity insecurity and challenging the power of those actors who use identity insecurity to set the political agenda.

However, during my interview with Patricia Mukhim, who participated in the rally and the confrontation with the Chief Minister a year later, she urges caution in drawing conclusions,

⁶⁹ Many of these organisations are concentrated in particular cities or states, such as Swayam in Kolkata or Maitree in West Bengal. But there are other networks that link such organisations together across India and South Asia, such as the National Coordinating Committee for Women’s Groups.

That (the rally) seemed to cut across ethnic and social lines, but it is not sustained. I didn't see the faces of those women (in the rally) when we had that launch of the women's commission. The thing is that commission, the organisation of that meeting, was done by the officials of the government who in their limited wisdom did not even think of calling other people. Whereas that movement organised by all the women's organisations we had that foresight to universalise the whole thing.⁷⁰

Thus while the events of 2003 and 2004 opened a space for the transcendence of the constraints derived from identity, power, and inequalities in civil society, the prolongation of this space should not be taken for granted. Furthermore, the opening of this space does appear limited to domestic violence. The women's movement has not yet addressed the more complex and inter-linked issues relating to gender and insecurity in the Khasi Hills, or the use of gender by ethno-nationalist civil society actors. These civil society actors are not yet making the linkages between traditions, inequality, land, environment, decision-making, and access to resources. There does not appear to any organisational cause of this, rather it may be more related to the urban nature of the actors themselves. While there is involvement from women and men from rural areas, the movement is largely spearheaded by well-educated urban women with little experience of rural circumstances. Thus while civil society actors opened a space for marginalised voices on domestic violence, these voices were limited to a particular group.

5.5 Conclusion

Despite the multiple causes of gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills there are major constraints on the ability of civil society actors to contest these causes. Analysing these constraints reinforces many of the points made about identity, power, and inequalities made in the previous chapter. However the case study provided in this chapter is different

⁷⁰ Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Social Activist, *Personal Interview*, 23 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

to the previous chapter as some of these constraints have been contested in a far more effective manner, and transcended to a certain degree. By examining the attempts to transcend these constraints I have argued that transcendence, while difficult, can be achieved. In this case transcendence occurred when civil society challenged the power of identity insecurity and the ‘outsiders’ discourse, the attempts by the state to coopt gender issues and maintain the status quo, as well as the national and local constructions of gender relations in Meghalaya. Again these findings must be linked back to the central concerns of this thesis, thus I return to the question of what this means for civil society and human security and the relationship between the two? I will conclude this chapter by discussing each part of this question in turn.

First, as with the previous chapter, identity, power, and access have a major impact on which issues are politicised in civil society and which actors have the power to set the political agenda. Identity has several manifestations in this case. The most obvious is the way in which ethno-nationalist civil society actors have attempted to alter the matrilineal inheritance system in order to maintain vigilance against ‘outsiders’. Not only does this jeopardise women’s reproductive and marital rights, but it gives a false impression of women’s empowerment which hides many of the causes of insecurity from public view. This is compounded by the national construction of gender relations and the persistence of the conventional understandings of the matrilineal inheritance system. This has meant that the causes of gender-based insecurity in the Khasi Hills are perceived by civil society actors in other parts of India to be either non-existent, or less severe, meaning civil society actors in the local context have few avenues to contest the ways gender relations are politicised by more powerful actors. This national construction has also prevented national amendments seeking to empower women in other parts of India from being extended to Meghalaya. Yet at a local level women are barred from participating in the *dorbars* and are very poorly represented in the state legislature. Any attempts to redress the lack of access to political spaces is met with resistance from traditional power brokers and their allies in the higher levels of governance and has invited the response that such a change would be against tradition and thus a threat to the uniqueness of Khasi identity.

Thus while the national construction of gender relations in Meghalaya has isolated gender-based insecurity from actors in other parts of India and placed a renewed emphasis on contestation at a local level, tradition as invoked by powerful interests denies access to the institutions making decisions that have a major impact on the causes of gender-based insecurity at a local level. Access is further jeopardised by the cooption of gender-based activism by the state; rewarding ‘approved NGOs’ and marginalising activists critical of the government. Yet this has been challenged by civil society actors by making links between women from different ethnic groups in the local sphere to contest the high levels of domestic violence in Meghalaya.

Secondly, the existence of competing constructions of insecurity is again evident. The attempts by ethno-nationalist organisations to use identity insecurity to demand changes to the matrilineal inheritance system and to redefine where the boundaries of the Khasi ethnic group lie cause insecurity by dictating the terms of women’s reproduction and their choice of partner. Yet this also causes insecurity by diverting attention away from women’s lack of empowerment and claiming that they have too much power. In other words, the use of identity insecurity to further the ‘outsiders’ discourse causes insecurity by denying rights and also prevents other causes of insecurity from being politicised, in part because it feeds into dominant perceptions of Khasi gender relations in national and local contexts. Thus once again we can see that identity insecurity, in both its genuine sense and the ways in which it is used by ethno-nationalist civil society actors, has empowered certain actors and prevented the empowerment of others. Identity insecurity is also evident in the persistence of absolute male domination in village level political institutions, *dorbars*, and virtually absolute domination of modern political institutions; especially the state legislature. The exclusion of women from the *dorbars* is defended on the grounds that any changes to this would threaten Khasi traditions. Not only does this disregard the evolution of the *dorbars* into modern political institutions that carry out many of the functions of the state and the possibility that the *dorbars* in their present form are largely a product of the colonial era, but it perpetuates the causes of gender-based insecurity by denying women access to institutions that have control over resources and development funds, meaning that many of

the causes of gender-based insecurity are left unaddressed and unknown by the actors with the greatest capacity to alleviate them.

To challenge ethnic identity on gender grounds is to threaten the dominant discourse in civil society and existing power structures, thus leaving challengers open to the charge that they seek to undermine Khasi identity and the safeguards on Khasi traditions. As is evident in this chapter, various national actors have been unwilling to suggest changes to traditional structures on gender grounds, even when these changes have been embraced in other parts of India. While national actors have been unwilling, local actors who have sought to challenge ethnic identity have done so by universalising the causes of their insecurity as women rather than as members of particular ethnic groups and demanded the establishment of a new political body that would be able to address the causes of gender-based insecurity regardless of ethnicity and Sixth Schedule status, transcending the constraints generated from competing constructions of insecurity in the process.

Thirdly, the relationship between civil society and human security can be clearly seen in the above case study. Identity insecurity empowers certain civil society actors and institutions and grants legitimacy to particular forms of contestation. These marginalise the causes of gender-based insecurity and the actors pursuing them, placing renewed importance on the ability of these actors to transcend these constraints. Civil society actors contesting domestic violence were able to politicise the issue by making linkages between women within the local sphere, universalising the issue and circumventing identity insecurity in the process. The eventual dissipation of the movement and the cooption and attempted cooption of key members into government appointed bodies is an important adjunct to the protests. The important point to note is that agency may be severely limited, but this does not mean that agency does not exist. The importance is to locate the constraints on agency and contest assumptions that a simple causal relationship exists between civil society and human security. The implications of this will be assessed in the next chapter.

Part III- Transcendence: bringing back the political

Chapter 6- Transcendence: Re-thinking Civil Society, Re-interpreting Human Security, and Re-imagining Meghalaya

That civil society exists in a field of power- or that there are differences of power within civil society- hardly seems to cross the minds of those who wish to see the space of civil society expanded, and that of the state (and of the market, maybe) reduced. This discourse is in fact quite deliberately apolitical...

- Harriss, 2001/2004: 121

At a certain level of analysis, there is no disputing that those who experience poverty and oppression must be first among those concerned with the question of what is to be done about it. But once again the question is befuddled by a false unity. 'The people' are not an undifferentiated mass. Rich and poor, men and women, city dwellers and villagers, workers and dependants, old and young; all confront different problems and devise different strategies for dealing with them. There is no one question- 'what is to be done' - but hundreds: what should the mineworkers do, what should the abandoned old women do, what should the unemployed do, and on and on. It seems presumptuous to offer prescriptions here. The toiling miners and the abandoned old women know the tactics proper to their situation far better than any expert does. Indeed, the only general answer to the question, 'What should they do?' is: 'They are doing it!'

-Ferguson, 1990/1994: 281

Their voices are suppressed because they are not supposed to be speaking. They are being shown to- they are being told- that we represent your case because we know better; we can speak better on your behalf.

-Patricia Mukhim, activist and journalist, personal interview, 2005

6.0 Introduction

This chapter critiques existing conceptions civil society and human security and suggests ways in which the constraints on civil society may be transcended. By drawing on the conceptual framework established in Chapters 2 and 3, and the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5, I argue that civil society needs to be rethought, human security needs to be

reinterpreted, and Meghalaya needs to be re-imagined. There are several aspects to each of these, however central to all of them is a need to emphasise the political. The tendency to think of civil society as a 'sector' or a 'sphere' of pre-given and generalised norms, values, and actors depoliticises the struggles taking place within civil society. Similarly viewing human security as a mere normative counterweight to national security or a more holistic approach to human development ignores the ways in which different constructions of insecurity coexist and compete within different locations, producing new inequalities and reproducing old ones. The emancipatory potential of human security is lost when the concept is depoliticised and applied on top of existing social, economic, and political relations without taking account of the ways power constitutes these relations. Lastly, simply viewing Meghalaya and the Khasi Hills as a homogenous and coherent community or society with a single set of insecurities overlooks the inequalities within the Khasi Hills whether based on class, gender, and/or ethnicity.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section argues that civil society needs to be rethought in three ways. First, the impact of identity politics has a major influence on the functioning of civil society, especially in locations where identity politics are heightened and constitutive of political, social, and economic relations. Secondly, the existence of power relations within civil society has a major impact on who has access to political spaces and which causes of insecurity will be politicised. Thirdly, existing inequalities based on ethnicity, class, urban-rural location, and gender are not simply overcome by applying models of civil society or human security to local contexts, and often these inequalities are exacerbated.

The second section argues that human security needs to be reinterpreted in order to come to a more critical understanding of what constitutes insecurity for different people in different locations. I argue that human security needs to be reinterpreted in three ways. First, the impact of identity politics must be taken into account. In locations like the Khasi Hills where identity is insecure, insecurity whether caused by environmental degradation or gender relations for example, is experienced through identity politics. Civil society actors must challenge this if they wish to construct insecurity in other ways. Secondly, the

utility of applying a singular understanding of what constitutes insecurity to entire ethnic groups, national groups, or minority populations is questioned as the experience of insecurity will differ *within* different nations, ethnic groups, communities, and even families. Furthermore, conceptualising insecurity along ethnic lines leaves powerful actors within ethnic groups to define what constitutes insecurity. Thirdly, I argue that competing constructions of insecurity must be recognised. I point out five types of competing constructions and argue that in a limited space, these insecurities compete for attention, legitimacy, and funding.

The third section of the chapter calls for a re-imagining of Meghalaya. The majority of the literature on Meghalaya and the Northeast region depends upon static categories constructed through colonial ethnography and postcolonial state formation, with preconceived understandings of what constitutes insecurity. I argue that these categories need to be deconstructed, and that agency needs to be recognised beyond the constructions of the region in the Indian national context, and the ways these constructions have been utilised within the region itself.

The fourth section discusses transcendence. By examining the contestation of domestic violence by the nascent women's movement in the Khasi Hills, and the formation of linkages between different ethnic groups, I discuss the circumstances under which transcendence may take place. I argue that the mere existence of civil society actors pursuing human security will not guarantee transcendence, but that transcendence will come from challenging the power relations that underpin the dominant material and ideational structures in a particular location. The final section concludes by arguing that civil society and human security have a constitutive relationship that is complex, contextual, and fundamentally political, and unless this is understood then transcendence will not be possible.

6.1 Re-imagining Civil Society

Civil society needs to be subject to a critical approach as discussed in Chapter 2 in order to recognise constraints on political participation and the potential to transcend these constraints. This section draws heavily on the case studies discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 to identify the three main factors constraining civil society in the Khasi Hills. The first is the influence of identity politics in enabling and disabling participation in civil society and determining which issues are politicised. The second is the influence of power on participation in civil society. The third is the importance of contextualising the study of civil society by taking into account inequalities within particular locations. I will argue that a thorough examination of the empirical context enables the constraints on civil society to be understood and the potential for transcendence to be recognised.

Identity

In locations of heightened identity insecurity, the choices for civil society actors will be limited by identity politics. Identity politics can influence whether or not individuals or groups will participate in civil society, yet it may also prevent individuals and groups from participating. Similarly identity politics may enable certain issues to be politicised in civil society yet may marginalise others. The locations of identity insecurity are not fixed and can emerge in various locations depending on a range of economic, political, and social factors. As discussed in previous chapters, there are two main aspects to identity insecurity in the Khasi Hills, the political power of identity and its use to increase the power of particular actors, and the genuine sense of insecurity derived from the status of the Khasi as a national minority and the location of the Khasi Hills close to countries with large populations. These will be discussed in turn.

There are several factors that make ethnicity politically powerful in Meghalaya, and these can be explained using the work of Anthony Smith. According to Smith, there are three aspects that contribute to the political power of ethnicity: (i) the ‘uneven distribution’ of ethno-history, (ii) the prevalence of myths of ethnic destiny, and (iii) the ‘nature and

location' of territorial attachments (1999: 253). Smith's first and third aspects are particularly relevant in the Khasi Hills. The ethno-histories of the peoples of North India, Bengal, and Assam provide a deep resource that has been continually drawn upon in political and social life, making these communities 'unlikely to disappear' (1999: 265). By contrast the cultural and ethno-historical resources of the Khasi 'nation' have been disjointed and in some cases severed. Colonial ethnography and administration, state formation, and ethno-nationalist movements have shaped Khasi identity narratives and these narratives construct widely accepted mythologies that emphasise the distinctiveness between 'hill' and 'plains' peoples, between 'tribal' and 'non-tribal' peoples, and between Khasis and non-Khasis.

Smith's third aspect, that ancestral homelands are not isolated from other deep resources, is apparent in Meghalaya. In the Khasi Hills, the hills themselves are bound up in histories and myths of Khasi creation and migration. Furthermore, many of the internalised aspects of colonial classification have become attached to the territory, such as the 'good natured' or naïve 'hill tribal' compared to the manipulative and dishonest plains 'Indian'. Thus the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are defined geographically, by the hills, despite the existence of Khasi communities in the surrounding plains areas. The Khasi form of identity politics is defensive, in other words there is little discussion of expanding Khasi lands, and the focus is on protecting the lands from the numerically superior and culturally hegemonic communities that surround them. Due to population pressures and the growth of non-Khasi populations in surrounding states, this form of identity is emphasised for political gain by ethno-nationalist organisations and mainstream political parties.

Secondly, the prevalence of identity is also derived from a genuine sense of identity insecurity amongst Khasi people. As discussed in previous chapters, ethno-nationalism has become more pervasive since the formation of Meghalaya. This has been referred to as the 'outsiders' discourse throughout the preceding chapters and this affects the agency of civil society actors. Both historical narratives of identity and contemporary notions of otherness influence civil society, yet often the distinctions between the two are unclear as they feed into each other and are used selectively as part of the same discourse by various actors.

An aspect frequently ignored in the Khasi Hills is the almost complete exclusion of non-Khasis from civil society. When ethnic identity has a major influence in drawing people into participation in civil society, people of different ethnicities are excluded *because* of their ethnicity, especially if they are part of communities designated as a threat to the identity of the majority group. Thus many of these groups experience heightened insecurity because of their ethnicity. However, as will be discussed below, these insecurities are experienced by non-Khasis differently based on class, gender, and location. This was challenged to a degree by the march against domestic violence discussed in Chapter 5, yet in a general sense, meaningful participation in civil society in the Khasi Hills is determined by ethnicity.

Similarly, identity politics can facilitate the entry of a particular issue into civil society, yet it can also deny other issues a place in civil society, and has the potential to marginalise and discredit certain issues. There are obvious examples; the uranium mine has been politicised because of the threat of ‘outsiders’, as have the attempts to alter the matrilineal inheritance system. These issues were designated as important because they involved possible threats to Khasi identity. Other issues that may cause insecurity, such as environmental degradation, and the privatisation of land, have largely been excluded from the political agenda as they contain very few identity elements.

Furthermore, identity can reconstitute an issue along ethnic lines. Again this is demonstrated by the debate over the uranium mine. The original opposition came from the people in the proposed mining area, yet as the campaign has escalated the voices from the area have become marginalised in the debate, except at times when they are politically useful, and the debate has come to reflect identity insecurity. The original concerns over land loss, the effects of open-pit mining, and environmental damage have been marginalised as the issue has become reconstituted as a question of cultural survival versus a question of economic gain through development.

This is not to say that identity will be the *only* reason why groups and individuals participate in civil society or the only factor that influences whether an issue will be politicised. In some locations it may have very little influence at all. Other factors may be far more influential, such as material shortage, state neglect, and the unjust actions of authorities. However, in places where ethnic groups, nationalities, tribal and kin groups, and migrants have conflicting social and political relationships, identity will have a major influence. Identity enables agency in many senses by creating a shared sense of insecurity that needs addressing, yet it also constrains agency. In other words, identity can ‘get people involved’ in civil society by appealing to a shared sense of purpose or responsibility but at the same time it can also deny involvement to those without a shared sense of identity, and to those seeking to address issues that contest the dominant uses of identity.

For example, in the fight against the uranium mine discussed in Chapter 4, the KSU and other mine opponents have been able to draw support from people living far from the affected area by politicising the mine as a question of survival for the Khasi people. Yet these same civil society actors have not been interested in contesting other causes of insecurity such as the changes to customary land ownership for example, or coal mining, both of which are difficult to politicise as identity issues as those who benefit most from the privatisation of land and from coal mining are not ‘outsiders’ but wealthy tribal landowners. Thus those individuals and groups facing insecurity from land privatisation and the environmental degradation caused by coal mining are left with a diminished space in which to contest the causes of their insecurity and it is difficult for them to participate in anything but the dominant modes of contestation.

Power

Power relationships within civil society in a particular context must be understood, and it needs to be recognised that power is constitutive of relations within civil society, not merely a peripheral consideration. There are three main ways in which power manifests itself in civil society in the Khasi Hills. The first is the role of power in determining which issues come to dominate civil society in a given location, i.e. the dominant discourses of

civil society. The second is the role of power in influencing which actors have access to civil society, in other words, determining which groups and individuals have a voice. The third is the power derived from those civil society actors with close relations to the state, the district councils, and the *dorbars*. These actors have access to authorities and institutions that can bring about change in various ways. These three are constitutive: discourse determines access, and access enables particular actors to shape political discourse. If a particular issue is outside the dominant discourse(s) then it is difficult for groups and individuals to voice their insecurity. If individuals and groups are unable to speak the language of the dominant discourse(s) then it is difficult to gain access to civil society. This has a major impact on the internal dynamics of civil society in the Khasi Hills, as actors with access have a far greater influence in shaping which insecurities matter and which will be addressed, further marginalising those with limited access or without access altogether.

In the Khasi Hills this can be seen most clearly in the influence of the ‘outsiders’ discourse on environmental and gender insecurity. This has been discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5 and will not be repeated at length here. Yet power also manifests itself in access to material resources. I have taken an example from fieldwork in the Khasi Hills to illustrate this. Though this example does not fit into the primary case studies on environmental and gender insecurity, I have used this example as it illustrates how external actors, i.e. actors from outside local civil society, can shape access to civil society in the Khasi Hills by providing resources. This has a further influence on which issues are politicised and further marginalises actors contesting issues that have no currency in either the ‘outsiders’ discourse, or the discourses propagated by transnational networks. The role of power inequalities in the local space has been discussed in detail in the previous chapters and the following example aims to complement the points made by adding a further spatial dimension.

In early 2004 I attended a workshop for NGOs in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya. There were members from several small NGOs in attendance, and many of them were from rural areas. The keynote speaker was giving advice on how best to start development

organisations. A few questions were raised about lack of funding and difficulties getting help to start organisations and the speaker responded by advising the audience to start HIV/AIDS organisations because foreign donors were very interested in HIV/AIDS in India and they had a better chance of getting money that way. A year later in April 2005, the centre of Shillong was turned over to the organisers of a three-day AIDS awareness campaign. The event was attended by a selection of Ministers, several Indian film stars, and distinguished patrons. The event was organised by the Impulse NGO Network, a well established, government approved NGO, and the Assam Rifles Wives Welfare Association, an organisation attached to the local branch of the Assam Rifles paramilitary force.⁷¹ The event attracted government sponsorship, sponsorship from foreign aid organisations and foreign government aid providers, corporate sponsorship from airlines, car manufacturers, and media outlets.

The state-run National AIDS Control Organisation records eight cases of AIDS in Meghalaya (NACO, 2005). Even allowing for a lack of reporting and the possibility of much higher numbers of people infected with HIV and not full-blown AIDS, the level of interest in HIV/AIDS is interesting when compared to the chronic levels of rural poverty in the Khasi Hills. As discussed in earlier chapters, Meghalaya is one of India's poorest states. In terms of health, only 36.16% of households have safe drinking water, only 26.61% have access to toilet facilities, and over 42% of children under-2 years old are not vaccinated (Planning Commission, 2001: 171, 173, 254).

Just after the awareness campaign in Shillong concluded I spent two weeks with members of a tiny, six-member volunteer development organisation in the West Khasi Hills District.

⁷¹ The Assam Rifles paramilitary force has been fighting insurgency movements in the Northeast of India for two decades. It is ironic, and also disturbing that members of the Assam Rifles have been accused of hundreds of rapes and murders in the Northeast during counter-insurgency operations, most notably a case that caused widespread civil unrest in Manipur in 2004. Most of these go unpunished due to the constitutional protection given to the armed forces in India's Northeast under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. In this case the Assam Rifles Wives Association has used its funds to promote sexual responsibility. See S. Baruah, (1999, 2005); Hazarika, (1995); McDuire-Ra, (2005).

The organisation is based in Nong Kulang, a village deep in rural Meghalaya. The District suffers from poor infrastructure, insurgency and counter-insurgency, large-scale out migration, low health and education indicators – especially malaria and infant mortality, high levels of erosion and deforestation, and problems with soil and water pollution from uncontrolled and unmonitored coal mining. There are two health clinics in this part of Meghalaya, one in Nong Kulang itself and another in Ranikor, about six hours away. When I visited the clinic in Nong Kulang the door fell off its hinges, and five goats and a wild pig ran out of the empty building. The clinic in Ranikor, though it had cement walls and a fresh coat of paint, only had a doctor on Mondays. Villagers must travel to Shillong for medical help; a two-hour walk and then a twelve-hour bus ride away. During my time in this region locals told me what I gathered were typical stories of family members not making it to the bus departure point by foot or dying on the bus to Shillong.

This shows the ability of a certain group of actors to politicise certain health issues and for these to come to represent health in a singular way. This is not to suggest that these organisations set out to deny other actors a voice. However, some organisations are better equipped to respond to the offerings of national and international donors and thus determine the issues that *matter*. There is much discussion that India, and the Northeast in particular due to its location, is facing an impending HIV/AIDS crisis, and indeed there appears to be cause for concern given the location of the region in and around international borderlands, the close proximity to narcotic production sites, and the ongoing insurgencies in the region.⁷² Impulse NGO Network, originally an organisation working with disaffected youth, has become heavily involved in HIV/AIDS awareness and education in the state.⁷³ The organisation's President has spoken in several countries and receives international guests from foreign embassies and international NGOs at the Impulse office

⁷² While rates in Meghalaya are low, the figures for the Northeast are bolstered by high levels of infection among intravenous drug users in Manipur and Nagaland, commonly perceived to be a result of their location on the Myanmar border along opium trafficking routes.

⁷³ Hasina Kharbhih, President; Impulse NGO Network, *Personal Interview*, 15 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

in Shillong.⁷⁴ The organisation has received funding from the US Government through USAID, various state government departments including the Social Welfare Department, the State Council for Science Technology and the Environment, the Ministry of Textiles, transnational NGOs like Save the Children Fund, and UN bodies such as UNICEF and UNIFEM (Impulse NGO Network, 2003: 68-69).

This is not to undervalue the work that organisations like Impulse are doing for HIV/AIDS, however the ability to attract funding by focussing on particular issues and the need for government ‘approval’ restricts the ability of smaller, localised, and poorly connected organisations to politicise other health issues, especially if those issues focus on state neglect. Impulse is not necessarily to blame for this situation, but it should be noted that the dominance of a particular issue, especially one with the powerful currency embedded in HIV/AIDS makes it difficult for other civil society actors to politicise other health issues.

This is very frustrating for civil society actors from rural areas and working in rural areas. Journalist and former consultant to the Planning Department, Patricia Mukhim, argues that many civil society organisations are into HIV/AIDS for the money, and that organisations themselves have become bigger than the issue.⁷⁵ Mukhim argues that diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, and polio which affect much greater numbers of people in Meghalaya get very little attention, especially when the majority of sufferers are in rural areas. Social activist Tarun Bhartiya from the rights advocacy collective The Freedom Project, sees this as the extension of market values to civil society.⁷⁶ For Bhartiya, the prominence of HIV/AIDS shows that civil society has become about accessing funds not about addressing needs. While urban-based NGOs access transnational networks of advocacy and donors,

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Social Activist, *Personal Interview*, 23 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

⁷⁶ Tarun Bhartiya, Social Activist; The Freedom Project, *Personal Interview*, 19 April 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India

grassroots organisations write letters to the Block Development Officer asking someone to visit rural areas to give basic health care.

In the context of widespread state neglect, the ability to speak the language of civil society is a strong determinant in being able to access broader networks of civil society. There are two aspects to this, language is important for forums and for using the media, but it is also important to speak the language of international organisations in order to gain funding and support. Hannigan (1995) uses the phrase ‘issue entrepreneurs’ to describe those able to speak the language that captures funds and sets the agenda in public debate. In the Khasi Hills, the ‘issue entrepreneurs’ are usually young Khasis from wealthy backgrounds, some of whom may have gone overseas for their education. They speak the language of donor agencies, they are adept at writing proposals and producing reports, and they draw attention to the issues that they know will grant them funding. In this way, civil society reflects inequalities in material resources and further marginalises the voices of those suffering from problems with poor market value. Local power inequalities can be exacerbated by the structures of funding in transnational civil society as well as by local identity politics. These issue entrepreneurs come to represent the entire Khasi ethnic group, and in some cases, the entire population of the Khasi Hills.

If we consider this example in the light of the previous two chapters we begin to see the various ways in which power inequalities *within* civil society impact upon which issues are politicised and which actors are able to contest these issues. In the Khasi Hills this divide appears to be along class, ethnic, and urban/rural lines, though this is complicated by the almost constant migration between urban and rural areas and the existence of a marginalised under-class in urban areas made up of both Khasis and non-Khasis, the power of rural elites in the *dorbars*, and the existence of non-Khasis in the state administration. If this is considered in the context of the pressures the state places on civil society in the Khasi Hills in the form of registration, the banning of certain organisations, and the cooption of organisations into close working relationships and dependent relationships with the state, then the extent of the constraints on civil society can begin to be envisaged. In many cases civil society is understood as an oppositional sphere to the state, in other

words the state determines the degree of autonomy civil society will have because it controls the distribution of resources and legal and coercive mechanisms. Yet in order to come to a more complex and critical understanding of civil society, we must identify the power relations beyond the state contained within civil society itself. To return to the central argument presented in Chapter 2, the mere existence of civil society does not guarantee human security, nor will it guarantee that the diverse causes of insecurity will even be 'seen', let alone addressed.

Several authors have discussed the power imbalances between civil society actors in the global North and actors in the global South when part of transnational networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). However it is vital to understand the power inequalities between civil society actors in different nation-states, between different regions within nation-states, within these regions, and within local spaces. Certain actors in the local context may be able to access wider networks of civil society actors due to their financial resources, the issues they address, the language abilities of their members, their location (urban/rural), their ethnicity, and/or their social connections. There are no clear boundaries between these different spatial zones, nor are linkages necessarily formed in a linear manner. In other words, linkages do not need to progress by 'steps' from local to regional to national to transnational. Certain actors may form linkages with other actors in non-linear ways, for example between actors in local spaces and actors in other parts of the world. However it is very difficult for actors unable to access civil society at a local level to access wider civil society networks. This is demonstrated in Chapter 4; those suffering most from environmental degradation and the changes to land ownership in the Khasi Hills are limited in their ability to voice their insecurity, if they can, they can only voice it in a specific way.

Contextualising inequalities

Civil society needs to be studied in context. The location, whether local, regional, and possibly national, in which civil society actors are situated must be taken into consideration, while depictions of civil society having particular characteristics and

features at a global, hemispheric (North-South), or regional level must be treated with caution. The case studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5 are illustrative on this point. Any analysis of civil society actors in the Khasi Hills that uses *only* ‘Non-Western civil society’, or ‘Asian civil society’, or ‘South Asian civil society’, and describes any of these as having intrinsic characteristics differentiating actors in this part of the world from ‘European civil society’ or ‘North American civil society’, will be severely limited. It is difficult to imagine what insights these models of civil society could provide to Meghalaya or any other local context. However, they may provide an outer layer of contextual clarity if studied in conjunction with more specific local factors.

Caution must also be taken when analysing civil society at a national level. Again, the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 would not be advanced very far by using ‘Indian civil society’ as a starting point. The politics around civil society vary in different parts of India whether regionally, in different states, or locally. As discussed in Chapter 2, the limitations on civil society actors will be different in different sub-national contexts. However the role of the state does bring some coherence to national analyses, yet the state will be experienced in different ways in different locations. Thus the local context is vital to understanding civil society and the ability of civil society actors to provide human security, as the local context is the physical space where civil society actors exist. Protest, lobbying, and contestation, shape and reshape politics at different levels, but those affected and those participating *live* somewhere; the local sphere is still where participants live, work, and organise. They have a location with political, social, and economic conditions, thus different locations may experience civil society differently.

Yet the term local can be vague. What are the boundaries of the local? In the present study, does local refer to village level political, social, and economic relationships? District level? State level? Or are the boundaries of the local determined by where the different ethnic or linguistic groups begin and end? Is the local merely the opposite of the global or transnational? Strictly delineating boundaries as to where the local begins and ends is difficult and perhaps undesirable. Berry has argued that clearly defining the limits of the local in India is very difficult due to the contradictory processes of migration, trade,

pilgrimage, military service, marriage, in conjunction with national education through schools, national and international themes through television, and the political influences of party politics and international agencies (2003: 76). Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan argue that equating the local merely as the binary opposite of the global or conflating the local with community ‘requires that internal differences be glossed over and erased.’ (2001: 12) Thus a more complex understanding of ‘the local’ needs to be considered.

The local must be conceptualised with other spaces in mind (Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal, 2003: 9). Thus civil society needs to be examined *across* different spaces. Focussing *only* on the village, the district, the regional, the national, and the global is restrictive. It imagines boundaries that may not exist. In the case of the Khasi Hills, the Indian Government, the regional institutions in the Northeast (including the military), the Meghalaya Government, the district councils, and the *dorbars*, all have different enabling and constraining relationships with civil society actors. These layers of governance influence the agency of the civil society actors themselves, which actors can access civil society, and the ability of certain actors to politicise different issues. Thus the dynamics of civil society evolve at different levels.

Yet a strictly spatial definition of the local is also problematic. In the Khasi Hills, ‘the local’ can mean different things to different groups and individuals, to different political and cultural institutions, different media, different civil society actors, and these meanings are fluid, taking on different forms at different times. For example, the Langrin War-San Lyngdoh Development Organisation, the group of landowners and headmen from the proposed uranium mine area who support the mine and its employment and development potential, ‘the local’ refers to those people living in the mine site. For the Khasi Student Union, ‘the local’ has been constructed as *all* Khasis, thus the uranium mine threatens the ethnic group, and not just those living in its proximity. The moves to alter the matrilineal inheritance system of the Khasi has conceptualised ‘the local’ as women of a particular ethnicity. Yet the women’s movement has challenged the boundaries of ‘the local’ and recast the local in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious sense. In all of these

examples, the local is the site where people experience insecurity, and these different experiences are vital for understanding the dynamics of civil society.

6.2 Re-interpreting Human Security

Human security is an ambitious normative project that rebukes militarism and traditional conceptions of insecurity while simultaneously incorporating social justice and rights in a holistic conception of interlinked human development goals with the individual, or a group of individuals, but not the state, as the referent object. Despite the breadth of the concept, it is useful for empirical study as it is premised on the condition that insecurity cannot be the same for everyone, everywhere. In this sense it provides a useful alternative to development, as it holds the possibility for local, regional, and sub-regional versions of insecurity and security rather than a (mostly) singular discourse to be embraced or opposed. If different conceptions of what constitutes insecurity are to be realised then the different groups experiencing the condition of insecurity need to be able to access civil society in some way to contest the causes and make demands on capable actors, both state and non-state, to implement measures to ease insecurity. Thus access to civil society is crucial, as discussed above. However, it is also crucial to come to a more critical understanding of what constitutes insecurity and for whom. I will discuss three of the limitations in contemporary understandings of how human security can be achieved: the neglect of identity in shaping human security preferences, the tendency to view insecurities as corresponding neatly with ethnicity or location, and the existence of competing constructions of insecurity.

Insecurity and identity

Identity impedes the search for human security by civil society actors and, as argued throughout the preceding chapters, identity shapes dominant discourses in the Khasi Hills. Identity is insecure in the Khasi Hills, both in terms of the genuine sense of insecurity and the political uses of this insecurity. Insecurity is derived from the relative size of the Khasi ethnic group when compared to the size of surrounding ethnic groups, the porous

boundaries of Khasi ethnicity, the location of the Khasi Hills on the periphery of India and in the Northeast borderlands, the emphasis on difference between the Khasi and ‘outsiders’, both tribal and non-tribal. However, while there are several key aspects to Khasi identity such as hill tribe status, the matrilineal inheritance system, communal land ownership, and *dorbars*, identity takes different forms in different parts of the Khasi Hills and within different locations according to linguistic variations, religious beliefs, folklore, land ownership variations, local power structures, production techniques, education levels, and degrees of urban migration and return.

During fieldwork, and especially from conversations with experts and custodians of Khasi culture in different regions, it became clear that identity has multiple fissures. These fissures become operational at certain times depending on the social, political or economic issue being contested. Conversely, certain issues will cross the fissures within and between different Khasi communities and individuals. The scale of the issue may have some relevance here, but it appears that it is the nature of the issue itself that is most important. Thus issues like the influx of ‘outsiders’ generally cross these fissures, while local issues, especially distributional issues, often emphasise these fissures. Thus the unity of the Khasi peoples is most effectively mobilised through appeals to one form of identity as an ethnic, or tribal, whole. Hence the political gain from emphasising the ‘outsiders’ discourse is that it mobilises Khasis as one group. The insecurity of Khasi identity gives identity political urgency, currency, and legitimacy, increasing the power of ethno-nationalist civil society actors. Thus the political power gained from the ‘outsiders’ discourse is significant, hence its primacy in the Khasi Hills. It empowers certain actors, and is reproduced by these actors to maintain and increase their political power.

Yet the ‘outsiders’ discourse can only partially explain insecurity in the Khasi Hills and there is a discord between the fear of ‘outsiders’ and the major causes of insecurity. Khasis are a national minority yet they are the overwhelming majority in the Khasi Hills. The Sixth Schedule protects land rights, provides employment and educational reservations, and recognises the authority of district level institutions and village level *dorbars*. In both the Khasi Hills and Garo Hills of Meghalaya non-tribals are minorities with limited rights.

Yet wealthy non-tribals are able to circumvent constitutional restrictions with the help of Khasi and Garo elites. Poor migrants are severely marginalised in the Khasi Hills, and increasingly poor tribals are joining them in a growing underclass. Despite the assurances offered to Khasi people through the Sixth Schedule and the formation of Meghalaya, identity insecurity persists, and by most accounts has increased as the advantages bestowed upon Khasi people have also increased. The recent attempt by both Khasi and Garo ethno-nationalist groups to pursue separate states by dividing Meghalaya, as discussed in Chapter 4, is another example of this. Both ethnic groups are majorities in their districts of Meghalaya, both are under the Sixth Schedule, both are 'tribal', thus both have control over land, resources, and reservations, but as identity insecurity has been further politicised and the power of ethno-nationalist actors have grown, Garos have increasingly become the target of Khasi identity politics and vice-versa.

A reinterpreted understanding of insecurity must address this. The insecurity of identity can have a catalytic effect as other insecurities are channelled through identity politics. The examples of environmental insecurity and gender-based insecurity are illustrative of this argument. In these cases environmental degradation is only addressed when it can be used against those threatening identity, and marriage and inheritance laws are contested in order to stop the boundaries of the ethnic group being stretched. It is here that the constitutive relationship between civil society and insecurity can clearly be seen. The insecurity of identity has an impact on civil society by limiting the ability of actors to contest insecurity outside this discourse. As civil society actors have a much more reduced ability to contest causes of insecurity that have little to do with identity, the causes of insecurity from environmental degradation and gender relations, among others, continue to be experienced by those without voice and remain unseen from actors with the capacity to address them, both within the Khasi Hills and externally. The persistence of identity insecurity ensures that proponents of the 'outsiders' discourse will continue to have the power to set the political agenda.

But will this always be the case? Does identity insecurity hold some pre-given precedence over other types of insecurity? There are several possible answers. First, one could argue

that yes, identity will always take priority over other forms of insecurity because it is more politically salient, emotive, and intrinsic. Yet this position assumes a pre-given and unchanging relationship between identity insecurity and other forms of insecurity, and also assumes that ethnic identity will always matter to individuals and groups. This position echoes the way identity, ethnicity, and nationality are often analysed as unwavering, primordial, and irrational resources in ethnic conflict (Barnett, 1999; Mueller, 2000). This instrumentalist approach ignores the complex political, social, and economic relations that exist in contexts where identity emerges as a dominant political discourse. As Smith argues, the saliency of ethnicity depends upon the ways in which it is mobilised and the political environment in a particular context (1999: 187-224).

The second possibility is that identity will take precedence over other forms of insecurity in locations where ethnic tension is high and ongoing, locations such as Northeast India in general, or the Khasi Hills more specifically. While this may help to account for the ongoing sense of insecurity derived from the geographic circumstances of the Khasi people, it is problematic as it ignores the role of politics in making identity insecure in these locations. This is not to argue that it is the actions of various actors alone that create ethnic tension, but that geographically locating sites of ethnic tension ignores that these sites may have periods of tension between ethnic groups, but also periods of relative peace and cooperation. The Khasi Hills is an interesting example. Most respondents and acquaintances over the age of 40 with whom I spent time or conducted interviews, discussed the peaceful and amicable relations between Khasis and other ethnic communities in the Khasi Hills before 1979 (see also A. Baruah, 2004: 1). It appears that there have been periods of peace and periods of conflict between groups, but these are not set or fixed. Thus an approach that focuses on particular locations being 'hot-spots' for ethnic conflict can ignore the factors that influence the fluctuations between periods of tension and periods of peace, and the various degrees in between.

A third possible answer is that identity insecurity will take precedence over other forms of insecurity in certain situations at certain times. This is a more ambiguous answer but a more satisfactory one that takes into account the dynamics of identity politics. In locations

like the Khasi Hills identity has constant aspects due to the location of the area and the politicisation of migration. Yet the severity of identity insecurity fluctuates along with other political issues with both internal and external origins. Thus the salience of identity insecurity fluctuates over and above the constant identity insecurity that comes from being a national minority, and different social forces and civil society actors drive these fluctuations at different times.

Yet the salience of identity insecurity may also have external influences such as structural economic change, shifts in agricultural policy, or natural disasters, which may aggravate insecurities and lead to blame being attributed to 'outsiders'. This suggests that at times when identity insecurity is particularly prominent, other causes of insecurity will be heavily influenced by identity. At other times, other causes of insecurity may have a greater prospect of being detached from identity. Recognising the potential of certain actors in civil society to *create* the conditions where insecurity can be detached from identity is crucial, and while difficult it is not impossible, as the nascent women's movement in the Khasi Hills indicates.

The final approach to the question is to reverse the proposition and ask whether other causes of insecurity can subjugate identity insecurity. This may indeed be possible, though in the cases studied power relationships work in the opposite direction. However, there are examples from other locations in which identity insecurity has been overcome or reduced by cooperation between and across ethnic boundaries. Varshney (2001) discusses the building of ties in civil society between Muslim and Hindu communities in different locations in India and how these have overcome violence and mistrust propagated by local politicians and the media. Environmental and gender issues invite this possibility because of the opportunity they present to universalise insecurity beyond ethno-centric or state-centric frameworks. Yet the impact of identity must still be acknowledged whether it is seen as a disruptive force to realising human security or something that can be overcome; either way identity must be addressed rather than ignored.

Overcoming binaries

The second major aspect of human security that needs to be reinterpreted is a more critical assessment of the ability of human security to overcome existing divisions within a particular location. The tendency to view human security as the opposite of (or everything other than) national security implies a unity in the insecurities faced across an entire population, i.e. shared human insecurities. In effect, if human security is posited as an alternative to national security then the perception is that the insecurity of the 'humans' in question can simply be ascertained according to their circumstances, most commonly at a national level; i.e. the security of the Indian people as opposed to the Indian state, or of 'tribal people' or 'the poor' as opposed to the entire Indian population. Human security is an appeal to view security and insecurity beyond nationalist frames. It is also an attempt to recognise the impact of national security discourse on the lives of people living within states, especially if their security is threatened by the actions of the state. This perspective has particular relevance when discussing minorities. The national security of the state may involve the explicit denial of human security to minority groups. In Northeast India this is clearly evident in the conflicts between the military and civilians in insurgent areas. In the name of national security, the Indian armed forces are protected by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which allows the military and paramilitary judicial immunity in the Northeast region. In other circumstances the insecurity of minorities may come from their exclusion from the institutions of governance, the nature of their inclusion into the institutions of governance, the denial of particular cultural, linguistic, and political rights, and structured economic disadvantages. This approach allows us to look at where insecurity occurs beyond statist frameworks and is one of the main accomplishments of human security in an analytical sense. However in looking beyond statist frameworks we also need to be aware of the need to look beyond ethnic frameworks and hastily conceived state-ethnic group or state-minority group binaries.

There are two main problems with this. First, this creates a largely false binary between the state and the citizens of states. This is unhelpful as insecurities manifest themselves along various fissures *within* different nations, ethnic groups, communities, and even families. Secondly, to speak of the 'insecurity of the Khasi people' as a whole, or the 'insecurity of

tribal people’, leaves the shaping of insecurity to the powerful actors within civil society and thus perpetuates existing inequalities and divisions within the ethnic group and leaves the insecurities derived from these divisions unnoticed and unaddressed.

While an ethnic group or nationality as a whole may share a particular sense of insecurity derived from specific factors, there will be different experiences of insecurity within a particular ethnic group. Different groups and individuals depending on their location, resources, and capabilities will experience the impacts of insecurity differently. The case studies discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 are illustrative of this multiplicity. Environmental degradation causes insecurity for some groups; especially those facing land degradation and erosion problems, yet for other groups, the destruction of the environment and the privatisation of common land have increased their economic security. This is not to suggest that multiple insecurities are involved in some kind of zero-sum relationship, i.e. insecurity for one group means security for another. However, existing divisions, based on class, gender, and ethnicity fragment the notions that a set of insecurities are applicable to an entire ethnic group or minority group. There may be insecurities that are felt by a particular ethnic or minority group as a whole, but we must also recognise the various insecurities existing within these groups. Otherwise we risk missing the complexities and gravity of insecurities derived from social, political, and economic relationships and conflicts in various locations.

A further aspect to note is that generally more than one ethnic group lives in a particular location, often experiencing insecurity from the same structural, social, and institutional factors. Different ethnic groups may experience this insecurity differently, and certain structures, norms, and institutions may privilege some ethnic groups over others, yet they may also privilege some groups on class or gender lines. Insecurity may affect people of different ethnicities differently, but may also affect people of different ethnicities *similarly*; the example of the movement against domestic violence in Chapter 4 illustrates this point. Gender-based violence affects women in the Khasi Hills from a range of different ethnic groups, religious groups, and class groups. Thus insecurity conceived along ethnic lines,

while an improvement on statist understandings of insecurity, can be limiting. This will be discussed further below.

Competing insecurities

Human security requires consideration of competing constructions of insecurity within a particular spatial location. This is not just a matter of looking at competing constructions of national insecurity and human insecurity; but of looking at how different constructions of insecurity reflect different interests, identities, narratives, and discourses within civil society. There are less-studied and less-obvious competing constructions of insecurity within and across societies and local and regional levels. I have divided these into five types. First, there are competing insecurities within the same form of insecurity, for example, the economic security of one group causing economic insecurity for another group. Secondly, there are competing insecurities from different forms of insecurity, for example environmental insecurity being subjugated by economic insecurity. Thirdly, there are more complex variations of this. For example, when gender-based insecurity challenges various components of ethnic identity at a particular period when these components are being emphasised to alleviate identity insecurity. Fourthly, there are competing insecurities in adjacent locations, whether across borders or in within national boundaries, insecurity experienced by one group can lead to them undertaking actions that make groups in adjacent areas insecure; this can clearly be seen in migration into the Khasi Hills from surrounding locations. Lastly, in a limited space, insecurities compete with each other for legitimacy and political recognition. These will be discussed in turn below.

The first type demonstrates how one particular form of human security, in this case economic security, can be a source of security for one group and a source of insecurity for another. This is not inevitable, but it needs to be addressed through a more complex understanding of local conditions, causes, and consequences of securitising various aspects of social and economic life. The Supreme Court ban on timber discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, illustrates this. The debate has been between those concerned over the impoverishment of certain communities after the ban, those who see that deforestation continues on private

land and with the collusion of public forestry officials, and those that stand by the ban. The ban has had a number of effects, mostly on the economic insecurity of the people who earned their livelihoods from the timber trade. These impacts have been heavily gendered and affected those involved directly in the timber trade and those indirectly involved in economic activities supported by the timber trade (Nathan, 2000; Ramnath, 2002). Thus the economic security of those making their livelihoods from the timber trade was rendered insecure with various flow-on effects. Yet the ban has increased the economic security of forest dwellers and those dependent on secondary forest produce for their livelihoods by providing a more sustainable environment (the collection of secondary forest produce was not included in the ban). The economic security of the small-time timber traders has been rendered insecure, those whose economic security was threatened by the commercial timber industry have had their economic security improved, while those who own vast tracts of land and forest have been able to continue to log timber and sell it. Thus in one location we can see how competing claims can lead to insecurity for different groups and security for others.

The second type of competing insecurity comes from different forms of insecurity. The example of the uranium mine is illustrative here. The KSU has opposed the mine on the grounds that it will allow the influx of 'outsiders' into the state. The mine proponents, the Indian Government and the Uranium Corporation of India Limited have argued that the mine will benefit local communities and bring development to the area. As the project has gone on, many people from the mine-affected area have begun to support the mine as they see it as bringing jobs to the poorest region in the state. The environmental aspects of the debate have become marginalised by the 'outsiders' discourse from the mine opponents and the economic arguments of the mine proponents. The formation of the Langrin War-San Lyngdoh Development Organisation, a pro-mine lobby made up of village headmen and other people from the affected area, indicates that environmental insecurity has been marginalised in favour of the economic insecurity of the local people. Furthermore, this is not being challenged by the mine opponents on environmental grounds but by drawing again on the 'outsiders' discourse. Thus environmental insecurity is being marginalised by economic insecurity and identity insecurity. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 4,

economic insecurity appears to be taking precedence and shifting the position of several prominent civil society organisations that previously opposed the mine.

The third type is similar, but calls for closer attention to the complex relationships between competing constructions of insecurity that do not appear to be in direct conflict. The example of gender-based insecurities discussed in Chapter 5 is helpful in demonstrating this. The creation of 'tribe' as a category during the colonial and postcolonial eras and the allocation of certain gender relations within contemporary conceptualisations of 'tribal' society in India has allowed a mythology of gender equality and women's empowerment to persist, preventing critical evaluations of existing social and political institutions, and of the gendered impact of changes in the Khasi society, especially regarding land. At the present time in the Khasi Hills, the 'outsiders' discourse and the perception of insecurity of Khasi identity mean that mythologies embedded in dominant understandings of identity have become important symbols of the Khasi tribe as a bounded ethnic group. In other words, the insecurity of identity has meant an increased emphasis on mythologies that denote what it means to be Khasi by certain actors. Concurrently civil society actors have begun to further question the social, political, and economic role of women. These actors are not just challenging power structures at village, district and state levels, or the elites maintaining these structures, but they are challenging the ways in which tribal identity reinforces these structures at a time when the set of mythologies and constructions contained within dominant discourses of identity are being emphasised. In other words, gender-based civil society actors are contesting the gendered mythologies of tribal identity at a time when other civil society actors need these mythologies the most in order to contest the 'loss of identity' attributed to 'outsiders' and the impositions of the Indian state and Indian culture.

The fourth type comes from competing incidences of insecurity in different locations, most commonly adjacent locations or borderlands. Migrants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees arrive daily to the urban centres of Meghalaya. While non-Khasi migrants are the most visible migrants, thousands of Khasis from rural areas travel to the cities as well. However, as discussed throughout the preceding chapters, the focus of civil

society actors has been non-Khasi migrants, mostly from Bangladesh, Nepal, and the 'plains' of India, but also other members of Scheduled Tribes that have migrated from the Garo Hills and Karbi Anglong district of Assam. Many of these migrants face various levels of insecurity in their places of origin. This insecurity may be from landlessness, environmental degradation, economic insecurity, and localised violence, among others. Their search for security often brings them to the Khasi Hills. This is not to suggest that the Khasi Hills is viewed as a solution for all of the problems of insecure people in surrounding areas but that migration to escape insecurity will take people to any place where there appears to be opportunity. Hazarika has interviewed Bangladeshi migrants in Assam and Bangladesh, and these interviews show that many of the Bangladeshi migrants working in the fishing industry in Assam were persuaded to migrate by the stories of returning migrants (2000: 196-7). Many of those migrating from rural areas of the Khasi Hills to urban areas are driven by the same allure and their reasons for leaving are similar: landlessness, no jobs, poor returns from the soil, to escape from gender-based violence, abusive parents, or to go to school. Khasi and non-Khasi migrants will put similar pressure on the wage market, the job market, and on living conditions in the towns. However it is the migration of non-Khasis that leads to identity insecurity in the Khasi Hills, thus the insecurity experienced by non-Khasis and their subsequent migration leads to the insecurity of the 'host' population.

The fifth type comes when the space for civil society is limited. In the Khasi Hills civil society is constrained by the state, which places strict conditions on registration for civil society organisations, and only funds 'approved NGOs'. As argued throughout this thesis, civil society is also constrained by forces beyond the state, in other words by civil society itself, by the dominance of particular actors and particular discourses that privilege particular insecurities. As the space is limited, some actors and causes of insecurity will be ignored and excluded, while others will be politicised and acted upon. Those that are politicised may then become institutionalised making it more difficult for other insecurities to be addressed. As certain insecurities become co-opted into institutions and into particular advocacy networks they become normalised. Once resources are allocated, norms and practices made into routine, it becomes very difficult for civil society actors and

individuals to pursue other causes of insecurity that do not have this level of recognition, as demonstrated with the HIV/AIDs example above.

A limited space means limited resources. However a limited space also means limited conceptions of what counts as ‘a problem’. In a limited space, certain insecurities may be more lucrative, less controversial, less complicated. This may explain why the responses to environmental insecurity in the Khasi Hills have been so inadequate. It appears far easier for both state and civil society actors to apply for development monies from donors and implement schemes rather than addressing the complex and interlinked causes of insecurity. Thus the space, the context, where insecurity is being contested, and the size and capabilities of the actors in that space can determine which of the multiple insecurities is addressed and even which insecurities ‘count’ as ‘real problems’, regardless of the severity of particular causes of insecurity.

6.3 Re-Imagining Meghalaya

In order for the constraints on civil society and the search for human security to be recognised and transcended, the context in which these are occurring needs to be critically examined. From the empirical cases presented in this thesis, it is apparent that categories of ethnicity and approaches to the region by both state and non-state actors are so entrenched that the region needs to be re-imagined in order for them to be unravelled. Unless these categories can be critically deconstructed insecurity and constraints on agency within the Khasi Hills will remain unseen and unaddressed.

Existing inequalities are not necessarily overcome by simply applying human security to a whole people, nor do we learn much about civil society from examining it at hemispherical, national, or regional levels. I will begin by discussing the need to examine forms of association in the region at various levels beyond ethnicity, including class, gender, and location. Secondly, I will argue that legal categories also need to be deconstructed. Thirdly, I argue that the agency of people in the region needs to be viewed

at a more varied and complex level, beyond the dominant constructions of violent anti-nationalism, or reactionary anti-modernity.

Diversifying the tribe

The categories of ‘tribal’, ‘plains tribal’ and ‘non-tribal’ are usually taken as the starting point for an analysis of the Northeast and it is this that is so problematic. By assuming that the tribal group is a distinct ethnically and linguistically bound community with a predetermined set of attitudes towards the Indian state and non-tribals, and with predetermined gender relations and relations with the region’s ecology, the politics of the region are reduced to a simple and largely unhelpful dichotomy of the ‘tribal group’ versus the Indian state. The above research suggests that not only is this not the case, but that such assumptions contribute to the political practices, identities, and power relationships within and between ethnic groups in the region, thus the starting point for analyses of the Northeast must be revised. Inequalities *within* the tribal group/ethnic group must be recognised and used as an entry point into any meaningful understanding of civil society and insecurity in Meghalaya.

In the Khasi Hills, class, gender, ethnicity, and urban-rural location affect access to civil society and produce insecurity. These are not exclusive; there are well-connected elites in rural areas for example, just as there are gender-based inequalities across different class groups. Gender, class, ethnicity, and location have enormous bearings on access to civil society and to state institutions, access that shapes the ways insecurity is contested and addressed. It does not appear possible, or desirable, to privilege one over another, for example it would be difficult to say that class is more important than ethnicity or that gender is more important than location. What has been indicated through the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 and through observations during fieldwork is that access to civil society is determined by a number of factors, not ethnicity alone, though often these other factors are experienced *through* ethnicity, especially during times when ethnicity is politically charged.

Class is an important and often overlooked cleavage in civil society in the Khasi Hills and often determines the ways in which ethnicity and identity politics are experienced. For example, ethnic difference and lack of common language may prevent marginalised tribals and non-tribals from associating together to act politically, yet it may be of little obstacle for association between the tribal elite, tribal and non-tribal professionals, state and central government bureaucrats, and wealthy tribal landowners. Despite being of different ethnicities, and being on different sides of the Khasi/non-Khasi divide, the interests and economic and political relationships between bureaucrats, professionals, landowners and business people may lead to stronger associational ties. Furthermore, they will usually share English as a common language, unlike many rural Khasis, whether in rural areas or as urban migrants, who will often speak only their local dialect and perhaps standard Khasi, and unlike non-tribal labourers and tribals from other parts of the Northeast and Meghalaya who may not speak Khasi at all nor share any common language. For example, Khasi and Garos frequently speak to each other in English, despite being scheduled tribes from the same state. Raatan cites the 1991 Indian Census that lists 88 different ‘Mother Tongues’ in Meghalaya, explaining the utility of English as a form of communication amongst diverse linguistic groups (2004: 152-4). Despite Khasi speakers being the highest number in Meghalaya at nearly three quarters of a million, only around 20% of Khasi speakers live in urban areas, indicating that urban life in Meghalaya is plural and in urban areas the majority of the poor share no common language nor effective communication beyond their own ethnic group.

Inequalities based on gender have an enormous bearing on access to civil society, which issues are contested in civil society and how these issues are received by other actors and institutions. The perceptions of women as empowered and privileged by land inheritance based on matriliney inhibits critical examination of gender inequalities. As discussed in Chapter 5, poverty in the Khasi Hills is heavily gendered, traditional political structures exclude women, and the involvement of women in the state legislature is minimal. Not only does gender need to be reconsidered in Meghalaya and the egalitarian assumptions opened to critical scrutiny, but the impacts of the intersection of gender, class, and ethnicity on access to civil society needs to be examined. Gender divisions are crucial to

understanding inequality, but divisions within gendered categories are also important. Women in the Khasi Hills will have different experiences of associational life and insecurity depending on class and location. This appears obvious, but is often overlooked. Poor rural women are almost completely marginalised from public life as they have no role in rural *dorbars* and have minimal mobility to make connections with women outside of their immediate environs. Furthermore, as landlessness increases, poor rural women have no land to manage or pass on to their children while women bureaucrats and professionals in urban areas, while excluded from ‘formal’ politics, may still have assets passed on to them.

Furthermore, poor non-tribal and non-Khasi women are even further marginalised as they have no access to reserved positions in educational institutions, reserved state jobs, and are usually landless. As discussed in Chapter 5, rural life becomes more difficult Khasi women are increasingly taking to working in coalmines, road building, construction, and migrating to urban areas to work as domestic workers and as hawkers. Yet non-tribal women bureaucrats and professionals and those from wealthy families have very different experiences of insecurity. These insecurities and interests are not given and thus presupposing a set of insecurities or interests common to women in Meghalaya, women in the Khasi Hills, Khasi women, or non-Khasi women is very difficult. The ability of civil society actors to bring women from different class and ethnic backgrounds together on the issue of domestic violence, as described in Chapter 5, shows that insecurity has to be contested to be addressed and linkages between different groups of women have to be *made*; they and are not predetermined based on shared experiences of insecurity.

Similarly it is important to note that non-tribal groups are diverse in terms of their integration into the social, political, and economic structures in the region. Non-tribal peoples work as labourers, yet they also work as central government officials, public servants, professionals, business owners, and traders. They do share a degree of marginalisation from the spheres of public life reserved for tribals yet differences based on class, gender, and ethnicity *within* the non-tribal population are far more important factors in political association and access to civil society than any common ‘outsiders’ identity.

Non-tribal labourers and transient workers have little voice in civil society and few opportunities for associational life in a public sphere dominated by identity politics, especially as identity politics targets their status and presence in the region, while non-tribal professionals and traders often have close ties to political parties, state enterprises, and the tribal elite. In the Khasi Hills the tribal/ non-tribal distinction has steadily been replaced by an even more exclusive Khasi/ non-Khasi distinction on the one hand; evident in the attempts to divide Meghalaya between Khasis and Garos discussed in Chapter 4, and a distinction between the wealthy/landed and the poor/landless regardless of tribal or non-tribal status on the other hand; evident in the migration of Khasis to coal areas and urban areas to work alongside non-tribal labourers at the lowest levels of the economy.

The final aspect is the urban-rural divide. In the Khasi Hills, the urban-rural divide does not necessarily create a neat division between rich and poor. There are poor people in urban areas and there are wealthy people in rural areas. However, human development indicators show that overall those living in rural areas face far greater levels of insecurity (Planning Commission, 2001: 164, 173, 187-188). Yet as many of these people migrate to urban areas looking for work and housing, the situation becomes more complex. The urban-rural divide is important for understanding the Khasi Hills and the Northeast more generally, because the majority of the rural population have a very limited access to civil society. The issues faced by those in rural areas will often be different from both the problems faced by people in urban areas, and the problems people in urban areas *imagine* that people in rural areas face, thus the applicability of particular understandings of insecurity that apply across an entire ethnic group cannot be assumed.

There is not a single set of insecurities faced by people in the Khasi Hills. Even looking at divisions such as urban-rural, male-female, rich-poor, does not account for the differences in the ways insecurity is experienced where these categories intersect. However despite the complexities generated, examining Meghalaya through simplistic frameworks of ‘tribal’ and ‘non-tribal’ and assuming a set of insecurities and preferences synonymous with those categories is limiting and counterproductive.

Legal categories

Not only does the homogeneity of ethnic categories need to be challenged, but also legal categories of citizens, non-citizens, refugees, migrants, and IDPs need to be discussed critically. The condition of insecurity experienced by different people will not necessarily be consistent with their legal status, though their status may have a large bearing on the insecurities they face. Several authors have argued that human security must go beyond state-centric notions of citizenship and recognise the human security needs of various groups within one location (McDonald, 2002, 2003; Newman, 2001). Thus in viewing all humans as individuals whose security must be addressed, migrants, refugees, and IDPs should be granted the same standing as citizens of states. Yet the viability of these categories in Northeast India as a region and in the Khasi Hills specifically, is undermined by difficulties in distinguishing between refugees, IDPs, and migrants. Many of these individuals and groups are constantly moving, working in particular places for short periods of time, then moving to new areas, while some move back to other areas or their places of origin. Furthermore, the status of people as IDPs and refugees, as opposed to migrants for example, does not necessarily mean that host communities will accept them.

However, some civil society actors are starting to acknowledge the need to create a more functional legal framework for ‘outsiders’, whether migrants, IDPs, or refugees. One such actor is the FKJGP, a ‘pressure group’ that has fought against the influx of ‘outsiders’ through various methods for nearly two decades (Malngiang, 2002: 187). During my interview with the president of the FKJGP, he argued strongly for the introduction of identity cards and work permits in Meghalaya.⁷⁷ The FKJGP is pushing for a three-tier system: green cards for permanent residents; blue cards for semi-permanent residents, mostly for central government employees working in Meghalaya; the third is a temporary card for labourers and tourists which will be valid for a set period of time. While conducting the interview the President gestured to groups of Bengali and Bihari labourers working on a building site behind where we were sitting and pointed out that under the

⁷⁷ Bah Lyttan, President: Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo Peoples, *Personal Interview*, 5 March 2005, Shillong, Meghalaya, India.

new system, when the half-completed building was finished, the labourers would have to go back to where they had come from, and by having a photo identity card, they could easily be detected if they stayed on longer. When I asked if this system was open to abuse, he stated that the FKJGP would not allow the system to be abused, and mentioned that they would crack down on identity cards the same way they had cracked down on trading licences, by physically going into the bazaar and demanding to see the trading licences of non-tribal traders.

The laws restricting trading licences to non-tribals have made the licences more lucrative, and the district council has been accused of accepting massive bribes to issue licences. Furthermore, tribals who do not require the same licences have sub-let their premises to non-tribal traders in many instances (Malngiang, 2002: 188). Working permits appear vulnerable to the same levels of abuse and corruption, and non-tribal labourers and migrants would still be harassed and those without cards would be subject to further violence. Yet the idea does extend a notion of rights, albeit limited rights, to ‘outsiders’; at least those ‘outsiders’ able to negotiate the proposed work permit system. While the work-permit system is a start, it is restricted to those who are able to secure employment, leaving many more insecure, yet the extension of permits may go some distance towards placating the ‘outsiders’ discourse if ‘outsiders’ are able to be classified and herded into a set economic and cultural niche.

Agency

The agency of different groups in Meghalaya and the Northeast needs to be re-examined. The majority of the literature on the Northeast portrays a very limited understanding of agency in which groups and individuals are denied varied *forms* of agency. The peoples of the region are portrayed as being either (i) violent anti-national agitators, or (ii) anti-modern reactionaries. These two approaches will be discussed below.

(i) Anti-national

Pre-colonial and postcolonial constructions of the people in the Northeast as savage and barbarous continue to be reproduced in the region and within tribal groups, yet it is the way the region has been reconstructed in the postcolonial era as a violent borderland, a distant and disturbed periphery, which limits understandings of agency. Decades of insurgency have had a major impact on this. Other parts of India, and indeed surrounding countries, only hear of the region when violence is taking place (Hasan, 2004: 128; Hazarika, 1995: 63). Sanjib Baruah argues that media and academia provide ‘an undifferentiated picture of nameless “insurgencies” and Indian soldiers engaged in the defence of “the nation”.’ (2005: vii). Several texts on the Northeast, or on particular states, explain politics in the region in these terms. For example ‘(the political situations) have emanated generally from a sense of isolation, alienation and neglect, particularly from socio-economically backward communities with the ethnic factor emotionally intertwined.’ (Singh, 2002: 39; see also Nag, 2002; Singh, 2004).

Violence is seen as the problem, and the causes are perceived as coming from ‘...turmoils and upheavals based on racial diversity, mutual doubts and suspicion of various tribes and the future political uncertainty of the people whose political goal is not yet definite.’ (Singh, 2004:247) It is as if violence is a logical solution to the diversity of the region and an end product of the limited forms of agency of which tribal people are capable. Not all those acting politically in the region are acting in violent ways, nor are they acting against the Indian state, or the extension of the state into the region. This is not to refute the significance of insurgency and ethno-nationalist politics in the history or the contemporary politics of the region, however, the continuation of insurgency in various parts of the Northeast restricts understandings of agency. The complexities of identity politics, land and environmental degradation, poverty, and gender inequalities are unnoticed or ignored, as are the actors attempting to address these issues.

(ii) Anti-modern

If people in the Northeast are not seen as violent then they are seen as victims without agency, rendered passive by their ‘primitiveness’ and their traditional ways. As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, tribal identity has been constructed as being anti-modern. This can be applied to many of the portrayals of the tribal populations of the Northeast, portrayals that cast tribes as unitary stereotypes whose only agency comes from their rejection of the modern state and development (Nongbri, 2003: 41). The impact of such portrayals is to deny all forms of agency except non-compliance: i.e. non-compliance derived from an incompatibility between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ forms of life.

Denial of all but violent or reactionary forms of agency to the peoples of the region reinforces constructions of identity that are fuelling the fragmentation of the region. Yet as Sanjib Baruah argues, it also reproduces a mindset within and outside the region that ‘turns a blind eye to today’s sufferings in the name of abstractions such as nation-building and development.’ (2005: viii) Studies of Northeast India privilege the insecurities derived from insurgency, and from ethnic identity politics, which marginalises and ignores the insecurities that many of the people in the region face. Some of these insecurities may be a result of insurgency and counter-insurgency, but many, such as environmental insecurity and gender-based insecurity have only partial links, if any, to insurgency.

6.4 Transcendence

This section discusses the ways that constraints on civil society may be transcended, and in turn ameliorate the causes of insecurity. In keeping with the critical approach adopted in this thesis, I have focussed on the ways the existing order has been formed and maintained in Meghalaya, but critical theorists are also concerned with the possibilities of transcending the existing order (Cox, 1981/1996: 97). Rethinking civil society, reinterpreting human security, and re-imagining social relations in particular contexts allows constraints and limitations to be recognised, it also makes visible the agency of those actors challenging these constraints and limitations. I argue that while agency may be extremely difficult for

civil society actors addressing specific human security issues within particular institutional structures, to ignore agency is to ignore the emancipatory potential of civil society. I will discuss the ways in which reworked concepts of civil society and insecurity lead to an enhanced understanding of the possibilities of transcendence. Civil society is often ignored where transcendence is slow or non-existent. It is important to note that civil society actors do not all aim at transformative change, or the overthrow of particular systems or structures. Their gains may not always be apparent or forthcoming, but it is the political struggle to contest existing material and ideational structures and the power relations underpinning them, which holds the possibilities of transcendence.

In examining civil society, its limitations, and the potential for transcendence, a more dynamic understanding of agency is needed. Structures, and the various ideas, discourses, institutions, and norms that create and sustain them, constrain and enable civil society actors. They co-opt, they marginalise, and they shape these actors and the issues that are contested and the ways contestation takes place. On the other hand, civil society actors have the potential to challenge and change these structures. The preceding chapters have examined the ways in which the structures: ideational, material, and institutional, have formed through historical processes (Chapter 3), and the impact these have had on civil society (Chapters 4 and 5), generally it has been argued that these structures have constrained agency. However, while the structures that constrain and limit civil society in and across particular locations must be considered, agency must not be ignored or discounted. In order to locate the potential for agency the study of civil society must make careful consideration of the ways in which both state and non-state actors from local, regional, national, and transnational spaces contribute to the structures, both formal and informal, that constrain agency. These structures must be challenged for civil society actors to transcend dominant discourses and open up spaces for change. In Chandhoke's words, in order to be effective civil society actors must 'render asunder dense and overlapping complexities of power . . . weave their way through un-hearing, uninterested, and perhaps uncaring public . . . [and] storm the linguistic and conceptual ramparts that protect the domain' (2003: 207).

The gender-based civil society actors studied in Chapter 5 form a very helpful example. It is argued in Chapter 5 that contesting gender relations that cause insecurity is constrained by the lack of political participation for women in modern and traditional institutions, mythologies and inaccurate perceptions of the role and position of women, the matrilineal myth and the 'empowered tribal woman' myth, the 'outsiders' discourse, which seeks to shape gender-based issues as ethno-nationalist issues, and by the cooption of the women's movement by the state. The origins of these constraints transcend linear spatial arrangements. In other words they come from local, regional, and national constructions of gender, development, and ethnicity. Indeed, the situation for women in the Northeast generally and in the Khasi Hills more specifically appears to be moving in the reverse direction to other parts of India. Thus the prospects for agency, especially those that challenge established institutions and socialised gender roles, appear to be severely limited as the overarching material, institutional, and ideational obstacles are immense. However, as demonstrated by the examples of the march against domestic violence and the campaign for a representative state women's commission, certain civil society actors have been able to challenge these obstacles. This is not to say that these groups will succeed in overhauling these structures, but to completely deny agency to civil society actors contesting dominant structures, myths, and discourses does not reflect empirical realities.

It is important to recognise the restrictions on agency caused by the power of exclusivist and ethno-nationalist politics pursued by state *and* non-state actors. Agency in this context requires transcendence, i.e. Chandhoke's 'storming' of the 'ramparts' (2003: 207). In the Khasi Hills transcendence for gender-based civil society actors involved making linkages across different ethnic groups, both tribal and non-tribal. These civil society actors have been successful in contesting structures, myths, and discourses by creating networks of women from various ethnic backgrounds; challenging the dominant discourses and the dominant political structures in the Khasi Hills. Yet agency may not always depend upon linkages and networks. Transcendence may come from more limited sources, or fewer civil society actors.

It is also important to note that agency and transcendence do not necessarily have a causal relationship. In other words there may be agency but transcendence may be a longer struggle with no immediate prospects of success. Civil society is often ignored in such circumstances where transcendence is slow or non-existent. It is important to note that civil society actors do not all aim at transformative change, or the overthrow of particular systems or structures. Often the mere existence of organisations and actors outside the realm of the state and dominant structures needs to be recognised and supported. In addition to this, inequality and access needs to be examined in locations where transcendence has occurred and structural transformations have taken place. In other words, even when agency results in transcendence, we should not cease examining identity, power, and inequalities as they take new forms in particular contexts.

The constraints on agency and assumptions that a simple causal relationship exists between civil society and insecurity must be contested. Agency may be severely limited, but this does not mean that agency does not exist, nor does it mean that civil society actors pursuing 'good' are completely and irreversibly co-opted into the agendas of state and civil society actors pursuing 'bad'. As discussed throughout the preceding chapters, it is problematic to conceive of civil society as a wholly 'good' or progressive sphere of political activity; the 'bad' state, 'good' civil society distinction is frequently invoked in theoretical literature on civil society (as discussed in Chapter 2). Furthermore, the 'good' and 'bad' dichotomy *within* civil society is also problematic for analysing agency, as actors purporting to do 'good' can be establishing harmful and restrictive practices and structures and vice versa (Ferguson, 1990/1994; Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Thus to come to any useful understanding of civil society the 'bad' state, 'good' civil society model must be treated cautiously.

New Spaces

If ethnicity increases the power of identity politics and subsequently jeopardise human security, would it not be easier to embrace approaches to the region that seek to bypass ethnicity? The idea that emancipation will come from de-ethnicising politics is attractive,

yet the utility of such an approach is limited. First, in terms of practice, it would seem difficult to remove ethnicity from politics, especially given that provisions of the Indian constitution in the Northeast convey rights based on ethnicity through the Sixth Schedule, and claims for these rights have been at the centre of mainstream politics in the region for the last five decades. Secondly, disregarding ethnicity and identity politics would mean removing some aspects of identity politics that may *assist* in enabling civil society. In the case of environmental degradation, several helpful approaches to the environment such as customary forestry, community land ownership, and other methods are closely tied to particular understandings of the ethnic, tribal, or kin groups from which these practices derive. Furthermore, de-ethnicising politics can resemble several of the attempts at homogenisation that have occurred during the colonial era, but especially in the postcolonial era such as the compulsory use of Assamese language throughout the region.

Perhaps civil society and human security will be further enabled by focussing on struggles that seek to create new spaces, not necessarily de-ethnicised or universal spaces, but spaces that contest the ways in which identity constrains civil society and jeopardises human security. As long as identity is politically advantageous in the Khasi Hills, then identity will be emphasised by state and non-state actors to increase their legitimacy. In the Khasi Hills all issues are channelled through the ‘outsiders’ discourse and dissent is difficult. The state regards dissent as anti-national and powerful civil society actors regard dissent as an unwillingness to ensure the cultural survival of the Khasi people; privileging certain issues over others keeping existing power structures intact and de-politicising associational life by herding political action into a static discourse. If civil society is to challenge local power structures then new spaces must be created through political action. New spaces will come from various sources, recognising multiple voices, dissenting against dominant discourses and power structures. All of which can be considered as the beginnings of ‘transcendence’.

This raises the question of how best to approach transcending these limitations? Following the critical approach to civil society outlined in Chapter 2, it is vital to examine the social relations reproducing and maintaining hegemony in civil society in the Khasi Hills, yet it is

also important to identify potential sources of emancipation which challenge this hegemony. If the constraints on civil society actors are based on the prominence of identity and the dominance of the 'outsiders' discourse, inequality within the tribal/ethnic group, and restricted access to civil society, then the seemingly logical step would be to identify civil society actors contesting the primacy of identity politics. There appear to be two ways of contesting identity politics: (i) by building linkages between civil society actors *across* the region and in other parts of India and surrounding countries, and (ii) by building linkages between groups *within* particular locations. These will be discussed briefly below.

(i) Linkages across spaces

In the Northeast civil society actors are isolated into their own ethnic clusters. One has only to read the names of sample civil society organisations to see that almost all of them include the name of the tribal/ethnic group whom they represent. As a result of these factors, civil society actors in the Northeast face being isolated from each other, from the rest of India, and from the South Asian region. Linkages across communities appear to offer the opportunity to transcend identity politics, yet networks formed across different parts of the Northeast and India often lack the diversity of voices needed to address the constraints on civil society resulting from inequalities within the tribal/ethnic group.

However, some civil society actors are transcending isolation, such as actors contesting domestic violence as discussed above. Networks between community-based development groups are also worth noting. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development in Kathmandu is linking local grassroots civil society actors in Meghalaya with civil society actors in Nepal, Bangladesh, and other parts of India to address core issues of development and poverty that transcend international borders across the Himalayan region. The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development has been working closely with the Khatar Shnong Socio-Organisation, a community-based organisation from the rural Khatar Shnong area of Meghalaya on projects based not only in

this area, but in other parts of the state that are ethnically and culturally diverse.⁷⁸ By focussing on linkages with other civil society actors, some of the barriers that have isolated the Northeast are being broken down by sharing common ground at the grassroots level rather than continually emphasising difference.

Yet while these networks are to be commended, they also create a different set of problems. Incorporating different civil society actors into larger networks raises questions about the grounds upon which these actors are incorporated. Often civil society actors are included on the basis of their ethnicity or their 'tribalness'. For example, larger networks of civil society actors from other parts of India often seek to include a group from the Northeast as part of their commitment to diversity. Similarly networks within the Northeast seek to include a 'Khasi' organisation or a 'Garo' organisation, universalising the insecurities faced by different groups based on their ethnicity. While this may serve to challenge identity politics by bringing various groups together, the actors are incorporated as 'ethnic' actors and their inclusion often mirrors expectations and perceptions included with the constructions of that particular ethnicity; especially the relationship between the tribal community and the environment, and gender equality within the tribal community. The diversity of experiences and insecurities within the ethnic group are often 'glossed over', to use Agrawal and Sivaramakrishnan's term (2001: 12). Ethnicity is still the main way of categorising actors; this may be a little consequence when relations between ethnic groups are amicable or relatively egalitarian but it may prove to be limiting when they are not.

Thus the diversity of the ethnic group or the 'tribal community' is diminished and a small group of civil society actors come to represent the entire spectrum of groups whose only similarity is their ethnicity. This is not to argue that networks of civil society actors are necessarily homogenising, but access to these networks needs to be critically examined. This reflects inequalities in capabilities, but it also reflects the physical and economic

⁷⁸ Iasaid Khongjee, President: Khatar Shnong Socio-Organisation, *Personal Interview*, 19 February 2005, Sohra, Meghalaya, India.

limitations faced by rural communities in accessing larger networks. In a poor, rural, and mountainous region, urban civil society actors will come to represent the entire ethnic group for the simple fact that they have access to communications technology, transport out of the Khasi Hills, and share similarities in language with transnational, pan-Indian, or pan-tribal civil society actors. The causes of insecurity that can be articulated to fit the agenda of larger networks will be privileged over other causes and thus such networks will not necessarily be of relevance to those most heavily marginalised.

(ii) Linkages within spaces

Transcendence may also be approached by focussing on linkages between civil society actors and political communities within the local context. In the Khasi Hills women's organisations have been very successful in contesting identity insecurity by making linkages across ethnic groups within the local context. The networking of women from various ethnic backgrounds on issues such as domestic violence and political participation challenges dominant discourses and dominant political structures. Thus the boundaries of political community are being contested as Khasi women from diverse class backgrounds and locations have formed links with each other and with non-Khasi and non-tribal women from diverse backgrounds and social groups. While the movement may still be elite-led, the political unit is not 'Khasi women' or 'tribal women', but women experiencing insecurity and marginalised by exclusion from political participation. Thus while links between civil society actors in the Northeast and across the region and into surrounding areas are important, without linkages between communities on a local scale, the boundaries of political community reinforced in institutional structures and dominant discourses will remain intact.

It appears that neither approach to transcendence is inherently more valuable than the other, nor does it appear that either approach can function effectively in isolation. However, any approach that does not contest the social relations that underpin the constraints on civil society and subsequently human security will reproduce them and further remove the prospect of emancipation. It is important to note that constraints on civil

society come from within and outside the local. In other words dominant perceptions of identity that have shaped social relations between and within ethnic groups in the Khasi Hills are formulated from historical and contemporary processes that are both external and internal. In keeping with arguments posed by Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (2003) and Nandy (1991/2004), the local should not be seen as a site of purity, equity, and resistance, in contrast to the hegemony of the global or national, but the various social relations within the local and between the local and the regional and the national need to be taken into account. However in the Khasi Hills, the local appears to be where inequalities are the most visible and pronounced. Skipping the local may lead to a form of transcendence, but it is difficult to see how this transcendence will be emancipatory for those already marginalised in the local context.

6.5 Conclusion

Valuable insights into civil society can be gained from a critical approach that recognises the constraints on political association and the potential for transcending these constraints. This thesis has argued that identity, power, and inequalities have a major influence on civil society and the ability of civil society actors to contest the causes of insecurity. This thesis has also stressed that the relationship between civil society and human security is constitutive. The constraints on civil society allow insecurity to spread, and the persistence of particular insecurities constrains civil society. It has also been made clear from the previous chapters that civil society is complex, dynamic, and fundamentally political. If human security is to be realised as an alternative approach to narrow understandings of insecurity and of development, then the constraints on civil society need to be recognised and transcended. In order for transcendence to be recognised, the complexities and dynamism of civil society must be subject to deep empirical investigation to isolate the conditions under which transcendence is likely to occur. In Meghalaya, transcendence is difficult as agency is limited by identity, power, and inequalities. Yet it is by challenging these limitations through the creation of new political spaces across locations and within locations that transcendence appears most likely. In the case of the nascent women's

movement in the Khasi Hills, linkages between different ethnic communities were able to break down dominant constructions of identity and their use by powerful actors, creating new spaces and universalising the causes of insecurity faced by women regardless of ethnicity. The point here is not that transcendence will emerge from simply de-ethnicising politics, but by re-politicising identity, power, and inequalities that constrain agency, enabling marginalised voices to be heard.

The approach of scholars and activists needs to focus on understanding how various groups in different locations and from different tribal and ethnic groups understand their insecurities, rather than assuming a set of pre-given insecurities or understandings exist for all peoples in the Khasi Hills, regardless of gender, class, ethnicity, and the various intersections and overlaps between these variables. Attention needs to be given to different voices and perceptions of what constitutes insecurity for different people within existing categories. In other words, attention needs to be given to the voices of those experiencing the most severe causes of insecurity, rather than basing our understanding of insecurity on approximations formulated far from the sites where insecurity is most acutely felt.

Conclusion

...larger considerations require, I think, the flesh and blood of detailed instances to take on substance. An example is not only the most successful way of embodying a generalisation, but it also has the advantage of always being richer and more complex than the principles that are drawn from it.

– Scott, 1985: xviii

This thesis has adopted a critical approach to civil society by using a detailed empirical study of the responses of civil society to insecurity in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. As part of this critical approach this thesis has focussed on both the constraints on civil society and how these constraints might be transcended. I have argued that while transcendence may be difficult it should not be discounted. While this thesis has provided insights into the concepts of civil society and human security it has also been a study of Meghalaya specifically and the Northeast region in general. It has attempted to unravel the ways in which the region has been constructed in different contexts by focussing on the ways environmental degradation and gendered poverty and violence lead to widespread insecurity in the society, affecting people's lives and challenging the binaries established during the colonial era and reproduced in the modern state of India.

In this thesis I have shown that civil society actors attempting to address insecurity are constrained by both state and non-state actors. Furthermore, they are constrained by the power of particular ideas, values, and political discourses propagated by state and non-state actors; some of which have origins in the colonial and pre-colonial pasts, while others are far more recent. I have argued that the main factors constraining civil society actors are the saliency of identity politics, the power of particular actors and ideas, and the inequalities within and between different groups of people. These intersect in various ways, denying political participation to large numbers of people in the Khasi Hills and jeopardising their ability to contest the causes of their insecurity. I have argued that civil society and insecurity have a constitutive rather than functional or instrumental relationship. It is not sufficient to merely recognise that civil society is constrained thus impeding the search for

human security, it has also been demonstrated that the prevalence of insecurity places additional constraints on civil society.

As part of the critical approach to civil society, I have sought to examine not only the constraints on civil society but also the actors and circumstances that may lead to these constraints being transcended. Transcendence is not assured by the mere existence of civil society actors, and as is made clear throughout Chapters 4 and 5, transcendence is extremely difficult for many actors, yet in certain circumstances transcendence is possible. This often involves long struggles against powerful actors and ideas, many of which are embedded in the structures that dominate political, social, and economic life. As discussed in Chapter 6, the conditions under which transcendence will occur will vary, but in all circumstances transcendence will be determined by the ability to challenge the status quo and open new spaces for political participation.

The nascent women's movement in the Khasi Hills made linkages between different ethnic, class, and social groups to contest the causes of domestic violence. This succeeded in creating a new political space in civil society, as it challenged the primacy of ethnic identity politics, which is the foundation of power in the Meghalaya polity. While the movement was coopted and eventually dissipated it does offer insight into conditions under which transcendence may occur. This is an important point and one that must be transferred to the study of civil society in other locations. Transcendence may be extremely difficult and often actors struggle without any measurable success. At other times, transcendence may occur to varying degrees, i.e. on a certain issue or as a broader realignment of power, but this may create further constraints for other groups. Thus it is vital to note that transcendence is an ongoing process, and as James (2005) reminds us, even when transcendence occurs, the process of critical enquiry does not stop, but must begin anew to interrogate reconfigured social relations.

As discussed throughout this thesis, the constraints on participation in civil society can be enormous for particular groups, but unless these constraints are recognised and attempts to challenge these constraints understood, then civil society remains of limited use in

analysing the way groups and individuals participate in political life. Yet even as a distinct sphere civil society can be difficult to locate clearly in different empirical contexts. In order to use the concept effectively we must be more fluid in our understandings of spaces, actors, and what constitutes the political. Chapter 2 isolates several key criticisms of the way the term has been used and argues that the term needs to be subject to a rigorous critical analysis within and across different spatial locations. This thesis attempted such an analysis.

One of the primary problems with conventional understandings of civil society is the thinness of the definition resulting in the seemingly endless academic debates on whether or not it is a suitable concept to apply to diverse empirical sites, especially in non-European thought traditions and in political practice in the non-Western world. Thus the question of whether civil society is a Western concept has become ubiquitous in contemporary literature, particularly in edited volumes such as those by Chambers and Kymlicka (2002), Kaviraj and Khilnani, (2001), and Post and Roseblum (2002). This is either answered in the affirmative (Gellner, 1994; Hall, 1995), or attempts are made to locate civil society in other cultural and ethical traditions, such as Confucianism (Madsen, 2002; Metzger, 2001; Nosco, 2002), Islam (Hafani, 2002; Ibrahim, 1995; Kelsay, 2002), Judaism (Stone, 2002), and in pre-colonial societies in parts of Latin America, Africa, and India (Beckman, 1998; Goody, 2001; Kamrava and Mora, 1998/2003; Rudolph and Rudolph, 1967/2003).

What is clear is that the majority of these discussions rest on epistemological questions. If we define civil society in narrow Eurocentric terms, it stands to reason that it will be very difficult to identify in non-Western societies. Similarly, if we attribute *all* forms of associational life in non-Western societies to specific cultural and traditional forms of social relations and political action, we risk essentialising political participation into a binary between Western civil society that is modern, and traditional civil society that is rooted in culture. As Chatterjee points out, 'One difficulty with this is the trap, not all that easy to avoid, of dehistoricising and essentialising 'tradition'. The related difficulty is one of denying the possibility that this other domain, relegated to the zone of the traditional,

could find ways of coping with the modern that might not conform to the principles of modern civil society.’ (2001: 172-3).

This thesis attempted to move beyond this binary, i.e. Chatterjee’s trap, by using the term civil society to describe the *existence* of non-state actors that are formal and informal, organised and disorganised, politicised and coopted, and to describe the political space where these actors exist. This space may be limited, it may be vibrant, it may be uneven, but it is the power relations in this space that must be interrogated through detailed empirical study. By using this far more fluid conception we can argue that civil society exists practically everywhere in the globe. This is dramatically uneven, of course, and the conditions in which these actors exist vary dramatically and in some cases these actors may be completely unseeable, unknowable, and undefinable to those from the outside. By allowing ourselves to identify civil society as a range of actors pursuing a range of ends in a range of circumstances, we can see civil society existing across the globe. Yet only a very small number of these actors form linkages with each other, have access to means of communication, speak a language discernible to one another, or share a normative vision.

Thus instead of discarding civil society as a Western concept or trying to identify it in fairly arbitrary non-Western cultural blocs, we must examine existing political participation in different locations and ask who is participating, what is being contested and why this is the case. We must deconstruct the assumptions inherent in its normative underpinnings. We must diversify our understanding of spaces and view the global alongside the transnational, the regional, and the local. We must examine the impact of identity, power, and inequalities within these spaces but also across these spaces. We must question where power is located and examine the impacts of its uneven distribution. We must identify the constraints on agency from the state but also beyond the state; from within civil society itself, from dominant discourses, narratives, and histories- the boundaries of which are not clearly defined and their reproduction not confined to state or non-state actors or to particular locations.

This thesis has also concentrated on the relationship between civil society and insecurity. As has been demonstrated, the alleviation of insecurity depends upon civil society to politicise the causes of insecurity and make them part of the political agenda in different locations. The initial concern was been the ability of civil society actors to politicise and contest different causes of insecurity. However, through the case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 and the analysis of transcendence in Chapter 6, it is clear that the relationship between civil society and insecurity is constitutive. Insecurity is widespread in the Khasi Hills, yet only certain causes of insecurity are politicised, making them visible and rendering other causes of insecurity invisible. Those that are politicised become part of the political agenda, empowering their advocates and marginalising other actors and other causes of insecurity.

In Meghalaya, identity insecurity is the most prominent example of this. Identity is embedded in the state's political institutions, social relations, and the Sixth Schedule. While many tribals in Meghalaya feel a genuine sense of insecurity from the real and perceived threats to their identity, it is the politicisation of identity insecurity that limits the political agenda and empowers ethno-nationalist civil society actors and their supporters, termed the 'outsiders' discourse in this thesis, constraining activism and leaving many causes of insecurity invisible. It is only by contesting the 'outsiders' discourse that civil society actors have been able to transcend these constraints, providing valuable insights into circumstances under which transcendence is possible. Without a thorough understanding of the constitutive relationship between civil society and insecurity, any analysis of the possibilities of emancipation from insecurity will be severely limited.

Aside from adopting a critical approach to civil society and human security this thesis has also been about Northeast India, and particularly the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. The Khasi Hills were subjugated by the British and then by the Indian state. They were attached to Assam, and almost swallowed whole before the state of Meghalaya was created in the 1970s. Now there is a strong movement to split Meghalaya into two ethnically exclusive homelands, one for the Khasis and one for the Garos. The final remaining alliance between any of the major ethnic groups of the Northeast region appears irreparably damaged. There

are many factors that have contributed to the poverty of the Khasi Hills, not least of which has been the dominance of identity politics, which have made contesting other forms of insecurity very difficult. At the same time growing poverty appears to be feeding ethno-nationalism. Ethno-nationalism is the dominant discourse in the Khasi Hills, but everyday life, at least in the countryside, seems far more preoccupied with survival than identity. In this sense, the Khasi Hills differ little from other settings across the world.

The political situation in the Khasi Hills can be perplexing at times. As a Scheduled Tribe, Khasis have protective rights under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution guaranteeing Khasis and Garos the vast majority of reservations in political institutions, jobs, educational institutions, and ensuring that, at least legally, no non-tribals can own land in Meghalaya. These rights are far more extensive than those granted to many other minority groups in India, and far more advantageous than those bestowed upon the more marginalised tribal communities in other regions of India covered by the Fifth Schedule. Yet despite these advantages and the enormous sums of money channelled to Meghalaya by the Indian Government, insecurity is endemic in the Khasi Hills. The dominant discourse in political and social life is concerned with expelling non-Khasis, ‘outsiders’, from the Khasi Hills. Yet as Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate, those facing environmental and gender-based insecurity are being rendered insecure by the actions of both Khasis and non-Khasis, yet voices that express these sentiments are thoroughly marginalised. Only the nascent women’s movement has been able to reframe the causes of insecurity along gender, rather than ethnic lines.

This thesis has called for a renewed approach to Meghalaya and the Northeast that deconstructs existing categories, many of them derived directly from colonial ethnography, and recognises the inequalities based on class, gender, ethnicity, and location. Only by examining the insecurities and constraints on activism along more diversified lines can the study of the region, its problems, and those attempting to change it, be advanced in any meaningful sense. While this thesis attempts to understand the limitations on civil society at a local level, there are still many neglected narratives from the region waiting to be studied. A comparative study of the limitations on civil society in other parts of the

Northeast may inform a more thorough picture of civil society and human security in the Northeast as a region, focussing on similarities and drawing out differences. Furthermore comparative studies between the Khasi Hills and communities in other parts of Asia may also be instructive on civil society and marginality, with the different approaches of the respective states to these communities being a key variable. I believe that this thesis has opened these avenues of inquiry and will be a catalyst for further research in this field.

Appendix A: Description of Organisations Interviewed

Organisations consenting to formal interviews

Federation of Khasi Jaintia and Garo Peoples FKJGP	Est. 1987, mostly from former KSU members. Type/structure: 3-tier. 312 urban and village based ‘units’ state-wide- though more heavily concentrated in Khasi Hills, District level ‘circles’, and Central Executive Committee. Current President claims 10,000 members. Identifies itself as ‘pressure group’. Main Activities: Anti-migration, monitoring trade licences, evicting migrant workers, lobbying against preventative detention acts and Armed Forces Special Powers Acts, pursuing Right to Information Act, anti-corruption, pursuing re-imposition of Restricted Area Permit system for Meghalaya, pursuing work-permits system. Location: Central Committee in Shillong, units state-wide. Registered with Government: No.
Freedom Project	Est. 2002 Type/structure: Collective of activists and artists. Main Activities: Right to Information Act, gender issues, domestic violence, government accountability, aid monitoring, development monitoring, social justice, organising forums, rallies, concerts, and other public events. Location: Shillong Registered with Government: No.
Impulse NGO Network	Est. 1993 Type/structure: Professional NGO.

	Main Activities/issues: HIV/AIDS awareness, anti-trafficking, support for domestic workers, anti-child labour, research and documentation. Location: Shillong. Registered with Government: Yes, closely affiliated with several Government departments, foreign donors, and UN bodies.
International Foundation for Agricultural Development IFAD	Est. 1977 (in Meghalaya since 2001). Type/structure: Affiliate project of Professional International NGO. North Eastern Community Resource Management Project for Upland Areas funded by IFAD in Rome, and Government of India. Main Activities/issues: Agricultural development, jhum management, crop marketing, self-help groups. Location: Shillong, operations in specific locations in Northeast region. Registered with Government: Yes.
Iai-treilang Multi Purpose Cooperative Society ITMCS	Est. 2003 Type/structure: Small community-based NGO. Wholly volunteer. Main Activities/issues: Halting land privatisation, erosion, health and sanitation, produce marketing cooperatives. Location: Phalangwanbroi, East Khasi Hills. Registered with Government: Yes, but no funds received as yet.
Khasi Student Union KSU	Est. 1978 Type/structure: Membership organisation of any Khasi in tertiary education (though large proportion of members are not). Each education institution and

	residential location has their own unit, and each unit sends two members to the Central Executive Committee. Only males can occupy president, general secretary, treasurer, and all other secretarial postings of the KSU. Main Activities/issues: Very influential ‘pressure group’. Ethno-nationalist aims. Against migration of non-Khasis, wants independent Khasi state, rallies and lobbies against uranium, want changes to matrilineal system, strengthen <i>dorbars</i>, changes to higher education system, more reservations for Khasis viz. Garos in Meghalaya. Re-impose Restricted area Permits, Working Permits for migrants, repeal 1950 India-Nepal Friendship Treaty. Strikes, curfews, rallies, forced stall closure, and forced eviction of migrants. Location: Shillong. But members widespread. Closely aligned to SSSS in certain localities. Registered with Government: No
Khatar Shnong Socio Organisation KSO	Est. 1990. Type/structure: Community-based NGO, full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff. Main Activities: halting land privatisation, erosion and land quality, livelihood generation, transparency in <i>dorbars</i>, village level infrastructure and welfare, health clinics, self-help groups. Location: Sohra, East Khasi Hills. Registered with Government: Yes.
Mar Chaprang Development Society	Est. 2000 Type/structure: Community-based NGO with full-

	time, part-time, and volunteer staff. Main Activities/issues: Village-level education, economic development, crop marketing, youth unemployment, anti-drugs campaigns, small level of environmental issues. Location: Jowai, Jaintia Hills. Registered with Government: Yes.
North East Network NEN	Est. 1993. Type/structure: Professional NGO: Gender issues. Main Activities/issues: lobbying and capacity building, women's rights and gender issues, domestic violence, health, livelihoods, human rights and armed conflict. Location: Offices in Meghalaya, Guwahati (Assam), New Delhi, and small unit in Imphal (Manipur). Registered with Government: Yes.
Synjuk Seng Samla Shnong SSSS	Est. 1992, though some claim as old as <i>dorbars</i> themselves Type/structure: umbrella organisation for all Seng Samla- the youth wing of the village <i>dorbars</i> (councils). Thus wholly Khasi organisation. Executive Committee elected every 3 years by each unit from various villages/localities. Main Activities: lobbying on employment issues, youth issues, government corruption, development issues. Location: based in Shillong but units in different urban and rural locations in Khasi Hills. Registered with Government: Yes (recently and somewhat reluctantly in order to receive funding).
Western Cultural Social Welfare Organisation WCWS	Est. 1998 Type/structure: Small locally based NGO with full-time, part-time, and volunteer staff.

	Main Activities: Grassroots development, education, free schools, community land preservation. Location: Nongstoin, West Khasi Hills. Registered with Government: Yes.
Women for Integrated Sustainable Empowerment WISE	Est. 2002. Type/structure: Faith-based NGO based in Catholic Church. Full-time and volunteer staff. Main Activities/issues: Income generation for women, outreach programs, self-help groups, skills training, micro-credit. Location: Shillong. Registered with Government: Yes.

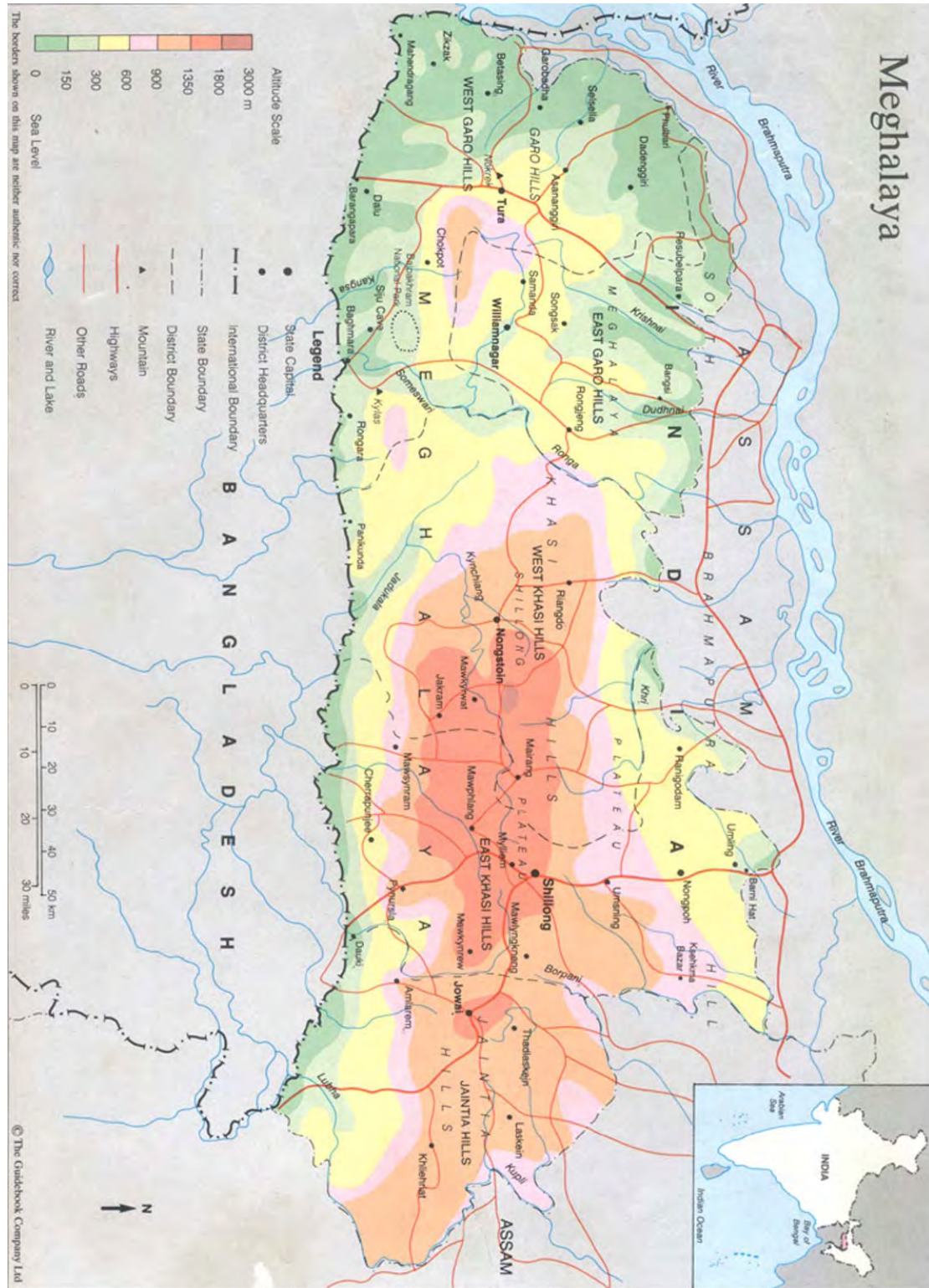
Other organisations consulted

Community Development Extension Program	Est. 1991 Type/structure: Volunteer organisation/umbrella organisation. Main Activities/issues: Develop network of community-based organisation. Train small voluntary organisations, village councils, self-help groups, community based organisations, cooperative societies. Holds forums for development organisations in remote areas and education programs. Land issues main priority. Location: Shillong, run from the North Eastern Hill University.
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	Registered: No.
Ki Lympung Ki Seng Kynthei	Est. Contested Type/structure: Umbrella organisation for women's wing of the dorbars. Women's wing fairly recent in dorbars, though some claim they are much older. Main Activities/Issues: Women's role in dorbars, education, health and sanitation. Location: Shillong. Registered: Yes.
Hynnriewtrep Youth Front	Est. 1989 Type/structure: Volunteer pressure group. Ethno-nationalist. Main Activities: Expulsion of migrants, stop border incursions from Assam, stop migration of Karbis into Jaintia Hills. Present in violent border regions trying to resettle Khasi/Jaintia villagers and depose Karbis from same areas. Location: Shillong/Jowai. Registered: No, closely aligned to FKJGP.
Meghalaya People's Human Rights Council	Est. 1996 Type/structure: Lobby group/pressure group. Small membership. Members drawn from Shillong, mostly Khasi dominated areas of Mawlai and Jaiaw. Most activities undertaken by organisations 'General Secretary' Main Activities: 'Indigenous rights', opposing the uranium mine in Domiasiat,

	the limestone quarries and cement factories in Shella in the East Khasi Hills. Become closely aligned with KSU. Location: Shillong. Registered: No.
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Appendix B: Map of Meghalaya



From Kowall and Kowall, 1995: 14.

Appendix C: Uranium Mining Posters



Photo by author: Sohra, East Khasi Hills Meghalaya, April, 2005.



Photo by author: Mawkyrwat, West Khasi Hills Meghalaya, May, 2005.

Appendix D: Glossary of Key non-English Terms

<i>adivasi, adivasis</i>	A term used to describe tribal peoples in India. This term is not common in the Northeast where the English word ‘tribal’ is most commonly used.
<i>Ahom (Tai-Ahom)</i>	The name given to the people who migrated into Assam from the Tai-speaking areas of the present-day Shan State in Myanmar, the Yunnan Province in China, and Northern Thailand, and settled in the upper-Brahmaputra Valley, part of present-day Assam. The Ahom Kingdom existed from the 13 th Century until the 1826 when it became part of British India. There is a movement in present-day Assam to distinguish Tai-Ahom ethnicity from Assamese.
<i>bandh</i>	A strike that shuts down all commercial and government activity in a particular town, city, or state. Usually physically enforced by patrols from the group or organisation that called the <i>bandh</i> .
<i>benami transaction</i>	Literally ‘nameless’ transaction, a term used to describe the leasing of private land from the tribal landowner to a non-tribal. In Meghalaya and other parts of the Northeast there are various laws that protect land from being owned by non-tribals, but this does not prevent the land being leased to non-tribals by the landowners, often in collusion with the <i>dorbars</i> .
<i>Bhoi</i>	The northern slopes of the Khasi Hills are known as Ri Bhoi, and the people who inhabit this area are known as Bhoi. Generally included as part of the Khasi ethnic group.

<i>Brahmaputra</i>	Literally ‘son of Brahma’, the Hindi name given to the river that flows through the eastern Himalayas and down through Assam into Bangladesh. Brahmaputra is also the name given to the valley that makes up the major part of present-day Assam and distinguishes the lowland riverine parts of the Northeast from the hills and mountains that surround the valley.
<i>dkhar</i>	A non-Khasi, ‘outsider’, or foreigner. Also the generic name given to the members of a clan formed from a Khasi male and non-Khasi female.
<i>Dorbar</i>	The name given to the various levels of councils in the Khasi Hills in which decisions over land allocation, land use, disputes, and increasingly the issuing of licences and permits are made. The <i>dorbars</i> were granted formal power through the Sixth Schedule of the constitution. In this thesis, unless noted, <i>dorbars</i> is used to refer to the <i>Dorbar Shnong</i> , or village-level council.
<i>Dorbar Kur</i>	Clan council, which looks after clan lands and settles disputes among clan members. All male members of the clan are sent to the <i>Dorbar Kur</i> as representatives.
<i>Dorbar Shnong</i>	Village council, which are the most common <i>dorbars</i> and the one that meets most frequently. The <i>Rangbah Shnong</i> , village headman, heads the <i>Dorbar Shnong</i> . The <i>Dorbar Shnong</i> has administrative, financial, and customary legal jurisdiction over the village and its members. It also receives development funding from the district councils and state government. Only adult males are allowed to sit on the

council and women are barred from speaking in *dorbar* meetings.

Dorbar Phyllum

Council formed from a group or cluster of villages.

Dorbar Raid

Literally ‘council of 30 villages’, though there may be more or fewer than 30 villages in the actual *Dorbar Raid*. All of the headmen from each village level *dorbar* are representatives in the *Dorbar Raid* and they elect the *Rangbah Raid*, as the chief executive of the entire area. The *Dorbar Raid* supervises markets, market levies, road building, and land allocation.

Dorbar Hima

An executive body for the 25 ‘Syiem-ships’ or *Himas* of the Khasi Hills, reflecting the boundaries of the feudatory states defined by the British.

Garos

Or A’chik one of the two main ethnic groups in Meghalaya, along with the Khasi, and the majority population in the Garo Hills Districts of Meghalaya. The Garos are of Tibeto-Burman origin and there are also Garo communities in Bangladesh. In the last decade there has been a strong campaign for a separate Garo state.

Guwahati

The largest city in Assam and the Northeast, on the banks of the Brahmaputra River.

Hyinñiewtrep

The shortened name given to the Khasi ancestors believed to have descended from heaven as seven domestic groups or families, *Ki Hyinñiew Trep*. Ethno-nationalist groups and insurgent groups commonly use the name to mean the ‘pure’

Khasi people.

Iing kur

Clan house or family house.

Jaintia (Pnar)

The Jaintia inhabit the Jaintia Hills Districts of eastern Meghalaya. While the Jaintia have differences to the Khasi they are generally considered as part of the Khasi ethnic group, though some dispute this. In this thesis the Jaintia Hills districts and Jaintia people have been included in the study of the Khasi Hills.

jhumming, jhum

Usually translated as ‘shifting cultivation’ in English. A form of agricultural production in which land is cleared, farmed, then left fallow and allowed to regenerate for several years while the cultivators move on to another area of land. This is generally carried out on common land and on steep slopes where other forms of cultivation are difficult.

Jhummas, jhummas

The name given to communities and sometimes ethnic groups who use shifting cultivation as their primary mode of production.

Ka ĩawbei Tynrai

The female ancestor common to all members of the Khasi *kur* or clan.

Ka Niam Khasi

The Khasi religion, still practiced by many Khasis, but Christianity is now more popular.

Kachari

People inhabiting the Cachar Hills of present-day Assam, very close to the eastern edge of Meghalaya.

<i>Khadduh</i>	The youngest daughter in a Khasi family often translated (inaccurately) as ‘heiress’ in colonial accounts of the Khasi. Under the matrilineal system the <i>khadduh</i> inherits land and property, and must take care of her parents and any unmarried siblings.
<i>Khasi</i>	The name given to the ethnic group inhabiting the Khasi Hills districts of Meghalaya, including several sub-tribes denoted by region of origin; Bhoi, Jainita/Pnar, Khynriam, Lyngngam, War. The Khasi speak a Mon-Khmer language and are believed to have migrated to India from Vietnam, Cambodia, and/or Laos.
<i>Khatar Shnong</i>	Literally ‘40 villages’, an area on the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills very close to Bangladesh. One of the poorest parts of the Khasi Hills and thus the focus of several civil society actors.
<i>Khynriam</i>	A Khasi sub-tribe from the Shillong plateau (i.e. the centre of the Khasi Hills).
<i>Kni</i>	The eldest maternal uncle who has a major role in the affairs of the family and the clan.
<i>Kur</i>	Clan.
<i>Lyngdoh</i>	A title given to the clan responsible for performing rituals in the village and also in the <i>Hima</i> or ‘Syiem-ship’. Often translated as ‘priest’.
<i>Marwari</i>	The name given to traders from Rajasthan who have

migrated into the Northeast since the colonial era. In Meghalaya Marwaris are associated with the timber industry and running commercial businesses.

Mikir/ Karbi

The name given to the peoples inhabiting the Karbi Anglong Districts of present-day Assam, but also living in parts of Meghalaya. The Mikir/Karbi are a Scheduled Tribe and were given the opportunity to join Meghalaya when it was formed but voted against it.

Mizo, Mizoram

The name given to the peoples inhabiting the present-day state of Mizoram at the intersection of the India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh borders.

Mleccha

The name used to denote marginal peoples outside the caste system in medieval India, often cited as the origin of the concept of tribe.

Rangbah Shnong

Village headman as voted by the males in the Khasi *dorbar*.

ri kynthi (kynthei)

Private land in the Khasi Hills, usually converted from common land by making improvements to the land to the satisfaction of the village *dorbar*. Rapidly replacing common land.

ri raid

Common land used by members of the village or a cluster of villages, mostly for shifting cultivation.

Shillong

The capital city of Meghalaya, situated in the Khasi Hills on the Shillong plateau, the highest part of the state.

<i>Shnong</i>	Village.
<i>Syiem</i>	Chief of the <i>Hima</i> or 'Syiem-ship'.
<i>Syiem-Ship (Hima)</i>	One of the 25 Khasi states as designated by the British.
<i>War</i>	The southern slopes of the Khasi Hills and the name given to the people from this area.

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