

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

The Morung Express: Naganess, indigeneity and religion

Aheli Moitra

A dissertation for the degree of philosophiae doctor – January 2024

THE MORUNG EXPRESS

ESTD. 2005

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THE POWER OF TRUTH

Pray not for a lighter load, but for stronger shoulders — Augustine of Hippo

REFLECTIONS
By Sandemo Ngullie



Due to the government's inability to handle the pandemic and fight corruption, the light at the end of the tunnel and all rays of hope will be switched off.

Phek: Show cause notice to teachers for being absent from school

KOHHIMA, AUGUST 9 (PTI): A village school management board (SMB) in Nagaland's Phek district has issued show cause notice to eight teachers for being absent from duty since March end. SMB Thuvopisu in Phek district has issued 'show cause notice' to eight teachers, including the officiating headmaster, of a government school in the village to respond within 7 days for absence from duty since March-end. Chairman of SMB Thuvopisu Vessathu Dozo said: "as school management board we are concerned for the academic progress of our students and despite government standing orders directing the teachers to be present in school..."

Newspapers in collective fight against COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 impact on newspaper industry in Nagaland- Part 3

Morning Express News
Dimapur | August 9



An employee overseeing a newspaper printing process in Nagaland. (Morung Photo)

Among the catastrophic effects the COVID-19 pandemic has left in its wake, misinformation and fake news seem to be one of the major challenges faced by newspapers all over the world.

In Nagaland, the scenario is no different.

In this three-part series, *The Morung Express* has attempted to explore the way the pandemic has left newspapers in Nagaland trying to stay afloat financially and at the same time keep readers informed.

The increase in the demand for news during these times of social unrest and uncertainty has resulted in a surge of unverified and fake news.

Editors and publishers of some Nagaland-based daily newspapers (both English and vernacular), K Temjen Jamir said newspapers are playing a very responsible role in combating the COVID-19 pandemic by educating people through editorials and keeping people safe from fake news.

"We also try to contribute the needs of the health workers in whatever small way we could manage. In fact, our foremost responsibility is to give fearless, factual, positive and impartial news reporting and coverage as frontline workers at this time of pandemic," he said.

Editor, *Capi* (Angami vernacular), Mhalezolle Kire said ever since the fight against COVID-19 pandemic in Nagaland, newspapers has been the main agent and ally of the government and health department in disseminating correct information, providing updates and especially combating fake news, which too have taken pandemic proportion.

"We strongly felt it our duty to timely inform our readers and public on the dos and don'ts, the guidelines and advisories of the government on the pandemic and, taking collective responsibilities by uploading and updating news through electronic

means to clear doubts and un-authenticated news," he said.

Editor, publisher and proprietor of *Nagaland Page*, Monalisa Changkija said the role of the Fourth Estate cannot be over-emphasized at the best of time, more so at the worst of time like the present.

"It is not only through dissemination of news and views that newspapers are putting in our mite towards collectively fighting the pandemic. From the very beginning, newspapers have been shouldering the responsibility to meet the needs of hungry and shelter-less people across the state, which we don't talk about or publicize," she said.

Besides, she said newspapers are also helping people 24x7, who need vital information and tie-ups for their problems regarding so many human issues say, for doctors, police, administrators, food, shelter, ambulances, medicines, funerals, etc.

Contribution of newspapers to economy

Coming to the contribution of newspapers in terms of employment and local economy, *Tir Yimyim* editor said in Nagaland, in the present context, newspaper industry has become major player in providing employment and livelihood to many families from news editors to hawkers.

"Among few industries in Nagaland, newspaper industry must be contributing more revenue to the State in form of GST. Whether we get payment for the services we rendered or not, we are liable to pay GST so we pay to the government accordingly," Jamir said.

According to Kire, the role of newspapers in providing employment and boosting local economy cannot be undermined. He said unlike government departments, the employment chain of news-

papers are intrinsically connected right from the editor or publisher down to the hawkers. Then, besides the regular employees and workers in a newspaper, scores of workers and agents connected with industries and business houses like paper and print, computers, advertisement etc are all part of the revenue generating set up of newspapers, Kire said.

Monalisa said it is difficult to quantify the contributions of the newspaper industry in Nagaland in terms of employment and by extension the local economy. She said if one considers the various machinery, including computers and their accessories, consumables, etc., most of which procured locally, the newspapers are actually one of the main support-systems in the sector that deals with items in the market.

"In terms of employment, besides our regular staff at the desk and the machine operators, drivers and cleaners, our papers have employed contract and strike workers, have mechanics, electricity generators, hire repairers, etc. so many other people to publish newspapers."

There are many other factors that are to be considered, she said. "The government departments are to be considered, the employment chain of news-

Prerogative of the GoI: NGBF on Interlocutors

Appeals for commi...

DIMAPUR, AUGUST 9 The Nagaland Gaon Burj (NGBF) has expressed its support for the 'propaganda' section of people's representatives of the Government of India.

Stating that the 'propaganda' section of the people's representatives is a solution to the 'propaganda' issue, the NGBF said, "The question of the interlocking of the Government of India with the Government of Nagaland is to be resolved by the Government of India."

The NGBF said, "The Government of India should take the lead in resolving the issue of the interlocking of the Government of India with the Government of Nagaland."

Cover: First half of the front page of *The Morung Express* published on 10 August 2020.

The Morung Express: Naganess, indigeneity and religion

Aheli Moitra

A dissertation submitted for the degree of philosophiae doctor

January 2024

UiT – The Arctic University of Norway
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education
Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies and Theology

Abstract

English:

This dissertation focuses on *The Morung Express*, a newspaper in Nagaland State, India, established by human rights activists in 2005. With a strong interest in indigenous issues, the newspaper presents itself as an alternative to mainstream media in India and claims to be guided by the historical experiences of the Naga people. This study examines a particular period in the newspaper's life (2020-2023) through a multi-method approach that includes content analysis, interviews with its journalists, editors, founders, and draws from experiences of the author's journalistic practice with the newspaper.

This research was guided by three overarching questions, including the ways in which indigeneity and religion were connected to 'Naganess' in select cases covered by *The Morung Express* in 2020, how its knowledge workers reflected on these connections in 2022-23, and how the institution related to boundaries between indigenous, religious and secular media.

Nagaland is inhabited by a Christian majority in a region surrounded by secular, atheist, Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist polities in India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar. Using articulation theory in this context, this study lays out how indigeneity and religion are connected to local and global scales in *The Morung Express*, and how such scaling practices shape and extend concepts related to 'Naganess' in specific cases and situations. Analytical themes such as a 'morung calendar' and 'debated prohibitions' contribute to these explorations. A focus on re-articulations and contradictions enables a study of shared understandings in Nagaland, limits set on their public articulation and challenges to such limits. Outlining a media paradigm informing the practices of journalism at *The Morung Express* problematises notions of 'indigenous media' and its relations to religious and secular media in this context.

Keywords: *The Morung Express*, indigeneity, religion, indigenous religion(s), Naganess, Nagaland, India, indigenous media, secular media, articulation theory, journalism.

Norwegian:

Denne avhandlingen fokuserer på *The Morung Express*, en avis i Nagaland State, India, etablert av menneskerettighetsaktivister i 2005. Med en sterk interesse for urfolksspørsmål presenterer avisen seg selv som et alternativ til mainstream-media i India, og hevder å være veiledet av Naga-folkets historiske opplevelser. Studien undersøker en bestemt periode i avisens liv (2020-2023) gjennom en flermetodisk tilnærming som inkluderer innholdsanalyse, intervjuer med journalister, redaktører og grunnleggere, samt forfatterens bakgrunn som journalist i avisen.

Forskningen ble styrt av tre overordnede spørsmål, inkludert måtene urfolk og religion ble knyttet til «Naganess» i utvalgte saker dekket av *The Morung Express* i 2020, hvordan kunnskapsarbeiderne reflekterte over disse sammenhengene i 2022-23, og hvordan institusjonen forholdt seg til grenser mellom urfolks-, religiøse og sekulære medier.

Nagaland har en hovedsakelig kristen befolkning, i en region omgitt av sekulære, ateistiske, hindu, muslimske og buddhistiske politiske institusjoner, i henholdsvis India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China og Myanmar. Ved bruk av artikulasteori viser i denne sammenhengen denne studien hvordan indigenitet og religion er koplet på lokale og globale skalaer i *The Morung Express*, og hvordan slike skaleringspraksiser former og utvider begreper om «Naganess» i spesifikke case og situasjoner. Analytiske temaer som «morung kalender» og «debatterte forbud» bidrar til slik utforskning. Et fokus på re-artikulasjoner og motsetninger muliggjør en studie av felles forståelser i Nagaland, grenser for å uttrykk dem offentlig, og utfordring av slike grenser. Gjennom skissering av et mediaparadigme som preger journalistisk praksis ved *The Morung Express* problematiseres begreper om «ufolksmedia» og dets relasjoner til religiøse og sekulære medier i denne konteksten.

Acknowledgments

My gratitude to *The Morung Express*, and all those I have associated with through it, for being the rock on which this dissertation stands. To Aküm Longchari, Nepuni Piku, Gentleson Vashum, Moalemba Jamir, Akangjungla, Imkong Walling, Imlisanen Jamir and Veroli Zhimo, I am indebted to your contributions to this dissertation, as also to my previous work as a journalist. To everyone else associated with *The Morung Express*, but not named here, you have extended just as much guidance, friendship and solidarity, making years of our collaboration, and this academic journey, possible.

Apuni sob ke beshi thanks aro salam!

I thank UiT – The Arctic University of Norway (UiT) in Tromsø and the Department of Archaeology, History, Religious Studies and Theology (AHR) for facilitating this PhD research between 2019 and 2023. At the AHR, my supervisor, Siv Ellen Kraft, asked key questions that guided the direction of this research. Thank you for seeing me through the entire process. Your practical outlook, quick interventions and perceptive directions are much appreciated. I also thank Bjørn Ola Tafjord who introduced me to the study of religion, equipping me with new tools and networks to re-think old assumptions. Both your efforts led to the fulfilment of the PhD program requirements, and my association with two research groups: Indigenous Religion(s): Local Grounds, Global Networks (INREL) and Governmateriality of Indigenous Religion(s) (GOVMAT).

Arkotong Longkumer introduced me to academic research and supported me throughout my training as a research scholar. I am grateful for your encouragement and solidarity; and thank you for evaluating my mid-term progress with insightful recommendations.

I thank the former heads of AHR, John McNicol and Åsne Ø. Høgetveit, for their support, alongside the entire support staff at the UiT. Thanks to Tore Børseth Bentz for addressing the administrative challenges I brought along. Thanks, also, to the UiT Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (HSL) that, in addition to my employment, facilitated a scholarship to spend a semester at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland (UK) as a visiting scholar. It provided me with an invaluable academic experience at the University's School of Divinity, and the opportunity to interact with a remarkable cohort of scholars at the Centre for South Asian Studies. Elsewhere in Norway, I thank Geir Afdal and Fredrik Saxegaard of the Research School Religion-Values-Society (RVS), hosted by the MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society; and the Norwegian Research School in History (NRSH), organised by the University of Oslo; for facilitating a wider engagement with the systematic study of religion and history.

Thank you, Lindsay Graham, for lending me editorial support – you were thorough in your reading and clear with your questions.

Tromsø, charming as it is, would have been unbearable without those who helped me find ground, and move from one housing to another on this island. The COVID-19 period, which started within a few months of my arrival here, led to total isolation with several local issues emerging from global research plans. Liudmila Nikanorova carried the greatest of my survival burdens, familiarising me with Arctic life and living through all seasons and adversities. Helen Jennings brought much-needed humour and a mountain of drawings and cakes. May-Lisbeth Brew cleared the fog of bureaucracy and information. Bjørn-Richard Pedersen and Petja Lyn Langholz listened to endless stories of life's uncertainties, sheltered me, asked impossible questions, found spectacular answers. Hilde Leikny Sommerseth showed me how leaders operate. Chi Quynh Vo and I bonded through Eurovision, as Asians from different nations. Asanuo and Michael Heneise shared the warmth of their hearth with pots of rice and pork. Rolf A. Elvestad provided every resource to make life worth living, demystifying snow and Norway in the process. To all of you, I am most grateful for your generosity. Your contributions to maintaining sanity through multiple crises will always be cherished, as will those of Joakim Sjøblom and Aksel M. Bjerke who materialised the mythical Norwegian hospitality. The South Asian community, particularly the Tromsø Bengali Community, lent spice to life. The bizarreness of life in Norway was shared in its delight with Anatolijs Venovcevs, Leni Mjåland and Theodor Sandal Rolfsen.

For food, shelter, family and (fashionable) clothing, in Dimapur, Nagaland, I am most grateful to Limatula, Lanusosang, Punarepla and Sheratenla. Survival, here too, was dependent on the salt of reminders not to take yourself too seriously, nor too lightly – for this, I am obliged to A. Sentiyula (also for preparing me to face Arctic winters), Akangchila Longchar, Talilula, Renchano Hümtsoe, Alemtula, Kivini Shohe, Zubeni Lotha and Parismita Singh. Furthermore, this study is indebted to the wisdom and solidarity of Along Longkumer, Aienla Bendang, the Late N Bendang Ao, Wati Aier, Alongla Aier, Monalisa Changkija, Easterine Kire, Larho Adani, Tungshang Ningreichon, Hans Ragner Mathisen (Keviselie), Atina Pamei Gaare, Gam A. Shimray, Seno Tsühah, Akole Tsühah, Atshole Thopi, C.P. Anto, Henry Goldsmith, Hewasa Lorin, rōzumarī saṃsāra, Tongam Rina, Linda Chhakchhuak, Kalpana Sharma, Laxmi Murthy, Ammu Joseph, Rupa Chinai, Merina Chishi, Henlly Phom Odyuo, Sopei Joel Rungsung, Kallol Dey, Ajay Sethi, Hilary and David Stookey.

Why do academics do what we do? I thank you for reminding me of the ground on which we stand, and walk: Sanjib Baruah, Dolly Kikon, Sarat Phukan, Xonzoi Barbora, Abdul Kalam Azad, Eyingbeni Hümtsoe-Nienu, Meera Gopakumar, Anisha George, Awanish Kumar, Nikhil Mathew, Deeksha, Joel Rodriguez, Yengkhom Jilangamba, Haripriya Soibam, Upendra Sonpimple, R.K. Debbarma, Duncan McDuie-Ra, Surabhi Pudasaini, Marisol de la Cadena, Bengt G. Karlsson and Meenal Tula, to name a few.

My solidarity remains with the Forskerforbundet and TODOS (Doctoral Studies and Postdocs at UiT) in Norway and the Network of Women in Media in India that fostered solidarity and kept open a steady flow of information related to happenings, rights, and responsibilities in the worlds of academia and journalism. Institutions I am grateful to for providing relevant

educational opportunities over the years: The British Association for the Study of Religions, the Religious Studies Podcast, New Books Network Podcast, Forum for Naga Reconciliation, Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights, North East Network (Nagaland), Sisterhood Network (Nagaland), Oriental Theological Seminary (Nagaland), Tetso College (Nagaland), Centre for Nonviolence and Peace Studies (University of Rhode Island, USA), Interference Archive (New York), North East Institute of Social Sciences and Research (Nagaland), Northeastern Social Research Centre (Assam), Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (Thailand), International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Scriptorium (Edinburgh), and the Kolkata Book Fair.

For adding conversations to the table in Norway and Scotland, I thank Astrid Hovden, Inga Bårdsen Tøllefsen, Espen Dahl, Istvan Czachesz, Laura Cervantes, Mia Lövheim, Roxana Mihaela Sarion, Gregory D. Alles, Eman Udaya, Endalew Lijalem Enyew, Larry Ibrahim Mohammed, Emre Sari, Miro D. Bobrick, Konsta Kaikkonen, Esther Tenberg, Mateus J. Schweyher, Henrik Nykvist, The'ang Teron, Heejin Kim, Kristine Aslaksdatter Siri, Cato Christensen, Prashanti Mayfield, Chandreyee Goswami, Elilo Ezung, Rae Fujimori, Adarsh Prabhakaran, Aswin Govindan, Aparna Vinod, Alakta Das and Adwitia Maity.

Through all this, my family remained steadfast. Masoom paved the way for political awakenings and is my prime source of strength and new configurations. Ranjana and Prasun Chakravarty cheered me on without exception. Santa and Santanu Moitra laid the base for everything that transpired since my time on the planet. It is your consistent encouragement, daily reminders, travel lists, pick-ups-and-drops, endless OTPs, diligent care, book scanning, annual bureaucracy, *golpo*, *ranna*, *jhogda*, and all-weather energy and enthusiasm that got me through this tornado.

To you, and to everyone else who walked with me, *tusen takk*, a thousand thanks!

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(All figures/photographs are the author's unless otherwise indicated)

1 Introduction

The focus of this dissertation is a newspaper called *The Morung Express* published in Nagaland State, located in the Indian Union on its borders with Myanmar. Established by a collective of human rights activists in 2005, this privately-owned newspaper presents itself as an ‘alternative voice to the dominant status quo’ through a location in ‘Naga people’s historical realities’ with its practices ‘guided by their (Naga) voices and experiences’ and ‘the power of truth’¹. It is the second largest English language newspaper in Nagaland State but, in comparison to newspapers in India’s metropolitan cities, is classified as a small newspaper. Its news and editorial content enable me to draw on contemporary issues in Nagaland today, connecting them to broader themes related to indigeneity, religion and Naganess. This dissertation focuses on a particular period of this newspaper’s life (2020-2023) through a multi-method approach that includes a presentation of its context from my own journalistic practice within *The Morung Express* from 2011-19; an analysis of content published on its pages in 2020 focusing on a selection of cases; and fieldwork-based interviews with its journalists, editors and founders in 2022-23 about the themes emerging from these case studies.

My point of departure was how *The Morung Express* presented its news in 2020, and the ways in which it articulated notions of Naganess to indigeneity and religion. This key question opened up the newspaper as a ‘field site’ to study how daily news media among marginalised peoples historicise their struggles in contemporary India; and how such historicisation pushed articulations beyond the borders set by nation states. Specific cases demonstrated recurring themes and seasonal debates that made the ‘news’ into ‘knowledge as commons’. This entails mediation that render prayers, martyrs, tradition, culture, church, and nation *as* articulated, collectively produced, public, and debatable in contemporary Nagaland. These insights led me to an exploration of how Nagaland’s

¹ <https://morungexpress.com/about-us> Accessed on 09.10.2023.

‘knowledge workers’ (journalists and editorial contributors) reflected on the themes that emerged from this study. Speaking to the newspaper’s founders also made me think about the medium of print and practices of journalism, leading me to questions on the extent to which such a newspaper related to more established notions of ‘indigenous media/journalism’, or to distinctions between religious and secular media.

The Morung Express works through a recognisable journalistic paradigm of shared norms, values, standards, and practices (Vos and Moore 2020). Reading the newspaper as an example of indigenous media/journalism locates the global context of this work, and the local conditions to which it responds. In the newspaper, Naganess is layered with historical, instead of timeless, tropes through a struggle to build collective meaning around issues of public participation.

The newspaper was established in the context of the Indo-Naga ceasefires from 1997, India and Myanmar’s continued militarisation of the Naga lands, and the subsequent Naga reconciliation process. The collective capital of its founders, along with the emergence of professionally trained journalists, were the immediate conditions for the establishment of this newspaper in 2005. Based within Dimapur, the main city of trade and commerce in Nagaland, the newspaper is circulated locally through market networks and globally through the Internet. Described by its founders and publisher as both a ‘national newspaper of the Nagas’ and a ‘place of learning’, *The Morung Express* and its journalists engage the contradictions between customary and fundamental rights, Naganess and Indianness, Indigenous Peoples and tribes, festivals and holy days, ethics and tradition, uniqueness and solidarity. As a newspaper and a pedagogical site of ‘critical consciousness’, the institution is put to work by expanding its public participation beyond the news, through election debates, lectures, and social collaborations.

1.1 Research questions and purposes

This study combines approaches derived from my training and practice in journalism with theoretical perspectives from religious studies, particularly in regard to indigenous

religion(s) (Kraft and Johnson 2017, Kraft, Tafjord et al. 2020), and articulation theory as developed by Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, James Clifford and others. The following research questions have guided my work:

- I. In what ways are Naganess, indigeneity and religion articulated in *The Morung Express* through select case studies in 2020?
- II. How do the knowledge workers – reporters, editors, contributors – of *The Morung Express* reflect on the emergent themes retrospectively in 2022-23?
- III. To what extent does *The Morung Express* relate to established notions of ‘indigenous media/journalism’, and to distinctions between religious and secular media?

This study is bifurcated into two broad parts. The first question addresses the first part, through chapters two to four. Chapter two presents the system of news production in Nagaland, how *The Morung Express* is located within that structure, and the broad contours of issues that are often related to indigeneity and religion on its pages. Chapters three and four explore calendars and prohibitions respectively, thereby covering annually occurring events on the one hand, and regularly occurring issues on the other. Both offer rich material for the exploration of articulations of Naganess to indigeneity and religion, including on local and global scales, and to tradition, secular and religious tropes.

The second research question is addressed through the second part, in chapters five and six. The fifth chapter takes the previous analysis back to the newsroom, asking how Naganess, indigeneity and religion are re-articulated by the ‘knowledge workers’ of the newspaper. The sixth chapter presents how the newspaper’s founders describe *The Morung Express*, ways in which journalism, indigeneity and religion are connected, while journalists also suggest why some of these may not be connected. All the chapters are collectively concerned with the third research question. It is through this that I present how *The Morung Express* relates to notions of ‘indigenous media/journalism’ but is also a news media like any other that responds to its local conditions and disrupts stark distinctions between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ media and practices.

1.2 Context and rationale

Nagaland State is part of the Indian Union, located in a region often referred to as the ‘Northeast’ of India. It is home to eight of India’s 28 states, eight union territories, and reported to have one of India’s two ‘largest concentrations of Indigenous Peoples’². Nagaland is home to a Christian majority in a region surrounded by atheist, secular, Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist polities in India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar.



Figure 1: The area marked with a black circle on this open-source map of South-Central Asia indicates the region where Nagas claim homeland territories, and the region from where The Morung Express is published. This map does not specify Nagaland in any form and is used only to help the reader think of its general geo-spatial location; to grapple with what this means when distinctions are made between ‘mainland’ India and the ‘Northeast’ where Nagaland State lies³.

² <https://www.iwgia.org/en/india/3601-iw-2020-india.html> Accessed on 21.09.2023.

³ This map was generated by Ian Macky using the free portable atlas software called Pat. <https://ian.macky.net/pat/map/scas/scasblu.gif> Accessed on 28.12.2023.

The Northeast region of India is commonly labelled a frontier (Glancey 2011, McDuire-Ra 2012a, Cederlof 2014, Baruah 2020, Ziipao 2020, Kikon and McDuire-Ra 2021), or borderlands (Pachua and van Schendel 2016, Pachua 2022), and, often troubled, peripheries of the Indian Union (Bhaumik 2009, Haokip 2012, Kimura 2019). Instated as a state of the Union in 1963, Nagaland is one among five federal units where Nagas claim homeland territories, including parts of neighbouring Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur states, and Myanmar (Naga Self-Administered Zone). There are many 'homeland' claims in the region (Baruah 2003, Van Schendel 2011, Kolås 2017, Longkumer 2021, Barbora 2022, Hausing 2022), some of which have led the state formation process in Northeast India. This is different to the linguistic affiliations that led to state formation elsewhere in India (Pulipaka, Gorthi et al. 2016). Collective protection of, and contestation over, land, natural resources and their classification (Jilangamba 2015) have led to violent resource politics, militarisation (Kikon 2019, Dutta 2020, Fernandes 2020), migration to urban areas in search of employment (Karlsson and Kikon 2017, Kikon and Karlsson 2019) and the emergence of stark class differences through extractive relations with the ecology in the region (Karlsson 2011).

Though officially secular, the Indian Union⁴, also referred to as India, is home to the largest Hindu population in the world, with a population share of 79.8%⁵. It has seen a rapid rise and spread of the Hindutva project post-independence that builds Hindu hegemony by linking the Indian nation state and citizenship with religion. Hindutva has become increasingly authoritarian since 2014 when the Indian national Bharatiya Janata Party came to power (Kaul 2017, Siddiqui 2017, Josh 2018, Iqbal 2019); though challenged in India's geographical and Christian peripheries, like the Northeast, the

⁴ Article one of the Indian Constitution notes that India is a union of states and union territories. To be clear about India as such a union, and not an ideological construct, I will often use the term 'Indian Union' interchangeably with India to refer to this union of federal states that operate through the main frame of a central constitution.

⁵ Among the country's 1.2 billion people as per the 2011 Census of India (no census has been conducted since then).

[https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=126326#:~:text=Total%20Population%20in%202011%20is,Stated%200.29%20crores%20\(0.2%25\)](https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=126326#:~:text=Total%20Population%20in%202011%20is,Stated%200.29%20crores%20(0.2%25)) Accessed on 14.08.2023.

party has won elections even in these areas through long term ideological programmes focused on development (Palshikar 2019, Longkumer 2021, Datta, Saryal et al. 2023).

With a population of about two million, the 2011 census classifies 87.93% of Nagaland State⁶ as Christian and 86.48% as Scheduled Tribe (ST)⁷. This makes Nagaland one of the few Christian majority states coupled with an ST-majority in the Indian Union⁸. Politically, the Nagas have been asserting their right to self-determination since 1929 in various forms⁹ (Van Dyke 1969, Vashum 2000, Karlsson 2001, Kikon 2005, Longchari 2016, Kelle 2021, Loong, Manby et al. 2023). Having been pushed to armed confrontation with the governments of India and Myanmar since 1956, Naga revolutionary groups have agreed to ceasefires with the Government of India since 1997, accompanied by political talks since 2001. There has been a regional bilateral ceasefire with the Government of Myanmar since 2012. The people of Nagaland State, as well as the neighbouring states in the Northeast region of India, have lived under martial law since 1958, promulgated by the central government in India through the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) that enables the Government of India to maintain a large army presence in the region leading to the widespread abuse of human rights¹⁰ (Kumar and Murthy 2002, Kikon 2009, McDuie-Ra 2009, Baruah 2014, Jilangamba 2016, Jimo 2023). In the time this martial law has operated, the number of armed

⁶ Nagaland State in this dissertation refers to a federal state in the Indian Union, not 'Nagalim' or 'Nagaland' that encompasses all Naga areas and homelands conceived of as a 'nation', unless otherwise mentioned.

⁷ <https://www.censusindia2011.com/nagaland-population.html> Accessed on 24.10.2022.

⁸ Nagaland is also described as the 'most Baptist state in the world' with the State's Christians termed as 'soul hunters' – extending their previous descriptions as 'head hunters' to their globally renowned Christian position. See <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/notes-global-church/most-baptist-state-isn-t-mississippi-it-s-nagaland-india> , <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2006/february/38.51.html> Accessed on 15.12.2023.

⁹ The British first touched base with some Nagas in 1832, before which some Nagas were in varied, and not always equal nor peaceful, relations with the neighbouring Axom kingdom, including through land, resources, tax and market related arrangements in the borderlands between the two. (See Misra 2000).

¹⁰ The law has now been lifted from parts of the Northeast.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/modi-govt-decides-to-reduce-disturbed-areas-under-afspa-in-northeast-amit-shah-8518556/> Accessed on 17.08.2023.

revolutionary groups in Nagaland State alone has gone from one in 1958 (in the then Naga Hills of Assam) to more than 20 in 2023. Such worsening conditions of armed conflict have emerged from India's signature style of 'managing' the Northeast region through the use of force in securing its borders, leading to, what political scientist Sanjib Baruah has aptly termed, 'durable disorders' (Baruah 2007).

India is ranked fourth on the Global Firepower index¹¹. As of 2023, it has an estimated army personnel¹² of 2,197,117¹³ and a defence budget of approximately USD 54 billion¹⁴. This means that India has the fourth largest capacity in the world to wage (and sustain) a prolonged conflict, which it can legally do in a democratic state through extrajudicial laws like the AFSPA (Hoenig and Singh 2014). The Standing Committee on Defense (2022-23) of the Indian Parliament reported that in 2021-22 alone, the army had an expenditure of Rs. 1,57,092.05 crore¹⁵ or approximately USD 19 billion. Compare this to Nagaland. In 2021-22, Nagaland State showed a total expenditure of Rs. 13,713.54 crore¹⁶ or approximately USD 1 billion, with less than 10% of the amount generated through the state's own revenue¹⁷. The state is economically and politically dependent on the Indian central government. Nagaland State accesses federal autonomy through Article 371-A¹⁸, which was inserted into the Indian Constitution through its 13th

¹¹ <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php> Accessed on 17.08.2023.

¹² Only land personnel, excluding air force and navy personnel.

¹³ Almost the same population size as Nagaland State, which was reported to have a population of 1,978,502 in the last official census conducted by the Government of India in 2011.

<https://www.censusindia.co.in/states/nagaland> Accessed on 18.08.2023.

¹⁴ https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=india Accessed on 17.08.2023.

¹⁵ https://loksabhadocs.nic.in/lsscommittee/Defence/17_Defence_36.pdf Accessed on 17.08.2023.

¹⁶ https://cag.gov.in/webroot/uploads/download_audit_report/2023/SFAR-2021-22-Report-No.-1-of-2023_Nagaland-06425c5998ab437.23115216.pdf Accessed on 17.08.2023.

¹⁷ <https://nagalandtribune.in/nagaland-cm-presents-tax-free-deficit-budget-of-rs-1374-17-crore-for-2023-24/#:~:text=Increase%20in%20state%20revenues&text=1%2C092.21%20crore%20during%202021%2D22,it%20has%20already%20reached%20Rs.> Accessed on 17.08.2023.

¹⁸ 12 federal states were created in the Indian Union through such special provisions for previously 'sovereign' entities, six of which are in the Northeast. While upholding the Indian parliament's recent decision to abrogate one such provision called Article 370 for the state of Jammu and Kashmir, the Supreme Court of India termed these provisions examples of 'asymmetric federalism' in India;

amendment in 1962 (Das 2016) as a result of the 16-point agreement reached between the Government of India and the Naga People's Convention in 1960 (Means 1971: 1014-21, Misra 2014: 16-7, Haokip 2017). This was one of few political integration settlements in independent India, with a 'peoples convention' not a 'princely state'¹⁹, that led to the formation of a state within the Indian Union that is, nonetheless, still controlled through a heavy military presence.

Nagaland State has a 60-member State Legislative Assembly. It has two seats in the Indian Parliament, one in the 543-member Lok Sabha (lower house) and one in the 245-member Rajya Sabha (upper house). The State Legislative Assembly is currently governed by an 'opposition-less government'²⁰, the only such case in the Indian Union. The Assembly is led by the local Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP - 25 seats) alongside the Indian ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP - 12 seats)²¹. In the run up to the election for the Nagaland Legislative Assembly in 2023, the NDPP published full front-page advertisements almost every day in all leading newspapers in Nagaland. Enabled by huge financial resources of the NDPP and BJP, some of its advertisements stated the NDPP's objectives, if voted to power, were to 'promote Naga soft power' by 'pushing creativity and innovation, propelling brand Nagaland, protecting our age old

ultimately, the abrogation indicated that such 'special provisions' are temporary legal mechanisms and can be revoked when the Indian parliament so decides. See <https://www.scobserver.in/reports/abrogation-of-article-370-judgement-summary/> Accessed on 14.12.2023.

¹⁹ Princely states were semi-sovereign entities ruled by monarchs, and controlled by the British, that were incorporated through various agreements (translated into legal provisions, as mentioned in the previous footnote) into the Indian Union after independence from the British Empire in 1947. Before the formation of Nagaland State, the polities of the Naga hills were self-governed through their organisation as villages and were not under the control of any one sovereign rule till the British partly administered the region from 1832 to 1947, and is now administered, in parts, by India and Myanmar.

²⁰ An 'opposition-less government' is one in which all political parties that are elected to the state legislative assembly agree to form an alliance. There is no opposition. Though it defeats the purpose of democratic governance, in Nagaland this is claimed to be in support of a favourable Indo-Naga political agreement, and thus accepted. People and groups have protested against this arrangement but mostly in newspaper opinion columns and on social media sites.

²¹ <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/installing-opposition-less-government-in-nagaland-will-be-mockery-of-democracy-say-political-analysts/article66610701.ece> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

traditions, preserving our rich cultural heritage, and promoting our legendary festivals’. Here, tropes often linked with ‘indigeneity’ are almost indistinguishable from the BJP’s promotion of India as a global ‘soft power’²².

More than half of Nagaland’s legislators are millionaires²³ in a state which performs the poorest in the Northeast region in terms of ‘poverty, health, and affordable energy’²⁴ with 73% of the population living below the national poverty line²⁵. In 2023, two women legislators were elected to power for the first time in Nagaland State’s history²⁶. Local political parties and their representatives almost always ally with political parties in power in the central government in India, dependent on them as their primary source of wealth, re-election²⁷ and impunity²⁸ in a debt-ridden state²⁹. Employment and other sources of monetary income for the electorate are often restricted to rural subsistence or mono-crop plantations and the public sector, particularly government jobs – civil services, infrastructural contracts, (coal) mining and contract labour through the government’s development schemes – are the state’s primary sources of income. These incomes also contribute towards bribes for bureaucrats and politicians³⁰. Village and tribe unions, churches, and Naga revolutionary groups are also dependent on these sources to ‘tax’³¹ Nagaland’s citizens who form their membership as a contribution to

²² <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/indias-soft-power-strategy/295206> Accessed on 22.08.2023.

²³ <https://adrindia.org/content/nagaland-polls-over-30-jump-assets-53-re-contesting-mlas-46-crorepatis> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

²⁴ <https://theprint.in/india/governance/nagaland-emerges-as-worst-performing-state-in-northeast-sdg-index-experts-blame-insurgency/727823/> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

²⁵ <https://nagalandpage.com/poverty-where/> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

²⁶ <https://morungexpress.com/lofty-expectations-ahead-for-nagalands-first-women-mlas> Accessed on 18.08.2023.

²⁷ <https://theprint.in/politics/three-term-nagaland-cm-serial-bjp-ally-the-importance-of-being-neiphu-rio/1392643/> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

²⁸ <https://morungexpress.com/impunity-and-corruption-in-nagaland> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

²⁹ <https://prsendia.org/budgets/states/nagaland-budget-analysis-2023-24> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

³⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2016/4/14/in-indias-nagaland-a-tale-of-taxes-and-corruption> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

³¹ Citizens of Nagaland do not pay an income tax to the Government of India, but they pay state taxes on all other items of consumption purchased from the market. Taxes to Naga revolutionary groups are

the Indo-Naga political negotiations. The past couple of decades has seen the state push ‘entrepreneurship’, putting the burden of employment and income on individuals, even as no largescale commercial-industrial sector has emerged. Poor infrastructure for development persists even as the extraction and exploitation of natural resources, particularly oil, remains contentious in state and revolutionary Naga politics³².

The reportage of these issues was limited during the Indo-Naga armed conflict as the Indian government imposed extensive restrictions on the international and national press in the Naga areas to undermine the state violation of human rights (Luithui and Haksar 1984, Misra 1984). In the ceasefire years, the Indian news media’s coverage of issues related to the Northeast, and Nagaland, mediated the ‘other’ (Sonwalkar 2004a) of the sub-continent, often bringing a condescending attitude to covering issues of the region through ‘parachute journalism’³³ and ‘alien standards’ (Kumar 2023: 185). These terms suggest that ‘outsider’ journalists with little knowledge of local politics reported on issues emerging from the region based on distant stereotypes. However, rigorous accounts also emerged through the ‘eyes of mainlander’ Indian journalists (Chinai 2018) who were sympathetic to issues raised by people of the Northeast, but found marginal attention³⁴ in the mainstream news media in India³⁵ (Sonwalkar 2004b, Sen 2011). My

paid in addition to these. The largest institution Nagas pay ‘taxes’ to, apart from their respective village unions, is probably the church through tithing programmes.

³² <https://scroll.in/article/869167/bone-of-the-land-the-search-for-oil-shapes-politics-in-this-corner-of-nagaland> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

³³ <https://nwmindia.org/national-meets/national-meet-bengaluru-2020/fixing-the-ethics-of-fixer-journalism/> Accessed on 16.08.2023.

³⁴ <https://www.newslandry.com/2021/12/09/big-medias-coverage-of-northeast-india-has-never-been-adequate-but-now-its-worse> Accessed on 15.08.2023;

<https://nwmindia.org/gender-lens/gender-media-elections/2017-assembly-elections/why-the-media-fails-to-explain-nagaland/> Accessed on 16.08.2023.

³⁵ An Oxfam India study on ‘Representation of Marginalised Caste Groups in Indian Media’ conducted between 2021 and 2022 found that seven major English language newspapers in India had only one percent of their authors from the Scheduled Tribes. See

<https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/workingpaper/who-tells-our-stories-matters-representation-marginalised-caste-groups-indian-media> Accessed on 28.12.2023.

own work with *The Morung Express* from 2011-2019 entailed an overlap of these two fields – human rights and journalism.

As a journalist and researcher, my work with the newspaper had the ‘outsider’ privilege that journalists without an exit ticket from Nagaland lacked. A bachelor’s degree in mass media (journalism), and a master’s dissertation in India’s decision to abstain from the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, helped me begin thinking about state-led violence against citizens, particularly on the peripheries of India, and how they were connected to state-enabled structures of impunity beyond international accountability. Brought up in a middle class, diasporic Bengali, caste Hindu, Indian family in Delhi, Muscat and Mumbai, our English secular social science education had little to do with these questions. The Indo-Naga ceasefires post 1997, the ongoing Naga reconciliation process, and the collaborative politics of *The Morung Express* facilitated the possibility for journalists like me to explore emerging issues in Nagaland. My work in Dimapur was supported by journalists and civil society members who taught me the ropes on covering issues relevant to the press in Nagaland and to the newspaper – human rights violations, crimes, cities, corruption, landslides, taxes, tournaments, trauma, festivals, biodiversity, agriculture, protests, and meetings related to the Naga reconciliation process, to mention a short list. Since 2015, and particularly in the past year, the growth of digital media and social media-based news channels in India has led to increased coverage of the Northeast region. Yet, regular coverage is often restricted to situations of conflict. News media in Nagaland is thus the main player in plugging the information gap for a local audience that was once dependent on the All India Radio for news and information even about their neighbourhood. I will detail the context and structure of the media in Nagaland in chapter two, but I raise this point here to address the rationale of my study within the context outlined above.

Indo-Naga relations are often mediated through racial stigma targeted at Naga (and Northeast) migrants living and working in cosmopolitan cities in India (Remesh 2012, McDuie-Ra 2012b, Kikon 2022, Rai 2023). This racialisation became even more violent during the COVID-19 pandemic when the virus was embodied in the migrant worker or

student³⁶, leading to a mass exodus from these cities and into their home states in the Northeast under traumatic conditions (Aier, Kechu et al. 2022). A collaborative project between the University of Melbourne, Australia, and the Oriental Theological Seminary, Nagaland, documented some of these conditions, supported by local newspapers like *The Morung Express*³⁷. In Nagaland, meanwhile, ‘non-local’ migrant workers faced a difficult situation³⁸ as the state went into lockdown, with villages sealing and monitoring their borders. The pandemic resurfaced ‘immigration panics’ (Wouters 2022) and ‘perceptions of illegality’ (Achumi 2019) of the ‘outsider’, which now also included Naga migrants returning home, seen as carriers of the virus.

As the main disseminator of daily news and opinions in a stifling atmosphere for journalism in India today³⁹, and as owners of the means of news production, newspapers in Nagaland emphasised these issues⁴⁰, kept them on their news and opinion pages, raising concerns otherwise brushed aside in a country flooded by concerns of class, caste, patriarchy, corruption, and poor planning. These Naga-owned newspapers also highlight and maintain up-to-date articulations of Naganess, indigeneity and religion in print, sometimes building their own systems of articulation. As an understudied area, this study would have been just as fruitful if done through a focus on any other newspaper in Nagaland. Some articulations may have differed, and a commentary may have emerged about other kinds of newspapers and journalism practices. However, *The Morung Express* is the only newspaper that claims to provide an ‘alternative’ that is

³⁶ Nagas, and other people from the Northeast, were often taken to be Chinese, with mainland Indians unable to recognise them as fellow citizens.

³⁷ <http://www.dollykikon.com/projects/covid-19-and-naga-migrants/> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

³⁸ <https://www.eastmojo.com/nagaland/2022/09/30/nagaland-how-covid-19-impacted-construction-workers/> Accessed on 16.08.2023.

³⁹ India ranks 160 in the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) out of 180 countries, with Norway at number one and North Korea at 180. <https://rsf.org/en/index> Accessed on 03.10.2023.

⁴⁰ <https://www.morungexpress.com/caregivers-share-experience-of-first-covid-wave> , <https://morungexpress.com/1244-migrants-leave--for-bihar-on-special-train> , <https://www.morungexpress.com/relief-packages-distribution-daily-wage-earners-kohima> , <https://morungexpress.com/finding-way-back-home-amidst-covid-19> , <https://morungexpress.com/no-lockdown-hunger> Accessed on 16.08.2023.

located in ‘Naga people’s historical realities’ making it recognisable as ‘different journalism’ (Bebawi and Onilov 2023). It is this ‘difference’ in journalism that this study takes stock of in addition to its similarities and relations with media and articulation paradigms in Nagaland, as well as elsewhere in the world today. With this in mind, I offer the following as an outline of how some crucial terms are used in this dissertation.

1.2.1 Naganess, indigeneity, religion

Nagas began to organise through Christian networks from the 19th century onwards and through connections to indigenous peoples’ networks from the 20st century. In this dissertation, the conditions under which these new organising potentials emerged are taken to be transnational processes through which different groups ‘recognise each other, form alliances, and distinguish themselves from others’ (Kraft, Tafjord et al. 2020: 186). They participate in the formation of solidarities through anti-colonial movements and discourses which make associations with ‘distant selves’ (Kraft 2022) – like Indigenous Peoples or Christians elsewhere – while drawing separation from ‘near others’ – like Hindus or Bengalis in the neighbourhood. These processes are located in the decolonising (Smith 2012) and decoloniality (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) related actions that led to new transnational collaborations in the 20th-21st centuries.

‘Naganess’ has been used as a term to study Naga material culture (West 1985); Nagaism as a socio-economic way of life (Civilisations 1953); in relation to Christianity, as renaissance (Yonuo 1974: 120); as political assertions among Naga groups (Wouters 2018); and as ‘oneness’ of the Naga people (Longkumer 2016b). It has been used in Naga feminist articulations (Kikon 2017a), and has been related to ‘blood and history’ (Longkumer 2017a: 159); ‘national’ performance through art, ceremony and at festivals (Joshi 2012, Longkumer 2016b); and to assert social, cultural, and political collective actions. Elsewhere, it has been used by a famous singer who claims ‘singularly stereotypical tribal’ Naganess⁴¹; as a Twitter hashtag⁴²; as celebration⁴³, and to

⁴¹ <http://www.naganess.com/p/about-me.html> Accessed on 25.01.2022.

⁴² #naganess

⁴³ <https://morungexpress.com/celebrating-naganess> Accessed on 25.01.2022.

contemplate its interweaves with Christianity⁴⁴. Naganess is not a fixed category. The point of this study is to understand the issues that arise when Naganess is involved in *The Morung Express*: what stays, what goes, through which ways, and to what effect, when ideas, things, practices described to be typical of the Nagas as a people, politics, culture and society are involved.

Nagas declared independence (unsuccessfully) from British colonial rule on August 14, 1947 – a day before Indian Independence – and emerged as a ‘national’ entity through the Naga National Council-led plebiscite in 1951 (Nuh 2002 (1986): 111, 123, Chasie 2005: 52, Kikon 2005, Lotha 2016: 26-7, Talitemsu 2017: 272-6, Haksar and Hongray 2019: 28-9). The Nagas were granted Scheduled Tribes status in 1950 with their recognition within the Constitution of India as ‘any Naga tribes’ in what was Assam⁴⁵. Following the constitution of Nagaland State as the 16th state of the Indian Union in 1963⁴⁶, a new ‘schedule’ was instated in 1970 that officially recognised five ‘tribes’ in Nagaland State; the list continues to grow as more ‘tribes’ are officially added to it⁴⁷. The Government of India does not recognise any constitutional category as ‘indigenous’ to India, which has historically given rise to debates on who or what counts as indigenous in India, including the caste versus tribe debate (Xaxa 1999), but also anthropological debates that influence the discourse on ‘indigeneity’ including positions of Verrier Elwin, G.S. Ghurye, André Béteille, Bengt Karlsson, and so on (see Karlsson and Subba 2006).

While Angami Zapu Phizo, father of the Naga nationalist movement, had already internationalised the Naga movement in the 1940s (Frank 2015), the emergence of left progressive politics among the Nagas led to the formation of transnational solidarities

⁴⁴ <https://morungexpress.com/naganess-interwoven-christianity> Accessed on 25.01.2022.

⁴⁵ <https://tribal.nic.in/CIm.aspx> Accessed on 15.08.2023.

⁴⁶ <https://nagaland.gov.in/pages/nagaland-profile#:~:text=The%20State%20of%20Nagaland%20was.and%20Manipur%20in%20the%20South> Accessed on 25.01.2022.

⁴⁷ The Tikhir became the latest, and 17th, ‘Naga tribe’ to be recognised by the Government of Nagaland in 2022. <https://www.morungexpress.com/nagaland-govt-issues-modalities-for-tikhir-yimkhiung-tribes> Accessed on 25-01.2022.

and advocacy for the rights of others seen to be in their position globally. The Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) was formed in 1978 at the radical left Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, collaborating its efforts with democratic and civil rights institutions (Haksar 1985, Haksar and Hongray 2011). Naga activist, Luithui, participated at an Indigenous Peoples' Forum in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in 1988 through a collaboration with the Christian Conference of Asia (Morton and Baird 2019). This led to the formation of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) in 1992, the same year that the NPMHR, alongside other institutions in South-South East Asia, participated at the (UN) Working Group for Indigenous Populations (Dunford 2019). In 1986, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs⁴⁸ had already published a comprehensive report on 'The Naga Nation and its struggle against genocide' (IWGIA 1986), one of whose sections drew heavily from a book written by Luithui, and the Indian advocate Nandita Haksar, who in 1984 had documented human rights violations in the Naga areas (Luithui and Haksar 1984). Later, the NPMHR became part of a group at the UN that called for governments across Asia to recognise indigenous people within their boundaries (Karlsson 2003, Erni 2008). Today, Nagas closely associate with global indigeneity (Kraft and Johnson 2017, Schermerhorn 2017, Kraft 2022, Kraft 2023), facilitating an exchange between local and global ways of 'becoming indigenous', bringing local issues from Northeast India, India, Northwest Myanmar, Myanmar and Asia to the global table.

Nagas may be understood as 'becoming indigenous' (Clifford 2013), or described as part of a specific global community, through a comparison of 'concepts and beliefs' with Mexican indigenous communities, Amazonian indigenous peoples, and the Ngaing of Papua New Guinea (Heneise 2019: 63, 66, 124). Naga and Sámi (indigenous community in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia) individuals came together through 'Songs of Asia' (Sanyü 2018: 130-151) in the 1970s, whose associations have been described as 'indigenous friendships' (Longkumer 2020: 110). Naga youth migrants

⁴⁸ A global human rights organisation with a special focus on Indigenous Peoples' rights. <https://iwgja.org/en/about.html> Accessed on 02.11.2023.

have been described as ‘indigenous migrants’ (Karlsson and Kikon 2017), and Nagas as Indigenous Peoples have transformed from a ‘cultural community’ into a ‘political community’ through asserting their right to self-determination (Longchari 2016: 206). My use of indigeneity is informed by these movements and descriptions. I use the category to study the particular moments in which events, ideas and practices published in *The Morung Express* come to be related to local or global notions of indigeneity – through a distinction of ‘us/our’ from ‘them/their’ locally and a comparison with some others globally – as in instances of tradition, culture, seeds, festivals, foods and media.

Nagas do not only, or always, organise as or ‘become indigenous’. The revolutionary group, National Socialist Council of Nagalim, while participating in the Working Group for Indigenous Populations in 1993, did not refer to Nagas as Indigenous Peoples but as an ‘independent nation’ with the ‘inalienable birthright’ of self-determination (Karlsson 2003). The Naga National Council does not use the term at all⁴⁹. Nagalim, or the Naga nation state as claimed with all its territories, is a member of the Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organisation (UNPO)⁵⁰. Political parties that claim to represent Naga interests almost never specifically refer to indigeneity or religion in their titles. Instead, they prefer titles like National Socialist Council of Nagaland/Nagalim, Naga National Council, Naga People’s Front, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, Indian National Congress, Janata Dal (United) and Bharatiya Janata Party, to name a few.

On home ground, increasingly, Nagas have also organised as a people/nation ordained by God (Lotha 2009, Lotha 2016). British imperialists were followed by American missionaries in the 19th century, marking the beginning of formal education that included translations of the Bible enabling the spread of printed text (use of a printing press to publish biblical and other material) among the Nagas (Thomas 2016, Longkumer 2018b). 20th century onwards, Christianity and nationalism were linked to build ‘Nagaland for Christ’ (Longkumer 2017a, Heneise 2019, Longkumer 2019).

⁴⁹ <https://morungexpress.com/nagas-are-not-a-minority-group-or-an-indigenous-people-of-india-nnc>
Accessed on 16.08.2023.

⁵⁰ <https://unpo.org/members/7899> Accessed on 29.09.2022.

‘Becoming Christian’ (Longkumer 2018a: 471), as organising through a specific global community and its practices, enabled Naga nationalism⁵¹ through claims of sovereignty and self-determination (Kelle 2021). Practices in this regard have also been described as practices towards ‘Indigenous Futures’ (Longkumer 2018b, Longkumer 2020), linking Christianity and indigeneity. While a section of the Nagas continue to belong to non-Christian religions like the Heraka (Longkumer 2010), and non-Nagas in Naga lands practice⁵² Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam and Jainism, Baptist Christianity remains dominant alongside Catholicism and a growing number of other denominations like the Nagaland Christian Revival Church, Seventh Day Adventists, Pentecostals, Spirit of Faith, or Presbyterians. Often, villages, even districts, are politically aligned along church denominational, or church leadership, lines. Christianity, as formal religion, remains tightly linked to Naganess through prophecy (Longkumer 2020), claims to human rights (Nuh 2002 (1986)) and useful in resolving conflict⁵³.

But Naganess has also been linked to tropes related to ‘indigenous religions’, or ideas, practices and things that do not fit into the ‘world religions paradigm’ (Masuzawa 2005, Tsonis 2017). Loina Shohe has described ‘Naga Indigenous Religions’ as tribe-wise beliefs, rituals, myths and traditions with their ‘own sacredness’ (Shohe 2020). Others have also referred to sacred relationships to land (Longchari 2016: 206), ancestral practices, sacred places, ritual orthodoxy, dreams, spirits, shamans (Heneise 2019), divination, healers, traditions (Joshi 2004), animist rituals (Chinai 2018: 202) and myths as ‘modern assemblages’ (Heneise 2016). For my study of *The Morung Express*, I kept open the boundaries between the indigenous, secular and religious. This enabled an exploration of the published content in *The Morung Express* when ideas and practices connected to Christian and non-Christian notions are articulated through value scales of

⁵¹ Linking national aspirations with ‘religion’ is not unique to Nagas in South Asia, with the Khalistan movement entailing a similar linking of a national homeland, in the region divided by the India-Pakistan border, through the Sikh Khalsa. For more, see <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Khalsa> Accessed on 25.09.2023.

⁵² Among Nagas and non-Nagas in Nagaland, there are atheists and secularists too.

⁵³ <https://morungexpress.com/motion-of-confidence-to-resolve-church-conflict-in-wokha> Accessed on 01.10.2022.

good versus evil, or presented as ‘us/ours’ and ‘them/theirs’, and are considered sacred, special, atemporal, universal and seem unchallengeable (but are also challenged).

In chapter two, I will lay out more examples of the broad ways in which indigeneity and religion are covered in *The Morung Express*.

1.3 Literature overview

This literature overview presents how media has been studied in the context of Nagaland. It considers how the media and its functions in India and the Northeast have been considered and linked to questions of indigeneity, religion or both. My focus is on how newspapers and journalism have been analysed in the context of Nagaland, in the Northeast and in India, and as belonging to a local but globalising network of ‘indigenous media/journalism’. By laying out a broad overview, I carve out the specific field(s) this dissertation sits in relation to.

1.3.1 *The Morung Express* as local news media

The Morung Express is often used as a source material for research on Nagaland (Lotha 2009, Lotha 2016), but has also been analysed for its news content. Though the research on the newspaper is not strictly academic, these studies are worth citing here. In 2010, a now-defunct news analysis site called *The Hoot* made a comparative study of some newspapers in Nagaland, including the *Nagaland Post*, *Nagaland Page*, *Eastern Mirror* and *The Morung Express*. It examined ‘lexical markers’ that framed media debates in Nagaland with a focus on conflict, reconciliation and ‘the Naga nation’ (Chattarji 2010a) and ‘religion in Naga newspapers’ that was stated to be ‘rooted in Christian theology’ (Ninan and Sapriina 2010). In both pieces, newspapers in Nagaland were termed ‘unique’ for these traits. Chattarji analysed news framing in Nagaland based on a ‘moral-religious dimension’, while Ninan and Sapriina list examples from *The Morung Express* of Christian news being commonly published that is not ‘acceptable in most parts of an officially secular country’. Chattarji points to the use of Christianity as a differentiator of Naga identity from a Hindu India. The report concludes, ‘It is interesting that Christianity is perceived as indigenous to the Naga people rather than a colonial import

and that while British colonialism is critiqued, one of its cultural legacies is embraced as a means of creating solidarity within and distance from the new colonizer, India' (Chattarji 2010a). The study of the news and mass media in Nagaland, thus, indicates that a colonial but cultural legacy – Christianity – is considered 'indigenous', and used in the news as a marker of difference from neo-colonial India.

Another report in *The Hoot* examined 126 articles from Nagaland newspapers, including *The Morung Express* and further specified how 'indigeneity' may be understood in this context. It focused on ways in which the conflict situation in Nagaland was handled in the newspapers. The article presented the founder of *The Morung Express*, Aküm Longchari, as stating, 'there is a cultural dimension to reporting [in Nagaland] where the sensitivities and institutional frames of clan, tribe, and society determine the parameters of reportage' (Chattarji 2010b). Chattarji remains concerned with the lack of critical distance and analytical perspectives while reporting local issues, citing a report from the *Eastern Mirror* that did not note the connections between 'culture' and 'politics'. My research in this dissertation, done more than a decade later, suggests that, as do news institutions everywhere, news institutions in Nagaland operate with both taken-for-granted and contested notions related to contemporary social conditions. Everyday reportage using local categories does not make for a lack of critical insight among journalists. Chattarji's research does not take stock of the ways in which news media draw relations between such concepts as culture and politics by reading newspapers as whole packages, not disparate news pieces, operating within their material and discursive conditions. Instead, the study expresses concern over a lack of autonomy in Nagaland's media and journalism from their material conditions.

A third report published by *The Hoot* examined the 'role of advertising' in Nagaland's elections through content published in *The Morung Express* and others. It concluded that though advertising showed elections in Nagaland to be a lopsided playing field, newspapers like *The Morung Express* attempted a 'different' direction – apart from publishing the regular crop of political party advertisements – by 'inviting leaders of all parties to an open debate' (Kumar 2018) noting the strategies that newspapers use to

negotiate the conditions in relation to which they work. The author of the piece, Vikas Kumar, compiled his media-related observations on Nagaland through a section termed ‘Media as an Agent of Change’ in a book that he released in 2023. The section is an invaluable contribution to the study of media in Nagaland, assessing the ways in which newspapers covered specific issues unfurling in Nagaland at the time through a focused content analysis. I noticed the continuous use of terms like ‘indigenous’ as a local category and ‘tribal’ as a constitutional category restricted to state boundaries, and how this was used in contrast to ‘immigrant tribal and non-tribal communities’ (Kumar 2023: 155). In this case, for instance, Nagamese, the common language spoken both between tribes and between tribes and non-tribes, is described as an ‘indigenous pidgin’ language and therefore something different from ‘tribal languages’ (ibid: 157, 161). This distinction enables Kumar to understand the economics of ‘tribal language’ newspapers and what their potentials could be; however, it is not clear whether their coverage of similar issues is any different one from the other. Kumar highlighted how controversial issues, like the public lynching of an Assamese Bengali Muslim in Dimapur in 2015 and the patriarchal protests against women’s reservation to political seats in 2017, were covered by the English language local newspapers (Kumar 2023: 166-199). On both counts, while studied local newspapers gave the issues wide coverage, Kumar’s analysis found them, including *The Morung Express*, wanting both in investigative reportage and in questioning the authorities for failing to ensure rights that enabled the persecution of a minority by a majority. Holding such authorities to account is something newspapers, as the ‘fourth estate’ or fourth ‘pillar of democracy’, are expected to do (Schultz 1998, Khalid and Ahmed 2014, Kumar and Singh 2019). Though we do not hear from journalists why that was the case in both instances of contemporary conflicts, Kumar’s analysis points to a complex terrain wherein newspapers like *The Morung Express* cannot, or do not, practice journalism as elsewhere, but also attempt to negotiate their agency through non-journalistic means, like public debates or lectures.

This terrain, Kumar indicates, is also a battleground for ‘identity wars’ between Christian and Hindutva forces, as well as a platform where Nagaland State elections⁵⁴ come into contest with the Indo-Naga solutions. These daily newspapers in Nagaland ‘create a sense of Naga nation’, with *The Morung Express* particularly underlining the ‘moral religious dimension’ of a ‘Christian paradigm’ that emphasises ‘brotherhood and peace’ (Roy and Das 2015: 7-8). But this is not all of what the newspaper covers. Another study showed *The Morung Express* also gave the largest amount of news space (not editorial space) to ‘science coverage’⁵⁵, or science-related reports, in a comparative analysis between a few pan Indian newspapers and Nagaland newspapers (Baruah 2019). Religion and science were both presented in *The Morung Express*, but the newspaper did not have a scientific, Christian or indigenous ‘voice’ while reporting the news, remaining instead an active battleground of identity contestation and debate (Kumar 2023: 214). These articles provided me with a sense of how *The Morung Express* has been studied and described through its published text, and in comparison with other local and Indian news media.

1.3.2 Role of local news media in Northeast India

News media have often been studied as ‘vehicles’ of identity formations and networks, both local and global. A dissertation from Assam University’s department of political science takes stock of the print media’s ‘role’ in situations like the Indo-Naga peace process (Kabi 2011); another study focuses on ‘peace journalism’ to reflect on the way print media ought to operate in militarised regions of Northeast India by bringing a ‘peace based’ approach to reporting conflict (Borgohain and Fernandes 2017). The approach is significant given that the majority of journalism in Nagaland is practised by Naga-owned institutions. When studying how Indian news media cover issues about the region, the focus is often on representation of the region (this is discussed below), while

⁵⁴ State elections are a time when advertising by political parties and civil society organisations provides extensive revenue to newspapers.

⁵⁵ The study does not specify the time period in which it was conducted. Science pieces have become increasingly common in editorial sections of *The Morung Express* recently. For instance, see <http://morungexpress.com/scienceploitation> Accessed on 18.08.2023.

with the local news media the focus is on the roles they play. Thus, all news media in regions operating in ‘indigenous’ or ‘conflict’ zones are automatically studied as vehicles of not just news, but of fulfilling their categorical duties (indigenous messages, peace journalism) without producing contradictions. This kind of research, however, does not point to the extent to which these roles may be seen to be played or through what specific devices of journalism, or the ways in which concepts involved in these studies, including conflict, politics, indigeneity and peace are linked.

Christian missionaries are credited with pioneering the printing press in the Northeast to introduce ‘religion’ (Charvak 2015, Longkumer 2019), a process that included replacing local concepts with biblical ones. Such a religious printing press led to the formation of a ‘modern public space’ linked to the re-emergence of local languages (Charvak 2015:16, 30). In Nagaland, the missionary-introduced printing press led to the preservation of written local languages, but also the introduction of English as a unifier, as well as differentiator, language alongside its use in developing a national narrative (Longkumer 2019: 14-15). This historical context has meant that some of the largest news media in Nagaland is the English language newspaper and a segway to studies that examine the ‘role’ of news media and journalism that is often secular and diverts from a religious printing press.

Through content analysis, the ‘role’ of the media in the Northeast has been analysed as ‘articulating ethnic interest’ through indigenous religion, Christianity, indigeneity and language (Roluahpuia 2017). In examining the role of print media (both local and regional) in the Indo-Naga peace process, Kh. Kabi’s dissertation (cited above) uses both ethnographic and content analysis methods to conclude that the Naga peace process owes the attention it receives to national (*The Telegraph*) and local (*Nagaland Post*) news media, with both reporting the Naga revolutionary groups as key to setting the agenda on the Indo-Naga peace process in the press (Kabi 2011: 191). In this way, the print news media are read as ‘facilitators’ of the peace process, and this may be understood to be the role of an ‘agenda setting’ media (ibid: 194). Important contributions of such studies include their methods of systematically studying text

produced by news outlets on a particular issue in a limited time period, comparing Indian and Nagaland's media and finding them to be more similar on certain issues than different. Whether the studies are examining the 'role' or 'influence' of news media practices, it is not clear how influence is measured or what kind of 'effect' framing exercises have over politics. The methods of examining the content in this way may show how large or small the coverage of a particular issue is in the local and regional press, but say little about the newspapers/news outlets themselves, their politics, their claims or logics by reading these texts only as representations of things outside themselves, but not as important sites of producing knowledge in the world through their construction of concepts in relation to their ownership and environment. Roluahpuia's study, nonetheless, shows helpful ways to think about how an issue about local identity and bureaucratic paperwork was 'framed' as a Manipuri issue, but also an indigenous issue, in these news portals showcasing the work of articulations in the media.

1.3.3 Representation of the Northeast and Naganess in media

In media studies on the region, it is common to study how Northeast India – or its many constituents – is represented in the 'mainstream' or mainland news media in India, and to conclude that the representation is insufficient, careless or politically motivated.

For instance, a short study by journalist Arijit Sen blames the 'tyranny of distance' for the mainstream media's (under)reportage of the Northeast and terms the 'regional' media a 'silent spectator' of underdevelopment and violence in the region (Sen 2011: 26, 34). A news media research study by Jasmine Yimchunger provides more depth. Employing the ethnographic method of focus group discussions, the author interviewed a 'Naga audience' on how they 'negotiate multiple identities' in relation to television news in India (Yimchunger 2019). Focus groups noted how 'Indian television' are 'Hindu centric' and do not represent the Nagas or the Northeast; the paper suggests that television should be more 'diverse' and dialogic at a time when Nagas are globalising but also seeing a 'nostalgic revival of ethnic identities' (ibid: 30-34). Perception (by an audience) is matched with a representation (of the said audience) that Yimchunger reads as 'misconceptions of the Naga way of life and their culture' (ibid: 33) without citing

specifically what programmes are being referred to. The study concludes that unspecified ‘Indian mainstream media’ – equated with colonial anthropology – project ‘stereotypical’ images, ‘misrepresenting’ Nagas through tropes like headhunting. Yet, a true ‘Naga culture’ and ‘Nagaism’ is proposed for Indian television to incorporate better through a list of essential markers – morung⁵⁶, headhunting, feasts of merit, nationalism and others (ibid: 26-27). Naganess is articulated in much the same way through its perceived representation as its aspired representation in this study – features commonly associated with the Nagas, what belongs in such a list, or how they are represented, remain unresolved matters.

In this regard, it was also useful to consider the study of how ‘nationalist’ content sites in Nagaland produce Naga ‘commonness’. A paper by Ranganathan and Roy-Chowdhury (2008) examines how some websites build Naga identity through nationalist and revolutionary discourses. Through rhetorical analysis of the content on non-journalistic websites like *NSCN Online*, *Nagalim* and *Nagarealm*, the researchers conclude that the Naga ‘hegemonic articulation’ presented on these sites attempts to ‘rearticulate social reality using an alternative national construct’ in, and through, the public sphere of the internet (Ranganathan and Roy-Chowdhury 2008: 67). With multiple Naga ‘festivals’ featured, among other content, the study reads the ‘unifying issue’ to be ‘religion’. Christianity, on these sites, stands as the differentiator (‘us’) from Hindu India (‘them’) that produces Naga ‘commonness’ but through their own nationalist frames of reference (ibid). This study is helpful in providing some of the ‘rhetorics’, like culture, religion, nation, that my own project explores, but in the daily site of the newspaper where the ‘us’ and ‘them’ are often contested and unsettled.

1.3.4 Newspaper media in India

Newspapers in Nagaland are located in the context of the Indian Union. The news media in India, particularly the newspaper industry, also emerged through missionary printing

⁵⁶ Morung is described in this study as a ‘dormitory for young people in the Naga traditional society’ (Yimchunger, 2019: 27).

presses, and grew in the colonial period with anti-imperial movements as well as capital moving into Indian businesses (Nair 2003). Between the 1960s and 1990s, the number of daily newspapers and their circulation grew rapidly across India, with their production concentrated in urban centres, and later expanding as a result of English-language monopolies taking over smaller newspapers (ibid: 4187). News media in India have been studied in terms of their role during anti-colonial movements and in the context of various press-related laws (Hussain 2017). There was a proliferation of print news media, particularly the daily newspaper, after the 1977 Emergency⁵⁷; it was associated with technological development, growing purchase power among consumers, burgeoning entrepreneurship, and regional politics finding their own public spheres (Jeffrey 1993, Ståhlberg 2002b). Democratisation was noted as the ‘dominant force’ that shaped the press structure and outcome, growing into the regional centres through articulation to local democratic processes (Nair 2003: 4187). This gave rise to ‘daily-newspaper culture(s)’ across India, often read along linguistic and federal lines (Jeffrey 1987). Studies also focused on how state policies and capitalism (Jeffrey 1997) played out in relation to newspapers, particularly in the context of Indian socialism, and affected the newspaper industry, including their proliferation in regional urban centres where new economic needs emerged (Jeffrey 1994). If factors outside the newspaper media affected newspapers, then the transformations that lay beyond the texts of these prints – post publication – also came to be studied in India as ‘news culture(s)’ that ‘create social relations’ and ‘shape identity negotiations’ (Rao 2010: 3). How can we study and understand these news cultures in specific regions?

Per Ståhlberg, in his doctoral dissertation titled ‘Lucknow Daily: How a Hindi Newspaper Constructs Society’ (2002), suggests a focus on a regional language daily in India, connecting local journalistic practices to global journalistic forms. Regional language news has often been ‘accused of inflaming’ religious sentiments (Ståhlberg

⁵⁷ Prime Minister Indira Gandhi put India on a 21-month Emergency from 1975-77 during which time civil rights, including press freedoms, were severely curtailed. <https://thewire.in/history/emergency-free-press> Accessed on 02.11.2023.

2002a: 4). Treating them as more than ‘instruments of manipulation’, the author brings theoretical weight from Benedict Anderson and Arjun Appadurai to study the way local newspapers ‘provide their readers with discursive connections between the local and familiar and all that which lies beyond’ (ibid: 13). He employs media ethnography following the journalists of a Hindi newspaper, *Dainik Jagaran*, in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, to understand their local and culturally specific conditions of journalism; and to look at journalism as a site of cultural production in a globalised era.

Megan Robb’s 2014 thesis, titled ‘Interpreting the *Qasbah* Conversation: Muslims and *Madīnah* Newspaper, 1912-1924’, looks at how newspapers connect religion and identity, which is also relevant to my study. Through a focus on urban Urdu newspapers, like *Madīnah Newspaper*, Robb establishes the link between local concerns and global ‘reformist Islam as a unifying influence’ (Robb 2014: 2-3). The thesis brings attention to print news culture in South Asia’s smaller urban spaces, reading print as not just a European national-making enterprise of print capitalism (Anderson 2016) but also as a continuance of knowledge sharing practices through other means (print) in previously unconnected spaces. With Urdu as a unifying language in parts of the public sphere in North India, newspapers in the 20th century became central to the production of common-sense (Hall and O’shea 2013: 8) that attempted, for instance, linking ‘local manifestations of Islam’ with Indian anti-colonial struggles through the global Khilafat Movement⁵⁸ (Robb 2014). Such approaches to the study of news media have been rare in Northeast India, or even among news media published on, or relating to, indigenous people’s movements in India.

1.3.5 Indigenous media/journalism

Indigenous media is an emergent field of research that traverses, among others, anthropology, sociology, history and media studies (Ginsburg 1991, Ginsburg 1994, Wilson and Stewart 2008, Alia 2009, Salazar 2009, Wilson 2015, Nemeč 2021,

⁵⁸ An Indian Muslim-driven pan-Islamic movement in the 1900s.
<https://www.britannica.com/event/Khilafat-movement> Accessed on 02.11.2023.

Montoya, Baca et al. 2023). It has been applied to the Indian news media context in only a few instances (Rycroft 2014, Schleiter and de Maaker 2020). Indigenous media studies (Pace 2018) have mostly focused on electronic media, particularly films made in a local ‘voice’ (Ginsburg 1995). It led to the theorising of indigenous people’s media networking projects as a ‘new media nation’ (Alia 2009) that could bypass the nation-state to address their own interests. A special focus on media owned and run by indigenous people has enabled the study of global indigeneity connected to a local public sphere, particularly with the right to media recognised under Article 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

In South Asia, ‘indigeneity’ has been framed in media through links to sovereignty and self-determination struggles (Schleiter and de Maaker 2020). In one study, Uday Chandra combines content analysis of a music video with ethnography and challenges how ‘indigeneity’ is far from a settled affair between non-*adivasi* producers, consumers, and the represented *adivasi*⁵⁹ (Chandra 2017). In another study, Akshaya Kumar ‘claims indigeneity’ (Kumar 2020) for ‘Bhojpuri-speaking’ media and audiences, based on a definition of ‘indigenous peoples’ as ‘non-dominant people’ with a different non-mainstream culture (Karlsson and Subba 2006: 6); a media that Kumar tells us also draws distinctions between an ‘us’ and ‘them’. Kumar shows how the indigenous category can be put to analytical use as not representing ‘an indigenous culture’ but simply in place of ‘vernacular’ low-budget media production which has something ‘in common with other media industries representing indigenous communities’ (Kumar 2020: 92). Offering a class analysis of media as a site for strategic coalitions, Bhojpuri ‘imagined indigeneity’ is used as a ‘placeholder’ (ibid: 100). Indigeneity has also been used to study the specialness of print news media in Northeast India, for instance, through the ways in which civil society, or ‘indigenous traditional social hierarchy’, ‘shapes the news culture’ of ‘modern media’ in Mizoram (Ratnamala and Malsawmzuala 2021). In eastern India too, studies have focused on how Santali

⁵⁹ *Adivasis* are generally understood as the indigenous people in mainland India. Though they also live in the Northeast, they are not considered indigenous in a local sense or with land rights in the region.

(Adivasi) print media (magazines) have moved the site of political assertion from language to print. Nishaant Choksi has observed how printing technology led to the spread of a new script (Ol-Chiki) that produced new ideas of what constitutes a ‘properly Santali media artefact’, promoting regional political autonomy through the practices of production and exchange of script on print (Choksi 2017). It brings attention to tribal media production in South Asia in relation to their potential for re-structuring political and social networks.

All these studies could be said to fit into the study of indigenous media. With little focus on the practices of journalism, the field remains small and evolving. The Worlds of Journalism⁶⁰ study, which started in 2007 as a global study of the conditions and practices of journalism, does not mention indigenous media/journalism on its website, nor does the study of ‘different global journalisms’ that highlights journalistic practices in non-Western contexts (Bebawi and Onilov 2023). However, one of the authors, Folker Hanusch, has identified ‘Indigenous journalism culture’ through a study of Māori media in Aotearoa New Zealand that identifies its main ‘dimensions’ to be empowerment, maintenance of identity, following cultural values and norms, as a watchdog, and for language revitalisation (Hanusch 2013, Hanusch 2014). Indigenous journalism has been described as distinct from other forms of journalism in this regard with potential to make visible indigenous issues (Skogerbø, Josefsen et al. 2019: 998-1000), and enable new comparisons of, for instance, the Sámi, Roma, Māori and Inuit as participants in a ‘new media nation’ (Alia and Bull 2022: 93-118).

In this scenario, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) has recently invited the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to conduct a study on ‘Indigenous media’, to be reported during the former’s 2025 session⁶¹ with a view to examine ‘national policies, practices and funding programmes on Indigenous media, comprising capacity building and

⁶⁰ <https://worldsofjournalism.org/> Accessed on 18.10.2023.

⁶¹ <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-report-free-and-independent-indigenous-media>
Accessed on 16.08.2023.

content production in Indigenous languages by Indigenous media professionals, including Indigenous women, and for the promotion of international cooperation, knowledge sharing and cooperation among Indigenous media and other partners, including mainstream media and governments.’⁶² It does not specify what ‘indigenous’ means in this context, and is possibly based on self-recognition of ‘pre-colonial’ and ‘unique’ groups and communities to the category of Indigenous Peoples.

Several possibilities have been considered on how best to academically study such a formation as indigenous media (Pace 2018: 1-12). A study that disturbs as well as fills the field includes how Sámi media in Scandinavia and Russia can be simultaneously classified as ‘indigenous media, ethnic minority media and minority-language media’ (Pietikäinen 2008: 174), thereby drawing attention to Sámi journalistic processes and practices that relate to revitalisation movements of small, nearly culturally annihilated, minorities in a region where integrationist projects abound. As the UNESCO study sets out to do, Pietikäinen’s study also shows how ‘ethnic minority media’ cooperate with recognisable indigenous people’s media networks across the global north. The primary role of such media is described as a ‘vehicle for transmitting information’ (ibid: 180). In this case, a ‘Sami way’ of reporting the news is described wherein ‘people and their lives’ are given preference, in their ‘own language’, over ‘authorities and officials’. References to a ‘Naga way’ of journalism is unpopular among the professional journalists I spoke to in Nagaland who invoke boundaries of journalism to protect the paradigm from such articulations (Carlson 2012, Carlson and Lewis 2015). In Nagaland, the largest news institutions operate with English as a language of local and global outreach and consider themselves reporting ‘official’ statements connected to ‘people and their lives’. Nonetheless, a ‘Sami way’ or ‘Naga way’ to move these journalistic boundaries suggests a process of journalistic paradigm reconsideration (Vos and Moore 2020). Through this, new actors, like activists, also participate in the field of journalism by claiming ‘alternative’ positions as a method of legitimation and reporting what is left unreported in mainstream media, as in the case of *The Morung Express*. A similar ‘new

⁶² <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000386146> Accessed on 03.10.2023.

wave' in media – formation of a more nuanced paradigm – has been reported from other parts of the world, like Australia, where notions such as 'traditional cultural knowledge' have waned, giving way to 'contemporary indigenous accountability' as areas of indigenous media attention, which includes state, governance and accountability (Ginsburg 2012: 20).

If media and journalism are important sites for bringing public attention to these issues, sociologist Nick Couldry asks two questions that are important to this study: *what types of things do people do in relation to media? And what types of things do people say in relation to media?* (Couldry 2004: 121). Bringing this 'practice' based approach to my research, I study the practices of a newspaper through presentation of the news, tracing articulation, and what the newspaper's workers and founders say about these. Through this, my research contributes to the evolving field of indigenous media/journalism by exploring the ways in which a private, legally recognised, print media institution supported by advertising relates to global networks, but is located within local conditions and knowledge assumptions that it operates with, but also challenges. This includes distinctions that are drawn between religious and secular tropes, but also distinctions that can be made between indigenous, religious and secular media based on these descriptions.

1.4 Data, methods, methodology

Following the leads provided by the literature, this section will briefly address the data, methods and methodology used in my dissertation.

My training as a journalist began in 2003 with *The Indian Express* in Mumbai. Turning to non-academic research from 2007-10, I returned to journalism from 2011-19 with *The Morung Express*. Journalists and researchers have a similar task of identifying important issues, finding sources and data to report facts, setting up the context in which they will be reported, and analysing them. Yet, the two professions are different. Their audiences differ, as does the immediacy of their work. With a shorter format (at least in print), and as institutions bearing a democratic responsibility towards accountability, journalistic approaches, methods and analysis vary to different degrees from those of

researchers. Journalists go into a field with a strong idea of the story they are there to tell, often following a lead. They ask pointed, even leading, questions to report as many claims around an issue as possible. Academic researchers also follow certain leads but often let their interlocutors tell them the story they want as broadly as is possible within a category under research. Sometimes, there may be no ‘other side’ to report on, while overarching theories and methods establish distance from interlocutors. The two professions vary in several ways, including literature, ground situation, framing and capital (see Nikunen, Korvajärvi et al. 2019).

My research design was shaped through struggles with moving from journalism to academia, but also by the conditions produced by the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide. Both in 2020 and 2021, I attempted to return to Nagaland and failed to do so due to travel restrictions. This produced the first part of the dissertation wherein these conditions made me take the news and journalistic content of *The Morung Express* seriously, noting how issues that were already of interest to me were being covered during a year – 2020 – that was part free, and part hit by the pandemic restrictions. New borders emerged, as did bordering practices. Public information became even more important, with newspapers continuing to impart this duty despite extreme physical and financial restraints. Reading *The Morung Express* under such conditions and from a distance provided fresh material; the content analysis approach provided distance in geographical and temporal terms. Reading the newspaper throughout the year enabled me to read it as an annual, theme-wise and holistic package instead of analysing its articles in isolation. If I had only wanted to understand myriad articulations of Naganess, indigeneity and religion in the news media in Nagaland, I could have done a comparative analysis of the content across newspapers. I avoided this method, turning my focus to the practices of *The Morung Express* particularly and its articulations in the light of its claims to alterity that makes it a local newspaper linked to global notions of indigeneity, religion and media/journalism.

In 2021-22, I continued researching this material, sketching out the themes under which to place and analyse the raw data from the newspaper’s pages at the University of

Edinburgh in Scotland, where working with a South Asian cohort helped me think of the material in new ways. As part of a reverse fieldwork method, I went back to Nagaland towards the end of 2022. By this point, I had a broad analysis of the newspaper content written out through chapters two to four, which form the first part of this dissertation. Discussions of these with the journalists and founders of the newspaper grounded the second part of this dissertation that is presented in chapters five and six. This brought new material to study, thereby producing a distinction between the two parts in terms of what articulations could be analysed within an already demarcated context.

1.4.1 Content analysis

In Nagaland, the pandemic led to local measures that made it difficult for the newspaper industry to continue work as usual. Total lockdowns and restrictions on movement made it difficult for journalists to get to work, collect news from their sources, and produce the newspaper. The transportation of newsprint from distant cities became challenging, leading to shortages. Newspaper distribution within and beyond cities became restricted. Many small newspaper establishments struggled. *The Morung Express* (and others) survived by changing its strategy from a physical to an online newspaper, and by downscaling its information potential due to restrictions on the movement of journalists. This means that they reduced the number of pages it printed from twelve to four pages during the toughest periods, and increasing it to eight pages later, a policy they have continued till today. The newspapers were set into PDF copies and emailed to subscribers, or WhatsApped, instead of dropping them at their doorsteps. This option is still available to subscribers. These options were made known through newspaper bulletins to the readers. This is how I came to subscribe to the newspaper online and could read the newspaper as most other readers would do, apart from those surfing their website, which is laid out differently. The newspaper set in PDF format enabled me to study the material published through the page-wise layout of news, editorial, advertisements, opinions, and examine what was important for the newspaper to publish on which pages, like page one or page five, where public discourses were presented, how they conversed with news items on page one, etc. Basically, reading the newspaper

each day of the year in 2020 helped me do a thorough content analysis of the year-long material published on its pages and read the newspaper as a holistic package.

In the study of religion, a popular way of establishing links between media and religion, particularly in the Nordic context, has been through the method of discourse analysis that aims to understand the representation of religion in a public sphere mediated by the secular separation of state and church (Taira 2013, Taira 2019). Examples include longitudinal studies of how world religions are covered in, say, Danish newspapers (Christensen 2019), the Swedish press (Lovheim 2019) or Norwegian newspapers (Lundby 2019) through a search for words like ‘religion’ and noting trends in how religion is portrayed in the press over time. I borrowed from this approach, but focused on the study of ‘religion’ as proposed by the Indigenous Religion(s): Local Grounds, Global Networks (INREL) project, thereby to focus on issues in the media that come to be ‘articulated and recognised as religions and indigenities’ (Kraft, Tafjord et al. 2020: 5). This approach, in addition to others, helped me select specific cases through which indigeneity and religion were articulated (Kraft 2010, Johnson and Kraft 2018); indigeneity and religion are treated as second-order categories which give ‘primacy to presentations made of them’ (Satlow 2005: 287, Gill 2019: 185). This brought focused and methodical attention to particular issues that come up when indigeneity and religion are at stake. The content for analysis was, accordingly, shortlisted and coded⁶³ (Badzinski, Woods Jr. et al. 2021). This was based on my previous understanding of issues and the news in Nagaland, but also in relation to the categories under study, namely Naganess, indigeneity and religion.

The data for this dissertation were generated from the pages of *The Morung Express* in 2020, the primary year of severe pandemic-related restrictions. By pages, I mean the content published on the pages of the newspaper, including news reports and feature

⁶³ While shortlisting the articles of interest to me in the initial phase of this study, I marked out the pieces and allotted each such marked-out page to folders like global indigeneity, global Naga, indigenous media, indigenous religions (Christian, others), Naga politics, cultural appropriation, customary laws, and so on. A further study of the material and this method of ‘coding’ led to the chapter themes that emerged and became final parts of this dissertation.

articles written by journalists, illustrations made by cartoonists, editorials written by editors, opinion pieces written by non-journalist public individuals, advertisements, columns, and news from other agencies. In the first scan, I read everything the newspaper published that year, highlighting every piece of interest and allotting them to a wide range of categories to draw out sub-categories of interest later. Several of these sub-categories were somehow related to indigeneity and religion. Based on the sub-categories, the 2020 pages were scanned again for potentially missed data that could be classified under these. The database was then coded into an excel sheet that determined the issues that had more – both broad and narrow – possibilities for articulations of indigeneity, religion and Naganess⁶⁴. Eventually, time-bound themes like calendrical events became the first concrete theme of interest followed by the issue-based theme of debated prohibitions. Both the themes provided a view on how the newspaper is organised through time and space and provided ways to study the articulation of Naganess to indigeneity and religion but in sufficiently different directions.

1.4.2 Targeted interviews

The interviews conducted for this study did not emerge as the first step of research, but only after considerable research had already been conducted on the ‘field site’ of the newspaper itself. In Nagaland, I asked the journalists, editorial writers and founders of *The Morung Express* to reflect on their own work, and on the themes I picked out from the study of its pages in 2020. I describe the conditions and context in which the interviews were conducted in the introduction to chapter five. These interviews did not seek reasoning for what material came to be published in the newspaper but focused on the themes of calendars and prohibitions; these interviews also aimed to understand the

⁶⁴ Researchers use far more sophisticated coding methods, including software tools like NVivo, whose use I witnessed among students analysing a large body of data at the University of Edinburgh in 2021-22. By the time I accessed a crash course on this, it was too late to start using the new software. Besides, given my existing understanding of the news cycle and local debates relevant in the newspaper, software tools such as these were not absolutely essential to my study. However, I would be keen to understand how the use of such technology changes what themes researchers choose to study and analyse, possibly impacting their research focus and direction.

ideational underpinnings of a newspaper that claims to be an ‘alternative’ to the ‘status quo’.

There were challenges in finding time with entire editorial teams, journalists and editors, in the short four months I spent in Nagaland in 2022-23. Many of our conversations ran into stormy seas. Journalists are used to fairly hard standards of questioning⁶⁵. In the newsroom, where most of our interviews were conducted, each of us had no fear of offending the other because, first, all of us saw each other as journalists of an equal standing⁶⁶. Second, we had all worked in the same newsroom for many years giving us a grounded perspective on each other and the group, even in our disagreements. The interviews resulted in new and independent (but connected) material, including articulations that I had not previously come across in the published material of the newspaper. Designing the research in this way helped me assess *The Morung Express* as an ‘arena of struggle’ (Kellner and Durham 2006: xxxiii). Contradictions emerged during moments of articulation wherein ‘objective’ practices of journalism are invoked over ‘critical’ aspects that bring out distinctions between ‘religious’ or ‘secular’ approaches to the coverage of news and regular themes. It provided an outlook on how lines are drawn between religion and other categories, but also the extent to which ‘indigenous’, ‘religious’ or ‘secular’ media and journalism are useful distinctions. An analysis of these aspects helped me arrive, first, on the notion of ‘knowledge as commons’ and then read the practices of journalism as inhabiting an articulated media paradigm that emerges from its conditions and regulations while responding to local interests and needs for information and empowerment. They inform how journalism in Nagaland works as ‘fourth estate’, as holding the state and other actors accountable to democratic norms and rights, and, in the case of *The Morung Express*, as also building a counter-hegemonic space for political assertions.

⁶⁵ Journalists are often interviewers, not interviewees. Nonetheless, this makes them familiar with interviews as method.

⁶⁶ Even though I was a ‘former’ journalist with a gap of four years since the last time I practised journalism with the team.

1.5 Theories

Articulation theory is the backbone on which the analysis of the empirical material of this dissertation stands. In an overarching sense, articulation theory implies the study of both an expression and a linkage. This enabled me to study Naganess, indigeneity and religion on the pages of *The Morung Express* in a way that gives an overview of the themes I study, the specific issues they express, how categories are linked in the process, the people and the institutions involved in such issues, and why some linkages are made, and others are not.

1.5.1 Articulation theory

Antonio Gramsci developed the notion of a prevailing ‘worldview’ as ‘common sense’ that must be historically determined at the level of everyday life (Gramsci, Hoare et al. 1971). Building on this, Stuart Hall’s theory of articulation enables the study of ‘a process of creating connections’ (Slack 1996: 114) that is, at the same time, a struggle over the ‘production of meaning’ (Levenson 2022: 200). This approach has proven useful in the analysis of race, ethnicity (Bennett 2016: 284, 285), social formations (Clarke 2015), and indigeneity and religion (Clifford 2013, Nikanorova 2019, Kraft, Tafjord et al. 2020, Jennings 2021). It has enabled me to pay attention to how concepts are linked locally; the related process of journalism that goes into making and sustaining specific articulations (Clarke 2015: 277); what such articulations indicate when classified as indigenous or religious during this specific period; and the ways in which they contribute to the production of a contemporary counter-hegemonic sense.

Articulation theory emphasises the study of a form of connection that can make a unity of two different elements, only under certain conditions (Hall and Morley 2019: 235). For instance, the conditions of a privately owned, advertisement dependent, newspaper makes it necessary to publish advertisements of Indian Independence Day on page one of *The Morung Express* alongside news of Naga Independence Day; both come to be linked through their publication on the same day and page of the newspaper, articulating Naganess in different directions, enabling a comparison between how each day is presented. These linkages are ‘not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all

time’ (ibid). Mutually dependent, and mediated, categories have no ‘intrinsic belongingness’ but are historically constituted through a current mode of production (ibid: 236). These connections do not lead to a reductionist, in the sense of timeless and autonomous, characterization of a formation under study. They point to contradictions that the newspaper engages with. Contradictions⁶⁷, throughout this dissertation, should be understood as the movement of concepts in oppositional directions – through correspondences or contestations – that occur in the moment of an articulation. These oppositional directions direct us to the ways in which power works, through vertical governing or horizontal organising. Contradictions emergent in these moments show asymmetric power pulls of articulations in various directions, but also a tendency of one concept to transform into another under given conditions. Not all articulations are, thus, possible at any moment in time or space. My exploration is hinged towards understanding these possibilities, or lack thereof. In this study, Naganess is the historical, open, but finite, category that stands articulated (Hall and Morley 2019: 171-221), and *The Morung Express* is the concrete site of struggles over its re-articulation (Levenson 2022: 195). Articulation theory helps me describe the empirical data in a finite yet open way, and to approach the formative processes of what could be understood to inhabit the space of ‘commons’ in Nagaland today (Victor 2022).

Articulations are interdependent, that is, contingent but also determinate, acted upon as well as acted against (Hall 2003: 144). For instance, prohibitions on items of consumption are connected through their public contestation. Naganess is articulated to tradition, culture and customs in one prohibition, and to Christianity, moral and historical limits in another. Pulling in oppositional directions, Naganess is re-articulated both through Indian constitutional laws that facilitate the construction of Nagaland as a ‘Land of Festivals’ within the Indian Union, and through Baptist Christian notions as a ‘Land of God’ independent of India and Myanmar. These two directions indicate a process of articulation that is also termed ‘politics’ (Levenson 2022: 210). These are

⁶⁷ https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm Accessed on 12.10.2023.

negotiations that inhabit a continuing application of an Indian rule of law alongside a continuing struggle for self-determination. This type of reading helps point to processes in *The Morung Express* – in this historical period, but also in relation to another era when Naganess has been articulated to indigeneity and religion in producing the Naga colonial subject⁶⁸. They may involve the selective mobilisation of past resources (Clifford 2013: 23), as I find in chapters five and six, through a journalistic paradigm of objectivity and compulsions of capital on the one hand, and re-articulations of the newspaper itself as a historical site of production of knowledge as commons, on the other (Hess and Ostrom 2007, Federici 2019, Purkayastha 2023). The production of ‘knowledge’ – information collated by journalists and published through an editorial process – as ‘commons’ – news as a public good, open to use and reproduction without depletion – points to the processes in *The Morung Express* by which prayers, prohibitions, martyrs, jubilees, customs, traditions, festivals, almighty, are made public, conditional, shareable, debatable and open to limited action (re-articulation) by an editorial team and others (once published).

1.5.2 Scale and scope

An important marker of ‘new times’ in which articulations emerge is the two-way movement of articulations between the global and local (Hall 1996). To harness the potential of such movement, I combine articulation theory with theories on scale and scope.

The Morung Express has several pages that are divided along geographical lines. These include local or Nagaland news, regional or Northeast (India) news, National (India) news and World news. Articulation of local issues to regional and global concerns, particularly related to Scheduled Tribes, Indigenous Peoples, Unrepresented Peoples and Christians, gives it additional directions of movement, and recognition, on local and global scales. Theories developed through the field of human and political geography

⁶⁸ I do not trace the ‘genesis’ of categories in this way, but study the processes that lead to formation of a ‘concrete’ in a particular time and space.

provide a way to understand and apply scales and scaling exercises as more than geographical limitations and leaps. Theories of scales have been developed to understand the era of globalisation that has rescaled ‘people’s everyday lives and identities across the planet in complex and contradictory ways’ (Herod 2011: 1). They have often been used to study impacts of climate change and mitigation strategies (Wilbanks and Kates 1999). Scales have been theorised as substantive social products but also as arbitrary constructs that order processes and practices (ibid: 13-14). Their potential has been examined in terms of movements (of concepts, ideas, practices) across scales of the local to the global or vice versa, but also movements in terms of metaphors of ladders, circles, encompassment and networks (Herod and Wright 2002, Herod 2011).

The previously mentioned INREL project takes a substantive methodological approach to reading scales of local, regional or global as things already designated in the world. Practices, terms, ideas and things are taken stock of – articulated, translated, performed – as they jump across such scales (Kraft, Tafjord et al. 2020: 11-13). The scales used in related studies include taking note of how issues move across geographical spaces (local to global) but also in relative value (good, bad, ugly) and size (small, large) (Kraft 2022: 19-20). Or, how what is culturally contingent is ‘local’ while relating to ‘regional, national, continental or global’ scales enable processes that constitute these very things as something else, like ‘indigenous’ or ‘religious’ (Tafjord 2016). Or, how ‘distant selves’ may be formed through scalar exercises that engage indigeneity or religion (Johnson and Kraft 2018).

In this study, I treat scales as both a ‘category of practice’ and a ‘category of analysis’ of how practices are scaled (Herod 2011: 35-6). This means I study how Naganess is articulated as unique through a Christian global scale, and also as distinct through a Scheduled Tribe regional/local scale – both enabling a study of the ways in which Naganess is articulated to religion and indigeneity and with potentially different outcomes. Moreover, news may often present issues that are local to a place, but my analysis includes their potentials or scope towards being upscaled to a regional or global

scale. Thus, I determine the emergent possibilities of certain kinds of articulations over others. Are certain articulations both local and regional? Are global articulations downscalable in scope? Articulations go from the local to regional to global to universal or move through the spaces in between, impacting the scope of an issue (Strathern 2004, Tafjord 2016, Blaser and Cadena 2017, Jensen 2017, Johnson and Kraft 2018). The prohibition of alcohol is a local Nagaland issue, but potentially upscalable to become relevant for all Baptist Christians. Yet, it is almost never a global issue on the pages of *The Morung Express*. A dog meat prohibition is potentially a local issue but becomes a regional concern for the right to freedom and equality for all Indians, and a global concern for the rights of all indigenous people. Again, we return to questions of who is able to, and who does, change the scope of an issue, the ways in which they do so, as reported in the newspaper, and what these scoping exercises say about the conditions which articulations inhabit (Blaser and Cadena 2017: 188).

1.6 Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into two sections and seven chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. The first part has three chapters, starting with a deep dive into the structure of news production in Nagaland, followed by a content analysis of select cases in *The Morung Express* conducted and written between 2020 and 2022. The second part has two chapters that came out of a fieldwork trip to Nagaland and interviews with its journalists, editorial contributors, founders and others. This part of the study was conducted and written between 2022 and 2023.

I

Chapter 2: News production in Nagaland.

What kind of a newspaper is *The Morung Express*? How is it organised? What kind of media and state structures does it operate in? These are some of the questions that this chapter addresses. All newspapers are shaped by their context – they report on events local to their geographical area – but also present news, features and opinions from elsewhere to their readers. While a broad context of Nagaland and Naga politics is

presented in this introduction, chapter two goes into the structure of the news and newspaper production in Nagaland in depth, with a focus on *The Morung Express*. With my own contextual understanding of the media landscape as a starting point, this chapter presents the organisation of the newspaper and its workers, the pages and layout of the newspaper, other projects, apart from news production, that *The Morung Express* takes up, and some of the broad ways in which indigeneity and religion are normally presented.

Chapter 3: The Morung Calendar.

What kind of regular, time-bound, events are covered by *The Morung Express*? What do these cyclic and taken-for-granted events say about how the newspaper is organised? In what ways do they articulate Naganess to indigeneity and religion? Seeking answers to these questions by focusing on these regular, stable events that are reported in the newspaper enabled me to study issues that were located in the news space through time. *The Morung Express* follows a general scheme of the Gregorian calendar with 365 days, divided into 12 months ranging from January to December with 28-31 days each. Within this annual framework, a reading of the newspaper throughout the year 2020 led me to other calendrical systems that enabled an analysis of the events reported as part of the news. I was able to recognise many of these as regular – as covered in the newspaper each year – having reported on some of these events myself during my work at *The Morung Express*. Through the umbrella term ‘Morung Calendar’, this chapter takes stock of the ways in which Naganess, indigeneity and religion are connected through different calendrical systems throughout the year. Three kinds of calendars emerged in my reading of *The Morung Express*. I classify them as the Nagaland for Christ calendar (Nagaland as a ‘Land of God’), the Incredible Nagaland calendar (Nagaland as a ‘Land of Festivals’) and the Global Naga calendar (local page, global days). Processes of ritualisation and festivalisation locate the pulls of articulations in various directions.

Chapter 4: Debated prohibitions.

What kind of issues does *The Morung Express* focus on that are regular but not annual events? What kinds of debates does it provide space for? Prohibitions often come in the form of legal – state legislative and administrative – measures that put restrictions on life and liberties. Contestations to these prohibitions are not time bound and are often conditional on the sparks that set them off. As in most years, prohibitions on two food items – alcohol and dog meat – came to be debated in *The Morung Express* in 2020. Through these debates, the prohibitions showcase how Naganess is articulated to indigeneity and religion, and how actors participate in contesting such prohibitions. An alcohol prohibition shows a tight link between church, state and civil society, while a dog meat prohibition throws up arguments of animal welfare versus food customs. Lines of separation are drawn between religion and rights, while customs are connected to rights. ‘Debated prohibitions’ is an umbrella term that enables the study of debates on institutional restrictions and arguments for (or against) control imposed on consumption in Nagaland – a recurrent issue over the years, but also hotly debated in 2020.

II

Chapter 5: Back to the newsroom: re-articulation by knowledge workers.

How do journalists reflect on the themes of this study? How do they articulate their uses of the themes that appear in this dissertation? In this chapter, the themes analysed in the previous chapters are brought into conversation with journalists, editors, editorial contributors and other workers at the newspaper in 2022-23. The conversations lead to a re-articulation of Naganess, indigeneity and religion, bringing in the variety of directions that the analysis of such articulations can go (or not) in this context. Through this, *The Morung Express* is understood through the information needs and interests it addresses as a local info sheet, a newspaper, and as indigenous, religious, and secular media, with emergent possibilities of building knowledge as commons.

Chapter 6: Terrain of struggle at *The Morung Express*.

What kind of newspaper did the founders of *The Morung Express* imagine? How do they articulate Naganess through their descriptions of the institution? The description of the newspaper as a ‘morung’, or as a ‘place of learning’, offers new presentations of how sites that were articulated as ‘heathen’ in another era are re-articulated as secular pedagogical sites today. Further, I ask journalists what they think of the newspaper’s classification as ‘indigenous media’ and ‘christian morung’. Taken together, the description of the work of *The Morung Express* is used to think about an articulated media paradigm that renegotiates practices of journalism in Nagaland and enables a reading of this newspaper as contesting strict lines between indigenous, religious and secular media. This chapter is an exploration of the terrain of struggle entailed in the formation of an ‘alternative’ space through the medium of the news.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The conclusion presents tentative answers to research questions raised in this introduction. Here, I summarise the ways in which Naganess is articulated to indigeneity and religion in the printed text of *The Morung Express* in 2020 through the use of analytical themes, and through different scales. I also present some of the contradictions that come up in conversation with the newspaper’s knowledge workers in 2022-23 about the themes and articulations presented in the first part of this dissertation. Finally, I summarise the extent to which this newspaper may be understood through the categories of indigenous, religious and secular media.

I

2 News production in Nagaland

This chapter maps the conditions, structures, and broad history of the news media in Nagaland State, India, as well as more specifically *The Morung Express*. I provide the material context of doing the news in Nagaland, and also describe how *The Morung Express* is laid out, its work structure, pages, and its claims. I present the way newspapers and other news media in Nagaland are part of the global news production enterprise recognisable as ‘mass media’, but also how specific situations shape the news and its production in Nagaland (Herman and Chomsky 1994: xii). Taking into account that contexts actively take part in enacting, producing the text (Asdal 2012: 382), or the newspaper in this case, the chapter is a resource to develop an understanding towards and exploration of the other chapters of this dissertation.

As a ‘people-oriented alternative newspaper’ in Nagaland, *The Morung Express* draws attention to the articulation of Naganess by laying out the relations, or the principles of cooperation, that underline Naganess as a ‘common subject’, but not as something only defined by a colonial or postcolonial state (Federici 2019). Through the use of English as the common language, it produces information and news as contemporary knowledge for a reading public, one that is often conversant in issues of human rights and political organising. The newspaper navigates myriad articulations through its context and the conditions of journalism in Nagaland, within whose structural system it is located. But it is not only in search for these principles of cooperation that readers approach a newspaper, which remains a crucial source of information first of all. In some neighbouring states, where Nagas are minorities, *The Morung Express* used to be distributed in its physical form till this became difficult due to the lack of capital and distribution networks. Becoming an e-newspaper during the COVID-19 pandemic may have helped bridge this gap, but the newspaper’s subscribers are today restricted to cities like Dimapur, Kohima and Mokokchung. Naga people in these other regions seek information through subscriptions to local news sites and newspapers, like *The Hills*

Times in Karbi Anglong (Assam) or *The Sangai Express* in Ukhrul or Senapati (Manipur) or the *Arunachal Times* in Tirap (Arunachal Pradesh). Sometimes, *The Morung Express* or even *Nagaland Post*, *Nagaland Page* and *Eastern Mirror* become their second or third source of information.

This is an explorative presentation of my understanding of Nagaland and *The Morung Express* that I gathered while working there as a journalist from 2011 to 2019. Given that there is little research on this newspaper, data on what kind of newspaper it is, and the general bent of the news, features and opinions it presents are also drawn from various websites, and news and feature pieces that have highlighted the history of the news media in Nagaland (also presented as part of the literature review in the last chapter). Sub-sections in this chapter discuss the workings of *The Morung Express*, and others, in Nagaland; a brief history of newspapers; how *The Morung Express* is organised institutionally and through its workers; how its pages and sections are distributed; and the other-than-newspaper projects it undertakes. I will also lay out examples from 2020 and 2021 of how indigeneity and religion are generally presented on its pages to introduce the kind of topics that the reader will encounter in the next chapters.

2.1 Brief history of newspapers in Nagaland

The *Ao Milen* is claimed to be one of the first newspapers to be published from the Naga Hills (then Assam). Started by the Ao Students' Conference (AKM), a youth organisation associated with the Ao Naga tribe, in 1933 under the banner of *The (Ao) Naga Messenger*, it was later re-named *Ao Milen* (Ao lamp/light) in 1937. In 2006, it became a daily Ao Naga language newspaper⁶⁹ but another newspaper, *Tir Yimyim*, continues to be the largest circulated Ao Naga and local language newspaper in Nagaland. In an article on media in Nagaland⁷⁰, the editor of the *Nagaland Page*,

⁶⁹ <https://nagalandgk.com/newspapers-of-nagaland-and-editors/> Accessed on 01.02.2022.

⁷⁰ <https://morungexpress.com/media-in-nagaland-challenges-and-opportunities> Accessed on 24.03.2021.

Monalisa Changkija, suggests that the first English language newspaper published from the Naga areas⁷¹ was established by early leaders of the Naga National Council (NNC), one of the first collectives to explicitly advocate Naga nationhood, along with an American Baptist missionary in Kohima, which would become the capital city of Nagaland⁷². It was first called *Times of Kohima* but changed to *The Naga Nation* in 1946 on the suggestion of prominent bureaucrat and parliamentarian, A Kevichusa⁷³; the paper was edited by the NNC⁷⁴ and the printing done by the Baptist Mission. It was possibly circulated only among the few who could read English at the time and could afford the Rs. 2 annual subscription charge. The first Naga newspaper to be ‘officially registered’ was the Angami (another Naga tribe) news quarterly, *Ketho Mu Kevi*, in 1957 published from Imphal (Manipur) (Charvak 2015: 29). Many more newspapers and weeklies like *Citizen’s Voice*, *Ura Mail*, *Nagaland Times*, *The Naga Banner*, *Oking Times*, *The Nagaland Herald*, *Nagaland Today*, and a fortnightly called *Naga Chronicle* (India 1971), were published from Nagaland between the 1940s and present, though most of these have now shut down.

The Indo-Naga conflict, which escalated in the 1950s, led to severe government (India and Myanmar) restrictions⁷⁵ on all freedoms, including independent news media coverage of the conflict. With the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA)⁷⁶ in operation, quiet interventions by foreign correspondents led to the

⁷¹ Before Nagaland was made a federal unit in 1963, the Naga Hills district fell under the state of Assam in India.

⁷² The American Baptist Foreign Mission Society (1872-1955) had already established printing presses in the region with a view to educate and evangelise the Naga Hills. See Longkumer, A. (2019). "'Along Kingdom's Highway': the proliferation of Christianity, education, and print amongst the Nagas in Northeast India." *Contemporary South Asia* 27(2): 160-178.

⁷³ http://loksabhaph.nic.in/writereaddata/biodata_1_12/2129.htm Accessed on 25.03.2021.

⁷⁴ <https://morungexpress.com/75-years-of-naga-national-council> Accessed on 24.03.2021.

⁷⁵ <https://eparlib.nic.in/handle/123456789/2429> Accessed on 01.02.2022.

⁷⁶ Commonly known as AFSPA, this law is a continuation of the British government's Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance 1942 designed to quell the Quit India Movement mobilised to expel the British Empire from India. Carried over by independent India, the law enabled the Indian army to operate in these conflict areas with extra judicial powers like shoot-to-kill on suspicion in ‘disturbed areas’.

‘internationalisation’ of the Indo-Naga conflict (Means and Means 1966: 295, Longkumer 2018b: 11-2). Political internationalisation efforts were led primarily by Angami Zapu Phizo, one of the pioneers of the Naga national movement⁷⁷. The Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) challenged the AFSPA in the Supreme Court of India in the 1990s, and related human rights violations were reported through networks like the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs⁷⁸, the United Nations and Indian organisations like People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), People’s Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), South Asia Forum for Human Rights, The Other Media, and a large network of individual activists (Haksar 1985). This context meant that the Indian media’s coverage of the nationalist struggles in Nagaland was restricted to moments that involved violent, armed conflict. This reduced the relations of India and the Northeast entirely to one of national security, the latter often depicted as threatening the former. Reference to ‘Indian’ media in Nagaland means those media institutions that operate from ‘mainland’ India, particularly its metropolitan cities like Kolkata, New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai and who claim to be pan-Indian news media. Many of these are large news media outlets that also have regional editions that address issues local to the Northeast, although they are not usually specific to each state of the Northeast. With the spread of digital technology, more web channels run from metropolitan Indian cities, on YouTube, and now cover issues in the Northeast region than previously. International media are also interested in Nagaland, but this attention is primarily in times of conflict and violence⁷⁹. This makes Nagaland’s media particularly important to make news, information and opinions on a daily basis available to a local audience. Newspapers are a primary and trusted source of daily news and information in Nagaland. Operating from the city of Dimapur, the daily editions of *The Morung Express* involve the work of its publisher, administrators, editors, reporters,

⁷⁷ <https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/3ARYXMNwsz27unaESW5bcP/Im-a-Naga-first-a-Naga-second-and-a-Naga-last.html> Accessed on 01.04.2021.

⁷⁸ IWGIA Document 56, July 1986.

⁷⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/05/nagaland-killings-india-security-forces-shot-civilians-mistaken-for-militants> , <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/5/multiple-dead-after-operation-in-northeastern-india> Accessed on 01.02.2022.

designers, operating personnel, printing technicians as well as independent contributors. Once printed, drivers, distributors and hawkers circulate the newspaper. In its digital form, the newspaper and its messages circulate worldwide. It is a source of information among Nagas living across the world. In a militarised zone that continues under a cessation of gunfire (ceasefires), printed news becomes the ‘safe space’ for disagreeing groups to participate in public discourse. For non-Nagas in Nagaland and elsewhere, *The Morung Express* provides ‘Naga views’ of news from around the globe as well as ‘Naga news’⁸⁰, as in news from the Naga areas.

The Morung Express was started by a collective of friends and human rights activists in 2005 under the banner *The Morung for Indigenous Affairs and JustPeace*. Having changed size, form, and editorial teams, over the years, it is now an eight-page broadsheet newspaper published at the Themba Printers and Morung Publication in Dimapur. It is one among several English and local language daily newspapers published from Nagaland, including the *Nagaland Post*, *Nagaland Page*, *Eastern Mirror*, *Tir Yimyim*, *Ao Milen*, *Capi*, *Sumi Küküpütsa*, *Nagamese Khobor*, and *Mokokchung Times* amongst others. Of these, those that are registered with the Registrar of Newspapers for India⁸¹ (RNI), instated through the Government of India’s Press and Registration of Books Act 1867⁸², are regulated by the Press Council of India⁸³ and the Print Media Advertisement Policy that came into effect in 2020⁸⁴. According to the RNI’s 2021-22 report, Nagaland State registered 29 publications, including 10 dailies, 11 weeklies, one fortnightly, four monthlies, two quarterlies and one annual, among the 1,46,045 registered publications in India at the time⁸⁵. Out of these, six dailies from

⁸⁰ Not the same as ‘Naga News’, a newsletter run by the Department of Information and Public Relations, Government of Nagaland. <https://ipr.nagaland.gov.in/naga-news> Accessed on 01.02.2022.

⁸¹ http://rni.nic.in/all_page/history.aspx Accessed on 24.03.2021.

⁸² <https://mib.gov.in/acts/press-registration-books-act-1867#:~:text=It%20was%20a%20regulatory%20law,other%20matter%20printed%20in%20India.> Accessed on 24.03.2021.

⁸³ https://www.presscouncil.nic.in/Content/29_3_History.aspx Accessed on 01.04.2021.

⁸⁴ <https://www.printweek.in/news/whats-new-in-print-media-advertisement-policy-2020-43446> Accessed on 31.07.2023.

⁸⁵ https://rni.nic.in/all_page/PIN2021_22.html Accessed on 31.07.2023.

Nagaland reported their circulation data to the RNI, indicating a combined circulation figure of 80,105 copies per publishing day in 2021-22⁸⁶. The four English dailies had a combined circulation of 71,028⁸⁷ with the *Nagaland Post* reporting the highest circulation of 35,709⁸⁸. This means the other three English language dailies in Nagaland had a combined circulation average of 35,319 per publishing day in 2021-22, putting *The Morung Express* into the category of ‘small’ publication⁸⁹. *Nagaland Post*, the largest newspaper in Nagaland, is a ‘medium’ publication in India.

Table 1: Available year-wise circulation per day of publishing in Nagaland, sourced from the Office of Registrar of Newspapers for India’s records⁹⁰.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
No. of Publications	22	22	23	25	25	26	29	29	29
Nagaland Post	61,394	63,572	66,173	64,338	63,764	59,749	55,185	31,704	35,709
Other 3 English dailies	84,124	93,663	1,02,748	1,10,698	76,076	75,742	66,962	41,868	35,319
Total English	1,45,518	1,70,490	1,68,921	1,75,036	1,39,840	1,32,491	1,22,147	73,572	71,028
Total circulation (dailies)	1,84,216	1,96,357	1,94,640	1,91,946	1,74,699	1,61,143	1,43,317	82,014	80,105
Total circulation	1,84,216	2,09,612	2,08,040	2,14,186	1,74,699	1,61,143	1,43,317	82,014	80,105

The growth of audio, visual and digital media has not, according to the RNI, adversely affected the print media in India though circulations decreased between 2019 and 2021. This was also the period in which the COVID-19 pandemic was marked by two country-wide lockdowns in India. In Nagaland, the circulation of newspapers is shown to be on

⁸⁶ Falling from 82,014 in 2020-21.

⁸⁷ The other two non-English publications reported an average circulation of 9,077. In 2020-21, English dailies in Nagaland had reported a circulation figure of 73,572 copies per publishing day. http://rni.nic.in/all_page/pin202021.html Accessed on 19.01.2022.

⁸⁸ https://rni.nic.in/all_page/PIN2021_22.html Accessed on 31.07.2023.

⁸⁹

https://www.davp.nic.in/writereaddata/Final_Print_Media_Advt_Policy_Revision_dated_23072020.pdf Accessed on 31.07.2023.

⁹⁰ https://rni.nic.in/all_page/press_india.aspx Accessed on 31.07.2023.

a steady decline since 2017-18 (see table above), taking a big hit during the pandemic. Though the *Nagaland Post* has begun to recover a little bit, the other three English language newspapers have continued on a downward spiral as per the figures cited in the table. Such large scale measures as blanket lockdowns affect market players disproportionately, widening the gap, in the case of Nagaland, between small and medium newspapers.

2.2 Making the news and newspapers

As per the 2011 census of India, Nagaland State is reported to have a literacy rate of 80.11%⁹¹. Larger newspapers in Nagaland are often broadsheets in the English language. Most of the smaller newspapers, or tabloid-size newspapers with medium and small circulation, are local language dailies. One of the largest circulated dailies in Nagaland is the *Tir Yimyim*, the Ao ‘native’ daily newspaper that describes itself as ‘a protector and promoter of the mother language’⁹². English, however, is the official language adopted by the Government of Nagaland. While Ao is reported to be a linguistic majority in the state⁹³, the state’s *lingua franca* is Nagamese – it is the language of trade and is the common language between different communities and classes of people in Nagaland. However, the Nagamese print news industry has struggled to survive, with *Nagamese Khobor* the only Nagamese language newspaper in the state (Kumar 2023: 155-160). Nagamese is considered an ‘intrusive’ non-indigenous language with a ‘negative impact’ on ‘Naga indigenous languages’, as indicated in a Morung Weekly Poll conducted in April 2021⁹⁴. The English-speaking elite sometimes consider it as a ‘bazaar’ or market creole that signifies neo/post-colonial

⁹¹ https://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/data_files/nagaland/6-exe_summ-6-7.pdf
Accessed on 31.01.2022.

⁹² <https://tirymyim.in/about-us/> Accessed on 01.02.2022. As per the RNI, Ao Naga language dailies had a circulation of 22,706 in 2018-19.

⁹³

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170525141614/http://nclm.nic.in/shared/linkimages/NCLM52ndReport.pdf> Accessed on 31.01.2022.

⁹⁴ <https://www.morungexpress.com/is-the-use-of-nagamese-having-a-negative-impact-on-naga-indigenous-languages-how> Accessed on 01.02.2022.

capitalism. This group prefer the English language to be the companion to ‘indigenous’ and ‘native’ languages, which are recognised as ‘mother languages’ and the ‘mother tongue’. However, Nagamese remains the connector-language as it is the primary language of communication between various linguistic groups in Nagaland, and with neighbouring communities, who may not have access to an English education. What Nagamese lacks in textuality, it gains in communicability. Even if people don’t prefer to read the news in Nagamese, they like to listen to it in Nagamese. Many broadcast and web-based news channels that have emerged recently in Nagaland use Nagamese as their primary language, alongside English, making news accessible to a much larger audience than English language newspapers have been able to reach.

Newspapers are, nonetheless, the most trusted media institution in Nagaland, followed by government run radio stations (All India Radio), some local cable-based television networks, a couple of new satellite-based television networks called Hornbill TV and NLTV, and several popular YouTube channels run by young people; most of them have a presence on various social media platforms. Despite the rise of TV, web and social media, I observed that newspapers continue to be a familiar, important and trusted source of information and knowledge. It is a common refrain among journalists in India that print media continues to do a better job of overall news coverage than most other media. In Nagaland today, newspapers – as opposed to websites, television news channels or social media – have continued to be able to set social agendas through the news. In my own experience as a journalist over the past decade, newspapers are trusted by readers to frame debates of political and social interest, particularly when the newspapers’ side of the debate aligns with the readers’ views, which in turn may sometimes decide which newspaper a reader subscribes to. While certain news items go viral on social media, its tendency to attract divisive vitriol means readers wait for newspapers to publish verified reports, placing more trust in the editorial capacities of these newspapers. Within this trusted position, the *The Morung Express* claims to be a ‘voice’ specifically on behalf of the Naga people when reporting the news. The use of English enables the newspaper to cross linguistic borders which facilitates ease of navigating scales from the local (perhaps not hyper local as English translations on this

scale would be sparse) to the national and global. Non-media institutions in Nagaland that want to set agendas take part in the news by releasing press statements to the newspapers on a regular basis.

While this is a regular feature of news media anywhere, in Nagaland the fourth wall is permeable. Readers are welcomed to participate on the pages of the newspaper through the public discourse or public space section, or through the Morung Express Weekly Polls that invite readers to share their views on certain contemporary topics. On the other hand, civil society institutions and Naga revolutionary groups want their press releases published in exactly the wording given in their statements. This sometimes leads to disagreements when editors and journalists perform their regular duties and add news angles to press statements, altering the frame intended by the releasing institutions. While editors would be mindful of controversial or politically sensitive statements, some civil societies have objected, giving rise to a kind of news culture that keeps the messages of non-state institutions almost intact while leaving out more controversial statements.

Being relatively smaller than newspapers in metropolitan cities in India it is challenging to start and sustain a newspaper business in Nagaland⁹⁵ given the lack of access to capital, newsprint, printing machines and technicians needed to maintain them⁹⁶. Nagaland's social dependence on orality means messages and information are often passed by word of mouth – through family, friends, leaders, associates – and newspapers have been slow to pick up as a mode for information sharing. Many households in rural villages and small urban towns often share newspapers by reading them around a fire in the morning or evening. This particularly applies to regional language newspapers like *Tir Yimyim* (Ao) and *Capi* (Tenyidie) that are passed around from household to household as people make daily social visits to each other. From what I learned during

⁹⁵ <https://www.morungexpress.com/nagaland-newspaper-economy-in-deep-crisis> Accessed on 01.02.2022.

⁹⁶ A newspaper called *Nagaland Today* started operations in 2019 and closed down within a few months when they were unable to get engineers to repair technical problems in their printing machine.

my work, typically, households with an English newspaper readership in Nagaland subscribe to *Nagaland Post* as their main paper. If they can afford it, they will subscribe to a second English language newspaper depending on their preference that could include *The Morung Express*, *Eastern Mirror*, *Nagaland Page* and/or a local language newspaper.

Unable to depend on circulation to finance their institutions, newspapers are dependent on advertisement revenue. Government advertising forms the bulk of the revenue for newspapers in Nagaland. On most days, such advertisements can easily be spotted in the pages: Government of Nagaland tender notices for development projects; or, political parties' meetings; and Government of India's schemes. Advertisements from private citizens or institutions come in small numbers and sizes – congratulatory messages, affidavits, registration, sale of land, change of name, acknowledgements, deaths, marriage anniversaries, birthday greetings, church programmes, sale of local products, and others. Two occasions tend to bring the largest amount of advertising and revenue – the Hornbill Festival, a large festival funded by the state, and Nagaland State elections, when political parties pay for advertisements⁹⁷.

For the local news, newspapers in Nagaland do the reporting themselves, depending on information sources such as local events, press conferences, press releases and investigations of issues. For the national and international news, they subscribe to news wires and agencies like *Indo-Asian News Service*, *Press Trust of India*, *Reuters*, the *Associated Press* or others. *The Morung Express* itself also depends on the *Newmai News Network* and other India-wide news networks to gather information from across the Northeast. While 'investigative journalism' is conducted in subjects around crime, governance, elections, and development, Nagaland faces many constraints due to low levels of press freedom in the Northeast of India⁹⁸. In India generally, journalists are

⁹⁷ Funding of political parties in India is opaque and has been challenged in the Supreme Court of India. <https://thewire.in/law/electoral-bonds-sc-questions-anonymity-of-electoral-bonds-and-voters-right-to-information> Accessed on 13.11.2023.

⁹⁸ <https://thewire.in/media/what-its-like-to-be-a-journalist-in-indias-northeast> Accessed on 03.02.2022.

regularly targeted by the government through the use of anti-terror laws to prevent criticism of the government⁹⁹. In the Northeast, with high levels of state (and non-state) militarisation, journalists are prevented from investigating corruption. Government data is poor or unavailable, and close links between politicians and armed actors threaten press safety. It is possible for armed actors from either the Indian security forces or the Naga revolutionary groups to walk straight into newspaper offices and issue threats; the former even has the right to confiscate equipment like hard disks used to store information in newspaper offices. Such methods have been gaining traction even in mainland India over the past few years. To protect themselves, newspapers in Nagaland often come together to resist these restrictions. In 2015, for instance, some newspapers carried blank editorials on National Press Day (16 November) to protest against the pressure imposed on their freedom by Indian security forces¹⁰⁰. Local civil society organisations have also attempted to regulate or restrict newspapers in Nagaland, expressing their displeasure with how an issue involving them has been covered by the local press by going to newspaper offices in groups to demands changes. It takes dialogue and the negotiating ability of the news team or editors in charge to resolve these conflicts. Newspapers strive to balance these requirements and work under intense scrutiny. It is particularly challenging to report from the field on human rights violations by the Indian army and armed conflicts between Naga revolutionary groups, or tribes, villages, and churches due to the lack of security for local journalists. And yet, Nagaland's newspapers themselves remain the main site through which many of these agencies and organisations exercise their political agency – having their press statements published, and acknowledging the space and attention given to their particular issue, unlike within mainland Indian newspapers where the Northeast rarely features (Basu Thakur and De 2023).

⁹⁹ <https://freespeechcollective.in/2023/10/05/in-india-16-journalists-under-uapa-seven-behind-bars/>
Accessed on 05.10.2023.

¹⁰⁰ <https://scroll.in/article/769675/its-just-news-why-newspapers-in-nagaland-are-carrying-blank-editorials-today> Accessed on 25.03.2021.

2.3 Workers & organisation

In Nagaland, journalism is not an easy source of income – wages are low, and jobs are limited. Very few new journalists enter the pool and fewer still stick with it; many journalists support themselves with part time jobs. At *The Morung Express*, many workers are journalists by night but lecturers, students, cultivators, government job holders, freelancers, entrepreneurs, producers, writers, activists, and trainers by day¹⁰¹. They joined the institution through various channels, some out of journalism schools, others to further explore an interest in journalism, yet others for a more stable, if poorly paid, job¹⁰². Some non-journalists came to the news institution from digital and print design backgrounds, while others came from other newspapers to access a broader scope of doing the news. It remains tougher to be a female journalist covering politics in Nagaland though the male to female ratio in newsrooms remains roughly proportionate¹⁰³. Two English newspapers have women as their chief editors¹⁰⁴; *The Morung Express* newsroom had a number of women reporting, editing and designing (pages) the news¹⁰⁵. Wages and social security are not standardised in most newspapers, except, to my knowledge, at *The Morung Express* and *Eastern Mirror* which follow the Majithia Wage Board¹⁰⁶ regulations.

¹⁰¹ <https://morungexpress.com/rugged-journey-shared-future> Accessed on 30.12.2023.

¹⁰² Apart from the government, there are few other stable avenues of employment in Nagaland. Print media has been one of the state's most stable privately run small industries that has sustained over a long period of time. Wages are low because the newspaper industry makes little to no profit, and its industrial expenditure is not subsidised by the state.

¹⁰³ Though women report on sessions of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly or press conferences by political parties, few cover political campaigns or do investigative stories and interviews with politicians. Politics in Nagaland is controlled by men. Two women were elected to the legislative assembly in 2023, first time since Nagaland became a state in 1963. Most political and investigative stories (known as 'hard stories'), needless to say, must be accessed from behind the scenes, after hours, through spaces with limited access for women. Some female journalists like Monalisa Changkija, Merina Chishi, Bonnie Konyak and Tinakali Sumi, to name a few, have reported politics in their time as print journalists. Now, more women are joining the developing broadcast media in Nagaland, even reporting on controversial issues.

¹⁰⁴ *Nagaland Page* and *Eastern Mirror*.

¹⁰⁵ At least till the fieldwork for this study was conducted.

¹⁰⁶ <https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/Wage%20Board%20for%20Working%20Journalists.pdf>

Wage Board for Working Journalists, 2011. Accessed on 25.04.2021.

Journalists in Nagaland are organised along city-based press club lines which unionise locally for better working conditions; they rarely organise in collaboration with wider Northeast or Indian journalist unions¹⁰⁷ or, in fact, with Naga journalists beyond the borders of Nagaland State. The press is also organised through the Nagaland Press Association that brings together editors and journalists – this is not predominantly how journalists in the rest of India are organised, preferring to separate owners, editors and managers from the journalistic workforce. However, given the context in Nagaland¹⁰⁸, it has proven to be more productive for journalists and editors to work together, for instance, to get the government to pay for the advertisements it publishes in the newspapers, negotiating state-sponsored welfare schemes for journalists and their families, and rallying against total state control of media or addressing other issues.

Newspapers in Nagaland are owned and operated primarily by individuals – *The Morung Express* is the only one that I know of that has a Board to make major decisions, though its ‘owner’ is Aküm Longchari¹⁰⁹. The structure of most English language dailies in Nagaland follows the standard structure of news media organisations with a separation of editorial and administrative teams and tasks. Editorial teams are led by an editor – the team consists of reporters, correspondents, interns, stringers, sub-editors and associate editors in charge of various pages and sections of the newspaper who in turn work directly with page designers who set up/design the pages that are to be printed as an issue of the newspaper. At *The Morung Express*, this team works quite independently without the main editor overseeing every detail. The editorial team works from their headquarters in Dimapur’s Duncan Bosti collating the news from various sources, press releases and what journalists send them from Dimapur, Kohima, Mokokchung and elsewhere in the state. Once they have edited the news and laid them out on the pages

¹⁰⁷ There is a slow shift seen in unionising with some journalists in Nagaland joining networks like the South Asian Women in Media and the Network of Women in Media, India.

¹⁰⁸ Most owners (publishers) of the newspapers are, currently, also the editors of their respective newspapers.

¹⁰⁹

https://mi.nic.in/CheckReg_Data/RegistrationDetails.aspx?RegNo=4haM0gC7bFJM%2bmLz3x9ILQ%3d%3d Accessed on 31.07.2023.

with designers, the latter send the electronic page files to the printing press (Themba Printers and Morung Publication) located in Padam Pukhuri, Dimapur. At the press, workers work the night shift to put the newspaper to print on an offset printing press that the institution acquired in 2005¹¹⁰. Once printed, the newspapers are driven to distributors who further hire hawkers to deliver them to consumers.

Advertising, newsprint, circulation, distribution, marketing and finances are handled by an administrative, marketing and management team. With a news and advertisement office also in Kohima, the capital city of Nagaland, *The Morung Express* employs about 50 workers, including Naga and non-Naga, part time and full time, journalist and non-journalist working employees¹¹¹. With a circulation of less than 25,000 copies per day of publishing – making it a ‘small’ category newspaper in India, as stated before – *The Morung Express* and *Eastern Mirror* have the second largest circulation in Nagaland, after *Nagaland Post*. Apart from its website, *The Morung Express* also has accounts on social media sites, such as a YouTube channel¹¹², Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts through which it disseminates the news. I focus on the physical copy of the newspaper – delivered to readers also as an electronic subscription since 2020 – to gauge the way in which news is directly presented to its primary readers.

As a ‘people-oriented alternative newspaper’, *The Morung Express* assumes an ‘intended audience’ (Richardson 2007: 1) as the ‘people’ for whom journalists and

¹¹⁰ Compared to the two other English language daily broadsheet newspapers in Nagaland, *The Morung Express* uses a one-step-older printing technology that adds a time-consuming process to the production of the newspaper. This means that *The Morung Express* has a larger printing workforce, pays more wages, but also puts its paper to press earlier than the other newspapers (thereby losing the latest stories) and reaches the distribution network later than the other newspapers (thereby losing market). This affects the newspaper’s income and increases the pressure on its journalists who have shorter deadlines than others to produce their daily work. Though the lack of capital contributes to these conditions, and to the inability to make a technological shift, the press is able to retain more human jobs in the industry.

¹¹¹ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1495031/> Accessed on 25.03.2021.

¹¹² <https://www.youtube.com/@TheMorungExpress05> Accessed on 31.07.2023.

editors produce the news¹¹³. According to the newspaper's internal statistics, the demography of this group is between 25 to 55 years of age.

2.4 Pages, layout, and other projects



Figure 2: Top half of the front page of the first issue of *The Morung Express* in 2020.

The newspaper begins, as anywhere else, with a masthead. Presented above is the *The Morung Express* masthead with the place of publication (Dimapur), volume of the publication (XV), issue number (001), number of pages (12, now reduced to 8) and cost of the issue (Rs. 5) at the top¹¹⁴. With a gap, the day and date (Friday, 03 January, 2020) follow with the web address (www.morungexpress.com) appearing next to it. Below

¹¹³ An audience is not a once and for all decided matter. I use Richardson's notion of an intended audience only to signify a specific demography of readers for whom content is regarded to be generated at *The Morung Express*.

¹¹⁴ These are details from the first issue of the year, 2020, during which the content of the newspaper is analysed. Things changed considerably during the same year as the COVID-19 pandemic spread to, and through, Nagaland and its newspaper industry.

this, left to right, is the logo of the newspaper with the year of its establishment, 2005. The name of the newspaper – in black and red – runs across as a banner, *The Morung Express*, with the motto, ‘The Power of Truth’. Below this, a quotation frames the day before the headlines, illustrations and the news follow. *The Morung Express* is known for its reversal of what is understood as the ‘lead’, or top story of the day, that appears at the top of the front page. Long feature stories (as seen above, for instance) that are often considered ‘anchor’ (bottom of the page) stories in other newspapers are given lead space on its front page. In that, it breaks from the ‘breaking news’ model of news delivery. While some pages are moved around based on the amount of content the newspaper receives on any given day (and advertisements that the newspaper may carry on its pages), the basic distribution of pages (as of now, with eight pages), content-wise, is as follows:

Page 1: General and major news (local, regional, national, international), news in brief, quotations, illustrations, updates on inside pages.

Page 2: Nagaland News.

Page 3: Nagaland News/Northeast News.

Page 4: Editorial page – ‘In Focus’ (On Saturday, this page becomes ‘People, Life, etc’ and, on Sunday, ‘Faith Leaf’ along with results of the Morung Weekly Polls).

Page 5: Op-ed page – reserved for ‘Public Space’, ‘Leisure’ and important phone numbers (On Wednesday, this page becomes ‘Morung Learning’ and on Sunday it is ‘Chalkboard’ with content for children).

Page 6: India /World/Business.

Page 7: Entertainment.

Page 8: Sports.

The newspaper ends with a print line where details of the editor, publisher, addresses, RNI registration number, printers, phone numbers and emails addresses are provided. Presented below are two printlines, the first from 2020, when the content of the newspaper is analysed (Editor: Dr. Moalemba, Publisher: Dr. Aküm Longchari), and the

second from 2022-23, when interviews with the newspaper’s journalists were conducted (Editor & Publisher: Dr. Aküm Longchari).

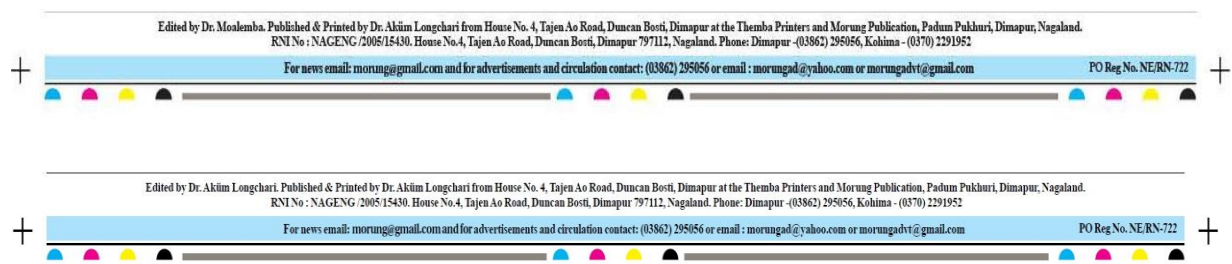


Figure 3: (Above) Print line of *The Morung Express* in 2020. (Below) Print line of *The Morung Express* in 2023.

While the front page and editorials are the more ‘serious’ matters, the sports and entertainment pages are popular among readers. These are mixtures of local reportage, and national and international news reports. The entertainment page is designed quite differently from the other pages, making it stand out from the other content of the newspaper, as ‘younger’, with innovative design templates. One of the most important sections in the newspaper is the Public Discourse and Public Space. For this, non-journalist non-employees contribute opinion pieces to contemporary and historical – and *historicising* (Chakrabarty 2009a) – debates. In newspapers elsewhere, these may be presented as ‘letters to the editor’ but in Nagaland these public opinion pieces are taken out of the bracket of writing only to the editor¹¹⁵, made into commentaries with bylines in the same way as journalists would have their pieces credited. However, opinions expressed in these pieces are not taken as the editorial stance of the newspapers and are rarely edited. In *The Morung Express*, these sections also work as a space to publish longer texts of important press statements carried on page one as news. These sections take as much part in ordering notions, events and issues in *The Morung Express* as its news and editorials.

¹¹⁵ Except *Nagaland Page* that follows the ‘Letter to the Editor’ format too.

The Morung Express claims to be an ‘independent English language newspaper which provides an alternative voice to the dominant status quo’ and that it was ‘conceived from the Naga people’s historical realities and is guided by their voices and experiences’¹¹⁶. In the section titled ‘guiding principles’, its publisher notes that the newspaper emerged from the desire for a free press based on ‘qualitative and investigative’ journalism, which it finds ‘essential’ in order to enable ‘a Naga public that makes informed decisions’. Its ‘principal statement’ starts with ‘*The Morung Express* acknowledges and respects the power of public opinion and its ability to safeguard democratic space with the potential to support vital policy formulation and decision-making processes. *The Morung Express* promotes developing a critical consciousness that can mobilise public opinion into taking appropriate actions that will usher in a transformational era where sustainable democracy and *JustPeace* can thrive’. While I will come back to the building block ideas of the newspaper in chapter six, *The Morung Express*’s principal statement points towards the news, editorials or discourse of the newspaper to focus on public discourses in relation to peace, self-determination, transformation, change, nonviolence, brotherhood, shared future and other justice-related notions. The newspaper’s prime motto continues to be ‘speak truth to power’¹¹⁷, that Sheila Jasanoff has, elsewhere, described as an institutional stance towards public duty (Jasanoff 2022).

Through these claims and aspirations, the newspaper structures issues in the news for its audience that indicates the ‘shared presuppositions of what practices or worlds consist of’ (Jensen 2017: 206). These presuppositions are put to work through the daily coverage of news, but also special features, in ways that turn abstract statements into historical determination (Levenson 2022). Here, abstract notions of self-determination or just peace, for instance, are translated into everyday matters by frontpaging stories on, say, ‘the indigenous handloom’, communal food and agriculture practices, Naga reconciliation, government accountability on economic expenditure and other such

¹¹⁶ <https://morungexpress.com/about-us> Accessed on 09.02.2021.

¹¹⁷ One of the first usages of this term is often attributed to the American Friends Service Committee, or Quakers, in their 1955 document titled ‘Speak Truth to Power: A Quaker Search for an Alternative to Violence’. <https://quaker.org/legacy/sttp.html> Accessed on 29.03.2021.

topics. The daily enactment of these in text, as print news and in English, orient readers and knowledge workers – journalists, editors, designers – at *The Morung Express*. Such editorial choices over a period of time make the newspaper a site where Naganess is, and can be seen to be, shaped and struggled with, in relation to both local considerations and global networks. The newspaper is a civic space, the fourth estate and, as an example of indigenous journalism (Hanusch 2013), a site where journalism is negotiated in relation to a Naga context.

Apart from published news, *The Morung Express* conducts several public programmes to discuss and debate current affairs, bringing together students, civil society organisations, university lecturers, elite commentators and the local public of the cities their programmes – like Morung Lecture and Morung Debate – are hosted in. Many of these programmes are conducted in collaboration with other institutions, both inside and outside Nagaland, including the Sinai Ministry, Heritage Publishing House, Oriental Theological Seminary, Fazl Ali College, Panos South Asia, The Other Media, Zubaan and Heinrich Böll Stiftung, to name a few. In the past, these initiatives have led to collaborative publications including *Sitting Around the Fire*¹¹⁸ and programmes like *Cultures of Peace*¹¹⁹. Currently, *The Morung Express* is collaborating with two Naga anthropologists and the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) in a repatriation process around human remains¹²⁰. Locally, it has collaborated with projects like Love Burma Mission¹²¹ of the Eleutheros Christian Society based in Tuensang, Nagaland, as a ‘symbol of solidarity’ with the Naga people in Myanmar who face extreme poverty and state apathy. These solidarities are not just built through special alliances – the newspaper frequently presents issues, particularly on its editorial and op-ed pages, from Myanmar and further east. The sources for these include *Asia Times*, *the Irrawaddy*, and

¹¹⁸ A media and civil society initiative on ‘dialogues’ to facilitate peace, politics and reconciliation.

<https://morungexpress.com/sitting-around-fire> Accessed on 31.03.2021.

¹¹⁹ <https://morungexpress.com/cultures-peace-0> Accessed on 31.03.2021.

¹²⁰ <https://rradnagaland.org/category/online-press/> Accessed on 01.08.2022.

¹²¹ <https://morungexpress.com/love-burma-mission-1> Accessed on 31.03.2021.

The Diplomat, and reports or analysis by journalists like Bertil Lintner¹²² are commonly published. The institution regularly hosts scholars from across the world. Many journalists arriving to cover issues in Nagaland seek the institution's help in guiding them with networks – reliable sources, commentators, travel routes, contacts, safety norms and other advice required to carry out their work.

2.5 Indigeneity in *The Morung Express*

The term 'Naga' – referring to peoples who identify themselves as a nation but also as indigenous people and Scheduled Tribes in India – is consistently present in Nagaland's newspapers. Newspapers in Nagaland, particularly *The Morung Express*, often report on the aspirations of the 'Naga peoples' (Longchari 2016: 208), and the challenges of being Naga today. The views from different political parties, unions and other collectives that stress their specific tribe, clan, village or city identities, are examples of Naganess linked to indigeneity. The newspaper is a site where Nagas get an opportunity to learn the grammar of Naganess, but also to understand the location of non-Nagas within their polity and ways to relate to them. For instance, readers read about non-Nagas who live in Nagaland state, like the Kuki, Kachari/Dimasa, Mikir/Karbi and Garo, who identify as indigenous people and are categorised as Scheduled Tribes in Nagaland¹²³ and other states, but rarely identify themselves as adivasi. The news also covers those who do not identify as Scheduled Tribes nor as indigenous people, like Bihari, Bengali, Marwari, Malayali, Tamil and others.

While the Government of India's census has its own way of organising, or categorising, minorities – definitions of Scheduled Tribes are geared towards affirmative action programmes – it has never officially recognised the presence of indigenous people in its territories, instead terming everyone living in India as 'indigenous'. Political constructions of indigeneity have often become a race to claim origins (Xaxa 1999:

¹²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertil_Lintner Accessed on 02.02.2022. Lintner has written extensively on the Northeast India and Northwest Myanmar region, including on the Naga revolutionary movement.

¹²³ https://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_nagaland.pdf Accessed on 29.03.2021.

3591-2) wherein ‘origins imply authenticity’ (Baviskar 2006: 35), but also become ways to relate to specific territories (Xaxa 1999: 3593), in new ways of inclusion into and exclusion from Indian/neighbourhood politics, and participation in global politics (Xaxa 1999, Karlsson 2003, Fernandes 2013). Naganess has been articulated to most of these constructions of indigeneity and presented in *The Morung Express*. Often, networks that relate to Naganess in the newspaper organise under villages (e.g., Ungma, Khonoma), collection of villages (e.g., Aqahuto Area Gaon Buras Union), churches (e.g., Chang Baptist Churches Council), tribes (e.g., Yimkhiung Tribal Council, Chakhesang Public Organisation), conglomerate tribe unions (e.g., Naga Hoho, United Naga Council), revolutionary groups (e.g., Naga National Council, National Socialist Council of Nagalim), youth/student organisations (e.g., Tikhir Students’ Union, Naga Students’ Federation), women’s organisations (e.g., Naga Mothers’ Association, Konyak Nyupuh Sheko Khung), workers’ associations (e.g., Nagaland Self-Employed Women’s Association), government representatives (e.g., Nagaland Civil Service Association), and so on.

In my observation, these institutions articulate Naganess in myriad ways. For instance, in one issue of the *The Morung Express*, the Naga National Council’s leader of their Federal Government of Nagaland referred to the ‘Naga cause’, ‘Naga patriots’ and the ‘long cherished Naga dream’¹²⁴ of sovereignty. In the same issue, the Government of Nagaland advertised one of its projects about an agriculture scheme for farmers in Nagaland in a news format (not as an advertisement) and called it ‘Naga-integrated settled Farming’¹²⁵. Similarly, a group that called itself ‘Naga Terriers’ – organised by Indian security forces in collaboration with a local youth organisation – were reported as trekking up the Dzükou mountains to ‘protect forests and spread awareness about Swachh Bharat (Clean India) among people’¹²⁶. I present these here to exemplify only some of the ways in which Naganess is articulated sometimes through the Census of

¹²⁴ The Morung Express, 22.03.2021, Vol. XVI, Issue 076, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 2.

India or by Naga nationalists, but it also may be articulated through mundane/routine events in the news to address a large but bounded audience. During a moment of articulation, however, issues not only show the structures they are part of, but also help us to understand the scales and the shift in scales, and what a Naga scale may entail for understanding the issue reported. For instance, when a gun battle over land led to the shooting of three men in Lamhainamdi village¹²⁷, the involvement of conglomerate tribe unions and their attempts to resolve it meant that it ceased to be an issue in which the state police could simply charge the individuals involved in the shooting. The case quickly became a Sümi (tribe) versus Zeliangrong (tribe) issue – in other words, the conflict was re-scaled in public discourse to speak to a tribe or group level. Even as this inched towards an inter-tribe conflict, it also became a Naga case when the FNR called for peace in the name of establishing ‘new relationships’, as, the FNR stated, ‘Indigenous Peoples do’, and related such actions to Naga people-hood¹²⁸. I use an example of conflict here with its capacity to lay bare such shift in scales, but such moves may be studied through the newspaper’s reports on many topics – mountains, biodiversity, seeds, crops, weaving, education, sports, cultivation, flags, roads, diseases, markets, the list goes on. Most of these reports articulate Naganess to local, regional, national or global scales for different purposes.

Readers of the *The Morung Express* encounter indigeneity in the sense of a globalising movement on its pages (Kraft, Tafjord et al. 2020: 3). Very often, these are stories from international content sites about the experiences of other indigenous people around the world. For instance, an article from *openDemocracy* by Pho Yre was carried in the commentary section of the In-Focus (or editorial) page of *The Morung Express*, titled ‘In the Menkragnoti Indigenous Land, we are resisting more than just COVID’¹²⁹. It discussed the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Menkragnoti Indigenous Land, Brazil, and how the community tackled different problems, including the use of

¹²⁷ <https://thenortheasttoday.com/latestnews/nagaland-lamhainandi-shooting-incident-opens-old-wounds-of/cid2562906.htm> Accessed on 01.04.2021.

¹²⁸ <https://www.morungexpress.com/fnr-saddened-by-march-22-violence> Accessed on 01.04.2021.

¹²⁹ The Morung Express, 30.03.2021, Vol. XVI, Issue 084, p.4

ancestral knowledge, such as ‘pajes (shamans)’ for healing, with a declaration on how they will ‘continue to resist’ injustices. On the very next page of the same issue, under the ‘Public Space’ section of the newspaper, there was an article from *Waging Nonviolence*, a non-profit global media platform, titled ‘Rejecting Settler Logic – an Indigenous view of American borders’ among the Apache. The piece focused on ‘decolonising’ the view on American borders, the indigenous relationship with land, the border as a reminder of how indigenous nations are ‘forced’ to inhabit them and the ‘spiritual reconnection between Indigenous peoples’ that is ‘building political power and the Earth through decolonisation processes’. Such pieces – in the news, editorial and public discourse sections – present certain kinds of global discourses to readers of *The Morung Express*. These provide ways of accessing as well as finding solutions to problems through connecting with distant collectives elsewhere (by using, for instance, local knowledge for healing during the pandemic due to the lack of state healthcare, or living on borderlands) and joining a global movement of which, in these instances, the Menkragnoti and Apache, are also a part.

2.6 Religion in *The Morung Express*

Key registers of ‘religion’ in *The Morung Express* are God, spirits, reconciliation, sacred, pastor, promised land, faith, vision, prayers, prophecies, missions and more. According to the 2011 Census of India, 87.93% of Nagaland State’s population is Christian¹³⁰. It is therefore likely that the majority of *The Morung Express*’s readership associates with Christianity. Many events reported in the news show prayers and invocations by Christian pastors and reverends, including during government programmes. Advertisements for prayer centers or revival events are regularly published. Most churches are organised around units familiar with those who identify as Naga, including villages, student/youth organisations, women’s organisations, tribe organisations, national and political organisations. Many of these congregate under the Nagaland Baptist Church Council, Catholic Association of Nagaland, Nagaland

¹³⁰ <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/13-nagaland.html> Accessed on 30.03.2021.

Christian Revival Church and other such collectives, that are also often presented in the newspaper through news, features and opinion pieces.

This is different from the rest of Indian news media that takes, or at least espouses, a largely secular line on reporting the news¹³¹, critical of religion and its (dis)contents, especially politicised religion, including Hindutva, a Hindu religious and ideological programme of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in India. Though ‘religious’ voices are rare, a propagandist section of mainstream Indian news media has developed a pro-government approach that mainstreams Hindutva-driven narratives¹³², making Islam and Christianity a minority, even hostile, issue¹³³. Articulations to both secular and religious tropes are presented in *The Morung Express*, but with wider and more sympathetic coverage to Christian and Biblical matters. Articulations of religion are regular in the public contribution sections. Take, for instance, the earlier reference in the *The Morung Express* to the indigenous view of American borders. On the same page – Public Space – of the newspaper, there was a piece titled ‘The Functional God’ by Brainerd Prince. The piece articulates four types of function of God in contemporary society¹³⁴. There is no contradiction presented here between the two pieces – the newspaper here simply presents two ways to grapple with circumstances relevant to Nagaland, or to Nagas and Christians elsewhere.

There are more straightforward examples of Christian articulations of Naganess, particularly in terms of self-determination and sovereignty. For example, the Public Space section had messages from Naga nationalist organisations sending greetings to people on the ‘historic day’ of Naga Republic Day (21 March) with expressions such as ‘God bless Naga land! Kuknalim!’, ‘Nagaland for Christ’ that are articulated to

¹³¹ This is, of course, a generalisation and used here only to demonstrate the distinction between the coverage seen in Nagaland’s newspapers of religion, and that of large news establishments run from, as mentioned before, metropolitan cities in India with access to big capital, wide news networks, etc.

¹³² Also termed ‘Godi media’ or privately owned media that also act like the government’s (lapdog) propaganda media. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Godi_media Accessed on 02.02.2022.

¹³³ <https://theprint.in/opinion/indian-media-waging-holy-war-against-muslims-hyenas/400407/> Accessed on 02.02.2022.

¹³⁴ *The Morung Express*, 30.03.2021, Vol. XVI, Issue 084, p.5.

Customary Laws and the Yehzabo (Naga constitution) that ‘preserve our land’ and ‘bind the people together’¹³⁵. Here, Christianity and constitution are connected by the many groups that aspire for Naga political sovereignty through revolutionary means¹³⁶. Naganess is also articulated to Christ for conflict resolution as in the example of the incident in Lamhainamdi and the involvement of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) and the tribal organisations. Once re-scaled from the level of the individual shooters to culpability of entire tribes, the group dynamics between the Sümi and Zeliangrong – quite clear from the newspaper reports that appeared during the time – came to a point where a large-scale conflict looked imminent. The FNR then issued a press release calling for the resolution of the conflict through dialogue and ‘practising our confessed faith in Christ’¹³⁷. Through frontpaging such messages as news, and giving coverage to complete statements from the FNR on inside pages, *The Morung Express* presents an articulation of Christ and conflict in a way that is useful in resolving a complex situation; the newspaper makes such articulations available – everyday, and in English – to a reading audience.

Other examples of the articulation of religion in *The Morung Express* include its former column called ‘Beyond Pulpit’. The column was introduced for a brief period of time in 2020-21 and included interviews with church leaders in Nagaland, mostly women, about how they carry out their Christian missions, how they find Christian meaning in their lives, and how they help their communities. *The Morung Express* has a Sunday editorial page each week, titled ‘Faith Leaf’, that hosts Christian content. Articles that are published on this page are sourced from international websites/blogs like *Christianity Today*, *Charisma Magazine*, *Christian Post*, *Church Leaders*, *Christian Century*, *Unlocking the Bible*, *Ligonier Ministries Blog* etc. But they also include contributions from local citizens who write about values, ethics, goals and ways of being good Christians, often as Baptist Christians. The second half of this page, also each week,

¹³⁵ The Morung Express, 22.03.2021, Vol. XVI, Issue 076, p. 5.

¹³⁶ <https://unpo.org/downloads/2548.pdf> Accessed on 31.03.2021.

¹³⁷ <https://morungexpress.com/fnr-saddened-by-march-22-violence> Accessed on 01.04.2021.

carries *The Morung Express* weekly poll results. The polls ask the audience to respond to various issues of current importance, including on governance, representation, policy¹³⁸, but also on Christian matters. One poll question in 2021, for instance, asked its readers what churches in Nagaland are most influenced by, and why, with options that included biblical teaching, tribal culture, materialism and others¹³⁹.

Other ‘world religions’ also find a place in the *The Morung Express*, especially during pan-Indian holidays like Id (Islam), Diwali (Hinduism), Guru Nanak Jayanti (Sikhism) and Mahavir Jayanti (Jainism). Their coverage is often on secular terms where photographs of these important days of non-Naga communities appear alongside news reports of their celebration in Nagaland State. Reports related to these events are substantiated through press statements from these communities or when the Chief Minister or Governor of Nagaland State congratulate the communities on these days.

But what of things that look like religion but cannot be straight away classified as such? Here, I refer to those tropes that have an undecided status as ‘religion’ and are sometimes boxed into the category of ‘indigenous’ or even ‘indigenous religion’. The festival calendar in Nagaland is particularly notable in this regard because of how it establishes a connection between particular communities and their tradition, culture, and customs. Elaborate reports and messages are carried in *The Morung Express* during these festivals, and their associated celebrations, which could include the Naga New Year¹⁴⁰ (Sagaing, Myanmar) and Sükrünyi (Chakhesang) in January, Sekrenyi (Angami), Luirá (Tangkhu) and Lui Ngai Ni (all Naga tribes of Manipur) in February, Aoleang (Konyak) in April, Moatsu (Ao) in May, Tuluni (Sümi) in July, Tokhu Emong (Lotha) and Ngada (Rengma) in November, and many more. Then there are festivals that do not have a sacred or ‘indigenous religion’ character to them, like the Biodiversity Festival by the North East Network (Chizami) in March that is organised a day after their celebration

¹³⁸ <https://morungexpress.com/category/weekly-poll-result> Accessed on 07.12.2023.

¹³⁹ <https://morungexpress.com/churches-in-nagaland-are-most-influenced-by-and-why> Accessed on 14.11.2023.

¹⁴⁰ <https://tourisminmyanmar.com.mm/naga-traditional-new-year-festival/> Accessed on 31.03.2021.

of International Women's Day (celebrating seeds as 'heritage', crops and women's work in Nagaland as 'traditional farming systems'), the Loinloom Festival organised by Exotic Echo Society (celebrating women's work in the production of textiles in Nagaland as 'tradition') and the International Hornbill Festival organised by the Government in Nagaland in December each year (dances and sports are showcased as 'tradition and culture'). In this landscape, traditions and cultures are linked to practices of 'forefathers' and 'since time immemorial', and significant in building a public and common but tribe-centric identity on a smaller and immediate temporal scale. Traditions and culture are also used in a secular context of a longer temporal scale of protecting biodiversity and slowing climate change, or towards fostering Naga 'unity'.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter introduces a broad overview – history, context, structures, conditions – of news production in Nagaland, particularly through the broad workings of *The Morung Express*. It is a framing guide for reading the empirical data presented through an analytical format in the upcoming chapters. Based on my understanding of the newspaper and its context – ownership, size, operation, distribution, policies, layout, news organisation – this chapter gives a sense of the location from which it publishes text as part of a global and Indian 'mass media'. The newspaper industry started in Nagaland through the printing technology brought by Christian missionaries and was later extended in its news and information production capacity by leaders of the Naga revolutionary movement. The rise of capital, global networking and professional journalism among Nagas led to the newspaper industry to materialise into its current form, bringing with it a large scope and potentials for articulation. Readers, like me, who engage with the newspaper in Nagaland – *The Morung Express* in this case – are able to access notions, presumptions, and epistemic structures, circulating in, and through, Nagaland's newspapers. Produced from Nagaland State, *The Morung Express* is also a popular source of information and opinions in the neighbouring states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur or in the Naga Self-Administered Zones of Myanmar where people associate with Naganess. It is, however, not necessarily Naganess that

readers seek from a newspaper in the first place; but the newspaper is an important site for a conversant public for whom the news is shaped in ways that is both cognisable to them and builds new ways of knowing, and updating, particular and relevant articulations in regard to indigeneity and religion and the ways in which they are generally presented in *The Morung Express*.

Chapters three and four pick up from here and present a systematic examination of the articulations of Naganess, indigeneity and religion in published articles in 2020 through two themes – calendars and prohibitions.

3 The Morung Calendar

This chapter is about calendrical events reported in *The Morung Express* with a focus on 2020. These include temporal and stable events that occur each year on the same dates or seasons that are given taken-for-granted coverage in the news. Giving the newspaper a ritual-like framework, these events help me study the calendrical, annual and stable ways in which *The Morung Express* is organised. Such events include Christian commemorations, agricultural cycles and international days. I identify three distinct calendrical themes that form part of the ‘Morung Calendar’ that works within the framework of a January to December year. I note how Naganess is articulated to indigeneity and religion from the material presented in the mode of these calendars in *The Morung Express*.

Newspapers most often follow an ‘editorial calendar’. Such a calendar marks out days in a year that are important for the newspaper in relation to its location. It gives the editorial team a sense of the stories to plan through the year and distribute to their network of journalists to investigate and write, and to assign deadlines for news and feature stories, how they will be laid out on prospective pages, and published on relevant days. *The Morung Express*, similarly, follows varied sets of events that remain important across years, with new days getting added to this calendar as per context. These are presented across local news and features pages. Such localised calendars help me read and classify different sorts of events – events that are covered each year they are conducted; sometimes, even when they are not. Some are events that are locally relevant and relate to festivals around cultivation cycles both in jhum-fields and wet terrace rice fields, Christian celebrations, Naga national commemorations, tribes, traditions, ancestors, while others relate to international and regional events. Several different

kinds of events are read in this chapter under the rubric of a ‘Morung Calendar’¹⁴¹ in *The Morung Express*.

To examine such cyclic and stable events, I ask, how does *The Morung Express* articulate Naganess through calendrical events in 2020? To answer this question, I have categorised the news reports published in 2020 in a systematic manner in order to classify them into types of events that are published throughout the year, as well as highlighting the kinds of events that have been important to the newspaper, and presumably its audience, in the past few years. While there are any number of events that could be classified into a calendrical system, I have classified these events into three different calendar years in order to examine how articulations of Naganess in these news reports relate to ideas of indigeneity and religion. How are registers of indigeneity and religion on different scales deployed during articulations of Naganess in these reports? What scope do they have for scalar shifts?

The Morung Calendar as discussed here consists of three different and concurrent calendars. The first calendar brings together Christian and Naga national days that are never classified as ‘festivals’ even though they occur every year, for instance, the Naga Republic Day. They are opportunities to articulate Naganess as a ‘nation’ and a ‘Land of God’, opening up news coverage to beyond Nagaland State, to a national Naga scale, with global potentials. Here, the global refers to a ‘nation state’ legal regime but also to notions accepted by Christians everywhere that are not necessarily ‘worldly’. This I term the ‘Nagaland for Christ’ calendar. The second calendar collates events that are explicitly classified as ‘festivals’, becoming opportunities to read a predominantly Scheduled Tribe-Naganess through the construction of Nagaland State as a ‘Land of Festivals’. They limit Naganess to state and nation-state boundaries. This calendar I have termed ‘Incredible Nagaland’. The third calendar reads events as presented through global, international, commemorations. These could be festivals but also days that

¹⁴¹ This is not the same as *The Morung Express* annual calendar produced by the newspaper in 2015, featuring a local photograph for each month, taken by in-house journalists, accompanied by descriptions.

observe the importance of international human rights frameworks locally. They speak to ‘becoming Naga’ on a global scale through universal, secular notions. This is the ‘Global Naga’ calendar. It should be noted here that most of these events are covered each year, at least in the past few years, though it is not possible to say when each of these events began to be presented in precisely these ways in *The Morung Express*.

While thinking of this, I extended the use of ‘becoming indigenous’ to ‘becoming Naga’ understanding it as a process that entails struggle, survival and renewal, enabling the study of these processes as ‘to compare’ across scales of local and global, and relative to context (Clifford 2013: 8, Kraft and Johnson 2017: 13-4). Naganess comes to be articulated in a way that links diverse practices and calendrical routines (difference) to a common Naga scale (similarity). I draw inspiration from Catherine Bell’s use of calendrical rites as events which give ‘socially meaningful definitions to the passage of time, creating an ever-renewing cycle of days, months, and years’ and which ‘occur periodically and predictably’ (Bell 1997: 102). This periodic-ness and predictability come from a ‘ritual-like’ or ritualised observation of agricultural cycles, weather patterns, and other social activities (such as clearing common roads or repairing communal infrastructure), that are not quite rituals themselves (ibid: 91). In *The Morung Express*, the periodic-ness and predictability of these calendrical events comes from their regular coverage each year through appeals to ‘tradition and formality’ (ibid: 92), like practices of ‘forefathers’, but also to the ‘almighty’ and as ‘thanksgiving’. The Morung Calendar helps to study temporal and stable events that are automatically reported in the newspaper each year and which are, most often, taken for granted.

The data for this chapter were derived from the pages of *The Morung Express* in 2020. The methods used entailed reading each day’s issue of the newspaper looking for news reports that featured such ‘ritual-like’ events, including news, features or opinion pieces (and photographs) on the commemoration of an important day that is covered each year. This would have been difficult to tell had I not worked in the newsroom of this newspaper for a few years. The coverage of such events may differ from year to year, but they would nonetheless be covered. Examples of such periodic events include

Christmas and the International Hornbill Festival. Both being important annual events, they find space on the pages of *The Morung Express*, over an extended period of days each year. In 2020, the COVID-19 restrictions were the immediate context in which public events were conducted and reported in Nagaland, as elsewhere.

I have laid out the analysis through the three calendars. The first, the ‘Nagaland for Christ calendar’, deals with the Christian year in the newspaper through its coverage of Christian events, festivals and messages throughout the year. The second, the ‘Incredible Nagaland calendar’, deals with the *kheti*, or cultivation of crops from different kinds of fields, and related festivals. Finally, I will look at the ‘Global Naga calendar’ that deals with United Nations’ mandated international days that are commemorated locally. The final section of this chapter, titled the ‘Morung Calendar’, will analyse the sections in terms of articulations of Naganess to indigeneity and religion through each of these calendars.

3.1 Land of God - Nagaland for Christ calendar

There is no section in *The Morung Express* that is classified as ‘Nagaland for Christ’. But, many of its reported stories and non-journalist opinion pieces contain the slogan ‘Nagaland for Christ’. Such news and opinion pieces are classified under various sections including local Nagaland news, editorial or opposite editorial¹⁴² pages, advertisements, photographs, headlines and in the non-journalist opinion section that it calls ‘Public Discourse’. To reflect on this section, I ask, in what ways does *The Morung Express* articulate Naganess through the ‘Nagaland for Christ calendar’?

Writing on the slogan ‘Nagaland for Christ’, the anthropologist Arkotong Longkumer notes, ‘Christianity provides not only a way of knowing God but also of navigating the complex world of national life. Translating this into everyday language and weaving this into the national narrative is a task that has occupied many in a quest to understand

¹⁴² Commonly known as op-ed, this is the page right after the editorial page that also carries opinion pieces.

the complex changes – from British colonialism, Christian missionaries to the Indian state – experienced by the Nagas.’ (Longkumer 2018b: 16). Extending Longkumer’s argument for the slogan’s ability to ‘organise space and give meaning to place’ (ibid: 17) in, and through, *The Morung Express*, I attempt in this section to examine reported events that articulate Naganess in ways that build Nagaland as a ‘Land of God’. I look at this primarily through events that are ‘seasonal and commemorative’ (Bell 1997: 103) but also appeal to divine rights that seek to legitimate a local social order (Martin 2013: 404-5) and challenge regional (India/Myanmar) and global orders around the right to self-determination.

3.1.1 Naga national days

There are several days that present Nagaland as a ‘nation’ founded through biblical principles and promises, which are given wide coverage in *The Morung Express*. Such national constructions are often presented in the newspaper through reports based on press releases that are given by organisations that also collectivise as ‘Naga’. These include, for instance, the Naga Republic Day in March each year. Naga nationalist and revolutionary groups take this opportunity to speak about ‘Naga unity’ through ‘Lord Jesus Christ’. On 22 March, 2020, a Sunday, the messages released by several Naga nationalist groups were carried in the Public Discourse page of *The Morung Express*. Four pieces were published in the form of messages on the 65th Naga Republic Day, three of which mention the term ‘God Almighty’. This is a political commemoration and references are made to the day neither as ‘ritual’ nor as ‘festival’. On 23 March, *The Morung Express* published the speech of the *Kedahge* of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN), Gen (Retd) Viyalie Metha, titled ‘No more are we islands as individuals, villages or tribes’. It started with addressing the ‘dear countrymen’ of the Naga nation whose ‘God is the Lord’.

In these reports, Naga revolutionary institutions like the FGN move Naganess from a local, and separated (individual, village, tribe), ‘island’-like scale to a national-Naga

scale. Geographically, the latter is an international/global scale¹⁴³ but FGN's use of God legitimises a Naga nation that does not exist as a state, connecting the local to a universalising – beyond global – scale. A shifting of scales from individual/village/tribe-local to national-universal works here to unionise smaller units into a common belonging that may not be recognised as a constitutional entity but is stabilised through Christian notions recognisable on a global scale. This shift from local to national is facilitated by the repeated use of phrases like 'God as Lord' connected to, in this case, 'our nation's survival amidst a whirlpool of political and social confusion as a result of India's occupation of our country' (23 March, 2020). *The Morung Express* lends significance to these articulations by publishing whole texts of speeches from the camp-governments of revolutionary groups that are neither equal to, nor lesser or more than, states. These camp-governments are important in Nagaland. The governments are formed by various revolutionary groups claiming to represent Naga national causes and are, as of 2023, in ceasefire agreements with the Government of India. They negotiate the terms of the settlement for the Indo-Naga conflict from their Indian government-monitored camps¹⁴⁴. Separated from their location in 'lands' – primarily community-owned village land – they are government-like entities for those who recognise their national project, and pay them taxes, enabling them to politically represent the Nagas as a collective¹⁴⁵. In the newspaper, this status is assumed with words like *Kedahge* (understood as 'president') of the FGN never translated. On the other hand, governments like that of the Indian Union and the Nagaland State also represent a Naga collective¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Nagas are spread out across four states in India and two nation states.

¹⁴⁴ For instance, the Federal Government of Nagaland and the Naga National Council operate from the Chedema Peace Camp in Kohima, while the Government of the People's Republic of Nagalim and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim operate from Hebron Camp in Dimapur. These are their official headquarters that are monitored by Indian government agencies.

¹⁴⁵ There are more than 20 such groups, and who supports them is sometimes ideological, and sometimes based on which group 'governs' which area. While many pay the 'taxes' to these groups voluntarily, many have strongly objected to them over the past years for the lack of accountability for how these collections are used, leading to them being termed 'extortion'. This opposition has been especially common in Nagaland State, though not so much in the neighbouring states where Nagas live.

¹⁴⁶ The largest of these collectives, in Nagaland State, is popularly termed 'Nagas of Nagaland'.

through state elections. Their coming together on the pages of the newspaper presents certain contradictions.

These contradictions may be seen, for instance, during South Asia's many independence days that are annual features of newspapers in Nagaland. Independence days – both Naga Independence Day and Indian Independence Day – become important opportunities for presenting Naganess in *The Morung Express*, both in terms of how some Naga collectives articulate them, and how the Government of India sees its own participation in this space. The national-global scale of contradictions emerges here. In its presentation of the two independence days, *The Morung Express* clearly headlines Naga Independence Day (14 August) but does not ignore Indian Independence Day (15 August). It just changes their scope of legitimation by headlining the former as a second lead and anchoring the latter as a paid advertisement from the Government of India. However, this is not entirely a decision of the newspaper's making. The choice of an anchor advertisement is that of the Government of India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting that has bought the advertisement space in the newspaper on the day. The lead story of the day, which is an editorial choice of the newspaper, has to do with education (headline: Scepticism over govt's 'pen-drive' initiative).

The second lead news item on 15 August of *The Morung Express* has the headline 'A movement that came to give us our identity: GNF organises 74th Naga Independence Day'. This is a report about the 'observation' of the 74th Naga Independence Day on 14 August by an organisation called Global Naga Forum (GNF). In this report, a member of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) and the president of the Overseas Naga Association, Visier Sanyü, notes a 'cultural renaissance' in Nagaland to cope with the village-burnings and torture meted out by the Indian army in the past. This 'renaissance' marked, according to Sanyü, the entry of a number of *new* things: songs, legends, traditions, taboos, festivals, food, belief system, superstition, conversion to Christianity. For Sanyü, in the report, much as these new things made a 'future' possible, they also brought international freedoms into the discussion. Washington University's Paul Pimomo, a member of the GNF, is reported in the piece as saying: '[the] Naga issue is

a political issue, not a law-and-order issue. *Just Peace* for Nagas is the freedom to determine our political future without colonial rule or new colonial imposition: to practice and to preserve the best in our culture and tradition; to grow and prosper as a people’.



Figure 4: The front page of *The Morung Express* on 15 August 2020. The red and yellow border markings on the page are mine, made during the process of coding the data. I used different colours to demarcate news pieces and other articles of interest based on themes.

The articulation of Naganess here is to a history of the Indo-Naga conflict that takes stock of time – a past that necessitated dramatic changes and shifts, and a ‘political future’ enabled by self-determination as a route to ‘just peace’. Naganess – to ‘protect Naga identity’ in the words of Visier Sanyü in the report – is articulated here through registers that are familiar to other communities across the globe (renaissance, preserving culture and tradition), but also to many indigenous peoples in Northeast India, due to a shared history of oppression, dramatic postcolonial and neoliberal changes in the 21st century as well as encounters with Christianity. Naganess is also, and primarily, articulated as a ‘political issue’ (as of a people) and not a ‘law and order issue’ (as of a state) in response to the continuing military regime of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, promulgated by the Government of India in relations to the Naga revolutionary movement.

The message in the paid advertisement at the bottom of the page is decidedly different. It is loud; it lacks the humility of the top half of the page. The message is directly from the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, capturing a photo of him with hands folded in a ‘namaste’. As an ‘Independence Day Greetings to all fellow citizens’, the advertisement states:

Jai Hind. 15th August is a day to pay homage to all those greats who worked hard for India’s freedom. Their struggles continue to give strength to millions. Independence Day is an occasion to reaffirm our commitment to build an India that would make our respected freedom fighters proud.

In this presentation, Independence is a done deal. The government advertisement is a message that on simultaneous independence days – contested postcolonialities – the appropriate national scale to encounter is India. That there is a half-page advertisement shows that the Government of India uses its power, both monetarily and regulatorily¹⁴⁷,

¹⁴⁷ Advertisements released by official agencies of the Government of India are regulated by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting’s Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP). When buying advertisement space in newspapers, they have the right to choose a space for their

to ensure its explicit presence on the front page of a local newspaper where many people and groups contest this presence.

Page two on the same day has more news in line with the Naganess articulated in the second lead on page one. These articles invoke the right to self-determination of all peoples, as well as those ‘together with Christ’¹⁴⁸. The first of these pieces is a report on the Naga Scholars’ Association’s ‘conversation’ on ‘Self-determination as human rights’ featuring the Secretary General of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, Gam Shimray. In this report, Shimray compares Nagas and ‘indigenous peoples all over’ through the use of customary laws as a social contract but also diverges from essentialising Nagas only as indigenous people. The United Nations’ international laws are extended to people with ‘distinct characteristics’ and ‘unique’ cultures; based on this, Nagas are termed ‘unique’. The long report links Naganess to global indigeneity through the right to self-determination, distinct from India’s caste structures, but also articulates Nagas as a unique people with a ‘collective selfhood’ located in Naga culture, worldview, practices, Naga history, Naga flag, and the Naga constitution.

The second of these pieces on page two – a Nagaland News or local news page – is a report also on the 74th Naga Independence Day being celebrated for ‘Naga people living in different parts of the world’. While also speaking on ‘historical rights’ related to independence, the Naga Students’ Federation (NSF) makes an appeal in this report that articulates Naganess to Christianity by asking ‘Naga people’ to ‘...respect each other’s differences and together with Christ, strive towards our ultimate goal’. The event, as per the report, is marked by calls for hoisting the Naga flag across the Naga areas at the respective ‘Oking’ of the NSF’s federating units¹⁴⁹. The term oking is left

advertisements. Small and privately-owned newspapers dependent on advertisement funding have little choice in the matter.

¹⁴⁸ These are not published because it is a random day, but because these are reports of events observed as part of the commemoration of Naga Independence Day as declared on 14 August, 1947.

¹⁴⁹ The Naga Students’ Federation is a union that represents village and tribe based student and youth bodies from the Naga areas of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. Its federating units are those that ally with the institution through elections and issue based campaigns.

untranslated¹⁵⁰. One of these flag hoisting ceremonies is reported to be in a village called Parashen, where a version of the Naga flag was first raised on 22 March, 1956¹⁵¹. The event is reported to open with a ‘Bible passage and prayer followed by the unfurling of the Naga National flag’. It is accompanied by a picture of a group of men standing in front of a house with the Naga flag raised. Naga Independence Day is an opportunity for the NSF, in *The Morung Express*, to articulate Naganess to a historical peoplehood formed through participation in Christian self-making. Celebrated locally, a national scale is built through hoisting flags, reading biblical prayers, and the publication of their photographs and reports as news, in print.

Both the above pieces have at least one common contradiction – they enlarge the scope of Naganess to a Christian global scale, but also restrict its scope from being applicable to everyone or even all Christians – neighbouring and ‘distinct’ indigenous people like Kukis or Karbis are not necessarily included in this ‘unique’ domain though many of them may be Christian. The scope enables legitimation over a broad but limited spectrum, both to legitimate the order these institutions seek by hoisting the Naga flag and articulating this as a God-given right, and in opposition to the Indian flag raised on 15 August¹⁵² at government events across Nagaland State.

Why is this legitimation required? The conundrum surfaces on 17 August when reports present the celebration of Indian Independence Day in Nagaland State. The newspaper offices of *The Morung Express* often remain closed each year on 26 January and 15 August (when workshops and other gatherings used to be held for in-house workers), a

¹⁵⁰ Emerging from the guerilla war stage of the Naga revolutionary movement for independence in the 1950s, oking (Lotha) translates to mobile ‘headquarters’ or ‘capital’ that shifted with the movement leadership. The author Nirmal Nibedon (1978) wrote a chapter on ‘oking’ describing it as a mystical (animist) ‘dream world’ of Angami Zapu Phizo, known as the father of the Naga nation, who led the first part of the Naga national movement alongside a core leadership circle known only to him and the circle. I assume that the audience of *The Morung Express* is familiar with the term ‘oking’ in Nagaland, even if not necessarily through its historical uses and present political implications.

¹⁵¹ Note that this date is a reference to Naga Republic Day, but used here to legitimize the flag hoisting ceremony as part of Naga Independence Day as historically located.

¹⁵² India established its national independence from colonial rule on 15 August, 1947.

day on Durga Puja¹⁵³ in October, a few days around and on Christmas, and New Year. This is why reports of events held on 15 August are only published on 17 August¹⁵⁴. All newspapers within the state give wide coverage to these events. Here, legislators of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly in the state and others commemorate Indian Independence Day through various public events in the different districts of Nagaland and announce development schemes, past and future, released through the year by the Government of India. They hoist and salute the Indian flag. Such commemorations articulate Naganess to Indian constitutionalism, also presented in newspapers across India. Such commemorations are standardised by the Government of India and its agencies across the Indian Union. Their presentation in *The Morung Express* is completely secular in form, rarely presented on page one as it is stale news by then, and reports are often simply derived from press releases by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations of the Government of Nagaland. These news reports are mundane, must-cover events.

The presentation of these conjoined independence days is ritualised on the pages of *The Morung Express*. Their contradictions are laid bare through their presentation on the pages; one independence day is connected to self-determination, culture, indigeneity and prayers through the news, while the advertising of another independence day need not assert its self-determination nor position in the world as a firm, secure and globally accepted nation-state. Through its journalism, *The Morung Express* presents some of the ‘strategic ways of acting’ (Bell 1997: 138) under the conditions of a ceasefire that enables the Indo-Naga negotiations to settle political differences, but also enables public participation on what those differences are, what needs negotiation, what ought to be negotiated and by whom. While Naga Independence Day (14 August) articulates Naganess through Christian, national and global scales, Indian Independence Day (15 August) is subordinated in presentation, does not articulate Naganess to such large

¹⁵³ A five to ten days’ celebration around a Hindu goddess and her family.

¹⁵⁴ The newspaper carries a ‘public notice’ for its readers informing them about the same.

scales¹⁵⁵ and is secularised in the news of *The Morung Express* through a presentation of must-do state exercises. The government advertisement sits brashly as a symbol of power on its front page. It has little scope for legitimation, and cannot be anything but Indian, a contested category in Nagaland to which people relate in many different ways. If Indianness as seen through these pages is taken to be a calendrical system imposed on Nagaland through the structures of the state (advertising + regulation), Naganess through Naga national days, like Naga Republic Day or Naga Independence Day, uses global notions of justice, peace and freedom to ‘challenge the hegemony of the prevailing calendrical system’ (Bell 1997: 104). A Naga national calendrical system enables the linking of biblical notions with practices, and its movement across scales, that articulate Naganess in ways that bypass Indianness. By limiting the latter’s scope to move across scales, its legitimising potentials are significantly lost.

3.1.2 Martyrdom

Several martyr days become part of the news published in *The Morung Express*. They are either reported as separate days or become part of published speeches on Naga national days, like Naga Republic or Independence days, where ‘martyrs’ to the ‘Naga cause’ are commemorated. A number of days are dedicated to the recognition of individuals who died during the conduct of rights-based movements as ‘martyr days’, also as recognition and remembrance of those movements. Funerals that erupted from the Indo-Naga conflict have brought communities together – their emotional energies are collectivised to carry the traumas of loss and grief. In situations of injustice, the making of the dead as participants in a national movement may be understood as the ‘cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers’ that make ‘national imaginings’ possible (Anderson 2016: 9).

¹⁵⁵ Though most people who take part in Indian Independence Day processions in Nagaland are Nagas, I do not examine here how Naganess comes to be articulated to an Indian scale through these events where national and federal government schemes are announced, which are also accessed by Nagas.

On 28 August, for instance, *The Morung Express* carried the headline, ‘72nd Martyrs Day observed at Mao Gate’. Here, the United Naga Council (UNC), a civil society organisation, observe the death of three Nagas on 27 August, 1948, which led to a ‘no tax campaign’ by the Naga National League to refuse to pay taxes to the Government of Manipur. According to the report filed by the *Newmai News Network*, the UNC stated:

It was an act of defiance against the Authority of the State, under which the Nagas in the state of Manipur had been placed without their consent. It was also a means of putting pressure on the Indian government for securing the merger of the Nagas in Manipur with the Naga Hills district.

The commemoration of martyrs at the popular Nagaland-Manipur border site of Mao Gate, a site for a ‘martyr’ memorial monolith instated in 2005, marks a divergence with Manipur as well as India in a calendrical manner – commemorated each year, on the same day, the news reports present how national borders stand contested to date¹⁵⁶. Such events link the past with present aspirations for a Naga nation ‘beyond the borders’ of the states over which the Nagas are currently divided, connecting a border site (Mao Gate) with the ‘sacrifices’ of the dead. In the reports of *The Morung Express*, known and cyclically remembered ‘martyrs’ make Naganess a matter beyond immediate concerns, to one of national concerns where borders are pressing barriers to freedom. Articulations to the lack of consent in making these borders, defiance through the non-payment of state taxes, and remembering state violence through erecting monoliths mark memory as collective and death as patriotic.

In a report from the Naga National Council’s commemoration of the 69th Naga Martyrs’ Day on 18 October, observed and publicised each year, the death of ‘Naga national leader Zasibito Nagi in 1952’ is linked to martyrdom. Observed in lieu of a ‘supreme sacrifice’ for ‘sovereignty’, Naganess is upscaled by linking ‘God-given lives’ and their deaths to a sacred and righteous cause. Here, ‘sacred claims’ perform absoluteness

¹⁵⁶ Nagas are a minority in the Indian state of Manipur, which lies contiguous to the south of Nagaland State.

(Kraft 2020: 74) of the Naga nation drawn from what is described in some reports as the ‘sacrifices, blood and tears’ of the martyrs. In the Iranian and Palestinian political movements, martyrs served a dual role: ‘to commemorate and to mobilise’ (Buckner and Khatib 2014: 371). As ritualised news published each year¹⁵⁷, martyrdom establishes the unnamed deaths as ‘sacrifices’ to enable their mobilisation in upscaled (national) articulations of Naganess for the future. Readers learn about these links through the publication of reports in Nagaland’s newspapers, events and articulations which are rarely presented in newspapers outside Nagaland.

3.1.3 Christian global events

The Christian year is a large presence in *The Morung Express*. Easter and Christmas feature as two of the most important dates in this calendar of Christian global events.

During Easter 2020, the newspaper follows the days of the ‘Holy Week’ with a focus on COVID-related lockdowns that limit church-based communal activities. On 9 April, a news piece published as a lead news item on page two carried the headline ‘NBCC calls to conduct Sunrise Services at home’. A boxed item inset this larger piece is headlined ‘CAN for special commemoration of Good Friday, Easter Sunday’. While both institutions – the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) and the Catholic Association of Nagaland (CAN) – were reported to give detailed instructions on how Good Friday and Easter Sunday were to be observed in homes instead of churches during the pandemic, the NBCC stated:

This is not a *ritualistic program* but to proclaim His salvation and proclaim to the world that we are thankful and grateful for the salvation he has brought to us through the birth, life, suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (italics added)

¹⁵⁷ Each year since the occurrence of an incident, that is. For instance, two young men who died during an agitation on 6 May, 2010, on the borders between Nagaland and Manipur, were soon declared martyrs. From 2011 onwards, 6 May is observed as one among many martyr days whose reports are published in *The Morung Express*.

For the NBCC and CAN, as per the report, the pandemic regulations are important to follow, but so are the ‘sunrise services’. It is this relationality to local crises that make these institutions contemporary and relevant. The site of these activities (services) is instructed to be moved from a public place, like a church or the Kohima War Cemetery where it is annually observed as ‘tradition’¹⁵⁸, to homes. Their observation is specified as important because the downscaling should not mean that Easter Sunday is just a ‘ritual’ – every day, mundane, habitual, customary, ordinary, secular. Pandemic or not, it is connected to ‘Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’, and therefore biblical, sacred and special even when it is downscaled. This enables institutions like the NBCC and CAN, as well as their Christian participants, to work in relation with the state to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus, but also keep the community together.

Christmas has an even larger presence in the newspaper. Most of December is filled with reports about Christmas related activities. Much like other years, a debate breaks out on whether shops should be opened on Sundays around Christmas time. The NBCC releases a statement on 5 December, carried on page three of *The Morung Express* in a news report, noting: ‘Christmas is not about shopping and entertainment’. Both during Easter and Christmas, the NBCC’s positions are widely presented in *The Morung Express*, and also contested through such things as the weekly polls where participants oppose rules like Sunday shop closures. The NBCC is undeterred in its work to classify certain days and events as sacred, marking their separation from profane activities like shopping. This, of course, does not stop most people in Nagaland from carrying on with shopping or entertainment activities¹⁵⁹ but the discourse is presented in the newspaper as a set of contradictions to be engaged with.

Christmas connected days in Nagaland also become opportunities to reinforce Naga ‘unity’ in *The Morung Express* throughout most of December. In a report on 19

¹⁵⁸ <https://easternmirrornagaland.com/kohima-citizens-to-celebrate-sunrise-service-at-war-cemetery/>
Accessed on 02.08.2023.

¹⁵⁹ Christmas and the month of December is marked by several carnivals, new and second hand shopping markets, and other festivities, all across Nagaland.

December, on page two, the convenor of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) calls for Naga ‘completeness’ during a pre-Christmas gathering of organisations that represent regionally differentiated Naga collectives in Dimapur. Naga ‘completeness’ can be achieved, says FNR convenor Wati Aier in the report alongside a photograph of a large group of participants, when ‘we’ stop talking about ‘eastern, western or southern Nagas’. Aier suggests a disassociation in ‘our minds’ of a ‘warring culture’ by making a new association: ‘in the name of Christmas as Christians’. This, again, is a curious case because the event itself is reported to be organised by the Southern Nagas’ Union of Nagaland State, is hosted by the Dimapur Poumai Baptist Church and attended by the Eastern Naga Peoples’ Union Dimapur and Tenyimia Union Dimapur with prayers by a pastor of the Tangkhul Baptist Church in Diphupar. These organisations represent regionally differentiated local collectives in Dimapur. These directional classifications orient the specific locations and politics from which Naga indigeneities emerge, often also decided by the state boundaries that run across the regions they inhabit, and that separate them. The FNR convenor proposes ‘completeness’ as a way to jump these regional scales towards a Naga global-Christian scale in the news report by relating Naganess with Christmas and Christians rather than with regional identities. Yet regional identities, or indigeneities defined by current political boundaries, are the concrete unions that enable the congregation of such a group and their articulations of ‘completeness’.

Christian days provide opportunities for *The Morung Express* as well as for contributors to articulate Naganess as part of a global Christian paradigm but also locates Christianity in Naga national life. A long ‘public discourse’ piece by a non-journalist, for instance, on 22 December reflects on the history of how a ‘new religion’ like Christianity entered and stayed on as a Naga entity. Songsongsangba Tzudir, the writer, details the encounter of ‘Christianity in Nagaland’ through the Ao Naga village of Molungkimong, then administered by the British as part of the Naga Hills district of Assam. The piece revisits American Baptist missionaries, and their local agents, who made ‘true Christians’ in Molungkimong; Christian teachings passed on from the American missionary E.W. Clark to the Assamese convert Godhula Brown and then to the ‘natives of

Molungkimong’, through practices like the linguistic translations of local songs. According to this piece, the first ‘gospel song’ in the Ao region was composed as a translation of, and adding to, a ‘traditional Moatsü song’. Today, Moatsü is classified as a ‘festival’ with associations drawn to indigeneity rather than religion, as we will see in the next section. Meanwhile, ‘the Baptist Church’ took its reigning place as the ‘new religion’, and though an ‘old religion’ is never described in the above piece, it may be assumed as events like Moatsü that have become performative and representational but are neither old nor considered religion. Both Christmas and Moatsü are regularly covered in *The Morung Express*.

3.1.4 Jubilees, fasting, prayers

While the year in general may see news and advertisements of several prayer and fasting events related to the Naga nation published in the newspaper, jubilees commemorating the establishment of institutions or celebrating the Christian-belonging of an institution are extremely popular news pieces towards the end of each year.

On 22 November 2020, for instance, a local page report notifies that ‘Kuda Village B-Khel celebrates 75th year of establishment’ with the ‘blessings of God’, the establishment of a ‘plaque’ and release of a ‘souvenir’. Another report on 28 December notifies the readers about the Kigwema Baptist Church’s celebration of a 100 years of Christianity. In the news report, a pastor stated, ‘A jubilee is the greatest time to exalt his name and renew our faith’. The same report also quoted another pastor as connecting ‘being Christian’ with good conduct in workplaces. Doing so would ensure, added the pastor, ‘Nagaland as a Christian state will have better roads, consistent electricity, water supply...’

Such events acknowledge the establishment and continuance of local place-based institutions through Christian organising. Connecting local, national and global scales through Christian belonging is an opportunity to remember and assert material needs (roads, electricity). In the reports, the setting up of monoliths (plaque) is a common feature of these ‘jubilees’ alongside Christian prayers and the release of a ‘souvenir’

magazine record the establishment of the institution and its history. These events are often hyper local. For instance, on 30 November, the headline of a report is ‘Naga Kuotsu Union celebrates golden jubilee’. The theme reported for the event is ‘Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: One Family’. The photograph accompanying the report is a group of Naga Kuotsu Union leaders – all men – in front of a new monolith. Articulations of Naganess here involve a hyperlocal scale of indigeneity of the Kuotsu (clan) who are ‘landed’ or direct owners of land in Mezoma village (or Kuda and Kigwema in the cases above), established and memorialised in place and across time through a monolith, in print through souvenir magazines, and globalised through prayers and Baptist, Catholic and Christian Revival networks.

In the news reports, the establishment of a new state project, a memorial, a new village, or a new building is marked by the setting up of a monolith (territoriality). A large body of work by anthropologists has linked Naganess to village/class-based locality through feasts of merit that were associated with ‘ceremonial’ practices that are often territorial and landed (Hutton 1922, Stonor 1950, Hutton 1965, West 1985, Jacobs, Harrison et al. 2012, Wouters 2015, Yekha and Marak 2021, Mayirnao and Khayi 2023). In the reports published in *The Morung Express* in 2020, ‘one family’ Naganess is articulated by Christian institutions that establish their presence, and become familiar to the landscape, through stone monoliths as memorials with dates, names and other important details carved onto the stones. These sorts of actions are also ceremonial and ritualised. They work to extend the scope of Naganess from hyperlocal to national and global scales, linking Christian and national citizenship through multiple scales by setting them up on the land, embodied in stone. They become resources for the recognition of the hitherto-unconnected Naga nation to a local polity, their connections established through their publication in the newspaper. From these, national upscalings are made by keeping open global potentials. On 17 December, page two, an anchor piece announces, ‘NMM 50th anniversary thanksgiving fellowship held’ – here, the Nagaland Missions Movement (NMM), run by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council, affirms, ‘Nagas are sitting on a gold mine of missions where we ought to take the gospel of Christ to all the nations’. Several such events over the year build the notion of Naganess as ‘Christian citizenship’,

linking territory and spirituality (Longkumer 2018c) from local monoliths to global missions.

Different churches, or collectives of churches, calling for prayers, fasting, revival and other such events are common features of the news in Nagaland. Among these, the most recurrent are the calls for fasting and prayers by the Council of Nagalim Churches (CNC) throughout the year for the Indo-Naga political negotiations led by the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, and others. On 25 October, for instance, a page one brief news item announces, ‘CNC calls for special prayer day’. The CNC, commemorating a ‘historic prayer summit at Agri Expo, Dimapur’, states in the report:

“Let us pray for spiritual revival in our land so that Naga people will submit themselves to the will of God and receive His blessing,” urging all to pray for peace, unity, love, forgiveness and reconciliation among the Naga brethren. It also sought prayers for the recognition of the symbol of Naga identity and a sign of Covenant between God and Naga people – the Yehzabo (Constitution) and Naga National flag – by the Government of India, so that a solution can be achieved at the earliest on the basis of the Framework Agreement¹⁶⁰.

Such fasting and prayer events connect local participants to processes that they cannot be physically parts of, like the Indo-Naga negotiations that legal experts and political representatives participate in. Through their publication in the newspaper, they become tenets towards realising aspirations of shared Naga futures through a particular format over others¹⁶¹. These ‘futures’ can be seen as practices of sovereignty in Nagaland that are allied with ‘tradition, custom, landscape, dreams, visions and prophecies’

¹⁶⁰ A Framework Agreement was signed between the largest Naga revolutionary group, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim, and the Government of India in 2015. It laid out the broad principles based on which the two parties would further negotiate the terms of peace in Nagaland. However, it has not materialised into a final agreement to date. For more, see <https://www.mainstreamweekly.net/article6157.html> Accessed on 08.12.2023.

¹⁶¹ For instance, a conglomerate of Naga revolutionary groups called the Naga National Political Groups also signed an agreement with the Government of India titled ‘Agreed Position’ in 2017. The Council of Nagalim Churches, however, does not ask the public to pray or fast for this but only the Framework Agreement.

(Longkumer 2020: 114). I add fasting and prayers as part of these ‘practices of sovereignty’ whose appearance in the news direct prayer points for readers and demarcate what is legitimised in this situation, namely the Framework Agreement. These practices make public participation possible in state-led political processes like the Indo-Naga political negotiations, linking local actions (prayers, fasting) with national (Naga nation) and global Christian (God’s fulfilment) scales. This becomes applicable even when Naga Christians migrate as missionaries, as collective action linked to national (Nagaland for Christ at home) and global (evangelising others in the world) scales. Fasting, prayers, missionary migrations establish Naganess as ‘Christian citizenship’ (Longkumer 2018c: 168) through biblical covenants, as sovereignties that include individual and collective participation in building this citizenship based on tenets that all Christians may understand. These articulations are made available as annual reminders on the pages of *The Morung Express*.

3.2 Land of Festivals - Incredible Nagaland calendar

‘Incredible India’ is a campaign by the Government of India’s Ministry of Tourism. ‘India, where culture echoes, tradition speaks’¹⁶² is one of many phrases it uses to brand India as a tourist destination. India has also been termed a ‘land of festivals’¹⁶³ with several communities across the country celebrating festivals related to their calendars that revolve around agricultural cycles. Some are local festivals, while others are recognised and celebrated on a national or even global scale. Some of these festivals relate to religious groups like Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and others, while some relate, in addition, to linguistic communities like Axomiya, Tamil, Marathi, Punjabi, amongst others. Newspapers in each of these regions, or among these communities, become locally relevant when they report on such local events. In this

¹⁶² <https://www.incredibleindia.org/content/incredible-india-v2/en.html> Accessed on 03.12.2021.

¹⁶³ <https://www.newkerala.com/india/Festivals-of-India/India---the-land-of-festivals.html> Accessed on 03.12.2021; <https://www.afternoonvoice.com/india-land-festivals.html> Accessed on 03.12.2021.

section, I ask, in what ways does *The Morung Express* articulate Naganess through an ‘Incredible Nagaland calendar’?

The Nagaland State government has branded itself as a ‘land of festivals’¹⁶⁴; travel blogs¹⁶⁵ and news sites¹⁶⁶ have taken this cue, and followed suit in their descriptions of Nagaland. Such branding efforts have effectively manufactured Nagaland as a ‘sub-nationality’ (Baruah 1999, Misra 2000) that extends from tribes and plugs into the larger Indian national framework. Here, (sub)nation branding may be considered as the ‘creation and communication of national identity using tools, techniques, and expertise from the world of corporate brand management’ (Aronczyk 2013: 16). The subnational identity located in Nagaland State works, in this case, to legitimate the notion of the state within the Indian Union by bringing together ‘tropes of heritage and modernisation, domestic and foreign concerns, market and moral ideologies’ (ibid: 17), whose shaping of ‘indigeneity’ in Northeast India has boiled it down, or ‘reduced identity’, to the spectacular display of festivals (Debbarma 2022).

Messages and news events related to these are published through the year, with media presentation crucial to visibility in the market. Only festivals recognised as ‘tribal’ – connected to the 17 recognised Scheduled Tribes in Nagaland¹⁶⁷ at the time of this study – are included in Nagaland State’s landscape of festivals. Tribal here refers to Scheduled Tribes, a welfare and identification legal category in the Indian Constitution (Xaxa 1999: 3589), one of the means through which most Naga ‘tribes’ operate and carry on

¹⁶⁴ <https://nagaland.gov.in/pages/people-culture> Accessed on 09.11.2021.

¹⁶⁵ <https://theholidayscout.com/nagaland/fairs-and-festivals.html#:~:text=Nagaland%20is%20aptly%20called%20the.organised%20by%20its%20various%20tribes.&text=The%20Angami%20tribals%20celebrate%20Sekrenyi%20in%20the%20month%20of%20February.&text=The%20ten%20day%20festival%20is%20also%20called%20Phousanyi%20by%20the%20Angamis>. Accessed on 09.11.2021.

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.hindustantimes.com/ht-school/nagaland-land-of-festivals-and-folklore/story-9Tq3oJcYqRnGvGF3ujpkjL.html> Accessed on 09.11.2021.

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/nagalands-hornbill-festival-2021-to-allow-fully-vaccinated-tourists-and-participants/cid/1841141> Accessed on 05.01.2022. This list expands and contracts depending on the politics of the times. In 2017, for instance, the Government of Nagaland de-recognised Rongmei as an ‘indigenous Naga tribe’ of Nagaland while in 2022 it added Tikhir as a separate Naga tribe.

their relationship with the Indian Union. Establishment of institutions such as the North East Zone Cultural Centre, funded by the central government in New Delhi represented ‘Naga culture’ through these festivals and enabled them to feed into the notion of Indian ‘national oneness’ (Longkumer 2018a: 473-4). Naga culture – a common term to denote diverse practices of the 17 ‘tribes’ – became a way to fund and link each of the tribes with a major festival recognisable through celebrations around the collective resource of kheti, or subsistence agriculture in jhum-fields¹⁶⁸ (Debojyoti 2006: 4913) as well as wet terrace rice fields (Solo and Kikhi 2021). These events have often been described as rituals and religions of the past (Mills 1926, Joshi 2007, Maitra 2011, Zhimo 2011). Today, they are commonly described and categorised as ‘merry-making’ events. This builds a Naganess related to, but also in tension with, the national scale presented in the previous section. Neither Easter nor Christmas are classified as tribal festivals. Indigeneity is specified to Scheduled Tribes recognised within the Indian Union. To understand this, I use the concept of festivalisation (Rasmussen 2010) as the making of annual events as a public spectacle in ways that produce a subnational scale of Naganess that connects the Nagaland State to the Indian Union. Through market-driven conditions, festivalisation enables the additional scope to connect Naganess to a global indigenous scale, though not necessarily a Christian global scale.

Through noting the ways in which an event may be classified as a ‘festival’ in Nagaland, and *The Morung Express* in particular, I attempt to understand the calendrical landscape in which Nagaland State’s communities operate as part of the Indian Union. While each of these events are marked by cultivation activity, the Hornbill Festival, termed by the state government as the ‘festival of festivals’, becomes the place to build ‘Incredible Nagaland’ as a celebration of Nagaland State, of what it looks like to be Naga on Incredible India’s terms. Culture, tradition, heritage and related affiliates operate as a soft integration of ‘Naga culture’ within the ‘diversity’ of Indian cultures that the

¹⁶⁸ Also called shifting cultivation involving slash-and-burn methods of cultivating food in the hills of South East Asia. <https://morungexpress.com/jhum-cultivation-is-prerequisite-for-sustaining-local-food-security> Accessed on 09.02.2022.

tourism branding of ‘Incredible India’, and now ‘Incredible Nagaland’, affords. The following sub-sections examine the kind of events that feature in *The Morung Express* as part of an Incredible Nagaland calendar.

3.2.1 Kheti festivals

Kheti, or agriculture on jhum and wet terrace rice fields related, festivals in Nagaland are often publicly performed but in 2020, some of these festivals were moved indoors, physically reduced in scale, or just cancelled, due to the COVID-19 restrictions. In *The Morung Express*, however, messages – sometimes with photographs of people in ‘traditional attire’ – continued to be published. In the absence of public celebrations in 2020, messages from the heads of Nagaland State, the Governor and the Chief Minister, were published in the newspaper, making them publicly accessible.

On 12 March, before the pandemic related lockdowns began, an anchor report on page two of *The Morung Express* carried the headline ‘Traditional activities mark Mleingyi festival celebration’. This is one of the festivals included in the list released by the Government of Nagaland as part of its ‘land of festivals’.

The idea came to fruition on November 6, 2018 when they organized their debut flower show in collaboration with the Nagaland Flowers Growers Society (NFGS). It was co-sponsored by the Nagaland Flowers Growers Society (NFGS). It was co-sponsored by the Nagaland Flowers Growers Society (NFGS).

Palms, Orchids, Bonsai, Ferns, etc. All the categories were attractive cash prizes according to the organizers.

Zanoa Mozib, pastor LBC, Dimapur spoke on the jubilee theme 'Jesus saves'. Rev C. Yathian, Pastor LBCPB, welcomed the congregation.

pastor pronounced benediction. The celebration will culminate on March 12.

Bhandari subdivision departmental coordination meeting conducted

BHANDARI, MARCH 11 (MEXN): The monthly departmental coordination meeting of Bhandari subdivision was held at the conference hall of the Additional Deputy Commissioner, Bhandari on March 11. ADPC stated that during the discussion hour it was informed that the medical department will observe World Tuberculosis Day on March 25 at the subdivision. ADPC, Bhandari, Thameri Chang also informed that census will be conducted from May 1 to June 15 which will include house listing. The house discussed on the need for construction of boundary wall, additional classrooms and other upgraded infrastructures required at the GHS, Bhandari and decided to highlight it to the DPTB, Wokha for further necessary action. GHS Principal Bhandari during the meeting said that teachers training programme affects the students due to class suspension in the absence of teachers, therefore, if training programme are held within Bhandari itself it will be helpful for both the students and the teachers. While discussing on matters relating to distribution of text books, uniforms and other materials under Sub divisional education officer, Bhandari (SDEO) it was further reiterated that systematic distribution process will be observed and procuring of goods and materials for schools by any individual would be done with authentic knowledge of head of concerned institutions. Education department gave a powerpoint presentation on their departmental activities.

Nagaland Zoological Park holds awareness prog on importance of forest and wildlife



KOHIIMA, MARCH 11 (MEXN): An awareness programme on importance of forest and wildlife organized by Nagaland Zoological Park, Department of Environment, Forest and Climate Change was held at Botanical Garden, Kohima on March 7. The programme was attended by staff of Blyth's Trigonop Conservation and Breeding Centre, Pollehadze Wildlife Sanctuary, teachers and students of Classes 6 to 8 of Dainty Buds and Mount Sinai Higher Secondary schools Kohima. Speaking on the occasion, Director of Nagaland Zoological Park, Rangapahar, Dr Prabhakar Kumar, IPS stressed on the importance of forest and wildlife and the need to conserve and protect it. He spoke on the consequences faced by wildlife due to excessive hunting for both commercial and livelihood. In this he encouraged the younger generation to have the mindset of protecting the wildlife. A quiz was conducted wherein basic general knowledge about Nagaland was asked, while field visit was also conducted. The programme led by Forest Officer-in-charge of Blyth's Trigonop Conservation and Breeding Centre, Deputy Ranger Medelozzo Kire while Field Assistant Kamli Bhabho tendered the vote of thanks.

retary, NMM as speakers throughout the crusade.



Training on banana fiber extraction and accessories making is underway at Runway Nagaland, Valley View Dimapur in support with Nagaland Tools & Training Centre, Industrial & Commerce Department from March 11 to 26. Runway Nagaland, through the banana fiber project hopes to create a value chain and sustainable ecosystem and address the mass migration of our village population to urban society which is affecting the community base lives and diminishing the village economy. (Photo Courtesy: Runway Nagaland)



A district level national awards scheme-essay and traditional art competition under Udayam Samsaagam 2020 organized by the Deputy Commissioner & Chairman District Level Committee, Udayam Samsaagam, Mokochung and District Industries Centre, Mokochung was held at Mayangnokcha GHS on March 7. Altogether 41 participants (21-Painting and 20-Essay) took part in the competition. The winners were as follows: Traditional art painting: 1st- Lemkhah L. Jaha (Mayangnokcha GHS); 2nd- Aaha Tamang (Straightway HSS) 2nd-Kiangsanga Jamir (Queen Mary HSS); Essay Category: 1st -Talmungang Imchen (Queen Mary HSS) 2nd-Sunita Rao (Straightway HSS) 3rd - N. Wonchho Choyou (Mayangnokcha GHS). (DIPR Photo)

Traditional activities mark Mleingyi festival celebration

PEREN, MARCH 11 (MEXN): The inaugural programme of Zeliang Naga Festival 'Mleingyi' was celebrated with Deputy Commissioner Peren, Sentiwapang Aier, NCS as the special guest at GHS Ground, Jalukie on March 10. According to a DIPR report, Mleingyi marks the event of 'self purification and advent of a new farming season seeking God's blessings for health and productive year'. The festival is a weeklong event involving various activities such as traditional fire-making (Mlertoi), merry-making and games and sports activities like head (licking the plank), beam (high jump), tuagi (shot put), beam (long jump), hego (long jump), hepo (wrestling) etc.



Sumi cultural troupe participates in the Zeliang Naga Festival 'Mleingyi' at GHS Ground, Jalukie on March 10. (DIPR Photo) Traditional fire-making (Mlertoi) marks the commencement of the Mleingyi festival and is usually performed by the clan headman of each dormitory by using strands of bamboo and fine bamboo fibres and keep the flame burning until the culmination of the festival. Speaking on the inaugural programme, DC, Peren, Sentiwapang Aier in his short speech, asserted Jalukie is a cosmopolitan town where mixed groups of people from different tribes exist. He encouraged the public to set an exemplary life as well as live life in the right direction and to maintain peace and harmony and to love one another in order to flourish in life.



Other highlights of the festival included traditional fire-making, Mleingyi blessing, folk dances, traditional parade, leiso/dagum (folk song) and sporting events. The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) Peer Team visited Sao Chang College, Tumung on March 11 and 12. The team was led by Chairperson, NAAC Peer Team, Prof. Bismita Chandra Barik, Member, Coordinator, NAAC Peer Team and Prof. Surajit Kumar Ghosh and Member, Prof. Dr. Donatus Kujur. The Peer Team was welcomed by the faculty of the college, students, alumni of Sao Chang College, Advisory Board, University Representatives and NGOs and well wishers from the District. The College Principal, Dr A. Nihoga gave a power point presentation. Peer Team interacted with various departments in the college, directorate officials, representatives from students, parent teachers Association and faculty. They also visited the establishment and interacted with non-teaching staff which was followed by cultural programme. (DIPR Photo)

Figure 5: Anchor of page two of The Morung Express on 12 March 2020. News piece of interest is demarcated in red.

The Morung Express sourced this report from a press release of the Directorate of Public Relations (DIPR) of the Government of Nagaland. It described Mleingyi as a festival of 'self purification and advent of a new farming season seeking God's blessings for health and productive year'. The report mentions the celebration observed with 'merry-making', games and sports activities. It also describes the 'usual' activities associated with it, including 'traditional' fire-making by a 'clan headman of each dormitory'. The Deputy Commissioner (DC, the administrative head) of the Peren district (where the event was held), Sentiwapang Aier, is reported to have described the town hosting the festival, Jalukie, as 'cosmopolitan' and the report reads:

...festivals celebrated among the Naga tribes are mostly related to agricultural activities, be it pre-harvest or post-harvest festival...the DC also mentioned that festivals are celebrated to honour the traditional and customary practices and further

spoke on the need to strengthen, preserve as well as utilize the rich culture and tradition with values which has been passed down from our forefathers.

The state representative links kheti to traditional and customary practices – things passed on genealogically, through forefathers. An unchanging realm is suggested here even as the event is held in the ‘cosmopolitan’ town of Jalukie, and its information disseminated through the news media. Described as a ‘festival’, Mleingyi is connected to ‘God’ by the DIPR, and to practices of ‘forefathers’ by the DC. Naganess is articulated to religion and indigeneity by linking customs to tropes like ‘ancient’ and ‘immemorial’¹⁶⁹. Within an Indian constitutional framework of Scheduled Tribes, Naganess is linked to an ‘essential characteristics’ regime marked by associations to a long and unknown past that includes ‘primitive traits, geographical isolation, distinct culture, shy of contact with community at large and economically backward’¹⁷⁰ (Xaxa 2001, Nongkynrih 2010). Through their linking to a Christian God, contextual circumstances, and tribe unions, they are made to belong in the present. That agriculture sustains food and nutrition sufficiency of communities on the peripheries of the state finds no mention.

On 2 May, *The Morung Express* carried a news piece with the headline: ‘Nagaland Governor, CM [Chief Minister] extend Moatsü greetings’. I have referred to Moatsü in the previous section in reference to translations of its songs to enable the first gospel hymn in the Naga Hills. Much as the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) or Catholic Association of Nagaland (CAN) were the instructive bodies on how to conduct Easter (or Christmas), the Ao Senden, a ‘customary’ adjudicator of Ao affairs, is stated to be the authority that directs the observance of the Moatsü ‘festival’ during COVID-19. In the report, the Ao Senden is reported to ask the community to ‘observe the festival with a prayer from their respective homes asking for blessings from the Almighty’. Much like the NBCC and CAN, the Ao Senden does not operate in a ‘primitive, isolated,

¹⁶⁹ Under Indian jurisprudence, customs are regarded as such when they are shown to be ‘ancient’ and ‘immemorial’, among other features like ‘reasonable’ <https://www.india-seminar.com/2000/492/492%20b.%20j.%20krishnan.htm> Accessed on 04.10.2023.

¹⁷⁰ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaselframePage.aspx?PRID=1514486> Accessed on 15.11.2023.

shy, backward' (see above) realm of indigeneity, but is a ritual actor that responds to a current situation and uses religion (the Almighty) to draw importance to the festival. Sharing a Moatsü message, the Governor of Nagaland at the time, RN Ravi, terms the Ao Senden an 'apex organisation'¹⁷¹, and Moatsü a 'period of entertainment after the stressful field works'. On the occasion, the Chief Minister of Nagaland, Neiphiu Rio, prays for 'the Almighty's protection' for the continuance of 'our rich cultural heritage'.

The use of 'Almighty' here, and 'God' in the previous example, is a connection to Christianity. Meanwhile, the Governor – a representative of the central government in India– articulates it as 'a period of entertainment'¹⁷². In this festivalising exercise, Moatsü is linked to a Christian almighty, heritage, community and entertainment in ways that may not make it fully recognisable as 'indigenous religions' (Cox 2007: 68-71) that has been denoted as having 'characteristics' related to ancestors and kinship relations, localised rather than 'universal', and applied within a 'restricted cosmological framework' (Cox 2016: 11). A universal cosmological framework (god, almighty) is applied here in addition to a broad region of jurisdiction of Ao people everywhere (who the Ao Senden represents through elected authority, common kinship and ancestors). Moreover, these also relate to present contexts and condition, including the COVID-19 restrictions that inform the Ao Senden and government's 'governance' of Moatsü, which was reported in *The Morung Express* with a photograph presenting 'traditional attires' (see photo below), which include products of global circulation like khaki pants and sneakers, but also local markers like hornbill feathers, weaves and tusks.

¹⁷¹ As is common to do in Nagaland where each tribe has such an 'apex organisation' that represents it at important meetings involving decision making at the level of the tribe.

¹⁷² In the Nagaland for Christ calendar, the NBCC stated that Christmas is never about 'entertainment', thus denoting the term as things opposite to Christmas and religion.

LOCKDOWN LESSONS

Educators in Nagaland share online teaching experiences

Vishu Rita Krocha
Kohima | May 1

Even as pre-recorded video lessons for students of classes 8, 9, 10 and 12 across the state were first telecasted today via Doordarshan amid COVID-19, teachers who were selected to present lessons on their respective subjects were in for a whole new experience of teaching.

A total of 25 subject teachers both from government and private schools have been selected for the video lessons on Mathematics, Science, English and Social Science for Classes 8-10 and History, English, Education, Economics, Political Science and Sociology for Class-12 Arts Stream and Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics and Biology for Class-12 Science Stream respectively.

Speaking to The Morning Express, Nellayappan, Assistant Director of School Education informed that some teachers "who are best in their subjects" were selected for the purpose.

He expressed optimism that the initiative would benefit students across the state and more so for those in rural areas where there are shortages of some subject teachers.

"We are also taking



A class IX student attends English class through TV as per schedule given by the Department of School Education, Nagaland in Dimapur on May 1. (Morning Photo)

Way forward

Initially it was a little uncomfortable as this is all very new, but it has gotten much better with time, disclosed Bentlungo Shilo, a Science Teacher of G Hio Higher Secondary School, who did his fourth recording on Friday.

In terms of the lessons, he also noted the lack of interaction with students. "I really want all the students to benefit from these video lessons," he asserted and suggested on a way to get 'feedbacks' so students can also clear their doubts, if any.

Meanwhile, stating that this is new to him, Tersaakum, who teaches Sociology at Sazohi College, however affirmed that being part of this initiative is like giving something back to the society.

"At times like these, teachers should be the volunteers because they are the ones who mould the students, and we should be the role models," he put across.

Mention may be made here that the pre-recorded lessons will be telecasted on Doordarshan Kohima everyday from 3:00-6:00 pm, and pre-recorded audio lessons will be broadcasted on All India Radio from 10:00-11:55 am and 6:00-7:10 pm.

For children in rural areas without accessibility to the facility, the district administration has been requested to facilitate access.

A new frontier: Good opportunity

"This is really exciting for me," expressed V Ganesan, a Mathematics Teacher from Fernwood School, who was the first to be recording.

He cautions that this will really help the children during this period of lockdown. Further motivated by positive feedbacks from students after Friday's telecast, he informed: "Some parents also called to say they are also learning, and I am happy that the department has undertaken this great initiative."

For Yivhe-khonuo Vieda, an English Teacher of Mount Simat Higher Secondary School, Kohima, more lessons could be covered in 35 minutes, which she reasoned was because there was no interaction with students in between as well as no disturbances.

While stating concern that "no matter how hard we are trying, if the

students are not concentrating, that's a worry," she however maintained that "as long as the classes do not resume, we should make the best of it and take it seriously."

Aseintuo Sekhose, who earlier taught at Fernwood School, Kohima and is currently pursuing MEd strongly felt that this is a good opportunity both for students and teachers while terming the experience as "very interesting."

"If we are to plan this in a different time, it would not have taken place but on the positive side, thanks to the pandemic, this is happening and will go a long way," she opined.

Nagaland Governor, CM extend Moatsu greetings

KOHI MA, MAY 1 (ME&N): The Governor of Nagaland RN Ravi today greeted the people Nagaland in general the 'Aos' in particular on the occasion of Moatsu, one of the premier festivals of the Ao Nagas. In his message, Ravi said that though Moatsu provides the people a period of entertainment after the stressful field works, the Ao Senden has urged the community to observe the festival at home due to ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Senden, the apex Ao organisation on April 30, has urged the community members to observe the festival with a prayer from their respective homes asking for blessings from the Almighty. In this connection, he lauded the Senden as well as other apex organisations and the people for being vigilant so far all the recent festivals.

"He wished a very happy, meaningful and blessed Moatsu celebration as the people observe the festival at home with prayers," a press release from PRO to Governor informed.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister Nephthi Rho also sent his Moatsu greetings to the community on Friday. "Wish you all happiness and good health and pray that the Almighty's protection continue to be upon us so that we will be able to celebrate our rich cultural heritage, as a community, in the near future," he tweeted.

V Patton: Nagaland Deputy CM, V Patton also extended Moatsu greetings to the Ao community. A press release from the Deputy CM's media cell said that the festival is being celebrated under different circumstances due to the ongoing COVID-19 this year, it should not dampen the spirit of festivity and can be celebrated meaningfully at their respective homes by observing social distancing. He also appreciated the "wisdom of Ao Senden for asking its community members to refrain from celebrating the festival publicly". Patton, on behalf of the state BJP legislators, meanwhile wished for peace, prosperity and goodwill to the people during this festival and in the days to come.



Two siblings in traditional attire play on the roof top while observing the Moatsu Festival amid the COVID-19 lockdown in Mokokchung on May 1. (Morning Photo)

Following social distancing & guidelines most valiant act: Ravi

KOHI MA, MAY 1 (ME&N): The Governor of Nagaland RN Ravi today said that in these difficult times, the most valiant act a person can do is to simply maintain 'social distancing' and adhere to the government guidelines.

The Governor stated this while extending his Moatsu greetings to the people and lauding the lauded the apex organisations and the people of the state "being vigilant so far in all the recent festivals."

"An important teaching by the older men to the young people during the festival is to be bold and heroic to defend and protect the community from enemies," Ravi added in a press release from Raj Bhawan Kohima.

Fire breaks out at Chiumoukedima

DIMAPUR, MAY 1 (ME&N): A late fire at Ward 11, Chiumoukedima destroyed 24 houses leaving at least 20 people homeless on May 1. There were no reports of injury to people. According to eyewitnesses at the site, the houses belonged to labourers who work for a mine in the area.

Cess on fuel is 'anti-people,' says DCCI

DIMAPUR, MAY 1 (ME&N): The Dimapur of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) today expressed its concern over the

Not acceptable KDCC on COVID-19 cess

KOHI MA, MAY 1 (ME&N): The Kohima District Congress Committee (KDCC) today opposed the

Special trains to be operated for movement of stranded persons

NEW DELHI, MAY 1 (ME&N): The Union

Figure 6: Top half of page two of The Morning Express on 2 May 2020. News piece of interest is marked in red.

The Morning Express does not contest who greets and governs these festivals, and accompanied rituals, but gives them an equal platform. The NBCC, the Chief Minister or Governor of Nagaland are just as present on its pages as the Ao Senden. The Ao Senden's involvement is not without a national scale of Naganess – they participate as representative bodies at consultations¹⁷³ instated as part of the Indo-Naga peace process. In these ways, bodies like Ao Senden straddle both the national and subnational scales of Naganess, through political peace processes, festival greetings and regulations.

As the monoliths, in the previous section, work to locate Christian and clan practices, this work is also done elsewhere by the morning. On 29 November, page seven (Entertainment/Nagaland), two lead news items presented the festival Ngada. 'NGADA:

¹⁷³ https://www.india-seminar.com/2020/732/732_along_longkumer.htm Accessed on 10.02.2022.

The Festival of Rengma Nagas' was accompanied by a picture of women performing the processing and weaving of yarn. In the report, Ngada is described as 'the greatest and most important festival' of the Rengma Nagas. The report is based on a press release by the Rengma Public Organisation Kohima – it comprehensively lists the activities that classify as festivities that must be observed to qualify as Ngada. The second news piece is carried right next to the first with a photograph of a 'cultural troop' with the headline 'Kashanyu Youth constructs morung with indigenous materials'.

The report is about the celebration observed at Kashanyu village's Renshü, translated here as 'Morung'. It is a new Renshü (Morung) constructed in the 'oldest Rengma Naga village' by the Kashanyu youth, using 'indigenous materials'. The 'guest of honour' at the event, a retired Government of Nagaland engineer & bureaucrat, noted:

The festival resembles a kind of thanksgiving which is clearly moulded by the Rengma culture. It is a post harvest festival that celebrates a successful harvest.

NGADA: The Festival of Rengma Nagas

KOIHIMA, NOVEMBER 28 (MEAN): Ngada Festival is "the greatest and most important festival" of the Rengma Nagas. Ngada Festival is celebrated in the last part of November every year, when the year-long hard-won crops are collected from field to the granaries.

According to a pressnote issued by Rengma Public Organization Kohima (RPOK), President, Khunt Woch the village priest announces the dates to celebrate when the preparation begins for the festival. The month will clean the village. Morning, Kooapole, traditional wells, collect banana leaves to be used during the festival and also expose their traditional dresses and attire in the sun to be worn during the celebration of the festival. The women folk collect firewood, prepare rice beer, wash animals and clothes and clean the house preparing for the celebration of the festival.

"Ngada Festival is a celebration of the post-harvest with thanksgiving to the God through the traditional blessings," Woch states. He explains that "Ngada means festival and the means series of celebrations. Ngada means a series of festival which is celebrated for 10 days which includes village-wide firewood, prepare rice beer, wash animals and clothes and clean the house preparing for the celebration of the festival.

"Ngada Festival is a celebration of the post-harvest with thanksgiving to the God through the traditional blessings," Woch states. He explains that "Ngada means festival and the means series of celebrations. Ngada means a series of festival which is celebrated for 10 days which includes village-wide firewood, prepare rice beer, wash animals and clothes and clean the house preparing for the celebration of the festival.



with all the participants on that very day a celebration which signifies that there is no feuding with each other in the community whatever wrongs or misdeeds committed in the past are forgiven and forgotten.

The following day of the Ngada festival marks the end of the year and the New Year begins with coming of new bulls selected for celebration for the year ahead with observation of thanksgiving for bountiful harvest and protection of crops.

Significance of Ngada Festival:

Renewal of relationship: During the festival, sharing of food and drinks with relatives, friends and invitees; guests shows that any misunderstandings, disassociations during the past years are reconciled, restored and renewed. It also marks the beginning of new relationships and peace treaties.

Respect and remembrance of the death ones: Traditionally, the Rengma believe that during the Ngada festival, the death souls visit the family and enjoy the celebration during the festival. Therefore as a sign of respect and remembrance, the families clean the graveyards and offer a piece of meat and drinks to the graveyard during the festival.

The past misdeeds, forgiven and forgotten: While cultivating fields with groups, doing trade and business, hunting together with the community, if one has hurt another intentionally or unintentionally, it should be forgiven and forgotten, involving a new spirit of goodwill and understanding to welcome the new year.

Kashanyu Youth constructs morung with indigenous materials



A cultural troop presents Ngada cultural item during the celebration of Rengma Ngada Festival at Kashanyu (Morung) on November 28.

TSEMINYU, NOVEMBER 28 (MEAN): Kashanyu village celebrated Rengma Ngada Festival at Kashanyu Morung (Morung) with Kashanyu Youth used only indigenous materials for construction.

"Kashanyu village is one of the oldest Rengma Nagas villages," stated Kashanyu Youth, President, Shyehhuan Chong and Kashanyu Youth, Advisor, Kageyhm Tip in a press release.

In his address, Er T Semny presented Ngada cultural traditions of the Rengma and encouraged the youths to live a good morale life and focus on all round development.

Er S.K. Tip said that Ngada is among the most popular festivals in Nagaland. "The festival represents a kind of thanksgiving which is clearly moulded by the Rengma culture. It is a post-harvest festival that celebrates a successful harvest," he said.

The programme was chaired by Kageyhm Tip. Kashanyu Cultural Troop presented Ngada cultural dance and Pelaryapans folk song.

'Makullungdi Festival Documentary Film' released

DIMAPUR, NOVEMBER 28 (MEAN): The Launglaim Citizens Forum (LCF) released the 'Makullungdi Festival Documentary Film' on November 28 through a webinar. TB Zehang, Opposition Leader and former Chief Minister of Nagaland released the film from his residence in Dimapur, stated a press release.

During the occasion, TB Zehang appreciated the LCF for taking on the initiative of organising the Makullungdi Festival. He urged all the Launglaim people living in the states of Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland and across the world to come together and unite with people with similar vision and advice.

Founding General, Founder and Principal, Highland National College, Imphal shared a brief history of LCF.

Dr Imrui, Additional Central Commissioner, Central Provisions Fund, Dimapur and also the director of the documentary film shared that the film focuses



on the 'Makullungdi Festival' event that took place at Makullungdi Village, Senapati District, Manipur from November 28 to 30.

It features delivered the voice of thanks while the LCF is available at <http://www.launglaim.org>

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CANSSEA triennial session conducted

KOIHIMA, NOVEMBER 28 (MEAN): The Confederation of All Nagaland State Service Employees' Association (CANSSEA) held its triennial session 2020 at the CANSSEA Conference hall, Thimble Kohima on November 27.

The session was chaired by Dr Tall Imong, the outgoing CANSSEA president who in his remarks called on CANSSEA members to be ready to face any challenges on any issue in such a trying time like ours today. Unlike the previous years the session was held in a low key affair in view of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic with limited number of invitees. Earlier, he led the programme with an observance of a minutes silence in memory of CANSSEA members who had passed away.

Dr Tang, the new president of CANSSEA, called on the members to infuse themselves with the spirit of work culture to better serve the public. He also assured to work to protect the rights of the employees while also expressing his desire to work with the Government.

Elects new office bearers: Office bearer for the term 2020-23 was elected with the following members:

President: Dr Tang, Vice President: Zuhemo Bangilo and Chakrapager Aier, General Secretary: Dr Hovhath Sotha, Joint Secretary: Yoenghong Chong and Yhamiselo Kent, Finance Secretary: Alako K Vepilo, Press & Information Secretary: Sioweth Nyusou, Women Coordinators: Tshimmaro Orving, Yueshema Angant, Treasurer: Veyelo Domo, and Advisor: Dr Tall Imong.

Zapam builds community hostel for village students



Oai Correspondent Kohima November 28

Nagaland's Planning & Coordination, Land Revenue and Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Noko Kroum on Friday inaugurated Zapam Village Hostel at Zapam under Dimapur.

It was constructed under Article 275 (1) during 2018-20.

Addressing the gathering, Kroum acknowledged the village for quality execution of the project. The Minister appreciated the village for initiating community hostel in the village, adding that such will go a long way to empower the future generation of the user community.

Kroum assured that the world would have to ease the burden of the farmers by improving agri link roads in the village. He maintained that good road connectivity will open up economic opportunities.

He encouraged the villagers to look forward in life with positive attitude and not waste time in trivial issues of differences. Kroum encouraged the village to provide land when developmental government projects comes in the area as the ultimate benefit goes to the user community.

Dinglo Khutso, president, 16 Pheasants Assembly Constituency NDFP said that the constituency people are fortunate to have a leader like Kroum who always extend and exhibit deep concern for overall development of the people.

In his brief report, Kohlika Kenye who supervised the construction of the hostel said that Kroum has fulfilled the long aspiration of the village to have a residential school in the village.

He recalled how the church, village council and Village Education Committee along with the students, parents initiated community hostel in 2017 to bring quality education in the village.

Kenye also said that village planning to introduce vocational learning in the hostel in the years to come to revive the traditional institution of learning through morung system.

Earlier, Zapam Village Council chairman Zewokha Weshah delivered welcome address. The function was led by Zapam VDI secretary Sedout-soli Weshah while one of thanks was delivered by Ntingpo Khutso.



Doyang Bridge construction at Liphayim, Governor's Camp has resumed after a gap of almost eight months due to lockdown on COVID-19 and the rainy season. The Nagaland Road Coordination Committee (NRCC) while appreciating has urged that Contractor M/S. I. Pathak Shree & Sons "to escalate the works on war footing to complete it at the earliest as situations utterly demands its utility." The Committee also appealed to the State Government to settle all accounts fair and square as deemed fit in order to fulfil the aspiration of the Naga general public. (Photo Courtesy: NRCC)

Finneas to release first Christmas song

Finneas is to release his first ever Christmas song next week. The 23-year-old singer/songwriter - who is the brother of Billie Eilish - took to Twitter to confirm he will drop a festive tune on Tuesday (01.12.20). The song, "Christmas song on Tuesday", comes after Finneas marked the "first" of his first Christmas song by releasing "The Break My Heart Again" in reference to Trump's catchphrase on the US 'Apprentice', Finneas tweeted: "Not to be afraid."

The "Break My Heart Again" Int-maker admitted in September that he didn't want to release any new albums during the coronavirus pandemic. He said, "I have a desperate desire to release them during Covid-19."

It's the vaccine record! I want it to be the album everyone's out dancing in the streets to." But he admitted he and his sister Billie, who co-write and co-produce her songs, were working hard on new projects.

Finneas explained: "Billie and I are full dreams ahead on her next record. I haven't suffered at all because of my set-up."

"Billie and I can work one-on-one. Source: Contact Music

Commemorating and Honouring the Sacrifices of Countless Nagas

Unveiling of Bust of **Dr. Imkongliba Ao** (President, Naga Peoples' Convention) at Raj Bhavan, Kohima as part of **58th STATEHOOD DAY CELEBRATION OF STATE OF NAGALAND**

Shri Neelisu Rio Hon'ble Chief Minister

Shri R.A. Revil Hon'ble Governor

Palma Bhushan Dr. S.C. Jaiir Lone surviving NPC member

Date: 1st December, 2020
Venue: Raj Bhavan, Kohima
Time: 12:00 Noon

Function will be live streamed at **MyGov Nagaland** Youtube channel and **MyGov Nagaland** Facebook page

Issued by Directorate of Information & Public Relations, Govt. of Nagaland

Figure 7: Page seven of The Morning Express on 29 November 2020, showcasing Ngada. An additional piece on the page was also marked in red but not used for analysis eventually¹⁷⁴.

¹⁷⁴ Note the advertisement at the bottom right corner of the page. Titled 'commemorating and honouring the sacrifices of countless Nagas', it is a paid advertisement by the Government of Nagaland (showing the current Chief Minister on the left, the Governor in the centre, and a former Chief Minister on the right) which is set to observe martyrdom in ways very different from the kind

The 'morung' has been listed as a feature of Naganess¹⁷⁵, described by anthropologists as a site for the conduct of political and ritual affairs, particularly related to 'head-taking' (Jacobs, Harrison et al. 2012: 27). Instead of head-taking though, here there is a reference to 'thanksgiving', with the first report explicitly linking thanksgiving to 'the God Almighty'. The use of 'indigenous materials' to build this 'renshü' refers to locally available material in contrast to plastic, as per the report; its translation to 'morung' upscales it from the local to a Naga national scale. Activities conducted during the time, like cleaning the village or preparing rice beer are termed 'festivities', while the 'significance' of the festival is linked to reconciliation, remembrance of the dead, and forgiveness. These links are drawn by the Rengma Public Organisation in Kohima, an 'apex body' of the Rengma people in Kohima, making them the new public (ritualised) agents (Bell 1997: 82), like the Ao Senden in a previous example, whose authority is promoted through the publication of their articulations of what Ngada is; not by village priests whose job is indicated in the report as announcing the dates of Ngada and the 'observation of rituals' for a 'bountiful harvest'. This strategy of linking ritual to the village priest and agriculture, while linking the festival to thanksgiving, reconciliation and such suggests that morung, and Ngada, survive through their re-articulation by modern day institutions. It is not just the church in Nagaland that contextualises, but also civil society, through festivalising Ngada or Moatsü in a way that take away their sacred (head-taking) potentials, keeping them at the safe and secular level of 'merry-making', games and sports, but important enough as platforms for tribe-scale reconciliation and forgiveness.

Articulations of culture, tradition, heritage to almighty, god and thanksgiving in *The Morung Express* may be read in the context of what has been described as a pure realm of Naga 'religion of forefathers' (Mills 1926) or of 'Naga religion' as 'heathen ritual'

discussed in a previous section in this chapter. In this case, the Nagaland State Government represents the Indian Union and uses 'honour' and 'sacrifice' to legitimise the formation of the state through the 16-point agreement signed with the Naga People's Convention. These are matters of contestation in Nagaland.

¹⁷⁵ Among other features like feasts of merit, gennas, shamans, and Christianity.

(Eaton 1984: 13). While many things and practices classified thus may go into the box of ‘indigenous religion’ today, they also inhabit the constitutionally demarcated box of social and customary practices in India. In *The Morung Express*’s news reports, ‘thanksgiving’ and ‘almighty’ are connected to these ‘festivals’ in a way that disturb these boxes and showcase the participation of a new set of modern ‘ritual actors’ in regulating and ritualising them, on the one hand, and state actors festivalising them, on the other. Instead of inhabiting neat categories, they become articulated domains of indigeneity and religion, entailing a process in which different sorts of actors participate.

3.2.2 Hornbill Festival

The Morung Express gives extensive coverage to the International Hornbill Festival each year, which is held for 10 days in December. In 2020, the Hornbill Festival, as it is locally known, was not held in Kisama village, where it has been held since it was instated in 2000, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On 24 October, page three, a headline states, ‘NPF slams Nagaland Govt’s plan to hold Hornbill Fest 2020’. The Naga People’s Front (NPF), the then opposition to the government in Nagaland State, termed the government’s decision to hold the festival a ‘suicidal mission’. The report noted:

The NPF acknowledged that the Hornbill Festival is a “perfect opportunity to improve our tourism sector and a time to showcase our traditional heritage to the outside world.” However, it stated that as the situation dictates this year the influx of international and domestic tourist from different places into the State will prove “catastrophic”.

This kicked off a wave of opposition that called for a halt to the international event. On 29 October, a front-page anchor piece stated, ‘Hosting Hornbill Festival would negate

efforts against COVID-19: AMK'. In it, an association called Angamimiapfü Mechü Krotho¹⁷⁶ asked the Government of Nagaland:

Why and by what importance the Hornbill Festival gets precedence over the academic or religious obligations, thereby risking health and lives? It appealed to the government to reconsider its decision and cancel Hornbill 2020 “in the interest of safety and sanity...”

The AMK is referring here to the closure of academic institutions like schools and universities, as well as religious ones like churches in relation to the pandemic. Is a festival important enough to risk life when these are not?

On 1 November, *The Morung Express* published an opinion poll it had conducted over the previous week asking readers, ‘Are you in favour of the Hornbill Festival 2020 being held, either virtually or otherwise, amid the COVID-19 crisis? Give reasons’. Such a debate is not conducted in the case of the kheti festivals linked to each tribe, which have more grounded – land holding – power and legitimacy over the constitution and conduct of Nagaland State than, in this case, tourism.

¹⁷⁶ This civil society organisation changed its name to Angami Women's Organisation in 2022, making it more recognisable to non-Angamis. <https://morungexpress.com/angamimiapf-mech-krotho-renamed-as-angami-women-org> Accessed on 16.11.2023.

politicians – former chief minister of Nagaland and governor of several states in India – Senayangba Chubatoshi Jamir, reflecting on ‘Nagaland for Christ’. SC Jamir, as he is popularly known, contests ‘tribalism’, corruption in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly, and elections, asking the Church to step in to defend ‘Nagaland for Christ’ as a response to these issues. Meanwhile, in the responses to the poll question, many commentators are angry and annoyed with the Government of Nagaland for considering the conduct of the Hornbill Festival, even if virtually. The most prominent argument detailed that it is a ‘festival’ that is ‘entertainment’, a ‘picnic’, and ‘dirty’ – basically, a frivolous event that should not be prioritised over health, safety, infrastructure or anything else. One commentator noted:

It’s a government employee entertainment with lots of modern day stuff nothing to do with the Nagas, the whole thing is dirty, dirty toilets, dirty prices, dirty food.

Another stated, echoing other comments:

Life is more important than festival.

In these reports, festivals are framed as something separate from ‘life’, and its frivolity must be kept in abeyance during a period of crisis (like a global pandemic). Even in other years, *The Morung Express* has often carried news reports on how funds for the Hornbill Festival could be better spent on developing Nagaland’s infrastructure. Even in a non-crisis situation, the Hornbill Festival is considered frivolous. Despite the scepticism, the Hornbill Festival remains on the pages of *The Morung Express* even though it is physically absent from Kisama, or the Naga Heritage Village¹⁷⁷, owing to its eventual cancellation in 2020. On 10 December, page seven, *The Morung Express* carried a whole page feature of photographs from past Hornbill festivals. It was titled ‘FLASHBACK: 10 things you should know about Nagaland’s Hornbill Festival’. It is worth taking a look at this to get a sense of the kind of coverage the Hornbill Festival

¹⁷⁷ The Nagaland State government has termed the site where the Hornbill Festival is conducted each year as the Naga Heritage Village.

gets each year. Such reports with many photos are often published throughout the time that the Hornbill Festival is held in other years. In 2020, the one page of photos on a single day creates a flavour of it from other years:

THURSDAY 10-12-2020
THE MORNING EXPRESS

NAGALAND | 7 +

FLASHBACK: 10 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT NAGALAND'S HORNBILL FESTIVAL

Amid the surge in COVID-19 cases, the premier Hornbill Festival christened "Festival of Festivals" has put Nagaland in the recent years. However, the 21st edition of the annual 10-day festival from December 1-10 went completely virtual due to ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In a flashback, *The Morning Express* presents glimpses of 10 things you should know about Nagaland's Hornbill Festival.

THE PROTOCOL: The inauguration of the Hornbill on December 1 coincides with the Sasohobry of Nagaland and usually a national politician is invited to inaugurate the event. In 2014, formally inaugurating the Hornbill Festival in Naga Heritage Village, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, announced a "view of developmental programmes and benefits for the people and students of the northeast during his short speech."

CULTURALLY YOURS: At Naga Heritage Village, Khama, cultural extravaganza performances called as "Culturally Yours" are showcased each day from December 1-10 attracting huge number of visitors. A Lusha cultural troupe perform traditional method of healing in this picture taken on December 5, 2018 at Khama. (Morning File Photo)

CULTURAL CONNECT: The Festival is not only showcases cultural performances of the Nagas but across the region and India. A cultural troupe from Mizoram are seen performing during the North East Day at the Hornbill Festival in Khama on December 2, 2017. (Morning File Photo)

BACK TO THE ROOTS: (Left) Traditional fire making is one of the indigenous games practised by all the Naga tribes. Here two men team up to make fire in the traditional way 2016 edition of the Hornbill Festival. (Right) A Sidi Race, another popular traditional game, in progress at 2018 edition of the festival. One of the objectives of the festival is connecting past with the present, and familiarizing youngster with the traditional ways of life. (Morning File Photos)

LEARNING THE ART: (Left) Artist performing folk song at the craftscape at Naga Heritage Village, Khama on the first day of the ten-day Hornbill Festival 2019. (Right) Exhibition and sale of artwork has also gain prominence in recent editions. Sale and demonstration of signature Naga craft and handmade distractions under one roof is another important highlight of the festival. Here, visitors have the opportunity to meet artisans at work and get a real time experience of the works of the craftsmen, the material they work with and to look at where the design meets the work. (Morning File Photos)

SOME LIKE IT HOT: Participants at the Naga King Chili Eating competition on December 7, 2018. Apart from cultural extravaganza, the festival features various competitions for tourists as well as locals. The Naga King Chili is considered the "hottest" chili in the world. (Morning File Photo)

THE TASTE OF NAGALAND: The food of the region, undoubtedly, is a must to explore in the Hornbill Festival. Inside each tribal Morum at Khama, a special cuisine exemplifies the traditional significance of the tribe. (Morning File Photos)

TOURIST: A tourist trying on ornaments and taking pictures with a group of Naga women in one of the traditional morums in this picture taken at Khama on December 2, 2018. Apart from reviving and protecting the rich culture of the state, one of the primary objectives of the festival is to present Nagaland as an ideal tourist destination. The 20th edition in 2019 had broken all previous festival records with a total turn-out of 2,82,011 visitors in ten days. This included 1,01,154 foreign and 1,80,857 domestic tourists, in addition to 2,54,212 visitors from Nagaland. (Morning File Photo by Imel Longchar)

MUSICAL EXTRAVAGANZA: (Left) In the photo, MONTY's fans also known as 'MONTY goers' are ecstatic during the band's symphony-debut concert at Dimapur, Nagaland on December 4, 2018. (Right) An artist performing at the Hornbill Guitar Amboree on December 4, 2018. Other than art things, the Hornbill Festival has been a celebration of music of old genres showcasing both local, national and international artists. Christened "The Experimental Festival" in the last edition, the Hornbill Music Festival is held simultaneously in Kohimani Dimapur. The International Hornbill Rock Contest is one of the most popular attractions for the festival goers. In last two editions, K-pop bands have made huge inroads with MONTY headlining in 2018, followed by Halcyon in 2019. (Morning File Photos by Manan Arer)

CONCLUSION: The 10-day celebration comes to conclusion with the lighting of Miss closing bonfire at Khama, Naga Heritage village. (Morning File Photo)

Figure 9: Page seven of *The Morning Express* on 10 December 2020. The entire page is of interest here.

The anthropologist Arkotong Longkumer notes the making of a ‘Naga culture’ at the Hornbill Festival which supersedes local variants (like the kheti festivals mentioned before) and is a ‘product of the entanglement between the local, national, and the global mediated through the Nagaland state’ (Longkumer 2015: 57). It is at the Hornbill Festival that the scope of Naganess through the Incredible Nagaland calendar presents a recognisable opportunity to go from tribal to indigenous. Naganess is presented through spectacular displays of indigeneity, mediated by the Nagaland State. Thus, the scale of Naga nationalism is bypassed for a global scope of modern primitivism and ‘authenticity’ (Longkumer 2016b: 223) that also draws from a sub-national scale of an ‘Incredible Nagaland’ placed within the framework of ‘Incredible India’. This is most visible in the branding and selling of the Hornbill Festival as an international site for Naga exotification, but through the representation of tribes recognised in Nagaland State. Each such recognised tribe is placed within their designated and de-ritualised morung at the site of the festival – functionally, they serve as restaurants that offer food associated with each tribe¹⁷⁸. *The Morung Express* display of photographs does not have a single morung though. Instead, it presents rock shows, fans, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a Naga head gear, a foreigner being decked in Naga jewellery, a bonfire, assorted food and games, bamboo crafting skills and a Mizo dance troop. *The Morung Express* presents Naga indigeneity through the Hornbill Festival in more ways than one: it is an opportunity to raise questions relevant to context (e.g.: through the weekly polls) as well as challenge a primitivist stereotype; at a Nagaland State scale, it is an opportunity for state actors to advertise it as an exercise that connects Naganess to essentialist imaginings of Scheduled Tribes within the Indian national framework; at an ‘Incredible India’ scale, this exotification is useful as an exercise in ‘taming of the recalcitrant frontier’ (Duncan McDuieRa in Longkumer 2016b: 218).

¹⁷⁸ Even this is fixed and commodified – Lotha morung is connected to fish with bamboo shoot, for example, while the Sümi morung to smoked pork with axone. As much as it is a source of revenue for those who set up shop at the morungs, they are also a source of fixing identities. Most Naga households are likely to cook either (or more) of these food items throughout the year.

3.2.3 Minority festivals

Festivals and other commemorations by minority religious communities in Nagaland, including Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Sikh and others, are often published in the newspapers. The coverage given to these events in *The Morung Express* is considerably smaller compared to the other festivals above, with brief reports on inside pages or a photo on the front page marking the presence of these days in Nagaland. The news reports are often the result of press releases from institutions run by entities affiliated to these religious communities, or greetings and wishes from the Governor and Chief Minister of Nagaland State on the relevant days. Some of the days that find mention in 2020 include ones linked to specific religious groups, like Id-ul-Fitr (Islam), Diwali + Durga Puja (Hindu), Mahavir Jayanti (Jain) and others. None of these are associated with tribes recognised by the Government of Nagaland, and they are recognised as festivals only in so far as their celebrations are relevant in mainland India, and the part of Nagaland considered to be the most 'mainlandish', that is, the city of Dimapur. They are clearly associated with 'religions' (Smith 1998: 275-80) as related to the diversity of festival-related holidays in India, and not quite with indigeneity, marking the relationship between Nagaland State and the Indian Union also in terms of a majority-minority secular relationship between different religions. These relations are almost invisible in large pan Indian news media that do not cover any Naga calendrical event, barring the Hornbill Festival at times. The ways in which secular relations are drawn between religious groups with a reversed majority (Naga)-minority (non-Naga) framework are provided by local newspapers, and in this case through the coverage of religious festivals. In a way, the festival approach also helps read minority festivals in Nagaland through a Christian lens. Christmas and Easter are important days but never classified as festivals; but Diwali is a festival.

Unlike the kheti festivals though, minority festivals never relate to the land within Nagaland nor to the Christian almighty, and are not considered indigenous¹⁷⁹ even though annually covered in *The Morung Express*. They inhabit the comparative world of religions alongside Christianity, with different gods and rules. Yet, like other calendrical events festivals in Nagaland, they are mediated by unions on the one hand, and government agents, on the other. On Durga Puja, for instance, in a brief report published on October 23, page three, the Dimapur District GBs Association calls for ‘peaceful coexistence among different communities’ for the sake of progress in Dimapur; on October 24, page one, the Governor of Nagaland calls for safe celebrations in light of COVID-19 while terming the day a ‘festival’ of ‘victory of truth over falsehood, triumph of the righteous and defeat of evil’. With the notion of ‘evil’ related to deities, such articulations belong to the domain of other religions. Though some of the communities and their members that observe these minority festivals in Nagaland may be considered ‘Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland’¹⁸⁰, they are never associated with formations such as indigenous religions¹⁸¹.

3.3 Local page, Global days – Global Naga calendar

The global indigenous presence in *The Morung Express* is prominent, setting it apart from other newspapers in Nagaland, as well as within India more generally. While the newspaper has a ‘World/International’ page, like most other newspapers in the world, to bring news from different places in the world to its readers — *The Morung Express*

¹⁷⁹ Most communities who celebrate these minority festivals are considered settlers who have lived in Dimapur from the 19th century onwards; this is before many Nagas began to live in this previously forested, mosquito-infested, hot valley. Till recently, it is these ‘non-locals’, as they are often referred to, who have maintained a control over the market in Dimapur, and supply chains across Nagaland.

¹⁸⁰ <https://dpar.nagaland.gov.in/new-format-for-issue-of-indigenous-inhabitant-and-scheduled-tribe-certificates/> Accessed on 03.08.2023.

¹⁸¹ In a plebiscite speech in 1951, A.Z. Phizo said ‘Indians are Hindus’ and ‘ancient Naga religion is “animism” that has nothing to do with the Hindus.’ Here, Nagas are an ‘us’ through animism while Indians are a ‘them’ through Hindusim, de-facto power holders and brokers in India. <https://www.neuenhofer.de/quenter/nagaland/phizo.html> Accessed on 11.02.2022. Today, Hinduism is often articulated as ‘indigenous religion’ and ‘animism’ as part of the Hindutva project (See Longkumer 2017).

lays special emphasis on global identity formations that relate to indigenous people and Christians worldwide, among other formations such as ‘unrepresented peoples’. In what ways does *The Morung Express* articulate Naganess through the ‘Global Naga calendar’?

The coverage of these global days are on two lines. In the first, the newspaper lays emphasis on the United Nations’ list of international days and weeks and on most years conducts special reportage on events like International Women’s Day, International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, International Day of Persons with Disabilities, World AIDS Day, Human Rights Day. The articles on these topics draw on primary sources whom reporters speak to directly in order to make special feature stories, which may be accompanied with editorial or opposite editorial pieces. On the other hand, press releases are sources for global days like World Soil Day, World Food Day and others. Obviously, not all such international days are covered in the newspaper, and they were even more limited during the pandemic in 2020. To take stock of some of the different kinds of accounts the newspaper presented, I have divided this calendar into several sub-sections.

3.3.1 Global indigeneity

Examples within this section include news, features and opinion pieces that articulate global indigeneity. News and features from global platforms like *Cultural Survival*, an indigenous NGO in the US that amplifies struggles of indigenous communities everywhere¹⁸², are often carried on the editorial pages of *The Morung Express*, making local and specific stories from elsewhere accessible to readers in Nagaland. It builds a common sense of addressing local issues through the language of global solidarity with Indigenous Peoples.

¹⁸² <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/about> Accessed on 16.11.2023.

Take the instance of this piece that was published in *The Morning Express* from *Cultural Survival*¹⁸³ on 5 August, page four – the editorial page or ‘In-Focus’ – that is headlined ‘Kasiyanna: Turning to indigenous knowledge during COVID-19 pandemic’.

4 | IN FOCUS

The Power of Truth
The Morning Express

VOLUME XX ISSUE 232

By Dr Anantha Tazuli

A reflection on the Nat'l Education Policy 2020

The recently announced National Education Policy 2020 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development sets to meet the needs of the 21st Century India. However, one of the immediate challenges in our educational system can be implemented only through a consensus among the various stakeholders.

The NEP 2020 is a mammoth and which is designed to address the issues related to pedagogy, structure, the various ingredients and of late the national contextualisation of education specifically in the, course and design.

The NEP 2020 has come at a time when the students of primary health have exceeded poor literacy which has also led to the generation of dropouts in middle and secondary schools. On the higher education front, it continues to suffer from its failure to offer multidisciplinary programmes.

An aspect of NEP 2020 that has caught the attention of many is its focus on structural pattern of the education system. A child must be introduced to school as early as 3 years; school board exam twice a year for performance enhancement; shift from rote learning, adding the mathematical skills and the focus that being a staff to a 5 to 4 design where the Undergraduate College degree programme is four years. The medium of instruction too, the policy says, should be the mother tongue till class 5 preferably till class 10. Considering the larger spectrum of India being a diverse country starting with language, and the new structural design requires a rethinking. A thorough discussion by our school board and of higher education is needed to be the content of the present issues, problems and challenges before its acceptance.

With the new NEP works, resolving the concerns of all subjects by reflecting it to its core essentials, and through interactive classes to introduce critical thinking, it also looks at a shift from the often boring classes by making it more interactive, and also offers flexibility of course choices. However, what matters in the content is the newer existing practices of various categories of knowledge every day, knowledge needs filtering and therefore content filtration. It is dangerous to have various categories of knowledge brought together that neither offering a harmonious learning system, nor a system that is free of biases.

Certain lessons can be drawn from Finland that has the best education system in the world. One may question how they created the best education system. They followed the simple logic of keeping it really simple that looks at all round development of the children. In their education world, they have shortening of school days and school years, which means they go to school for less but still do better. They also do more with standardised tests which are generally directed at solving well for the rest of their lives. They do not design tests that are designed to test whether they are almost obsolete and not the students do not have to spend lengthy hours doing homework after their study every day. This offers them more time to grow freely as kids, to be youngsters and enjoy life fully and, and thereby offering them more avenues to learn. Too much of school and college learning and exercises to achieve only rote learning.

With the NEP 2020 on the first draft compilation after 1986, and having the draft for the second round of consultation by 2020, it only pines on the need to focus on Indian history and culture and to be more on quality rather than quantity and content. If the fundamental issue is not addressed, tertiary Education Policy will be a lost war from the start.

COMMENTARY

WEDNESDAY 08-08-2020
THE MORNING EXPRESS

Anantha Degamam
Survival Cultural

Kasiyanna: Turning to indigenous knowledge during COVID-19 pandemic

Indigenous Peoples are no strangers to disease and disaster. Now, four months into the worldwide crisis brought about by COVID-19, the situation of Indigenous Peoples is starting to become lighted. Indigenous Peoples are facing particularly challenging times due to the introduction of fast growing, input-dependent, genetically modified crops has compromised the productivity of the community lands. Climate change too has impacted the agriculture and cycle and yield. The result of these occurrences is that communities are unable to harvest if the quantities of personal lands have not been anticipated.

The destruction of their communities brought about by the extractive industry also add to these challenges. Mining and logging have caused water sources to dry up as well as contamination of traditional water sources. Even the degradation of forests as protected areas is a cause of concern. In the instance of the Orang Asli, their return to the forests has caused some wildlife protection groups to demand stronger protection for endangered animal species as hunting could increase. But these concerns are neglected. The Orang Asli, and other Indigenous Peoples, follow very strict rules governing hunting for food, among which is the caution of never taking more than what they need, as well as looking out for animals that are very young or pregnant. They also call for more groups for stronger implementation of protected areas, including keeping people out of the forests. This is a goal given that extractive industries are being allowed to continue their operations despite community lockdowns, such as in Kakadu, where oil companies still operate. Indigenous communities to arrive at their operations.

In countries where the national government has taken on a more realistic response, Indigenous Peoples are especially vulnerable. Some of the national policies are unclear and not read among others.

The conversion of forests to monocrop plantations or to logging and mining concessions means loss of agricultural land for communities. In addition, the introduction of fast growing, input-dependent, genetically modified species has compromised the productivity of the community lands. Climate change too has impacted the agriculture and cycle and yield. The result of these occurrences is that communities are unable to harvest if the quantities of personal lands have not been anticipated.

The destruction of their communities brought about by the extractive industry also add to these challenges. Mining and logging have caused water sources to dry up as well as contamination of traditional water sources. Even the degradation of forests as protected areas is a cause of concern. In the instance of the Orang Asli, their return to the forests has caused some wildlife protection groups to demand stronger protection for endangered animal species as hunting could increase. But these concerns are neglected. The Orang Asli, and other Indigenous Peoples, follow very strict rules governing hunting for food, among which is the caution of never taking more than what they need, as well as looking out for animals that are very young or pregnant. They also call for more groups for stronger implementation of protected areas, including keeping people out of the forests. This is a goal given that extractive industries are being allowed to continue their operations despite community lockdowns, such as in Kakadu, where oil companies still operate. Indigenous communities to arrive at their operations.

In countries where the national government has taken on a more realistic response, Indigenous Peoples are especially vulnerable. Some of the national policies are unclear and not read among others.

TODAY in HISTORY Aug 05

Following are some of the major events to have occurred on Aug 05

- 1826: The first transatlantic cable is completed.
- 1862: The Union Navy captures Mobile Bay in Alabama.
- 1892: Hawaiian Islands separate a portion from Congress for her work as an annex, stop and soon during the Civil War.
- 1914: The first electric traffic signal lights are installed in Cleveland, Ohio.
- 1914: The British Expeditionary Force mobilises for World War I.
- 1918: The Austro-German Army captures Warsaw in present-day Poland, on the Eastern Front.
- 1936: The British navy detains the Ottoman ship the *Arandora Star* off the coast of Egypt.
- 1938: Mustafa Kemal is appointed virtual ruler of the Ottoman Empire.
- 1941: The German army conquers Tallinn 41,000 British prisoners in the United States and Sweden's posters in the Soviet Union.
- 1943: The United Nations Command suspends armistice talks with the North Koreans when armed troops are spotted in neutral zones.
- 1962: Actress Marilyn Monroe dies under mysterious circumstances.
- 1964: President Lyndon Johnson begins bombing North Vietnam in retaliation for the Gulf of Tonkin incident and asks Congress to go to war against North Vietnam.
- 1974: President Richard Nixon admits he ordered a cover-up for political as well as national security reasons.
- 1981: President Ronald Reagan fires 11,500 striking air traffic controllers.
- 1982: Public officials are indicted on civil rights charges in the beating of Rodney King.
- 1990: Croatian forces capture the city of Knin, a Serb stronghold during Operation Storm.
- 1997: The reconstruction of the 1993 World Trade Center building, *Reunited World*, given its title.
- 2012: A gunman in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, opens fire in a Sikh temple, killing six before committing suicide.

Figure 10: The 'In-Focus' or editorial page of *The Morning Express* on 5 August 2020. The green border demarcation denotes the piece of interest on this page.

¹⁸³ It is published as 'Survival Cultural' on the day's page, possibly due to a copy editing oversight.

Such features in the editorial pages of *The Morung Express* are a regular presence. They are useful tools in relating Naganess to issues of land, languages, culture, activism and others through a global set of agreed parameters like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). That they are always carried on either the editorial or opposite editorial pages of *The Morung Express*, and are longform journalistic pieces, show their special status in the newspaper – this is not applicable to any other newspaper in Nagaland. Pieces like the one carried here do not specify Naganess but open up the possibilities of engagement, especially through registers of ‘indigenous knowledge’ that present how distant communities, in this case the Cordillera in the Philippines, deal with pandemics through ‘rituals to shut off the community from outsiders’, bringing ‘balance’ with neighbours and the ‘natural and spiritual world’. Such registers are exemplary of articulations of indigeneity and spirituality also elsewhere, as in Canada, through a relationship with land and nature (Jennings 2021: 194). Some of these tropes have been used in the Naga context by using ‘Naga Tribal Spirituality’ as an example of ‘Indigenous Spirituality’ described as a ‘relationship between God-Humans-World/Nature’ (James 2015: 203). Theologian Lovely Awomi James, here, argues for a hitherto disconnected Christian God to be linked with a Naga ‘relationship with the world of nature’ that is practiced through ‘totemism, lycanthropy, and shamanism’ (ibid: 204). These categories have been routinely applied to study the practices of indigenous people elsewhere (Chidester 2014, Nikanorova 2019, Nikanorova 2023), contributing to their recognition as forms of ‘indigenous religions’, or ‘indigenous spiritualities’ as in this case, as separate from world religions like Christianity. Articulations of global indigeneity on the pages of *The Morung Express* provide its readers ways to understand and engage with such connections.

3.3.2 Naga indigeneity

Naga indigeneity is an instance of articulating Naganess through a global scale by directly relating them back to local issues.

One of the important dates in this regard is the International Day for the World's Indigenous Peoples on 9 August. In this context, a piece published on page five on 10 August 2020, Public Space, of *The Moring Express* is titled 'Institutional recommendations for the Naga solution'. The article is written by a social media influencer and entrepreneur in Nagaland, Yanpvuo Kikon.

Fading originality amidst advancements

Loheh Sonam
Kohbi village, Dimapur
Ever since we grew up, this college, and step into a fast growing computer generation, scientific advancement, experience exceptional growth and progress. However, amidst the fading and erosion of indigenous ethos is also wither. The chief

of our own unique identity is being compressed and neglected but preserved and grown on the digital culture and even ethics is many folds. Not studied, but through about existing in other cultures and even ethics is many folds. Not studied, but through about existing in other cultures and even ethics is many folds. Not studied, but through about existing in other cultures and even ethics is many folds.

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An appeal to COVID-19 survivors/recovered heroes

Botheh Jamir
Langpien, Dimapur
I would like to request you to come forward and share your testimonial message on how you have faced the sickness. It would be beneficial and clear many doubts and apprehensions about the coronavirus.
1. Possible diagnosis of the virus and how it was contained.
2. Diet plan during positive stage.
3. Management of general stress or psychological struggle during isolation period.
4. Your recovery life.
5. Medication and prescription support from medical care unit.
6. Do's and don'ts.
7. This forward resolution will be unknown to many people and will help fight the virus together. Indeed, there are many phobias and hearsay talks which only makes the COVID-19 fight even more complicated.
8. We will most like to hear from you!

The Pandemic: Daily Nagas and School Fees

Impricham Jungs
The global pandemic 2020 has been unprecedented in the history of mankind: the effects of the current pandemic is not confined to its geographic origin, virtually every section of people economy and all human activities have been severely hit. Even cases in exceptional cases seem to be absolutely nothing which the global pandemic left untouched. However, I wish to speak my mind on the matter which to me and lots of people I know finds it rather disturbing.

Institutional recommendations for the Naga Solution

Yanpvuo Kikon
eleven years ago in 2009. It was then that the first time Naga were introduced to the concept of the Naga Solution. Even on the 50th anniversary of the Naga Solution, many Naga villages are still in the dark about the Naga Solution. In 14 out of 15 of our constituencies, candidates were returned unopposed as village headmen and in some cases had decided to hold the Naga Solution. This is a practical tool today that empowers the village headmen to build their villages, where the head of the village or family decides if they wish to accept the Naga Solution.

Only if we can demand from the government to implement the Naga Solution, some countries, some wrongly framed washed about the history, identity and lineage of the Naga ethnic group. Early study of foreign history and culture might also be the cause. Nevertheless, amidst historical

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The Moring Express 'Public Space' is to provide space for diverse opinions to be expressed and heard. The opinions in the 'Public Space' do not reflect the views and position of the newspaper nor the editor.

LEISURE

CROSSWORD # 5048

SUDOKU

Single Rules: Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 through 9.

Game Number # 5026

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ACCEPTABLE

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Figure 11: Public Space of The Moring Express on 10 August 2020. This page often features unedited opinions of non-journalist readers. Piece of interest is demarcated in yellow.

The piece starts with this:

On this World Indigenous Peoples' Day, I would like for us to revisit the Indigenous Political System of The Nagas which was practiced before the modern concept of liberal democracy and before the electoral system was incorporated into our society which has resulted in all the chaos and corruption that we see around us today.

Kikon imagines a pristine, pre-colonial, 'traditional system' before the 'modernised context' of 'liberal democracy' took over. The writer proposes replacing the present party-based Indian electoral system with a past tribe/village representation-based 'indigenous Naga consensus based political/traditional systems' for a future 'Naga solution'. Articulation of Naganess to 'Indigenous Political System' enables Kikon to assert a separation from an Indian political party system, and a 'western' liberal democracy of individual freedom, for a system that is tribal, local, indigenous, consensus-driven, past-based and one which, the writer asserts, 'worked pretty well'. Kikon provides little evidence for these claims, and the piece ends with 'May God Lead Us Into A Better Future!'. As imagined Naga indigeneity, Naganess is articulated here through maximal scales that link global indigeneity (through a romanticised past) and Christian God (for a hypothetical future).

Here is a more grounded example. On 10 December, the front page lead news item has the headline 'Human Rights Day: Imagining a better world'. The UN Human Rights Day has always been important for *The Morung Express* which, most years since the newspaper started, has covered exclusive stories on issues related to human rights in Nagaland. In 2020, the story features interviews with journalist Atono Tsükrü Kense and 'Indigenous Rights Activist', Kim Chishi, with a special focus on the COVID-19 pandemic. The former notes issues of health, livelihoods and education while the latter notes that stigma and discrimination have been heightened during the pandemic which has 'divided our Indigenous society further'. Martemjen Jamir, whose position is never described, says in the report:

COVID-19 is a soul searching time for many but it has also exposed the hypocritical heart of almost every human being thereby revealing its fallen nature...the basic fundamental right of all, ‘right to belief’ remains infringed with churches closed and church gatherings restricted while every other social and political activity continues with hypocritical restrictions.

The article engaged with the COVID-19 to highlight how health measures affected rights, including a ‘right to belief’. With the closure of most public places, Jamir, here, makes ‘religion’ a more important right than others. Yet, churches in Nagaland were more practical, becoming some of the first institutions to successfully move their sessions online. By making it an issue of human rights, *The Morung Express* articulated indigeneity and religion in a way that speaks to the context and conditions under which certain rights and ‘unities’ stand fractured, and must be re-claimed. This includes a right to ‘belief’, or religion, referring specifically to the church in this news piece, but also to indigeneity that stands ‘divided’ by the restrictions. The Indian Constitution ensures a ‘right to freedom of religion’, with limitations that include health-related measures. The right here is also connected to indigeneity to question how restrictions apply to these spheres but not to other ‘social and political’ activities. Naga indigeneity here is relational and enables the newspaper to point to contradictions large enough to be ‘soul searching’ and fracturing moments but also to examine the ways in which constitutional limits are set on freedoms.

3.3.3 Global days, local rights

March is often a month that starts with the events around the annual International Women’s Day (IWD, 8 March) – news coverage of the global event focuses on the local and the specific. These commemorations are often organised by local institutions. For instance, each year, the North East Network (NEN) combines the celebration of IWD with an event the NEN designed, called ‘Biodiversity Festival’. It was reported to be in its 11th year in 2020. This festival is not recognised in the Nagaland State government’s list of ‘festivals’ because it is not linked to a particular tribe, though it is very much related to land practices. *The Morung Express* report on its affiliated events, carried on

page one of the newspaper on 6 March, it was headlined ‘Rediscovering indigenous science’. The linking of festival here with indigenous science, and a revitalising notion of ‘rediscovery’, speaks to global-indigenous scales articulated to ‘science’ and the secular. The report focused on the NEN’s Nagaland State director’s proposal of ‘indigenous science’ for a sustainable future that connects the youth and ‘indigenous knowledge systems’. The Secretary General of the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) called for ‘rediscovering our roots as Indigenous peoples whose future cannot be sustainable through non-indigenous means of livelihood, nor with foreign systems and ways of life’; he also cited ‘Naga traditional knowledge’ as an example of ‘indigenous people’s perspectives’ needed for ‘co-existence with all living things’ among future generations.

A longer report on the Biodiversity Festival was published on 7 March, the following day. Addressing some of the same issues, the report connected cultural and genetic biodiversity for a ‘resilient future’ through the protection of the ‘rights of our people vis-à-vis our traditional knowledge systems’. The photograph accompanying it showed two women farmers exchanging seeds in bamboo baskets as part of the festival. Such photos of women farmers exchanging seeds have been a staple feature of *The Morung Express* coverage of this event over the past few years and work well to articulate local land and biodiversity issues on a global indigenous scale.

March 9
DIMAPUR, MARCH 4 (MEAN): The Nagaland GBC Federation (NGBF) has decided to organize peaceful rallies in all district headquarters, including Meluri and Tsemnyu sub-divisions on March 9 at 10:00am to urge the Government of India to "fulfill the promises given to the Nagas." The decision to hold the rally was taken during an executive meeting of the NGBF on March 4. "We are made to understand by the negotiators that all the core issues have been resolved and agreed upon by them and all unresolved matters shall be left to be pursued through democratic political processes, so there is no more reason to delay in concluding the ongoing Naga Peace talks," a press release from NGBF President, Shalem Konyak Zalupa, General Secretary, Shukito, and Media Secretary, Akhu Naga stated. It invited all civil organizations, tribal hobos and individual to participate in the peace rallies "to voice their opinion for early Naga Political solution."

4-lane rock blasting works endangering lives: TYOD
DIMAPUR, MARCH 4 (MEAN): The Teynyim Youth Organization Dimapur (TYOD) today asked the Dimapur Deputy Commissioner to take necessary measures to ensure that rock blasting works along the Dimapur Kohima 4-lane does not endanger life of commuters and the public. In a letter to the DC, the TYOD President, Thejagula Angami and General Secretary, Khrozote Kaplo said rock blasting especially in the hill section of Chimonkedima area has become a daily activity. "It however observed that 'now most of the blasting is done besides the old road of the National Highway that results in blockage of the Highway for an indefinite period of time which is another harassment face by the commuters'." "Using of landmine and surface cutting should be carried out from top to bottom and not from bottom to top," the TYOD stated. It however claimed that in order to save time, the construction firms are "putting public life at risk." It also suggested that the blasting works should be done only after 10:30pm, during which vehicular movement is restricted till 5:00am. It further pointed to the risk posed by solid sandstone rocks left on the edge at various places without any support from the base of the ground. The TYOD appealed to the DC to inspect the work being carried out "so as to avoid any sudden manmade disaster or harassment."

NSCN (IM) says no knowledge of March 9 meeting
DIMAPUR, MARCH 4 (MEAN): The NSCN (IM) today stated that it has "no knowledge" of the proposed talks stated to be held on March 9 in New Delhi. A press release from the MIP of the NSCN (IM) said that this statement was issued to refute a report in an online news portal that talks between the Government of India of the NSCN (IM) was scheduled on March 9. It meanwhile stated that the Government of India "must be very clear about the position of its representative in East with regards to the Framework Agreement (FA), the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and its agencies like the NIA." It further advised the Ministry of Home Affairs "not to put itself into baseless and pseudo position."

ON PAGER
India confirms 31 cases of coronavirus

INSIDE

- Naga women's pursuit for equality**
Read on page 2
- Meghalaya: Curfew hours further relaxed**
Read on page 3
- Conduct exercises in unpopulated regions, says NPP Youth Wing to IAF**
Read on page 5
- Attack in Kabul kills at least 27 people, wounds dozens**
Read on page 9
- Ighalo double as United ease past Rooney's Derby**
Read on page 12

Local ecosystems take centre stage at Biodiversity Festival
March 2020
 Organized by NEN
 Venue: NEN Centre
 At: NEN Centre

Farmers exchanging seeds at the Biodiversity Festival 2020 in Chizami. (Photo Courtesy: NEN)

DIMAPUR, MARCH 6 (MEAN): Day two of the North East Network's (NEN) Biodiversity Festival at Chizami saw a celebration of the rich diversity of the North East and an acknowledgement of the contributions made by communities towards conserving biodiversity, genetic diversity in particular. It was an affirmation to create a synergy between the young and the old, the traditional and the modern, said Seno Tsubahi, Director, Programmes, NEN. She also spoke of the need to promote diverse livelihoods that strengthen local ecosystems. For this to happen, we need multiple solutions and approaches and not just one solution, she added. The festival was held under the theme 'Embracing Cultural Diversity and Biodiversity for a Resilient Future,' and saw the participation of around 300 people representing farming communities from Phek, Dimapur, Mokokchung, Tuensang, Noklak, Kiphire in Nagaland, members of Millet Network of India (MINI) and All India Millet Sisters' Network (AIMS) from Telangana and Gujarat, NGO representatives from Guwahati, Shillong, Darjeeling, Bangalore and officials from the State Government. MLA & Advisor for IT&C, Science & Technology, New & Renewable Energy, Mynhlonmo Kikon stressed on the need to address the carbon emission problem, adding that preservation of seeds, biological resources and culture is of paramount importance. On the challenges of biopiracy, he assured that the government will develop modalities to protect the "rights of our people a-vis our traditional knowledge systems." Supongmkishi Ao, IFS, Member Secretary, NSBB said that the two biggest challenges confronting Nagaland are climate change and the alienation of youth from their natural resource-based livelihoods. He informed that the State Biodiversity Board (SBB) is planning to address issues pertaining to the preservation of traditional knowledge, agricultural practices, and biodiversity.

Figure 12: Page one anchor (demarcated in red) of *The Morung Express* on 7 March 2020. On its right is an advertisement by the governing alliance (NDPP+BJP) in Nagaland State at the time.

Emerging here is a good example of ‘articulated indigeneity’ (Clifford 2001) where Naganness moves from the local to the global through a staggered, rights-based, approach that sees women as important to resilient and indigenous futures (though they do not advocate, at least here, women as inheritors and owners of the land they cultivate). Events that celebrate biodiversities of the land, seeds, soil, trees, cultivators – held together by local and women’s knowledge systems – often speak to futures or ‘the productive ways people orient their lives across time and space, rooted in the materialities and the sentient ecologies of everyday life’ (Longkumer 2020: 92). These futures in Nagaland are made imaginable through such stories in *The Morung Express*

that connect local seeds, sustainable futures and women's labour with global indigeneity but are also limited by the local context in which they operate.

An entire page (page two) was dedicated to International Women's Day commemorations on 8 March. The one that struck me most was the observation of the day by the Miqlat Ministry, a women-oriented service associated with the Nagaland Baptist Church Council. In this event, a legislative representative from the Government of Nagaland said, 'In the eyes of God, we are all equals'. Wati Aier, introduced as former principal and emeritus professor of the Oriental Theological Seminary, was reported as saying: 'We cannot go forward by looking backward', referring to the 'traditional outlook on women as homemakers, with little to no say in the society/community'. The photograph accompanying the report is of women weaving on their looms, also known as back strap looms¹⁸⁴. Shawls, *mekhala* or wrap around skirts, and other weaves are important ways in which Nagas identify themselves, and connect with each other, particularly through the loom labour of women. Using the photograph of a loom with this report from a local church ministry helps to create a local grounding for a body with global potentials, namely the church. Rights to equality are not related to global indigeneity here or a legal set of rights, but to equality through the Christian God, a link stressed by a state representative and one of Nagaland's most respected theologians. Here, the local context does not limit 'equality' that is presented to be a universal notion (equality for all).

James Clifford may be used here too to think of this as 'articulated Christianity' – an ensemble emerging from historically imposed constraints with no natural shape to its configuration (Clifford 2001: 478). In this case, Naga Christianity is associated with local and women's labour, practices and issues that are identifiable on a common Naga scale but also a global scale. International Women's Day becomes an opportunity for

¹⁸⁴ <https://asiainch.org/craft/tribal-cotton-weaving-of-nagaland/> Accessed on 10.02.2022.

Christianity to become a resource for local rights and for Nagas to participate as global citizens as progressive, indigenous and Christian people.

There are many other days including World Soil Day, World Pulses Day, International Day for Persons with Disabilities, World Music Day, International Yoga Day and so on that also become opportunities to recognise and engage with local issues through connecting with what is important elsewhere in the world today. These discourses are calendrically ritualised, and each year their usage proliferates among new institutions and actors who access such articulations through the newspaper.

3.4 Conclusion

A Morung Calendar helps me understand the ways in which Naganess is articulated through three different calendars running through the Gregorian calendric year in *The Morung Express*.

For this, the first question I asked was how does *The Morung Express* articulate Naganess through calendrical events in 2020? Using Catherine Bell's (1997) idea of 'calendrical rites' as ritualising 'periodical and predictable' events in *The Morung Express*, I classified the data through three calendars that brought together a comparable string of events presented by *The Morung Express* throughout 2020. Through these calendars, I draw on what these events may suggest about articulations of Naganess.

a) Naganess through the 'Nagaland for Christ calendar'

Using Arkotong Longkumer's (2017) notion of how the 'Nagaland for Christ' slogan organises space and gives meaning to place in Nagaland, my use of the Nagaland for Christ calendar shows the ways in which Naganess is linked to land and the Christian God, and how Nagaland is made a 'Land of God' in and through *The Morung Express*. Through this calendar, a Naga nation is established through links between local and national scales. Speeches made on Naga Republic or Independence days, for instance, articulate a nation 'promised' by Christ that emerges from history and sits in distinction to the Indian nation state. Claims of sovereignty are upscaled to the Christian global that

legitimises the Naga nation with or without this-worldly legalities of nation-state or international laws. Martyrdom is cemented as collective memory through the sharing of messages on ‘martyr days’, enabling immortal potentials for political claims when linked to individual, at times nameless, deaths. Naganess is articulated not just through the use of a distant past, and old heroes, but also new ones. Christian articulations lend ‘unique’ potentials to Naganess, giving it a ‘beyond comparison’ dimension. Christian global events, like Christmas, help local churches to distinguish themselves from other institutions in Nagaland as more important by separating themselves from other ‘ritualistic events’. Different local Christian bodies and representatives use the opportunity provided by days like Easter and Christmas to give instructions on how to conduct these events but also to emphasise ‘Naga unity in Christ’. Jubilees, prayers, fasting programs, monoliths and souvenirs connect local and global scales through landed and Christian practices that enable public participation in metaphysical and political affairs, giving Naganess a wide scope.

b) Naganess through the ‘Incredible Nagaland calendar’

I extend Anne Rasmussen’s (2010) festivalisation to the Incredible Nagaland calendar where Naganess is articulated to indigeneity as public spectacle. Drawn from the marketing campaign of ‘Incredible India’, Naganess, through this calendar, is limited to the Nagas (and non-Nagas) of Nagaland State in the Indian Union. A sub-national scale of Naganess is produced through the linking of culture, tradition, heritage and customs to Scheduled Tribes or ‘tribes’ recognised as those linked only to the state of Nagaland in India. Strategies of festivalisation sometimes construct indigeneity as public spectacle, as practices shorn of their religious importance, but repeated over time to ensure their continuance in public. The festivals studied here that are connected to kheti are prime examples of how festivals are linked to an essential features regime of tribes, but also to notions like ‘Almighty’. Often provided by the state, the linking of tribes and festivals through monetary funding limits the scope of Naganess to an Indian nation-state scale of sub-national Naganess. Tribal articulations, thus made, enable a ‘distinctive’ Naganess that makes it comparable to others, not just in the state of

Nagaland, but also as citizens of the Indian Union to other tribes elsewhere in the Union. During the International Hornbill Festival, which was not held physically in 2020, the state has the opportunity to curate its tribe ‘diversity’, all in one place, as a public display of exotic Naganess to an international, national and local audience. On the pages of *The Morung Express*, however, an opinion poll with local participants termed it as ‘dirty’ and unnecessary frivolity. The Hornbill Festival’s scope to expand Naganess to a Naga-national scale is limited by local participants through such objections, but a global indigenous image is presented in *The Morung Express* through myriad ways from its previous years’ collection of the Festival’s photographs that include non-indigenous participants. Finally, reports on minority festivals in the newspaper show how distinctions between Naganess and Indianness are drawn at the altar of ‘religion’ – through a secularist paradigm – with each relating in Nagaland through their respective positions as majority and minority religious communities. The governance of all festivals in the Incredible Nagaland calendar is done by civil society organisations and government actors.

c) Naganess through the ‘Global Naga calendar’

James Clifford’s (1997, 2013) understanding of roots as located, and routes as expanding, politics may both pass through the same site, as the Global Naga calendar in *The Morung Express* suggests. Through this, global indigeneity, or Indigenous Peoples from elsewhere, are brought to the pages of *The Morung Express*. Everyday stories from web portals like *Cultural Survival* make distant peoples into ‘one of us’. They connect stories of struggles and wins, and are given significance when they are carried as parts of important editorial pages of the newspaper in 2020. Further, Naganess is articulated to global indigeneity through political and human rights – this Naganess is not necessarily exported elsewhere but presented here by Naga institutions familiar with global indigeneity who connect Naga indigeneity with, for instance, biodiversity and sustainable futures. Several other global days, like International Women’s Day, become opportunities to bring together indigeneity and Christianity to stress equality for all.

The Morung Calendar helps take stock of articulations of Naganess, indigeneity and religion by bringing in the three comparative calendars. The three calendrical times are, however, not separated as such in the newspaper. They operate together, and begin to relate through their presentation in *The Morung Express*. While I infer the Nagaland for Christ calendar to articulate Naganess territorially and globally, creating a national sphere of Naganess, the Incredible Nagaland calendar links territoriality with Indian legal and constitutional guarantees, creating a sub-national sphere of Naganess. Festivals, rituals and agriculture are linked to the land, but also to an ‘Almighty’ that enable practices to become relevant to a Christian audience. The Global Naga calendar works to keep these gods localised to this world, or planet, both extending their national and sub-national scopes to internationalism in the form of Indigenism (Niezen 2003) and limiting their scope to certain collective approaches to human rights, rarely going into the subject of individual rights. Articulations of Naganess in these ways establish *distinction*, enabling comparison with other Scheduled Tribes in India as well as Indigenous Peoples across the world as a way to operate in present time. They also establish *uniqueness*, enabling comparison with Christian sovereigns as those that were God’s ‘promised lands’, like Israel, in biblical time. News and photos of agricultural seed exchanges establish *distinction* enabling comparison on the basis of agriculture and science in the present secular time; when linked to churches, prayers, monoliths, clans people, in the news, they become imaginable as *uniqueness* that enables self-determining possibilities of shared Naga futures capable of collaborations in several different directions that may include blood and clan ties, but also Northeast and Southeast Asia relations. Themes developed through the use of these calendars do not stick to their calendrical schemes but often criss-cross at Christian revival events, on agriculture fields, through the legislative assembly and global platforms. The processes that make them interact in specific ways in 2020 have been studied here through the relations that the journalism of *The Morung Express* establishes between them throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and through the scheme of a Morung Calendar.

4 Debated prohibitions

Things get banned all the time; and prohibitions on lives and liberties are most often contested. But they are also supported and reiterated. As debates, prohibitions provide a way to study articulations when they show up on public spaces, like a newspaper. What happens when the mode of control – prohibition – becomes the object of contest and control in *The Morung Express*? It offers the opportunity to study how Naganess, indigeneity and religion are articulated in two regularly debated issues, by whom, and what kind of arguments are presented in the newspaper. In Nagaland, these ‘debated prohibitions’, as I term them, are presented in *The Morung Express* throughout 2020.

Most of the year consisted of news about state-imposed restrictions¹⁸⁵ to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Nagaland State, prohibiting people from gathering in large groups. Prohibitions also included villages, both urban and rural, restricting the movement of people across their borders. These prohibitions were often debated in *The Morung Express*, particularly the state-led ones, for being ‘secular’ laws that curb ‘religious’ freedoms. I exclude these prohibitions from this chapter for now, and use ‘debated prohibitions’ as an umbrella to study two other similar cases in 2020 – a prohibition on alcohol and a ban on dog meat. Both these prohibitions are legal regulations that are widely debated in Nagaland’s newspapers. Both cases involve objects of human consumption and attachment – alcohol and dogs. The first is often referred to as ‘the prohibition’ while the second one is never referred to as a prohibition, but ‘a ban’. Both are officially controlled by the state through laws and administrative orders. The prohibitions are debated regularly in *The Morung Express*¹⁸⁶ and this also happened in 2020. Often, in Nagaland, the alcohol prohibition is supported by the same actors who contest the dog meat ban. Debates against both the prohibitions help

¹⁸⁵ Prohibitory laws like Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (1973) of the Indian Constitution.

¹⁸⁶ And other newspapers, social media sites, websites and news channels in Nagaland.

commentators mark commonalities and differences, which makes them, thus, comparable: one is considered ‘ours’ (Naga – alcohol prohibition) and one is ‘theirs’ (Indian – dog meat ban). Implicitly and explicitly, the presentation of both cases in *The Morung Express* can be analysed through the articulation of Naganess, indigeneity and religion. The questions I ask to do this are: In what ways does *The Morung Express* articulate Naganess, during the debated prohibitions in 2020, to indigeneity and religion? Who makes these articulations? For what purposes?

In *The Morung Express*, the alcohol prohibition is discussed in relation to a law passed by the Nagaland State Legislative Assembly in 1989, the Nagaland Liquor (Total) Prohibition Act. In 2020 alone, there were 57 pieces of interest – news, commentary, polls, editorials – related to the alcohol prohibition published in *The Morung Express*. Backed by local churches and civil society, this prohibition is often described in the news as something Christian. In *The Morung Express* the alcohol prohibition is never described as a matter of culture or tradition. The alcohol prohibition is an ‘insider’ matter¹⁸⁷; it is a Nagaland State centric issue in which collectives that also describe themselves as Naga participate. Individual commentators within the newspaper’s pages support or contest the prohibitions, both sides using biblical language at times. The prohibition is regulated by village level rural and urban institutions (apart from, and sometimes along with, the state police) but also by Naga civil society institutions, whose actions are ‘blessed’ by Scheduled Tribe linked church institutions. In 2020, the Nagaland State rarely participated in the debate in the news¹⁸⁸. Churches seem to hold the most power over the debate. While all other actors keep Christian articulations alive,

¹⁸⁷ At times also used to contest the non-Naga (non-Christian non-Scheduled Tribe citizens of Nagaland State) influence over markets in Nagaland. This argument was used only once in a Morung Express Poll in 2020 that I did not use in the analysis of this chapter.

¹⁸⁸ Even when Nagaland State representatives hold ‘consultations’ to reform the law, this gets minimal coverage in *The Morung Express*, possibly due to these events being held behind closed doors. When state representatives participate in public debates, it is often to make a point about the ‘loss of revenue’ incurred to the state as a result of the alcohol prohibition – they do not seem to support the alcohol prohibition. The state – both the Nagaland State police and Indian paramilitary forces that are shown to regulate the prohibition – are often in the news for ‘raiding’ bootlegging units and making some arrests about which they inform the public through the use of press statements.

when the churches speak on the prohibition, they use secular language of better organising the prohibition. During 2020, the debate continued and led to no resolution.

Dog meat became a contested issue when the Nagaland State bureaucracy brought in a regulation in 2020 that banned the trade of dog meat in open markets in Nagaland. In 2020, there were 32 pieces of interest on the dog meat prohibition that were published in *The Morung Express*. Within these debates, the prohibition is contested on customs, culture and tradition grounds. It is often made into an insider-versus-outsider issue, that is, Naga versus Indian. It is also an animal rights versus human consumption/choice issue that complicates the insider-outsider lines. Groups that support the alcohol prohibition are opposed to the dog meat prohibition – their arguments often depend on the effective re-articulation of debates to ‘customary practices’, changing the scope of the prohibition of dog meat and how it may be controlled. Religion or Christianity do not figure as much in this debate. Civilisational lines are drawn between an ‘us’ of Scheduled Tribes and meat eaters, and ‘them’ of India and cruelty-against-animals activists (who are, often, also Nagas and tribe members themselves). These debates, and an ensuing legal challenge in a court of law, led to the resolution of the issue in 2020 in favour of dog meat traders.

Articulations of both these debated prohibitions are drawn from federal links between the Indian Union and Nagaland State enshrined in Article 371-A of the Indian Constitution¹⁸⁹. Article 371-A outlines an Indian parliamentary distancing from, among other aspects, ‘religious or social practices of the Nagas’ and ‘Naga customary law and procedure’ thereby delegating these to a private Naga sphere of control. The debated prohibitions show how these things are ‘internally’ debated as well as how they are debated when Indian control is seen to be exerted on these ‘internal’ issues. Actors argue

¹⁸⁹ Clause 1(a) of Article 371-A, a special provision with respect to the State of Nagaland, notes that ‘Notwithstanding anything in this (Indian) Constitution’, no Act of Parliament in respect of ‘religious and social practices of the Nagas’, ‘Naga customary law and procedure’, ‘administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law’, and ‘ownership and transfer of land and its resources’ shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides. <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/371998/> Accessed on 13.12.2023.

for or against these issues that ultimately speak towards constituting a ‘we’ of Nagas (in Nagaland State) as distinct from a ‘them’ of India (Strathern 2004 : xiv-xvii, Kraft 2022: 20). These debates provide a basis for the study of ‘Naga customary law and procedure’ – through the dog meat prohibition; and ‘Naga religious and social practices’ – through the alcohol prohibition.

4.1 NLTP Act – alcohol prohibition

The Nagaland Liquor (Total) Prohibition Act (henceforth NLTP Act) was passed by the Nagaland Legislative Assembly in 1989. This prohibition is often traced to the British colonial enterprise that enabled the American Baptists to start their ‘civilising’ Christian mission among Naga ‘savages’ in the then unadministered region whose land and inhabitants were brought under the rule of these two forces from the early 19th century onwards (Jacobs, Harrison et al. 2012: 24, 152, Thomas 2016: 18-25). The Baptist policies of prohibition at this time focused on rice beer because of its use in non-Christian rituals (Longkumer 2016a); not consuming alcohol became a signifier of a Naga Christian by the 1940s (Eaton 1984: 14). With state power passing into Indian hands in 1947, the Nagaland Baptists began rallying for an alcohol prohibition more generally, and particularly those products that circulated through the market as Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL). In the 1980s, the Naga Mothers’ Association joined forces with the Baptists to make it a ‘social’ and ‘political’ concern (Misra 2017: 116), after IMFL and alcoholism spread across the Naga Hills following the Indo-Naga conflict (Tsuah 2015, Rodrigues 2020). Aided by Article 47 of the Indian Constitution¹⁹⁰, it eventually led the Nagaland State to enact the NLTP Act as an alcohol prohibition in 1989.

In 2020, this alcohol prohibition enables a situated debate. It is presented in the news through actions that some collectives take to implement the prohibition, and as

¹⁹⁰ This provision makes it a duty of the state (central and federal states in the Indian Union) to ‘bring about prohibition’ of ‘intoxicating drinks and drugs’ for raising the public ‘level of nutrition’ and ‘standard of living’. <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1551554/> Accessed on 07.08.2023.

contestations by individuals and other collectives. Arguments for and against the prohibition are both Christian and secular. To make sense of who says what about this issue in *The Morung Express*, I have divided the discussion into sub-sections of different participants who are presented in the news in 2020 – local colonies¹⁹¹, villages, and Naga institutions; individuals; and churches.

4.1.1 Local colonies, villages, institutions

The Morung Express's first report on the alcohol prohibition in 2020 was of a colony in Kohima city protesting 'liquor trade' in the city. On 2 February, a news article was carried on the front page of the newspaper as an anchor piece with the headline 'Citizens protest against liquor trade in Kohima'.

¹⁹¹ In India, urban neighbourhoods are often referred to as colonies.

THE MORNING EXPRESS

ESTD. 2005 THE POWER OF TRUTH

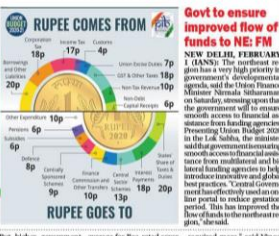
The most important thing is the indigenous people are not vindictive by nature. We are not here to oppress anybody - but to join together... with justice and equality ... EVO MORICE

India steps up farm support, offers tax cuts to revive faltering growth

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 1 (REUTERS) India sought to boost growth in a federal budget on Saturday that raised spending on farms and infrastructure and offered cuts in personal taxes. The measures fell short of market expectations and threatened Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in grappling with the country's slowest growth in a decade, with falling employment, consumption and investment ratcheting up the pressure to revive growth.

The government estimates growth this year to March 31 will slip to 5%, the weakest since the global financial crisis of 2008-09. It also warned an expected rebound the following year might stall at below one percentage point.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, presenting the budget for the financial year beginning April 1, said it will be the largest in the country's history. She also announced a 10% increase in the dividend distribution tax for companies, which will be levied on the company's profits. She also announced a 10% increase in the dividend distribution tax for companies, which will be levied on the company's profits.



How livable is Kohima? Citizens invited to participate in 'Rate Your City' survey



NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 1 (IANS) The northern region has a very high priority in government's smart city agenda, said the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday, announcing special access to financial assistance from funding agencies. Presenting Union Budget 2020 in the Lok Sabha, the minister said the government would increase the number of smart cities from 100 to 150 in the next five years.

The Kohima Smart City Development Limited team during the press conference on February 1. (Morning Photo)

Kohima | February 1

The Kohima Smart City Development Limited (KSCDL) today launched the 'Rate Your City' (RYC) survey from February 1 to February 29. The survey is a first of its kind in the city, where citizens will be invited to rate their city on various parameters. The survey is a first of its kind in the city, where citizens will be invited to rate their city on various parameters.

Sitharaman announced a new personal tax system including cuts for those moving to a capital city. She also announced a 10% increase in the dividend distribution tax for companies, which will be levied on the company's profits.

The budget will also provide a 10% increase in the dividend distribution tax for companies, which will be levied on the company's profits.

UK officially leaves the EU after 47 yrs

LONDON, FEBRUARY 1 (IANS) The UK officially left the European Union (EU) after 47 years of membership and more than three years after it voted to do so in a referendum, finally putting an end to one of the most divisive political issues in the country's history, media reports said on Friday.

Coronavirus death toll hits 259, infects 11,791

BEIJING, FEBRUARY 1 (IANS) China said the death toll from the deadly novel coronavirus in the country has risen to 259, with 11,791 infected cases in 31 provinces.

Citizens protest against liquor trade in Kohima



Kohima | February 1

With authorities failing to curb the sale of liquor, citizens in Kohima have taken to the streets to protest. The protesters are demanding that the government take strict measures to ban the sale of liquor in the city.

Share Your Views

Participate in the Ease of living Perception Survey

IS KOHIMA CITY A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE?

#MyCityMyPride

Scan the QR code for the greater good

Figure 13: Anchor piece of interest (demarcated in purple) on page one of The Morning Express on 2 February 2020.

According to the anchor report, by journalist Atono Tsükrü Kense, the Peraciezie Colony in Kohima held an 'anti-liquor protest' after it 'issued a ban order to 43 liquor outlets within its colony, and w.e.f. February 1 has banned all kinds of alcohol production, store and sale within its jurisdiction'. On the other side of the report, and in the lead piece of the newspaper, the Nagaland State government asks citizens to

participate in making Kohima a ‘smart city’ by asking if it is a ‘great place to live’. Kense’s news report ended thus: ‘With Nagaland struggling to enforce the NLTP Act, albeit unsuccessfully, many view that the Act should be reviewed since it is doing more harm to the people and the economy of the state, rather than having the slightest positive impact on its intended purpose’. In this case, the prohibition is implemented by the Peraciezie Colony, presumably by representatives of its village council that holds state-like administrative powers (Jamir 2011). The report presents contestations to the alcohol prohibition at the colony level through secular concerns related to health, economics and ‘drunkards sleeping on the pavement’¹⁹².

On 3 March, yet another report described a protest in another colony in Kohima. This time youth and women’s unions are ‘taking action’ against ‘illegal IMFL and local brews’. In the report, Indian Manufactured Foreign Liquor (IMFL) and local brews (rice beer and others) are separated, the former produced and circulated through the market from India (and thus cheap), the latter produced locally at home, the original target of missionary prohibition. However, both are equal targets of this particular action in 2020 even though the NLTP Act exempts local rice beers from prohibition. In *The Morung Express*, the Khikha-Rüleizou colony residents are reported as pouring Rs. 3.50 lakh worth of alcohol and local brew down a drain in the presence of students from Kohima Bible College as witnesses and possible participants. This was accompanied by a photograph of the alcohol being poured away for readers to, in turn, witness.

¹⁹² It is also a ‘moral’ concern, but not a structural concern for why people drink so much, drink widely available IMFL or why they cannot get home when they do.



Khikha-Rüleizou colony takes action against 'illegal IMFL and local brews'

KOHIAMA, MARCH 2 (MeXN): The Khikha-Rüleizou Youth Organisation (KRYO) and Women Organisation (KRWOW) today destroyed seized liquor, below Industries Office, Kohiama.

KRYO president Apele Suokhris said that seized liquor worth Rs 3.50 lakh was destroyed by the two bodies in presence of residents of the colony and students of Kohima Bible College.

He said that in view of the unchecked and rampant sales of IMFL and local brews through ghumtis (panshops) and residences in Khikha-Rüleizou Colony, Kohiama a joint operation was carried out by the two bodies of the colony for 2 consecutive nights and seized a huge quantity of IMFL in around 13 shops and residences.

He said the illegal liquor business has been going on openly for the last few years, however, the State Government and the Excise Department has failed miserably to check it.

Open sales of IMFL in the colony has attracted many negative elements and criminal activities have increased alarmingly disturbing the peaceful environment in the colony beyond tolerance, he said.

Therefore, he said, having a sense of helplessness at the totally inefficient machinery of the State government the Youth and the Women body of the colony was compelled to take action against the illegal sales of IMFL and local brews in order to get rid of the evil



Residence disposing seized 'illegal IMFL and local brews' in Khikha-Rüleizou colony, Kohiama.

menace prevalent in the colony.

Despite giving prior information and warning through a notification banning sale of liquor within the colony from February 22 last, no cooperation was extended, hence, seizure was carried out and they were also fined, he added.

Advisor, Rhüezou Lhisepliko Krotto, Sosino Kesieze said that the colony bodies initially made a humble approach requesting all those en-

gaged in the illegal business to discontinue but since they failed to comply, force had to be used.

During the destructions carried out today, they poured the IMFL bottles, breezer and cane beer into the drainage and flushed with water.

The two bodies while affirming to continue such checking cautioned that stern action would be initiated against the defaulters.

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The two bodies while affirming to continue such checking cautioned that stern action would be initiated against the defaulters.

25 from Nagaland awarded Teacher Innovation Award

KOHIAMA, MARCH 2 (MeXN):

A total of 25 government teachers from Nagaland were accorded the National Teacher Award for Zero Investment Innovative Ideas under the programme-Zero Investment Innovations for Educational Initiatives (ZIEI), an initiative of Sri Aurobindo Society and HDFC Bank under the nationwide education transformation programme 'Rupantar'.

ZIEI is one of the first and largest ever initiatives of India to honour those teachers who are bringing about a change at the grassroots through simple yet effective innovations to improve the quality and reach of education at zero or minimal cost.

Out of the 25 teachers selected from Nagaland, 14 awardees including Thejangülie Kirha, GMS Thekraijama, Shyerhulle Keat, GMS Lero Chazou, Khrilecheinu GMS Merhülieta, Kekhriengülie Khezheie, GPS Tekhüba, Kedeu Esther Kiso, GPS Kidima, Chubalemba Aier, GMS Officer's Hill, Adituo Dzüvichü, GPS Kipfüzha Kigwema, Neilazonuo Liezietsu, GMS Merhülieta, Vihoto Khanyo, GPS P. Khei Viswema, Adzüzie Keise, GMS Botsa,



Some of the recipient of the National Teacher Award for Zero Investment Innovative Ideas under the programme-Zero Investment Innovations for Educational Initiatives during the felicitation ceremony at Dogra Hall, IIT New Delhi held on March 1.

Theyiesanyü Kevin Sote, GIS Khonoma, Vikehietuo Victor, GFS Khonoma, R. Mosal Longkumer, GMS Forest Colony, and Lilavati Kirini Kachari, GPS CWSN attended the grand felicitation ceremony at Dogra Hall, IIT New Delhi on March 1.

They were felicitated by the Minister of Human Resource Development, Government of India, Ramesh Pokhriyal.

The programme was also at-

tended by the Minister of Rural Development, Government of India, Narendra Singh Tomar and Minister of State for HRD, Sanjay Shamrao Dhore, who exhorted the teachers in 3 different sessions. Altogether 900 teachers from all over India were selected for this year's national award. The most effective best practices chosen every year are published in Innovations Handbook Navachar Pustika

and systematically scaled up to reach thousands of schools in the country.

It may be mentioned here that Sri Aurobindo Society, which was founded in 1960 by the mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry India, is a global, non-profit NGO working throughout the world for individual perfection, social transformation and human unity in diversity.

Figure 14: Page two lead story on 3 March 2020 demarcated with purple lines.

According to the report, fed up with the 'totally inefficient machinery of the State government', the two unions decided to act 'against the illegal sales of IMFL and local brews in order to get rid of the evil menace prevalent in the colony'. Here, the presence of students from a local bible school as 'witness' help legitimise the effort that is shown to be taken as action against an 'evil menace' – in other words, alcohol trade and consumption is presented as an issue measurable on a value scale of 'good' versus 'evil'. The rhetoric enables the local institution to take juridical actions¹⁹³ including seizing and destroying the alcohol and fining 'evil' traders of alcohol. While the scale of spatial locality here is the Kikha-Rüleizou, its linking to the 'religion' of biblical or Christian networks like the Kohima Bible College makes it a relevant issue for the colony to govern. The former's scope, if read as geography-related 'indigeneity', allows the issue of prohibition to become a pan-Nagaland State issue, with Kohima being the capital of

¹⁹³ It is not just rhetoric but also the recognition of such city 'colonies' as 'villages' that allow them to make authoritative decisions and act on them within the boundaries provided by the Nagaland Village Councils Act, 1978. The journalist Merina Chishi has termed Dimapur a 'city of villages', a description also applicable to other cities in Nagaland.

Nagaland. Its scope is up-scalable to the extent of Nagaland State because of the legal boundaries of the NLTP Act and the limits it sets on who may be recognised as a legitimate juridical actor – it may not become an issue, at least in this case, for the Naga nation at large for the same reason¹⁹⁴. In my understanding, it articulates Naganess from the ground up – an urban colony (indigeneity) working with a local Christian network (religion). The potentials of such articulations are restricted to the scale of ‘Nagas of Nagaland’¹⁹⁵. Religion’s scope is also restricted here. The prohibition is linked explicitly to Christianity and not to ‘tradition’ or ‘culture’ or ‘indigenous religion’. Taking this cultural or indigenous religion perspective may enable a different set of potentials for the alcohol prohibition, including the possible lifting of it¹⁹⁶. The alcohol prohibition works to restrict scale and scope, enabling ensembles like Naganess to be articulated here to a maximal scale of Nagaland State, a minimal scale of Kikha-Rüleizou (or Peraciezie Colony in the example above), on the one hand of geography-specific ‘indigeneity’. As ‘religion’, it is linked to a maximal and minimal scale of Christianity. Indigeneity here is movable from colony to state scales without losing potentials for asserting control over the prohibition. Religion is not movable and can be articulated only to Christianity.

Reports on local institutions acting on the alcohol prohibition are common throughout the year, and the combinations they use to articulate the issue seem similar. It is through their recognition as ‘villages’ that they are legitimated as ‘Naga’. Forming the foundation of Naga claims to indigeneity, the Naga village is often described as the

¹⁹⁴ Unless perhaps articulated by actors like the Naga revolutionary groups.

¹⁹⁵ This is an emerging category of indigeneity in Nagaland State that seeks to articulate Naganess to the uppermost geographical scale of Nagaland State. This has been articulated by many civil society organisations including the Nagaland Tribes Council, or nationalist organisations like the Working Group of the Naga National Political Groups. The purpose has been to contest Nagaland State-linked ‘indigeneity’ (in terms of owning communal land within the state and accessing welfare benefits from Nagaland State) of those who are Nagas elsewhere, like Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh or Myanmar. However, whether on a Nagaland State scale or beyond, the village is an important source of building Naganess from below.

¹⁹⁶ To argue that alcohol (local grain based and home made brews) are a part of Naga social and customary practices could invoke guarantees of Article 371-A leading to the alcohol prohibition to be read as an infringement of rights guaranteed by the special provision.

pinnacle of Naga-belonging and self-determination, as the ‘village republic’ (Luithui 2001, Wouters 2017) and as ‘village-state’ compared with Greek city states (Longchari 2016: 205, 211). Implementing such things as prohibitions further strengthens and enables their authority, making them historical and contemporary, through the articulation of ‘indigeneity’ and ‘religion’ in these combinations and scales. Their targets are not only the Indian manufactured liquor, but all types of alcohol, moving their potentials from the political (ground up indigeneity) to religious (good versus evil).

Another example is a report on 14 September published on page three with the headline, ‘Villages in Chümoukedima town circle urge govt to revisit NLTP Act’. Pointing to the ‘powerful syndicate network where national workers, excise and police personnel manning the check gates are also involved [in the alcohol trade] due to hefty sums paid to them on a regular basis’, the villages in the area termed these actors ‘parasites’ and asked ‘the NBCC [Nagaland Baptist Church Council] to put in concerted and continuous efforts to keep pressuring the state government and also prepare an action plan for the church to continually fight against such activities’. Even though sacred language is not in use here, the villages find the NBCC to be the only authority that can pressurise the ‘syndicate network’ of all other actors that have legal (and political) mandates in Nagaland State. These may be read as ways to control the political economy of Nagaland through the solidarity networks of villages and churches to challenge the network of market forces that break the rules of the alcohol prohibition.

4.1.2 Individuals

Individual, non-journalist, commentators whose opinions are published in *The Morung Express* use religious language, arguing both for and against the alcohol prohibition.

On 24 February, *The Morung Express* published a piece titled ‘On liquor prohibition in Nagaland’ by Kahuto Chishi Sumi on the newspaper’s ‘public discourse’ that was fitted into a sub-section of page 10, which also carried sports news. The newspaper offered no introduction to the author, but he is not a member/worker of the newspaper due to the piece’s publication in the ‘public discourse’ section – the newspaper’s own position is

stated at the bottom of the piece: ‘Readers may please note that the contents of the articles, letters and opinions published do not reflect the outlook of this paper nor of the Editor in any form’.

Kahuto Chishi Sumi states the purpose of the piece to be ‘to spread awareness among the people of Nagaland’ but the piece itself is addressed to ‘the proponents of liquor prohibition’, which for Sumi include the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), and other church bodies, the Legislators of the Nagaland State Assembly, and the Dimapur Naga Students’ Union (DNSU). The author cites the example of the ‘American experiment with prohibition’ and points to the failure of the NLTP Act, allowing the flourishing of a black market and aided mafia control –the reference is to Nagaland’s political economy. The author is most annoyed with ‘Financial Freedom Fighters who, under the banner ‘Nagaland for Christ’, demand an astronomical cash deposit and monthly/yearly payments from any and all who wish to sell liquor.’ Here, the author is referring to the Naga revolutionary groups, their cadres, and the system of ‘taxation’ that sustain the ‘governments’ they run. Here is a scale of the Naga nation at work in the alcohol prohibition debate which is often kept to the Nagas of Nagaland scale, as described earlier. Sumi links the ‘underground governments’ with corruption in order to challenge their hold over Nagaland’s economy through trade in alcohol. Here, the upscaling of the discussion to a Naga national scale enables a contestation of the prohibition not just linked to the NBCC and Nagaland State, but to the mainframe of ‘Nagaland for Christ’ that is often used by revolutionary groups to legitimate their control over politics and the market. Naga revolutionary groups are redesignated ‘underground’, reminding the reader of their current status that is not on par with the state government.

PUBLIC DISCOURSE

For attention of Nagaland CM

T... present scenario in the affairs of appointment procedures in our state Nagaland has become an imbroglio. In our own opinion there is 100 percent truth that all the unemployed educated youth...

On liquor prohibition in Nagaland

Katolu Chris Sumi... The purpose of this essay is to spread awareness among the people of Nagaland. It addresses three entities in particular: namely, the proponents of liquor prohibition, especially those in the Nagaland Baptist Church Council and other Church bodies, who advocate it, the Legislature of the Nagaland State Assembly and the Executive of the Dimasup Naga Students' Union.

Rising star Jyotika wins fencing gold at KIUG games

BHUBANESWAR, FEBRUARY 22 (ANI) - Size does not always matter. Ask Himachal Pradesh's Jyotika Dutta, the open specialist in the Indian fencing world by name. Petite, lean and more often than not the shorter fencer in a competition, she has rarely come in her way of over-weighing and bigger opponents.



The 22-year-old underdog had growing stature in the sport on Sunday, clinching the first gold for Guru Nanak Dev University in Amritsar in Punjab in the fencing competition of the Khelo India University Games here.

Jesus seals win for Manchester City at Leicester

Manchester City's Gabriel Jesus scores their first goal. (Reuters/Photo)

The other end Schmeichel made great saves from Kevin de Bruyne, Agniero and Mahrez while Agniero also had a goalkick out for offence. Danish keeper Schmeichel's block on Agniero's penalty means Manchester City have now failed to score five of their last seven in all competitions.

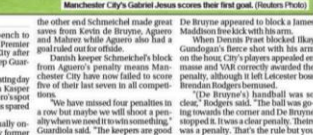


Figure 15: A 'public discourse' - also known as 'public space' - on page 10 of The Morning Express on 24 February 2020.

Additionally, Sumi tells the readers of his own 'recovering addict and alcoholic' status, thereby making him - at least for a local reader - a legitimate commentator on the subject given Nagaland's history with conflict, addiction, and activism leading to the current legal prohibition. 'The only section', Sumi notes, that 'seem to get a kick out of banning alcohol are sanctimonious, nosey parker 'Christians', who have no clue about Christ or Christian principles'. He demands that legislators 'lift prohibition' as 'Imposing prohibition is not a blessing, nor is lifting it a curse. You will be judged by God and Christ, not by the Pharisees and Sadducees in our midst, and according to whether you benefited or harmed society.'

‘blessings’ and ‘curse’; God and Christ are relevant in so far as ‘judgment’ based on social benefits and harms are concerned. Sumi’s language is Christian in the sense of using an accepted ‘cultural toolbox’ in Nagaland associated with the alcohol prohibition (Martin 2017: 106-8); he uses the same source that empowers the NBCC, that is the Bible and the notion of Nagaland for Christ, to argue *against* the prohibition instead of for it.

Other individuals argue *for* the alcohol prohibition as a ‘spiritual’ and ‘Christian’ concern. For instance, a piece by Z Lohe published on page 10 of 6 March states, ‘The liquor prohibition has to do with both physical and spiritual wellbeing of the Nagas and more so as Christians’. On 17 December, a piece titled ‘A Night of Disco-Braving the Odds of Prohibition’ by Keduovilie Linyü is published in the ‘public space’ on page five. It states, ‘In a Christian state, a high profile leader would struggle with power drunk during Christmas...What is important to note is that average Nagas living standard rose during the years, and spiritual decadence is upon them’. Linyü connects economic growth, power and ‘spiritual’ backsliding; here, spirituality does ‘moral boundary work’ as ‘setting out distinctions that allow status comparisons based on qualities judged as virtuous’ (Lamont 1992, Ammerman 2013: 275). The church and alcohol prohibition are both assumed to be virtuous, with Christianity setting moral boundaries through a culturally integrated language. The lapse in the prohibition’s implementation is seen as falling outside these boundaries, attracting classifiers of the current situation as ‘hypocrisy’. While Kahuto Chishi Sumi uses the biblical toolbox – pharisees, sadducees – to drive home a point on hypocrisy, calling then for getting rid of the alcohol prohibition (and church control) to ‘save’ Nagaland, Z Lohe and Keduovilie Linyü use a ‘spiritual’ argument, reminding Nagas of their Christian commitments related to morality, belief and sacred pacts that emphasise how the alcohol prohibition makes such a structure, manned by the church, work. The appeal in this case is to the authority of the churches, not God.

Hypocrisy seems to be a theme running through the debated prohibition. ‘Hypocrisy’ is presented as contradictions that include calls to an individual-responsibility framework

within ‘Nagaland for Christ’. The presentation of the alcohol prohibition in *The Morung Express* as ‘hypocritical’ may be read through Webb Keane’s ‘process of disentangling’ – an effort to correct what has been made to appear illicit¹⁹⁷; that which he terms as ‘critical’ to the ‘constitution of a modern subject and its place within an emergent political economy’ (Keane 2007: 224). Entanglements, in the case of Nagaland’s alcohol prohibition debate, are produced at two levels. At the level of the individual, people drink alcohol, and they are Baptist Christian. On the institutional level, churches exceed the perceived limits of their control (private, inside the church) into the political economy. Debates in *The Morung Express* point to a process of disentangling wherein both these levels are highlighted in terms of bringing individual freedom and institutional accountability. The focus, however, is not so much on the individual Christians – though their deterioration to ‘hypocrisy’ in drinking alcohol while being Baptist Christians is lamented – as much as on the churches and church-like institutions¹⁹⁸. *The Morung Express* manages to shift the focus of the issue from the ‘alcohol’ to the ‘prohibition’ – from *what* is governed to *who* governs. This is what links the prohibition with the moral governance of collectives, like churches and church-like institutions, on the one hand, and rationales of the state and other capitalists to maximise economic profits on the other. By asking ‘who governs’ (the prohibition), the newspaper brings church and church-like institutions under the spotlight of public accountability (discussed further in the next section). The expectation is that there ought to be justifiable rationales behind regulating an object that may, if unregulated in this form, be profitable to the local economy (Jasanoff 2009). The process of disentanglement also involves ‘hypocrisy’ – pointed out by individual commentators – when the moral concern and economic concerns are addressed through the common framework of ‘Nagaland for Christ’. The space for who governs the prohibition is then filled by the state, the churches, the civil society all working together without any mechanisms to

¹⁹⁷ By American missionaries in the context of 20th century christianisation and by Baptist Christians in Nagaland today.

¹⁹⁸ Like, in this case, the Nagaland State, ‘underground governments’ and the many Naga revolutionary and political parties that work under the banner of ‘Nagaland for Christ’.

hold them accountable except through individual building of a ‘hypocrisy’ framework through participation in public debates.

4.1.3 Naga unions and churches

Groups and collectives that claim to represent pan-Naga interests are often presented in the news pages of *The Morung Express* as supporting the alcohol prohibition. Some of them are implementors of the NLTP Act, alongside the police in Nagaland State, while others present common concerns that the prohibition highlights.

In 2020, the discussions in *The Morung Express* heated up when the Dimapur Naga Students’ Union (DNSU) served the excise department of the Government of Nagaland with an ‘ultimatum’. According to the report published in *The Morung Express* on 21 February, the union ‘demanded’ that the government either act against the sale of alcohol in Nagaland or face the consequences. Such ultimatums by Naga unions to the government are common in Nagaland. Considered legitimate authorities – sometimes even more so than the Nagaland State – they keep the government accountable on behalf of Naga citizens, and sometimes become governance units themselves by checking and shutting down ‘illegal’ liquor shops.

On 25 February, the government’s Excise Department responded to the DNSU’s initial ‘ultimatum’. The news piece was published on the front page of *The Morung Express* under the headline ‘Will take immediate action to curb flow of liquor: Excise department’. The same report notes that the Dimapur Ao Baptist Pastor’s Fellowship now supports the DNSU’s ‘demand to shut down liquor outlets’. ‘Shutting down of liquor shops is a long felt call for every right thinking citizen; particularly it is the cry of churches all over the State’, noted the Fellowship in a press release. It also termed the DNSU’s activities a ‘mission’ for which it expressed ‘prayers and support’, asking all churches to pray for them.

Here we see the ability of the DNSU to not just claim authority by enforcing the alcohol prohibition – and contest the state – but also to become recognised by the Dimapur Ao Baptist Pastor’s Fellowship as an authority. The Fellowship’s indigeneity is related to

their Ao identity, while their religion is related to Baptist Christianity. As Ao Christians, their classification of DNSU's activities as 'mission' is important as a sanction on behalf of Christians and churches in Nagaland State. It is the pastors who work to upscale actions taken locally in Dimapur to be applicable to all Nagas in Nagaland State (and to Baptist Christians in general) by turning it into a Christian mission. This method of reinforcing each others' authorities is a two-way street. On 26 February, *The Morung Express* published its lead news item on page five, a local news page, titled 'NBCC urged to deliberate NLTP Act'. In the report, the Naga Tribal Union Chümoukedima Town asks the NBCC to 'seriously deliberate' the 'rampant sale of illegal liquor in Dimapur'. Legitimising the authority of the church over the political economy of Dimapur, the Naga union links the state government's excise department, police personnel, 'some national workers', and the Army (presumably the Indian Army in this case) through their lack of action to control corrupt practices. The report ends thus:

The time is ripe for a great uprising, a time to start a revolution to uproot social evils and do away with all sorts of corruption in our society.

A temporal point is presented here – time is ripe – to move from 'evil' and 'corruption' towards a better future for 'our' society; this responsibility is pinned on a pan Nagaland church union like the NBCC. It is not just the NBCC, but its affiliates like the Christian Forum Dimapur, that are also presented as showcasing the alcohol prohibition as a 'noble' concern that will address such worldly and secular concerns as 'violence, social conflicts, law and order'. In *The Morung Express*, thus, Christian institutions come to be linked to social concerns through village and city specific organisations tying them up with concerns related to 'social evils' among Nagas in Nagaland State.

Often, it is the language of 'stakeholdership' that makes these movements across scales possible and controllable. *The Morung Express* published a front page report on 5 March titled 'NMA calls for review of NLTP Act'. In the report, the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA), a women-led civil society organisation, asked the Nagaland State government to 'initiate a proper debate on this with the NBCC and all concerned stakeholders'. Reminding the readers of the need for prohibition at a 'certain stage in Naga history',

the NMA stated: ‘Prohibition back then was trying to address a social issue in the midst of armed conflict and people dying due to alcoholism’. The NLTP Act, here, becomes a way to address ‘Naga history’, with the mothers’ association and the church council considered primary ‘stakeholders’ in articulating Naganess by addressing the social and political issues that were claimed to be resolved through the prohibition. The language of ‘stakeholders’¹⁹⁹ enables the prohibition to be re-scaled and re-scoped, and ultimately re-articulated, in several different ways but most importantly by focusing on ‘who governs’ the prohibition by laying claim to who the ‘primary stakeholder’ may be. It is not an equal ground for participation of ‘all’ – it is for some to govern. Who these ‘some’ may be is presented during an event conducted by *The Morung Express* that contests the alcohol prohibition by contesting who may control it. A report on this event hosted by *The Morung Express* is published in the newspaper on 15 March.

¹⁹⁹ It is not clear to me how the corporate ‘stakeholder’ language entered the Naga discourse, but it is possible that it has something to do with the ceasefire politics – following the current ceasefires between the Government of India and different Naga sovereignty groups – that often treat the peace process as a management enterprise, managing the different groups and peoples involved, to maintain or challenge status quo at any given time. Those who participate in these peace processes, and are considered legitimate actors to participate in them, are often referred to as ‘stakeholders’.



THE MORUNG EXPRESS

ESTD. 2005

THE POWER OF TRUTH

Wisdom ceases to be wisdom when it becomes too proud to weep, too grave to laugh, and too selfish to seek other than itself — *Kahlil Gibran*

NLTP Act: To be, or not to be Stay, repeal or democratize the debate for review?

Morung Express News

Dimapur | March 14

Debate over the contentious liquor prohibition law in Nagaland has for the most part pivoted around revoking or letting it remain. Successive governments over the years have tried only to meet premature deaths in the face of opposition from the church.

But there is still room to arrive at a conclusion albeit through constructive dialogue.

Based on this premise, on March 14, Heritage Publishing House, Morung Foundation and *The Morung Express* collaboratively presented 'The Conversation on: Should the NLTP Act continue in Nagaland?' styled on the lines of an interactive panel discussion at the DB-IDL, Dimapur.

The personalities in the panel were K Ela, Director of Prodigals' Home, Kevitsuo Angami, Additional Commissioner of Excise, Dr Pangermangha Kichu, Professor of Society, Christian Ethics and Contemporary Theology at Oriental Theological Seminary, Dr Salkyu Sangam, Assistant Professor, Faculty of International Relations and Political Science, North East Christian University, and noted social commentator Kahuto Chishi Sumi, who is also the Akaku (headman) of Hevhe village.

As opposed to the conventional two-way 'for and against' debate, the discussion today also brought up ideas that sought to provide means for the two diverging opinions to arrive at a middle point.

In the words of Prodigals' Home Director Ela, "There should be very honest and heart to heart discussions on this. We tend to blame the government and the church but we are also part of it."

While emphasising the need for a collective and candid dissection of



Attendants during the conversation on the NLTP Act held at DB-IDL Hall, Dimapur on March 14. (Morung Photo by Soresimh Mahong)

the issue, she said that continuing with the blame game would only result in more lives being lost and more families breaking apart. According to her, the debates have so far been isolated, limited to certain agencies and organizations. "If we are to continue with the Act, we have to revisit the Act and look at it from the aspect of making a law that which really makes individuals more responsible."

Echoing Ela's view, Dr Kichu said that the debate must be brought to the public domain and the NLTP treated in the context of a 'public property.' "It cannot be spoken of in

isolation," he said. He observed that the debate has been limited to hurling criticisms and that "oppositional discourse" will not work. While calling for a respectful approach, he said, "We have to create an environment for discussion. There has to be a process. If the church is not coming out, the citizens must democratize the process."

On the part of the church, he said that as the driving force behind the Act, it should also be sensitive to the opposing views and the ground reality and forthcoming enough to initiate dialogue.

For Dr Sangtam, the debate should not be limited to the question of "for or against" alone but rather a self-questioning, introspective one. "We are missing the point. We must rather be asking what makes the people consume alcohol. Alcohol does not make a society good or bad, it is the individuals," he said.

He broached a consequential scenario, as in, the effects it would have on the people if the event the Act is repealed. "If it is lifted we may get some revenue. But a little revenue more valuable than human lives?"

As an enforcement officer, Kev-

seno Angami highlighted the challenges faced by the Excise department against liquor proliferation in Nagaland. Nevertheless, he maintained that the department is doing whatever it can with the means at its disposal. He though admitted that the state is losing revenue.

If the state is to continue with the Act, he said that identifying the people running the illicit liquor trade is crucial. He added that there is also the issue of rehabilitation, especially marginalized women resorting to selling liquor to make ends meet. "We have to be sensitive and also look at the aspect of rehabilitating such people."

Kahuto Chishi Sumi was rather point blank in his views challenging the moral posture of the church as far as alcohol is concerned. According to him, consuming alcohol is a matter of choice and the Act of law that the church lobbied for, has denied the right of choice to the individual.

Pointing to the open sale of liquor, he said that Prohibition has only exacerbated a problem it sought to cure. He questioned as to why the church is reluctant to admit howsoever well intentioned it may have been originally.

"It is not a question of whether we can improve the Act. It has to be abrogated," he said.

Further, members in the audience referred to statistics pointing to an increase in the demand for certain pharmaceutical drugs (for recreational purpose) as a result of the NLTP Act.

Akum Longchari, Publisher, *The Morung Express*, in his concluding remarks called for "democratizing the (NLTP) discourse." "So far, it has been centered around certain institutions. However, it needs to go to the people because they are the primary stakeholders."

One duped with promise of job with airline

Morung Express News

Dimapur | March 14

Agiri from Dimapur was reportedly duped of cash amounting to nearly Rs 2 lakhs, falling prey to a fraudulent call promising a job with an airline.

On March 14, a girl came to Dimapur Airport with her parents to fly by a "non-existent Indigo flight" from Dimapur to Guwahati.

She was carrying an appointment letter with the logo of Indigo Airlines, signed "For Indigo Airlines, Airport Authority of India."

According to a copy of the 'appointment letter' provided by the Dimapur Airport Director Mughavi Zhimo, the girl was appointed as an 'independent full time job as a chair person of Indigo Airlines, Airport Authority of India.' Additional Commissioner of Police (ADCP), Rebo T Aye told *The Morung Express* that over the past two to three months, the girl had received a call claiming to be from the Indigo head office, promising a job with the airline. Preliminary statements revealed that the girl was asked to deposit some money in a bank account for securing the job. After the unsuspecting victim deposited the money amounting to around Rs 2 lakh, she received an email which contained the appointment letter along with three e-tickets. The ticket was for their flight from Dimapur to Guwahati, where the girl was to undergo training from March 15 to April 30.

But on reaching the airport, the girl realized that she had been duped, as the flight tickets turned out to be fake.

Meanwhile, Dimapur Police has taken suo motu cognizance of the case and an enquiry has been initiated, Rebo T Aye informed.

The ADCP said that this is not the first case of people falling prey to fraudulent calls and scams. Many cases go unreported, he said, adding that public should be more alert and also report such cases.

An official of the Indigo Airlines told *The Morung Express* that the case has been handed over to the concerned department, and refused to comment further.

The Dimapur Airport Director said that such cases show the ignorance of the public and appealed to not fall for such fraudulent job offers.

REFLECTIONS By Sandeep Ngulie

COVID-19: CSOs raise concerns on public safety

India declares COVID-19 a national 'disaster'

NEW DELHI, MARCH 14 (AP) — India's health ministry on Sunday declared COVID-19 patients a national disaster, a move that could allow the government to divert resources to the fight against the virus.

Figure 16: Page one lead of *The Morung Express* on 15 March 2020.

The report of a Morung Lecture held on the issue proposes the shifting of who the 'primary' stakeholders should be and how may this be decided through democratic decision-making²⁰⁰. The language of stakeholdership is a reminder that *The Morung Express* is part of a social stakeholdership model with, as has been described through African media systems, 'national orientations and an ideological base that is rooted in' and linked to local actors and politics (Olawuyi 2012: 93). *The Morung Express*

²⁰⁰ *The Morung Express*, in its news items, never clearly proposes who these stakeholders may be, instead focusing on the process – that is, democratic decision-making – that ought to be used to decide. For this purpose, it invites an array of speakers from theological institutions, social work organisations and the 'head' of a village, Kahuto Chishi Sumi, who is a vocal critic of the alcohol prohibition and its main agents in Nagaland (one of his pieces has been explored in the previous section).

participates in the articulation of a shared domain of Naganess that renders the newspaper a site of struggle²⁰¹. Issues such as the alcohol prohibition point to the terrain of such a struggle that *The Morung Express* engages with. In this case, it challenges the current ‘stakeholdership’ model of existing collaborations that do not permit the alcohol prohibition to move in too many different directions, as it cannot be challenged on different geographical scales and its positions are located on extreme value scales of ‘good’ and ‘evil’. I return to this discussion in chapter five.

What do the newspaper reports indicate about these existing collaborations? The NMA, for instance, chastises the Nagaland State government for holding a consultation on the NLTP Act without the NBCC. Pointing to history, the mothers’ union reminds the state government of how the churches union’s advocacy led to the NLTP Act²⁰². Much like the cooperation between the Dimapur Naga Students’ Union and the Dimapur Ao Baptist Pastors Fellowship in the previous example, here we see an upscaled version of a similar collaboration which also forms the historical context of the current prohibition in Nagaland, that is between the NBCC and the NMA. The mothers build links between local issues and common and ‘national’ Naga concerns (Banerjee 2000, Vamuzo 2011: 208-9, Deka 2016, Manchanda and Kakran 2017: 67). They are moral networks of indigeneity with ‘mothers’ symbolic of care for all children, particularly related to those who are victims of structural pressures that led to alcoholism spreading in Nagaland. Churches and civil society cooperate with each other particularly on the alcohol prohibition, bringing together Naganess, indigeneity and religion into one discussion – this collaboration is not necessarily the case at another time or over other issues²⁰³. The NMA articulates the alcohol prohibition to social necessities, expanding its scope to pan Naganess of general moral concerns, but not letting it flow beyond this scale (into the Northeast, for instance). The NBCC articulates a Christian framework, but through its

²⁰¹ A point I return to in chapter six.

²⁰² The main church council in Nagaland passed its first resolution for an alcohol prohibition in 1962. It sought state sanction on alcohol over the years, also through its women’s wing. <https://www.nbcc-nagaland.org/history/> Accessed on 20.11.2023.

²⁰³ In 2020, for instance, they don’t collaborate on the dog meat prohibition.

link to the NLTP Act, applicable only to Nagaland State. On its own, the NBCC had been unable to push a law against alcohol – biblical or religious articulations were not enough to push legal sanction as seen through its anti-alcohol advocacy from the 1960s till the 1980s. Established in 1984, the NMA joined hands with them and connected the issue of prohibition to peace in the context of the Indo-Naga conflict. The churches were the first to have used the term ‘political rum’²⁰⁴ to stress the use of IMFL (particularly rum) by Indian security forces in the conflict (Nibedon 1978, Joshi 2012). The NMA linked the issue of alcohol to the current historical, social and political context through an advocacy campaign that included prevention of violence, drugs, trafficking in women and setting up ‘reformation’ centres (Haksar 1985, Misra 2002), building a strong case for state intervention and legal sanction. The NBCC matched these with fasting programmes that led up to the NLTP Act being passed in 1989 (Rodrigues 2020). Collaboration and unionising of such actions, actors and institutions are, thus, one of the modes through which Naganess is articulated as time, space, advocacy and subject specific ‘unities’.

How the NBCC’s governing potentials make it a significant ‘stakeholder’ may be seen through a piece published on 17 December, the lead news item on page two with the headline, ‘Churches need to work with stakeholder[s] to implement NLTP Act effectively’. The piece reports on some of the important issues around prohibition that the churches in Nagaland hope to continue their engagement with.

²⁰⁴ <https://www.nbcc-nagaland.org/history/> Accessed on 21.11.2023. This wasn’t the only ‘political’ cause that the NBCC took up. It also runs the ‘Clean Election Campaign’ in Nagaland to reduce corruption in the electoral process in Nagaland.

'Churches need to work with stakeholder to implement NLTP Act effectively'

DIMAPUR, DECEMBER 16 (MEXN): "Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act (NLTP) 1989 is an important issue to be discussed and churches need to work together with the experts, civil societies and government to implement the act scientifically and effectively."

This was observed by Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), General Secretary and Joint Christian Forum Nagaland (JCFN), Chairman, Rev Dr Zelhoo Keyho during the consultative meeting cum pre-Christmas programme jointly organised by Christian Forum Dimapur (CFD) and JCFN on December 15 with the theme 'Heal Nagaland'.

"Church needs to collaborate with various stakeholders to develop some practical strategies to make the Act implemented effectively," Rev Keyho observed in his keynote address while stating, "We need to admit that the government and the church have failed to act upon the Act systematically and effectively. The Church cannot hold on to the Act without doing anything systematically, professionally and intelligently."

Church need to take criticism positively and constructively. "The time has come for all of us to especially the churches, government, civil society organizations all to work together to make the dream of the people of Nagaland a reality," he added.

A press release from CFD stated that the programme was organised with the objective to discuss on various issues such as Church response to Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act of 1989, Church response to unemployment & youth issues in Nagaland, Church response to present political situation in Nagaland.



Some of the participants of the consultative meeting cum pre-Christmas programme jointly organised by Christian Forum Dimapur and Joint Christian Forum Nagaland on December 15.

During the occasion, two panel discussions were also held with the following panelist: Maingwati Aier, Former Deputy Commissioner Dimapur and Commissioner of Excise Dimapur, Dr Sedevi Angami, Director of CIHSR, James Ngullie (representative on behalf of the Churches contribution, Yanbemo Lotha, Associate Pastor, Lotha Baptist Church, Dimapur and Rev Dr Paphino, Advisory, CFD, Dr Fr C P Anto, Secretary CFD moderated the panel discussion.

In the discussion, Moanwati Aier presented the statistics about various states in India implementing liquor prohibition. He mentioned states like Kerala, Gujarat, Manipur, Mizoram and Bihar are performing better than Nagaland "because they have very stringent measures laws and defaulters are severely punished." He said, "Like any other social issues, alcoholism is also another serious social evil." Aier explained the challenges and issues and also shared the strategies to combat the issue effectively.

Dr Sedevi Angami, Director, CIHSR presented on the alcohol hazards and its effects on the life of the individuals and society. In his talk, Dr Sedevi warned the future consequences on children and youth if the Act is lifted. He mentioned

various strategies to help the Churches and civil society to fight the issue effectively.

"In order to bring effective implementation of the Act, we need to have good governance, dynamic leadership in the local and state level," he asserted and also to the

churches in order to effectively respond to the various issues, he suggested that church needs proper curriculum for spiritual and social activities. He also strongly spoke about non-discriminatory approach and the need to teach to the children and youth and the need to overcome tribalism issues.

Rev James Ngullie briefed the initiatives, activities and various programmes conducted by various churches in response to the NLTP Act.

Yanbemo Lotha highlights the various youth related issues, challenges and how to respond positively to resolve the issues by various churches in the state. He shared that around 21.5% youths are unemployed in Nagaland. Therefore he urged the church to be an agent for the youth unemployment and a facilitator for helping them to find meaningful life. He also lamented that "Nagaland churches are focusing on outside mission rather than helping our own youths who are unemployed."

Rev Moses Murry, Chairman, CFD welcomed the response to the

political situation of the state. The gathering decided to pray for unity and reconciliation among all the political groups to come together and work for lasting peace and sustainable development. He mentioned that the unique history of the Nagas need to be respected and solution should not bring any more further escalation of violent conflicts among the people of God. He spoke about the proposed action plan.

Short speeches were given by Naga Women Hoho represented by Eke Zsou, Dimapur Naga Student Union was DNSU was represented by Nupato K Chishi and Nagaland NGO Forum was represented by Dr Hesheto all appreciated the initiative of the Churches in this regard.

A Christmas message was given by Rev Fr Chacko Karinthayil. Rev Dr P Dozo, Advisor, CFD pronounced invocation and Lanakum did the benediction. Rita Kikon, Secretary, Women Committee CFD chaired the programme.

It ended with a plan of action and to form a participatory and inclusive working committee under the leadership of Moanwati Aier.

NDPP 9th Kohima Town A/C conducts social work

Figure 17: First half of page two of The Morung Express on 16 December 2020 with the full lead of interest.

The event was organised in the format of a 'consultative meeting cum pre-Christmas' event by the Christian Forum Dimapur (CFD) and the Joint Christian Forum Nagaland with the theme 'Heal Nagaland', with the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) in attendance. While the collaboration between the churches and civil society institutions that was previously discussed is presented, participants in this report rarely use the language of 'sin' and 'evil' or other biblical terms that missionaries of yesteryears (or other local urban and rural bodies today) used while speaking about the necessity of alcohol prohibition (Keditsu 2014). The NBCC's language is secular and acknowledges the 'failure' of the prohibition. Its general secretary speaks about strategic matters like joining forces with other 'stakeholders', such as those within the state and civil society, and the need to address social and political concerns. It describes the alcohol prohibition as a 'dream of the people of Nagaland'. Other speakers at the event, including a doctor, also link prohibition to secular issues, not as 'turning away from God' (Taylor 2007: 2), but as associating it with the political economy of unemployment, political groups, revolutionary governments, health, education and so on.

This presents a context/time/space-specific way in which Naga Christians interact with Indian secularity that involves ‘contending [with] the politics of religious institutions and religious organisations playing a political role’ (Thapar 2010: 84). In this case, the Article 371-A of the Indian Constitution both enables Nagaland State to become ‘Nagaland for Christ’ (legal recognition to religious or social practices of the Nagas) and for churches to be connected to, and operate as, secular bodies of governance. A parliamentary non-interference policy, as sketched out in Article 371-A, between the Indian Constitution and ‘religious or social practices of Nagas’ enables relational (albeit categorically separated) development of the Nagaland State, the churches and civil society towards their common ‘project of “civilising” a population’ (Asad 2003: 253) as they operate within the Indian Union’s reformist structure (Sen 2007). A ‘Nagaland for Christ’ framework enables the churches (and Nagaland State) to bring reform through ‘religious’ and ‘social’ means that is connected to the Indian state’s commitment to reform through ‘secular’ means. The alcohol prohibition provides an opportunity to all these institutions to come together and strengthen structures of governance that require formulation in a Naga sphere of influence but that is not, in effect, disarticulated from the Indian Union, and its approach to reform also in regards to prohibition. However, the religious institutions in this case decide the level of their autonomy and relation to social and state issues and actors instead of the state setting limits on the former. The state, civil society and church work together, concerns about whose separation are only sometimes raised by citizens; much like in mainland India where religious institutions get away with setting the terms of relations with the state – as seen in the case of Hindu majority states – despite criticism of violating secular norms by some sections of academics, civil society and independent media (Srikantan 2017). The alcohol prohibition in Nagaland has not been legally challenged in court. The debates around it in *The Morung Express* show how the alcohol prohibition enables these collaborative processes, linking them to a few stakeholders at the scale of Nagaland State.

‘Practical strategies’ of the NBCC ought to be ‘scientific, systematic, professional, intelligent’ (as per the report above), allying with civil society organisations as

representatives of ‘indigeneity’ on socially, politically, economically relevant Naganess. This does not mean that the NBCC is not a religious institution. As per the news item here, the NBCC articulates Naganess through prayers for ‘unity and reconciliation’ among Naga revolutionary groups, on behalf of the ‘unique history of Nagas’ or Nagaland for Christ – an essential feature²⁰⁵ of Naga Christianity today. The alcohol prohibition provides the church unions the opportunity to participate as secular moderns (Asad 2003), or more specifically as Christian seculars (akin to ‘Christian moderns’ (Keane 2007)). Christians and Christianity not as autonomous agents, but as in Keane’s analysis, working in connection to semiotic, material, cultural, temporal – and, I add, secular – structures they are also part of. Such secularity – possible as participants in a Nagaland State as part of the Indian Union – enables the formation of a ‘modern’ – Christian and secular – Naga citizenship. In the next section on the prohibition of dog meat, more such links may be seen that make for a Naganess that is also linked to scheduled tribes – indigeneity – in the Indian Union.

4.2 Administrative ban – dog meat prohibition

Dogs can be beloved pets in Nagaland. They are also considered a culinary treat. In 2020, some non-government organisations and individuals in mainland India objected to the treatment of dogs in open markets in Nagaland and an administrative order from the Government of Nagaland followed, banning the trade of ‘cooked and uncooked dog meat’. The prohibition immediately turned into a debate in *The Morung Express*. Similar debates have been in the local (and Indian) media since at least 2016, and is one of the issues that helps understand how ‘Naga tribal’ spaces are made through claims, contests and controls (Kikon and McDuie-Ra 2021: 174).

²⁰⁵ What may legally be considered a ‘religion’ in India has been a matter of debate, with courts attempting to ‘reform’ them based on an ‘essential features’ regime that determines a religion by its core tenets. While this has only led to a further quagmire for the courts, religious institutions have prospered, connecting with social and political issues on many scales. For a detailed discussion, see Srikantan 2017.

The debate on the dog meat prohibition is rarely ‘religious’ though cognates like ‘worshipping’ and ‘sin’ show up at times. It becomes an issue of ‘Naga customs’ and ‘tradition’ pitted in confrontation with the ‘ethics’ framework of animal welfare. It becomes an ‘us’ (Nagas) versus ‘them’ (Indians) issue. It is also described as a matter of ‘individual choice’ and brings to the fore debates between dog-eaters and dog-lovers; the former falls back on ‘customary’ dietary rights and the latter invokes ethical considerations of ‘progressive’ nations. Unlike the alcohol prohibition debate, racism comes to the fore in the dog meat prohibition debate with food habits and smells remaining in suspended contestation. This unfurls in the context of a Hindu majoritarian caste society in India often deciding what is or is not acceptable to be eaten, or what food can or cannot be eaten, or what it ought to smell like (Kikon 2017b, Kikon 2022). The dog meat prohibition is, in 2023, argued in a court of law as an infringement of fundamental rights of the constitution. The debate over the eating of dogs in Nagaland erupts regularly and is carried out on social media, television news and newspapers in Nagaland. In 2020, even with the dominance of the pandemic in the news there were more than 30 pieces of interest published on the topic in *The Morung Express*.

To make sense of the data, the sections are divided into two parts, beginning with the administrative regulation that leads to the prohibition being debated and another section on how the prohibition becomes an issue of Naga custom and tradition in *The Morung Express*.

4.2.1 Governance, legal challenge & a campaign

The debate in 2020 begins with an administrative order²⁰⁶ from the Chief Secretary of Nagaland’s office that ‘bans’ the ‘commercial import and trading of dogs, and dog markets and also the sale of dog meat, both cooked and uncooked’ in Nagaland²⁰⁷. The

²⁰⁶ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/nagaland-bans-sale-of-dog-meat/articleshow/76771468.cms?from=mdr> Accessed on 07.08.2023.

²⁰⁷ Dog-related controversial news was published in *The Morung Express* in May 2020 with village and ward councils in the Mokokchung district issuing shoot-on-sight orders for unleashed and/or stray dogs. This was followed by the news of the shooting of pet dogs in a village in Mokokchung district in

news on the order was carried as *The Morung Express*'s front page lead news item on 4 July along with how people were responding to it. The piece was headlined: 'Dollops of support, 'scornful' of criticism: Dog-meat ban in Nagaland explodes into raging debate'. The story reported the Nagaland State Government's decision²⁰⁸ to ban the trade of 'cooked and uncooked dog meat' in Nagaland, described here as a state in India 'branded for its love affair with a supposedly unconventional dietary list'. In the report, a journalist described the 'ban' as 'another NLTP Act', with others agreeing that like alcohol, the trade of dog meat will be pushed underground to the 'black market'. Those supporting the ban pleaded for a 'humane society' and called for suggestions on alternatives to dog meat; some saw it as an opportunity to consider an eventual law in Nagaland to prevent cruelty against animals. Others protested, including terming the ban 'hypocritical' – are dogs more special than pigs and cows? – and suggesting that the government should have only focused on 'animal cruelty' not consumption. The dog meat ban is seen as 'outsiders' policing 'the diet of native and indigenous people'; animal cruelty arguments, it is reported, showcases limited understanding of 'our' culture and heritage.

June. Cases were filed by the district administration under laws that seek to prevent cruelty against animals. The Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals became active during this time, at least in the news, working with the administration on the issue of the treatment of dogs in Nagaland – in general, as well as in open markets.

²⁰⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbTpMJ9ARVk> Accessed on 06.09.2022.

THE MORNING EXPRESS

THE POWER OF TRUTH

I like the dreams of the future better than the history of the past — Thomas Jefferson

Dollops of support, 'scornful' of criticism

Dog-meat ban in Nagaland explodes into raging debate

Morning Express News
Kohima, July 3

The Nagaland Government's ban on dog-meat has exploded into a raging public debate on the ground. The ban, which came into effect on July 1, has been met with a mix of support and criticism. Many people, particularly in rural areas, have expressed their disapproval of the ban, while others have welcomed it as a step towards modernization and public health.



File photo of a dog for sale at a market in Dimapur. (Morning Express Photo)

While regarded as a well-meaning move, the ban has also drawn, as it received criticism in equal measure, largely on grounds of infringement on people's dietary practices. A recent human society meeting in Kohima, where the ban was discussed, saw a heated debate. Many people, particularly in rural areas, have expressed their disapproval of the ban, while others have welcomed it as a step towards modernization and public health. The ban is seen as a challenge to traditional practices and a sign of cultural imposition.

'Age of expansionism over'

PM Modi's message to China from Ladakh



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing a news conference in New Delhi on July 3. (PTI Photo)

Modi said, while addressing a news conference in New Delhi on July 3, that the "age of expansionism is over" and that India will not be bullied. He said that India will not be bullied and that it will stand up for its interests. He also said that India will not be bullied and that it will stand up for its interests. He said that India will not be bullied and that it will stand up for its interests.

REFLECTIONS

Duncan and Burma Camp Urban PHCs to function as OPDs
By Sandeep Nigam

State tally at 539, 31 recoveries on Friday

Cyber police investigating leaking of Gov's letter

Man held for sexual abuse of minors in Mokokchung

DIMAPUR, JULY 3 (MEX) District Hospital being utilized as COVID-19 hospital. The District Hospital, which is currently being used as a COVID-19 hospital, is expected to be upgraded to a full-fledged hospital in the near future. This will help in providing better medical services to the people of the district.

KOHHIMA, JULY 3 (MEX) Nagaland reported 12 recoveries from COVID-19 on July 3, after a steady rise in positive cases over the week. According to official records, the total number of recoveries has reached 539, with 31 new recoveries reported on Friday. The state government is optimistic about the recovery trend.

As per the reports of the Cyber Crime branch of the Nagaland Police, the letter was leaked to a group of people who are now being investigated. The police are working to identify the individuals responsible for the leak and to prevent further dissemination of the information. The letter contained sensitive information regarding government policies and procedures.

The man, who is currently being held in custody, is being investigated for the alleged sexual abuse of minors. The police are conducting a thorough investigation into the case and are seeking to identify any other individuals who may be involved. The case has caused a significant amount of concern in the community.

Dog shooting: One arrested by Mokokchung Police

Bethel Kitchen workers test negative for COVID-19

'No community spread of COVID in Nagaland'

Mon: DC and SP test negative for COVID-19

MOKOKCHUNG, JULY 3 (MEX) Mokokchung Police today informed that a person involved in the alleged dog shooting incident at Changdi village was arrested on July 3. The police are conducting a thorough investigation into the case and are seeking to identify any other individuals who may be involved. The case has caused a significant amount of concern in the community.

KOHHIMA, JULY 3 (MEX) The second COVID-19 test result of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Superintendent of Police (SP) in Bethel was found to be negative on July 3. The police are conducting a thorough investigation into the case and are seeking to identify any other individuals who may be involved. The case has caused a significant amount of concern in the community.

Stakeholders stated, and it is one that is not spread by others, but rather, it is spread by individuals who are infected. The police are conducting a thorough investigation into the case and are seeking to identify any other individuals who may be involved. The case has caused a significant amount of concern in the community.

DC and SP test negative for COVID-19. The police are conducting a thorough investigation into the case and are seeking to identify any other individuals who may be involved. The case has caused a significant amount of concern in the community.

Figure 18: Page one of The Morung Express on 4 July 2020. The lead news piece of interest is demarcated in yellow. A related piece is also published as an anchor brief on left corner of the page.

The dog meat prohibition raised questions around *regulation* (who regulates what?), *ethical deliberations* (animal cruelty + can all animals be eaten?) and *markets* (banning trade affects consumption without being seen to be autocratic?). Sheila Jasanoff (2009) lists these three factors as 'mechanisms for ensuring accountability' in governance (of innovation, in Jasanoff's work, but just as applicable here), but, as she also notes, the

grounds on which these ‘mechanisms’ are enacted exclude ‘publics’ from regulatory decision-making.

When regulating dog meat, the ‘publics’ are not a clear Naga versus not-Naga. With a focus on ‘cruelty-against-animals’, tradition, culture and heritage are not considered by regulating bodies. According to a report published on 5 July in *The Morung Express*, the Nagaland Animal Welfare Society (NAWS) lobbied the administrative head of Nagaland State (the Chief Secretary) – with access enabled by Maneka Gandhi, a Member of Parliament of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from Uttar Pradesh – to bring the regulation into force. This is not the first time Maneka Gandhi, also an animal welfare activist, has rallied for a prohibition on consumption and trade of dog meat in Nagaland²⁰⁹. NAWS describes dogs as ‘meant’ to be pets not food; and that dog meat consumption is prohibited in India through the Food Safety and Standard (Food Products Standard and Additives) Regulation, 2011. The report comes with the additional information that the ‘Humane Society International, India, estimates that around 30,000 dogs a year are smuggled into Nagaland where they are sold in live markets for consumption’. This and the shoot-on-sight orders from village and ward councils enables commentators to link dog-eating to civilisational discourses. On 6 July, page five, for instance the newspaper publishes a ‘public space’ article by a non-journalist commentator, Avinuo Kire, Kohima, titled ‘Nagaland – People must speak for voiceless animals’. Kire’s main point is that ‘customary practice/law’ cannot become a ‘convenient’ justification for ‘heartless acts’ against animals. Nagas, Kire notes, must keep up with ‘ethical practices of advanced nations’ since ‘despite frequent evidence pointing to the contrary, we Nagas like to pride ourselves in being civilised and progressive’.

Kire is Naga, and her comments may be considered part of the ‘publics’ who speak, contest widely accepted ‘customary’ norms, and introduce ethics – of progressive nations that Nagas compare themselves to – into associative practices of Naganess. Her

²⁰⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyeO4wvpmk8> Accessed on 06.09.2022.

comments remind me of bell hooks and Stuart Hall's thoughts on *blackness* – an essentialising, useful, category but insufficient as a historical exercise towards contingency and action; constructing identities as commodities, mystified and stripped of their historical emergence (hooks 2015: 23). Reading this in the light of Kire's comments, what is more important to ask, as both hooks and Hall note, is what does the 'subject' do, how do they act and think politically? (hooks and Julien 1991, Hall 1993). For Kire, it is not sufficient to claim moral legitimacy by articulating Naganess to customary practice as expected from her as a Naga citizen (mystifying and stripping it of historicity). Kire contests the systems that constitute 'customary practices' as 'distinct' and autonomous from ethical considerations of other societies. Such constitutions are often enabled by Article 371-A and Scheduled Tribes-related definitions, making Nagas static subjects. It restricts the articulation of Naganess to indigeneity as a global and relational category. These arguments point to the insufficiency of drawing rigid lines of separation between Naganess and Indianess – what, with the complexity it entails, would it mean to be Naga *and* Indian in the Nagaland State – to think and act politically – as part of the Indian Union and its ethics and logics? Participation in debates on ethics, dogs as different from other farm animals and linking them to customary practices, become important tools to articulate Naganess through its location in the Indian Union but also in opposition to the differences it attempts to preserve through defining Nagas via tight links to 'customary practices/law'. Instead of circling out minorities for their food practices that such fixing of Naganess enables, Kire notes that 'India has some of the finest provisions to safeguard animals' and calls for the 'ethical and humane slaughter of animals in slaughter houses'. Ethical slaughter of animals is also the solution that the day's editorial (6 July) by Imlisanen Jamir offers. Kire and Jamir re-articulate Naganess by refusing the power of the Indian state over the protected, undefined, reductive-difference-preserving, 'internal' realm of customs and customary practices that seemingly lie separated from ethics and logic on the (supposed) outside of it. Their arguments exemplify how Naganess can be articulated to animal welfare as much as the right to trade in and consume dog meat.

The connections between Naganess and Indianess raised by the dog meat prohibition, however, is marked by racism and racialisation. On 12 July, *The Morung Express* carried a front page anchor news item on the issue with the headline, ‘PFA must apologize: campaign against India’s largest animal welfare organisation’ written by journalist Veroli Zhimo. The report detailed a campaign that demanded an apology from an organisation called ‘People for Animals’ (PFA) for describing ‘the Nagas as a “villainous society”’. The campaign, which became a *change.org* petition eventually, mainly brought attention to PFA’s social media posts where its ‘Chairperson Maneka Sanjay Gandhi claimed that “All the dogs are now being brought in from outside the state as Nagaland has eaten all its own dogs.” These posts also claimed that ‘Nagaland has ‘dog restaurants’’. Moreover, according to a legal case filed, an ‘animal rights’ activist in Mumbai, Hema Choudhary, called for ‘boycotting Nagaland’ and threatened to, according to the report in *The Morung Express*, ‘cut our neck’.

A person as far as away as in Mumbai (on the west coast of the Indian Union) has the power to publicly articulate Naganess to ‘villainous’ sociality, calling for the beheading of all those who associate with Naganess. Power is expressed in how lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are drawn here. Meat consumption ‘characterises difference’ (Smith 2004: 232) between the dominant caste Hindus of India and Naga food practices. Food prohibitions (such as the one on beef) enable hierarchical caste practices to enter secular governance in the Indian Union, justifying what, and who, may be categorised as clean and dirty (Kikon 2022), and, in this case, as ‘villainous’, worth ‘boycotting’, and even killing. The articulations are immediately challenged, and called out in *The Morung Express* (and other news media in Nagaland) as racist.

Here, there is a presentation of the ‘other’ (Smith 2004) by classifying dog meat eaters of Nagaland as dangerous; Avinuo Kire, however, never others dog meat eaters in invoking ‘advanced nations’ and ‘animal rights’. The late Naga writer Temsula Ao opens her book ‘On Being a Naga’ by recounting an insult that was hurled at her in neighbouring Assam – ‘you dog-eating Nagas’ (Ao 2014: 1). Naganess is articulated as ‘inferior’ and ‘savage’ (ibid), to be ‘condemned and abused for their food culture’

(Kikon 2022: 292). Here, the ‘proximate other’, or the neighbouring Indian (Hema Choudhary), begins the process of othering (Smith 2004: 258). The ‘proximate self’, or a Naga person (Avinuo Kire), uses it as an opportunity to reflect on and open up ‘internal’ matters. The ‘proximate other’ (Indian) calls for the enclosure and obliteration of their perceived other, the Nagas in this case; the ‘proximate self’ (Naga) attempts a comparison of Naganess with ‘advancement’. It is not just through dog meat consumption, then, that Naganess is shaped but also through its prohibition, which opens it up to re-articulations. The abstract scale of ‘Naga customary practice’ is challenged through the prohibition and brought into conversation with cruelty-against-animals ‘ethics’.

The space for challenging the prohibition is also provided by two legal processes that unfurl. On 21 July, a front page news item published in *The Morung Express* announces that Hema Choudhury has been arrested and brought to Nagaland from Mumbai. Indian Union legal frameworks step in with Hema charged under the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act for making ‘derogatory statements against the Nagas conducing to public mischief and also promoting enmity between different groups of people, which is pre-judicial to maintenance of harmony’. On 6 August, *The Morung Express* reports that Hema has been granted bail by the Kohima Bench of the Gauhati High Court; a 23 August report states, ‘...55 days of incarceration have made her realize her mistakes and she has offered to tender an apology to the Naga community, which is infact gratifying’. Here, the law links Naganess to Scheduled Tribes by changing the scope of the issue from a Nagaland State (and Article 371-A) scale to a pan-Indian scale. Hema’s threats are acknowledged as an example of atrocities against scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the Indian Union, impacting ‘harmony’ in general. Such specific laws related to marginalised groups articulate Naganess to Indian tribal indigeneity, and, as in the following example, as holders of fundamental rights within the Union but through the preservation of difference.

On 15 September, a front page lead news item is published in *The Morung Express* under the headline ‘Nagaland dog meat ban challenged in HC’. The report was about a petition filed in the Gauhati High Court in Kohima by dog meat traders reported to be ‘aggrieved’ by the ‘ban on the trade and sale of dogs and dog meat in Nagaland’. The petition challenged the legal and constitutional validity of the administrative ban order passed by the chief bureaucrat of the Nagaland State Government. It asked for its suspension based on ‘rights to privacy’ under which food practices are then classified as a matter of choice. In this regard, the dog meat prohibition is termed a ‘violation of natural justice’, as a matter of concern for everyone, particularly all Indian citizens in this case.

Thus, the market (dog meat traders in this case), that determinant of ‘what will or will not be accepted by society’ (Jasanoff 2009), steps in to show how ‘public reasoning’ in Nagaland may also be constructed in an Indian court of law based on the argument that trading in, and eating, dog meat is a fundamental right, a ‘right to privacy’. Note that the report on the petition in *The Morung Express* does not mention anything about ‘traditional’ or ‘customary’ rights of the Nagas as clearly demarcated in the Indian Constitution’s Article 371-A. The case proceeded quickly in court. With the government failing to respond to the petition in 2020, *The Morung Express* reported on 27 November, ‘The Gauhati High Court, Kohima Bench, has temporarily suspended the blanket ban on dog trade and consumption of dog meat in Nagaland.’

4.2.2 Tradition, culture, customary practices

Other individuals who participate in commenting on the debated prohibition employ a different set of articulations to Naganess in *The Morung Express*. The first opinion article on the matter is published on the newspaper’s editorial page on 17 May, 2020:

The Power of Truth The Morning Express

VOLUME XXVIII ISSUE 151

Foster awareness on child abuse laws

By Wevill Zimo
Lanka has a fairly comprehensive policy and legal framework addressing rights and protection for children. The existing laws on child abuse and protection are comprehensive and cover a wide range of child abuse cases...

COMMENTARY THE END?

The right-wing drive away, the left-wing push, the middle ground, the right-wing push, the left-wing push, the middle ground, the right-wing push, the left-wing push, the middle ground...

Left Wing: The animal in us!

By Fr. G.L. Khing
Human beings and animals have much in common, but the differences make the two very different from each other. Some people have human beings, some have animals, and some have both...

To support or oppose meat ban in Nagaland

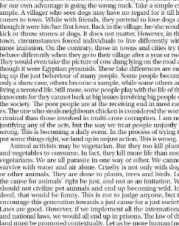
By Narsing Lal
In the right to practice our traditions and customs, the right to eat meat is a fundamental right. The right to eat meat is a fundamental right...



Dr. Lakshana Prabhu demanding president Dissanayake's resignation and declaring the appointment of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Colombo, Sri Lanka on May 15, 2020.



Dr. Lakshana Prabhu demanding president Dissanayake's resignation and declaring the appointment of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Colombo, Sri Lanka on May 15, 2020.



Dr. Lakshana Prabhu demanding president Dissanayake's resignation and declaring the appointment of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Colombo, Sri Lanka on May 15, 2020.



Dr. Lakshana Prabhu demanding president Dissanayake's resignation and declaring the appointment of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe in Colombo, Sri Lanka on May 15, 2020.

Figure 19: Editorial page of The Morning Express on 17 May 2020. Pieces of interest marked in yellow.

This is published under the editorial in a section titled 'left wing' and subtitled 'The animal in us!' written by GL Khing, a Catholic priest. If there could be a Christian post-modern position, this is it. In the piece, Khing states 'Love every creation' and 'Eating habits are subjective'; and more specifically, 'There are arguments for and against the issue (of the sale/consumption of dog)...Nagas have [a] different eating culture which must be respected'. It begins the debate on the premise of collective rights of Nagas with a 'different' - distinct from others - culture. The 'write wing' piece that is the next

anchor piece is titled 'To support or oppose meat ban in Nagaland' by ST Yapang Lkr, Kohima. This pitches the issue to be between 'animal worshippers' and 'meat eating people'. While the term 'animal worshippers' is a reference to Hindus in India, the following paragraph describes the 'meat eating people':

Even though our Nagaland has different tribes, the practices of our traditions and customs are similar in various ways, in which rearing and killing of domesticated animals like pig, dog, cow, bison, goat etc., in small portions or life weight is practiced since time immemorial, and is practiced as a way of life, or a tradition.....The constitution even gives us the right to practice our traditions and customs.

Thus, the 'meat eating people' here are 'tribes' and the recogniser of this, for the author, is the Indian Constitution that is stated to guarantee 'the right to practice our traditions and customs' which are also described as being practised 'since time immemorial'. Rendering the animal-related practices in 'time immemorial' terms enables recognition through registers of global indigeneity/Indigenism with the phrase often used in movements that relate to discourses on location in and dislocation from their lands (Wilmer 1993: 189-226, Niezen 2000, Lotha 2016). In this case, reading it with the 'left-wing' piece by the Catholic priest, GL Khing, the prohibition on dog meat helps understand Naganess through its articulation to an indigeneity of 'traditions and customs' related to the domestication of animals that is extended to a timeless temporal scale. It is made specific to tribe-related rights in the Indian Union, understood to be in an unequal relationship with their Hindu neighbours.

Articulations to 'time immemorial' practices become ways to contest the prohibition and bring it under the control of a Naga domain that holds ethical deliberations separate from government logic. For instance, on 9 July, *The Morung Express* published a 'public space' non-journalist opinion piece on page five titled 'Prevention of cruelty and ethical treatment of animal' by Thepfulhouvi Solo. As a retired Indian-Naga bureaucrat and

member of PETA²¹⁰, Solo writes about the prejudices against being Naga in India connected to food even though he explicitly states that he does not consume dog meat. Though the Indian law of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, does not distinguish between different animals, Solo notes how Nagas relate to animals in different ways. Using the argument of ‘time immemorial’ practices located in ‘former days’, he narrates how dogs were hunting companions, and later used as food sources by some Nagas. He argues that the government, as well as global regimes on animal rights, must adhere to the law on animal cruelty without encroaching on who can eat what. Nagas should decide, separately, how to manage the issue of dogs (using the example of Kohima village’s policy on stray dogs) through a collective and ‘customary’ regime, while the government should address cruelty through designated slaughter houses²¹¹. While Solo makes similar arguments to Avinuo Kire and Imlisanen Jamir, the difference is that Solo emphasises the need to separate ‘customary’ regimes from the ‘government’²¹², which, here, could be read as the secular state that involves itself in the construction of an ethical regime (Asad 2003: 255). For Kire and Jamir, the government is important as an adjudicator of the issue, and customary regimes should be subject to the same debates and logics as the government. For Solo, customary regimes have their own logic through which they govern²¹³.

²¹⁰ People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, a global non-profit organisation.

²¹¹ Solo’s arguments are almost identical to the ones made by Kahuto Chishi Sumi in the case of alcohol prohibition. Solo writes that Nagas do not automatically become ‘ethical’ through their ‘traditional customary’ treatment of hunting dogs, nor are they ‘inhumane’ for eating dog meat; food choices and conscientious behaviour, he argues, are not related. Similarly, Sumi argues that the alcohol prohibition has nothing to do with ‘blessings’ or ‘curse’ – alcohol is not related to religion.

²¹² To the question ‘Should the state government regulate citizen’s food choices? Give reasons’, a Morung Express weekly poll published on 12 July reported 14% poll participants responding with a ‘yes’ (arguing for regulation based on animal welfare, civilisation and advancement), 80% saying ‘no’ (citing cultural chauvinism and the prohibition’s interference with rights to choice, life and Naga custom+tradition as per the Indian Constitution), and 06% saying ‘others’ (the one response in this category stated that this question does not deserve an answer because it is a matter of ‘common sense’. It does not state which option may be considered common sense, but the current context suggests it is the category of ‘no’ that counts as common sense).

²¹³ He cites the example of how Kohima Village shot stray dogs without collars due to the spread of ‘rabid dog disease’ but no one went to court because ‘villagers care for their village more than stray dogs’.

Two examples back Solo's argument on a separation of regimes. On page five of 10 July, two pieces were published in the 'public space' section of the newspaper. One is titled 'Customary practice of eating dog-meat in Nagaland: A way forward' by Brainerd Prince, New Delhi. The other is titled 'Are cabinet ministers of Nagaland Non Nagas?' by Atsung Imchen, Kohima.



Figure 20: Public Space on page five of The Morning Express on 10 July 2020.

The first piece links food habits with 'culture' and advocates respect for 'cultural difference' or diversity²¹⁴. Making a case for equality, Prince challenges the dichotomies

²¹⁴ This expression is part of India's toolbox of 'unity in diversity' that many actors use to respond to claims of racism, casteism, regionalism, tribalism and other prejudices that are rampant in the Union today.

between ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ often invoked in mainland India – thereby helping understand Indianness in this context – to contest the eating of dog meat. Making arguments about pure or impure practices is unconstitutional, non-secular, notions drawn from Hindu caste practices, he writes. Prince falls back on the Indian Constitution to equalise food habits. He limits dog meat eating to ‘customary practice’ whose scope is limited to the ‘human’ and ‘cultural’ (governed by the Constitution); this is not a ‘religious issue or spiritual problem in a universal sense’, he notes, but a ‘human and cultural issue’. In India, as elsewhere, both the religious and the cultural are governed through a secularist constitution and made applicable through provisions like Article 371-A in Nagaland. Both religious and cultural practices are constitutionally restricted through limits set by other domains including health safety and animal cruelty.

The classification of some practices as ‘customary’, and not others, enables the movement of the prohibition from the jurisdiction of the state to the jurisdiction of ‘tribal councils’. The second piece on the same page helps us to understand this – it questions if legislators of the Nagaland State government are ‘Naga’ at all. The prohibition, Atsung Imchen’s article suggests, is enough to cancel the Naganess of state representatives. If the ‘central government bans beef that is complete b*****t for us Nagas’ because Article 371-A provides for this non-interference in Nagaland’s affairs, writes Imchen. He calls on ‘respective Hohos²¹⁵ to summon the cabinet ministers and Chief Minister of Nagaland to answer for their decision to ban dog meat’. Why, he asks, ‘are the Tribal bodies silent?’ Finally, he concludes, ‘We don’t need to be like Mainland Indians, our society and our way of life is [a] thousand time[s] better than what is there outside’.

Faced with a prohibition considered unjust, Imchen draws a comparison to other ‘tribals’ in the Indian Union, as well as non-tribals, measured on a value scale of good (insider) versus bad (outsider). The historical roots of such distinctions lie in British classification systems that were continued by the Indian Union. According to a Press Information

²¹⁵ Tribe and pan-tribe unions.

Bureau (PIB) report²¹⁶, for instance, the criteria followed to ‘specify’ a community in the Union as a Scheduled Tribe includes:

- (i) Indications of primitive traits,
- (ii) Distinctive culture,
- (iii) Geographical isolation,
- (iv) Shyness with the community at large, and
- (v) Backwardness.

Once demarcated, such boundaries set apart an unchanging inside from an encroaching outside. In this case, what is on the inside is made ‘good’ through the potential for them to be governed by tribal councils, as though unconnected from ‘bad’ considerations they must make to inhabit the world ‘outside’. For Imchen, how these lines are negotiated, and some aspects kept ‘distinct’ and in the jurisdiction of tribal councils, becomes the ultimate test of Naganess.

Scheduled Tribes in the Indian Union are ‘sanctified and legitimised’ as ‘indigenous’ to their state of belonging, which the political scientist Sanjib Baruah terms the ‘colonial ethnoterritorial frame’ that links ‘core ethnic groups’ with ‘near-exclusive’ access to rights and services (Baruah 2020: 89-90). In Nagaland State, Scheduled Tribe rights are further specified through Article 371-A of the Indian Constitution that guarantees Indian parliamentary non-interference with ‘religious or social practices of the Nagas’ and ‘Naga customary law and procedure’ among other things, thereby articulating Naganess to indigeneity and religion simultaneously²¹⁷. With distinction here made possible through a ‘protective status on grounds of indigeneity, relative “backwardness”, or

²¹⁶ <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseframePage.aspx?PRID=1514486> Accessed on 06.09.2022.

²¹⁷ Indian jurisprudence enables interaction between the ‘secular’ and the ‘religious’ by recognising the latter through ‘personal laws’ that allow ‘customary practices’ to be governed by ‘religious’ rules laid out by Hindu, Muslim or other (like, tribal) authorities. These assume the world religions paradigm and demarcate ‘tribal religion’ as a separate internal customary realm to be governed only by tribal councils. The ‘public laws’ of individual-based fundamental rights do not apply to these, and are often considered a point of contention and contradiction in Indian jurisprudence. For more, see <https://indconlawphil.wordpress.com/2016/02/07/individual-community-and-state-mapping-the-terrain-of-religious-freedom-under-the-indian-constitution/> Accessed on 21.09.2022.

perceived vulnerability vis-à-vis ethnically defined outsiders' (Baruah 2020: 92), things like food that are brushed under the general categories of social, cultural or customary practices of Nagas are left open to be described as 'backward' and thus regulated. It is comparable to the way dog-meat consumption has often led to constructions of the 'backward' and 'archaic' east (like China and others) as distinct from a 'progressive' west (Oh and Jackson 2011). Similar to this, while the dog meat prohibition in Nagaland is contested by the revolutionary group National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) by terming it an 'invasion on the rights of indigenous people', it also draws a distinction from 'the west' and a similarity with China and Nigeria in terms of consumption patterns. The union called Naga Hoho terms the prohibition 'ridiculous' and states that Nagas (custom, tradition and food habits) are not comparable to 'princely states' and 'mainland India'. The Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) (in a report on 23 July front page) defends dog meat consumption by citing health benefits²¹⁸, but also its trade as a revenue option for poor women, its predominant sellers. The NMA, connecting the two sides of the debate, calls for the replacement of the prohibition with campaigns to sensitise the public on animal cruelty and safety measures on the sale of meat. Such arguments, however, are few and far in between.

In a public space piece published on 18 July titled 'Dog meat ban might allow history to repeat', Shaokhai Mayirnao, Research Scholar at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, likens the 'Dog Meat Ban in Nagaland' to the Indo-Myanmar border that runs through the Ahng (Chief) of Longwa's house, comparing the prohibition to neocolonial bordering practices²¹⁹. Mayirnao produces a poem here, titled 'Celebrating Naganess' (italics added and lines separated):

²¹⁸ Theologian Eyingbeni Humtsoe-Nienu argues in a public space piece on 4 August that dog meat is 'medicinal' for women after childbirth, derived from 'traditional wisdom'. Her arguments were part of a discussion on 'politics of food' conducted by the Naga Scholars' Association on 1 August. All participants were reported by *The Morung Express* to argue against the dog meat prohibition.

²¹⁹ Here, Mayirnao uses the popular example of the Konyak Chief (Ahng – that Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1946) translated as 'sacred chiefs' of morung) through whose house runs the international border between India and Myanmar. His reference is to colonial and postcolonial bordering practices that drew borders on maps with pens at an office far away from the lands, ignoring

*Life is beautiful in the Naga Hills.
Its culture serenely magical.
People affable and affectionate.
Life is as mystique as elsewhere.
Hornbills of the nature and
folklores of the old demystify the verve.
And when the harvest season comes in,
bonfire at Morung invokes festivity.
Hues of shawls, makhela, beads, arm bands
and headgear spring in life.
Naga culture is a kaleidoscopic,
as psychedelic as rice beer.
To decode the aesthetics,
understanding Makhel ancestors might help.
To know the beauty, ask the spirit of forests;
to feel it, flirt with Naga chilli;
to celebrate it, wear the aroma of axone,
and dance away to the beats of drums and chants.*

Naganess is linked to nature, culture, spirits, ancestors, mystique, magic, folklore, through the land (Naga Hills), forests and objects like morung, food, shawls, and drums. This linking enables the essentialising of Naganess by filling what is ‘inside’ a cultural realm – pristine, protected and meaningful; but also fulfils the ‘criteria’ that the

the people who lived on these demarcated lands or the impact such borders had on their lives. The Chief did not have a say on where the borders would be drawn, just like citizens are not allowed a say on matters that ‘run through their kitchen’.

government lays out for identification of anachronistic Scheduled Tribes. This, according to the author, should be the logic for making a decision on the dog meat ban through what is ‘culturally appropriate’ and ‘developmentally inclusive’ so that descendants don’t ‘inherit a culture without historical roots’. A pure realm of Naga culture is put to work with help from ‘ancestors’ who exist since a past-infinite, and rooted, temporal scale of ‘time immemorial’ (Johnson 2002: 302). Neither God nor the NBCC are included in these articulations. Naganess is articulated, through this debated prohibition, to a rather fluid and shared, albeit ‘internal’ realm of Naga cultural, traditional, customary practices in the case of the dog meat prohibition on the pages of the newspaper while ‘religion’ stays out of the debate; ethics of animal welfare and slaughter disturb this internal purity of the realm, and showcase how such realms are connected through the newspaper to constitutional, health and safety considerations.

4.3 Conclusion

Prohibitions are debated subjects in *The Morung Express* in 2020 and provide an opportunity to exercise self-identification. This chapter began by asking the question: In what ways does *The Morung Express* articulate Naganess to indigeneity and religion through debated prohibitions in 2020? I used two debated prohibitions to compare the way different articulations are made to Naganess in these two instances through their presentation in the newspaper. The first is the alcohol prohibition that is presented as a concern for everyone, particularly Christians, in Nagaland State – it is an issue that is both supported and contested in *The Morung Express*. The prohibition is particularised to Nagaland State through the Nagaland Liquor (Total Prohibition) Act, 1989, an act passed by the Nagaland State Legislative Assembly. The alcohol prohibition is reported to be policed by local units of governance, that is, village and city councils/wards. As local authorities, they present alcohol as a moral concern and ‘evil menace’. They collaborate with Christian citizens to legitimise the policing of alcohol. The process is upscaled to a Naga national scale through collectives that are located in urban areas, like the Dimapur Naga Students’ Union, or the Naga Mothers’ Association (NMA) whose location is not in a place but through the Naga mother as a moral site of action. The

NMA also lend support to the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC), and its constitutive units, that, in turn, work to ‘bless’ and legitimate location-downscaled bodies like the Dimapur Naga Students’ Union. The NBCC uses secular language to speak about the effective management of the alcohol prohibition, presented as the *de facto* power centre of the prohibition, but retains its ‘religious’ character by relating the prohibition to matters related to Nagaland for Christ. Individuals who comment in *The Morung Express*, and support the prohibition, describe it as a ‘spiritual’ matter for Nagas as Christians. Those who oppose it also use a biblical toolbox to question the democratic premises of the power centre of the prohibition by questioning who ‘stakeholders’ of the prohibition ought to be. Hypocrisy often becomes a tool that aids in disentangling processes that both contest and support the prohibition to re-articulate Naganess that sticks to the scale of the Nagaland State related to the ‘social or religious practices of the Nagas’ as enshrined in Article 371-A. All in all, Naganess is articulated to a fairly firm category of ‘religion’ leading to an overall support towards the alcohol prohibition.

The dog meat prohibition is different. The state attempts to regulate it by articulating it as a cruelty-against-animals issue. Those who support this position in *The Morung Express* link the consumption of dog meat with an ‘ethics’ framework of ‘advanced nations’, calling for the regulation of the dog meat market as well as bringing ‘customary practices’ in conversation with an ‘ethics’ framework. According to them, the state and customary practices/law should not be subject to different logics. Consumers of dog meat protest the regulation by articulating the eating of dog meat with ‘time immemorial’ temporality of Naga ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ linked to customary laws. This domain is protected from parliamentary intervention in Nagaland through Article 371-A coupled with Scheduled Tribe rights. Both sides of the debate relate to Indian constitutionality in two ways – first, by attempting to link the so-classified ‘protected’ realm of customary practices with a ‘public’ ethics framework provided by laws against animal cruelty in India and elsewhere in the world; second, by keeping the ‘insider’ realm of culture, customs, traditions – into which relations with dogs are classified – protected from an ‘outsider’ Indian and Hindu regime. The dog meat prohibition is contested using campaigns that call out racism in mainland India where dog meat

consumption is connected to Naganess through such terms as ‘villainous’. In response, Naganess is filled with essentialising tropes consisting of morung, hornbills, nature, spirits and culture to classify a protected domain in line with the state criteria for the classification of tribes. Naga national-scaled institutions defend these as ‘rights of indigenous peoples’ and a secular health choice, with the Naga Mothers’ Association making an argument both for the withdrawal of the prohibition but also consideration of cruelty against animals (much like those who make the latter argument). A legal process shows how the prohibition is a challenge to individual (fundamental rights), market (trade) and collective (scheduled caste and scheduled tribes) rights in India. All in all, Naganess is articulated to a fluid category of indigeneity that seeks more autonomy in this domain from ‘mainstream’ regulatory practices.

The next part of this dissertation will re-assess the articulations raised in chapter three and four through the reflections of the journalists and editorial workers who have reported the analysed articles in these two chapters. It will also examine the ways in which this newspaper relates to the category of ‘indigenous media’.

II

5 Back to the newsroom: re-articulations by knowledge workers

The first of two chapters in the second part of this dissertation, this chapter brings journalists and editorial decision makers at *The Morung Express* into conversation with the themes presented so far. In 2022-23, with a first draft of the three empirical chapters, I set out to explore how my former colleagues, and current journalists and editors (for the purposes of this chapter, I term them ‘knowledge workers’), at *The Morung Express* reflected on these broad topics. Speaking with them about journalism, revenue, religion and indigeneity in Nagaland brought up new directions to thinking about these issues, and for further analysis, which I have considered in this chapter through the following research questions:

- (a) In what ways do the reflections of the knowledge workers at *The Morung Express* relate to articulations of Naganess, indigeneity and religion as presented in the former chapters?
- (b) What are some of the contexts and considerations that shape the printed text in *The Morung Express*?

This chapter weighs in on the categorisation of events based on specific calendars, whether an event belongs naturally to a ‘religious’ or ‘indigenous’ domain, or in what ways debates turn when an object of control is termed ‘sinful’ or not. It also looks at the ways in which the journalists invoke their professional practice to maintain a ‘secular’ media position, but also consider their relation to the market and their audiences while covering ‘religion’. I term their reflections ‘re-articulations’ for the purposes of this chapter to show how the same categories may be presented and articulated in different (and sometimes common) directions.

To begin, I designed a few broad questions for the interviews I would conduct at the Dimapur office of *The Morung Express*. While contemplating who to interview, I

thought of working with three broad categories of members with whom I would conduct targeted, but semi-structured, interviews (Engler and Stausberg 2021: 351), namely: the founders, the editorial team and journalists, and non-journalist workers²²⁰. By using semi-structured interviews, I was able to use a list of questions related to the themes under study, while also leaving room for conversation. I used a set of questions particularly crafted for each group, depending on the roles they play in the newsroom. With the founders and the non-journalists, questions were kept broader still, focusing on the historical development of *The Morung Express*, and the routes through which mid-level labour participates in shaping this newspaper. The most important group concerning this study is the editorial team. For the purposes of this chapter, I have termed them ‘knowledge workers’ (Wayne 2009: 17-37) whose ‘central activity is the elaboration and dissemination of ideas’ (Wright 1979: 192). This was the team that put together and produced the newspaper in 2020, and had relative autonomy and independence in the production process of the day-to-day news (Wayne 2009: 18). The printed news forms the primary source material of this dissertation through which the broad topics emerge; its text is the product of the labour of knowledge workers²²¹. I do not try to establish the knowledge workers’ ‘autonomy’ here but explore how their ideas, approach and considerations relate to common notions while shaping the information they receive into news. This, in my reading, is critical to producing *The Morung Express*. The newspaper is circulated among, what Suhas Palshikar terms, the ‘speaking classes’ or the ‘opinion makers’ of society (Palshikar 2023). Knowledge workers convert ‘information’ to ‘knowledge’ through reportage, editing, contesting, extending scope, challenging borders and bordering practices. This makes for the production of ‘knowledge as commons’ (Purkayastha 2023). Here, I extend the notion of commons from public consumption spaces like forests, water bodies, grazing grounds (Hess and

²²⁰ This classification was done to make conversations easier between teams. Later, I realised that founders and an editorial contributor are also non-journalists, but not the kind who are referred to in this initial classification. Non-journalists in this instance are non-news workers of the staff at the headquarters of *The Morung Express*.

²²¹ Just as the whole newspaper, and its circulation as a market product, is the labour of all classes of workers at *The Morung Express*. Some of this has been laid out in chapter two.

Ostrom 2007) that degrade with use, to knowledge resources like science and technology (Purkayastha 2023), or open digital resources and the work produced by newspapers like *The Morung Express* as re-usable public goods. Produced through practices of journalism of a privately owned media institution, such ‘knowledge’ adheres to shared understandings of Naganess, sets limits on how it may be articulated, but does not exclude the public from engagement and is open to further re-articulation by other actors.

I began speaking with the editorial team towards the end of 2022 and the start of 2023. This meant there was a gap of two to three years between the time they made the decisions to select and edit the texts for publication in 2020, and the time when our discussions were conducted. Although the editorial team was not expected to recall the specific choices they made when selecting news articles to publish in 2020, it was more important for me to hear their reflections on the articles that were eventually published. In a way, I was asking them to do what I did with the reports – reflect on them from a distance. The distance, in their case, was of time. The distance, in my case, was both physical and time-bound as I had been away from the newsroom since 2019. The team’s thinking and my own has moved and grown in different directions over those past few years too. Both parties were working with *The Morung Express* in the present, but in completely different capacities. I had migrated out of the system they still inhabited. I was now paid by a university to critically analyse a newspaper they were paid to publish. The conversations that followed from these two standpoints are presented in this and the next chapter.

5.1 Re-entering Nagaland

It is with these reflections, and the awkwardness derived therefrom, that I re-entered the Dimapur headquarters of *The Morung Express* in December 2022. Many new questions emerged.

For instance, new lines of indigeneity had been drawn over Dimapur. The Inner Line Permit (ILP) that used to be applicable only to the hills of Nagaland²²² were now also applicable to Dimapur²²³. Now, to enter Nagaland, stay there and work – from another part of India – I needed an ILP or permission from the Nagaland State government. This also meant that the state government, apart from the central government, also decided who did *not* need an ILP. The Nagaland State government now determines citizenship in Nagaland by linking it to indigeneity through categories such as Scheduled Tribe, Backward Tribe and Indigenous/Non-Indigenous Inhabitant. This is, in turn, a step towards the Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland that was reported to be under consideration²²⁴. According to the criteria of the Register, a person of non-Naga origin whose ancestors resided in Nagaland before a certain year²²⁵ could be an ‘indigenous inhabitant’ of the State of Nagaland in the Indian Union. However, a Naga person from another state who could not meet such criteria may no longer be able to claim indigeneity in Nagaland State²²⁶. Once everyone who ‘belongs’ in this manner is ‘indigenised’ to Nagaland State, everyone else would require an ILP to enter, visit, work or stay in the state. With a sizeable proportion of non-Nagas, and as a common market point for the region, Dimapur used to be exempt from these provisions of indigeneity. The new ILP regime extended to Dimapur was passed in December 2019, almost concurrently with the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act passed by the Indian

²²² A British ‘protective’ mechanism that separated ‘tribals’ from ‘non-tribals’ in South Asia through the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873. This remains the legal basis for the ILP mechanism.

²²³ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/nagaland-brings-dimapur-under-inner-line-permit-regime/articleshow/72474268.cms?from=mdr> Accessed on 08.08.2023.

²²⁴ <https://unacademy.com/content/upsc/study-material/polity/reasons-for-nagaland-government-constituting-a-commission-for-riin/> Accessed on 08.08.2023.

²²⁵ The Register is yet to finalise a ‘cut off’ year to establish legitimate ancestry. This has been a bone of contention. While the latest ILP notification has marked this year to be 1979 (you do not have to apply for an ILP if you can show you have been a resident of Nagaland since 1979 or before), local civil organisations have demanded the cut off year be 1963, the year that Nagaland State was established.

²²⁶ <https://thewire.in/government/nagaland-indigenous-register-panel-criteria> Accessed on 26.07.2023.

parliament the same year, following local demands to protect Nagaland's 'indigenous inhabitants'²²⁷.



Figure 21: Dimapur is one of the main points of market access for people in the region, in which indigenous and non-indigenous people participate, both of which categories of people now require Inner Line Permits to do so. In the picture on the left, a large second-hand clothing Christmas market is seen which is predominantly run by 'non-indigenous' sellers, while the photo on the right shows an 'indigenous' woman from a neighbouring state of Nagaland selling local food items. Despite the restrictions on entering and working in Nagaland State, both types of seller prefer to do business in Dimapur with potentially better profits than the small neighbouring towns they hail from.

Indigeneity was under general discussion in several other ways. For instance, the day I reached Dimapur, *The Morung Express* was hosting its 18th Morung Lecture titled, 'A conversation on Repatriation: Histories of loss and renewal of hope'²²⁸. Speakers

²²⁷ The ILP regime was also extended to the neighbouring state of Manipur the same year. It has been in place also in the states of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram in Northeast India. These permits can be obtained online for a fee. For Nagaland, see <https://ilp.nagaland.gov.in/> Accessed on 22.11.2023.

²²⁸ <https://www.morungexpress.com/repatriation-has-to-be-a-naga-process> , <https://nagalandpage.com/repatriation-of-naga-ancestral-human-remains-dialogues-continue/> Accessed on 26.07.2023.

included Kikrulhounyu Paphino, an art executive at the Nagaland State museum in Kohima, Hewasa L Khing, Head of the homegrown Tetso College, and the famous Naga anthropologists, Arkotong Longkumer and Dolly Kikon. The process to repatriate ‘Naga ancestral human remains’ (Talilula 2023) housed in the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford, United Kingdom, to Nagaland had created a hotbed of discussion that falls within categories of interest to me: Naganess, indigeneity and religion²²⁹. Local journalists were being asked to engage with the issue. Newsrooms, especially those at *The Morung Express*, which has partnered with the repatriation process under the banner of ‘Recover Restore and Decolonise’²³⁰, were riddled with questions. If the human skeletal remains at the Pitt Rivers Museum were to be understood as Naga and ancestral, which modern collective do they belong to? Who was to claim them? In what ways was this process similar to other repatriation processes undertaken by Indigenous Peoples elsewhere in the world?



Figure 22: 18th Morung Lecture conducted at Dimapur's Lighthouse Church in December 2022 on repatriation of Naga human remains.

²²⁹ <https://rradnagaland.org/all-posts/> Accessed on 01.05.2023.

²³⁰ <https://rradnagaland.org/#> Accessed on 01.05.2023.

In Kohima, meanwhile, the Hornbill Festival – the ‘festival of festivals’ in Nagaland – was underway. It was the usual fare with extensive traffic jams between Kohima and Kisama, the main venue of the Festival; people indulging in rice beer and rice-and-pork/fish meals at the ‘morungs’ while mingling with a recognisable Miss Nagaland and an unrecognisable Member of the Indian Parliament among the crowds; shopping for artwork sold by entrepreneurs under a bamboo shed; and watching performances by troupes divided along ‘tribe’ lines during the day and along music genre and band lines during the concerts at night. These tribes and their morungs were, of course, restricted to those tribes recognised by the Nagaland government as ‘indigenous’ to the state. Several other activities went on in parallel. Night markets, cycle and car rallies, ‘off road expeditions’, camping, village sightseeing, Dzükou (mountain) treks are only some of the adventures available for Festival goers during this time. Despite the wide coverage it got in newspapers and social media, some journalists dismissed the possibility that the Festival was a ‘Naga’ festival. Such a festival belonged to the State, not the people, they said. A tension persisted in Nagaland between who may legitimately claim Naganess, and the forms of indigeneity through which they make the claim. But also, to whom, and for what purposes. While journalists questioned the Naganess of the Hornbill Festival, for others it was a way to introduce Nagaland to the world.



Figure 23: Visiting dignitaries light a mega bonfire, a feature of the closing ceremony of the Hornbill Festival in Kisama near Kohima, Nagaland. Every year, the Hornbill Festival is debated in newspapers and social media sites for its frivolity and decadence.

Religion was just as present. In Dimapur, as in Kohima, Christmas had arrived. Households had decorated their outdoor trees, set up their indoor Christmas trees, put up trinkets and lights. Those with financial exigencies collected material and handcrafted their own trees and decorations. One I saw being made, in my first few days, was crafted from white plastic waste (emulating snow) with a red star placed atop. Cakes and Christmas hampers were exchanged; carnivals were organised locally in several colonies. Villages were adorned in fantastic light displays, organised by the church, youth, and women councils in each village; people without cars made sure they could access a friend with one to see the displays²³¹. Indisen and Thahekhü villages, amongst others, in Dimapur are famous for their Christmas decorations.

²³¹ Dimapur has poor public transport infrastructure.

Meanwhile, the Advent Christmas lottery scratch card from Norway I had brought along with me to Nagaland quickly gained popularity. Children of the household where I was staying wanted to scratch a box each day, while the adults discussed the ‘great idea’ around the kitchen fire. Norwegians are wise enough, someone declared, to celebrate Christmas season with lotteries alongside presumed church visits. A comparison with Norwegians, assumed to be an ‘advanced’ society, was reassuring for all the reprimands that carnival goers in Nagaland sometimes faced for playing card games (gambling) at local carnivals to win their dinner rooster, or a tray of eggs.

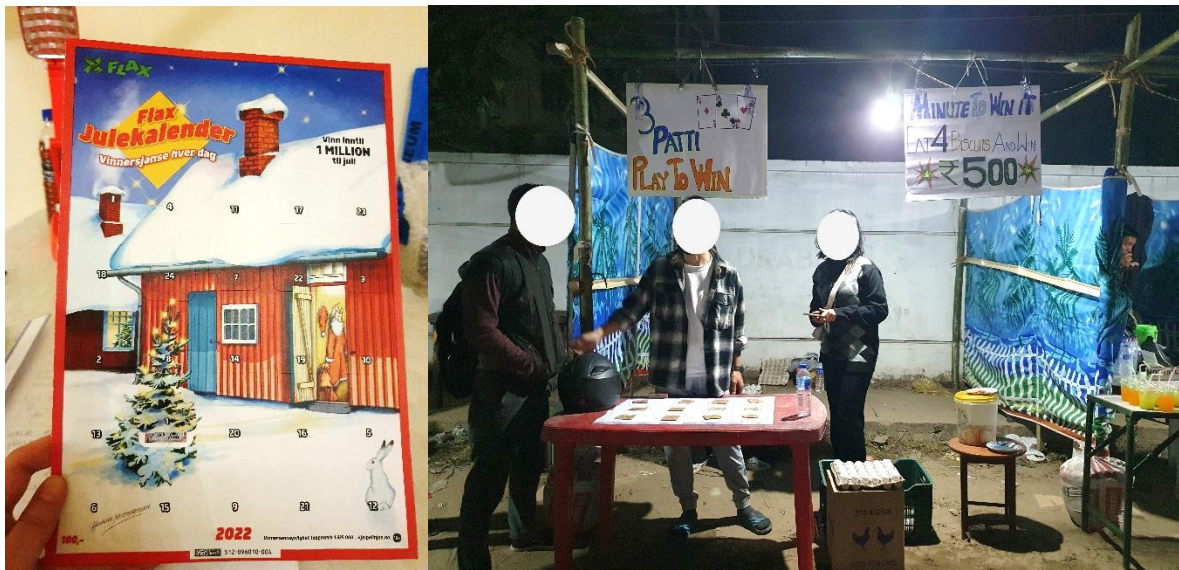


Figure 24: (L) The Norwegian Advent Christmas calendar lottery scratch card. (R) Card games at the Dimapur Night Carnival in 2022. While many people are reprimanded by Christian neighbours for ‘gambling’ during Christmas season, the Norwegian Advent Christmas calendar lottery scratch card convinced some carnival goers in Nagaland (who visited my house and saw the scratch card) that their own choices of having fun during Christmas season were shared by ‘advanced’ societies as in Norway.

It was hard to miss reports in the newspapers about the celebrations of 150 years of Christianity (1872-2022) in Nagaland. The Ao Baptist Arogo Mungdang (Ao Baptist Churches Association, ABAM) held a large celebration of this ‘sesquicentennial’²³² as

²³² <https://morungexpress.com/celebration-of-150-years-of-christianity-in-naga-hills> Accessed on May 8, 2023.

did the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC)²³³ – both recognised a particular narrative of Christianity’s ‘arrival’ into the Naga hills which was contested by others. At a public event on 12 December, the graphic novel – ‘1872 Graphic Non-Fiction’ – was launched. This was written by Talilula, a friend, author, and scholar, in collaboration with an artist named Tetsong. *The Morung Express*, in its report on the event published the next day, described the book as ‘the story of Christianity in the Naga Hills’ as told by a ‘local and indigenous voice’²³⁴. These descriptions were drawn from comments made by Pangernungba Kechu, a theologian of the Oriental Theological Seminary in Dimapur, who spoke at the event, and described the graphic novel as an ‘indigenous form of storytelling’. Talilula explained this further, according to the report, by drawing a distinction of this work from those works done through ‘the lens of white missionaries’. As I sat in *The Morung Express* newsroom discussing indigeneity and religion in the report on the novel, I faced immediate contestation of the ways in which I chose to describe the report. Someone said the article was neither about religion nor indigeneity, but ‘local voices on big histories’. Another journalist contested the claims around 1872 altogether. While large bodies like ABAM and NBCC were celebrating that Christianity first ‘entered’ Nagaland through one Ao village, another Ao village had claimed that it was, in fact, through their initiatives that Christianity arrived. Another editorial contributor to *The Morung Express* who I spoke to suggested that these disagreements had nothing to do with religion. They emerged from the village ‘politics’ of the time (around 1872), said the commentator, and were ‘mistranslated’ in their reports and diaries by the Clarks, the first American Baptist missionaries in the particular villages (Mary Mead Clark and her husband, EW Clark), as religious or Christian conflict. Such lines of separation between religion and other aspects of life were commonly drawn even when conflict among church bodies were often reported and discussed; these were justified as ‘politics’ as a domain separate from ‘religion’.

²³³ <https://www.morungexpress.com/nbcc-to-celebrate-150th-anniversary-of-coming-of-christianity-to-nagaland> Accessed on May 8, 2023.

²³⁴ <https://morungexpress.com/1872-a-retelling-of-christianitys-insertion-into-the-naga-hills> Accessed on May 8, 2023.



Figure 25: The compound walls of a church's staff quarter in Dimapur painted with the message to vote properly in the Nagaland State Legislative Assembly elections held in February 2023. Politics and religion are often closely connected in Nagaland.

Despite Christian events filling both the news and editorial sections of the newspaper, and a Christmas tree adorning its newsroom, journalists at *The Morung Express* told me that they do not prioritise Christmas any more than Chhath (a North Indian celebration, also observed by Bihari diaspora across the world). That, despite the debates it seemed to pursue, *The Morung Express* is just a newspaper like any other that covers matters of local relevance which determine how debates unfurl. During our conversations, they articulated 'indigeneity' and 'religion' in ways I had not considered while writing the previous empirical chapters of this dissertation. For instance, events under the 'Nagaland for Christ' calendar could also be linked to 'tradition' as a continuing practice, not just to notions about God, they suggested. While this chapter is about taking these perspectives into account, it is also a step forward in understanding the processes that shape the news specifically, and knowledge in general, at and through *The Morung Express*.

5.2 Methods

Amidst the daily evening gatherings and carnivals that marked December and Christmas, it became almost impossible to set up a workspace at home. Dimapur has no public libraries and any other workspace is hard to find. The most stable option available was still my old workspace, the newsroom.



Figure 26: Day and night views in 2022-23 of the building that houses the office of The Morung Express in Duncan Basti, Dimapur, Nagaland, on its ground floor.

I wrote to *The Morung Express* asking if they were able to provide a desk at which I could carry out my academic work. The editor said this was possible. At a desk among many desks in *The Morung Express* newsroom, I set up my UiT laptop. This is the space I chose to work at for four months in Nagaland, using a majority of the day shift instead of the night shift when journalists produced most of their work (most often, they would be out reporting during the day). When editorial meetings happened, I left the room.

The first thing to do was to make office staff aware that I had not returned to the Dimapur office of *The Morung Express* in my previous capacity as a journalist. I printed out several copies of an ‘information sheet’ explaining my PhD research study, inviting workers to participate and outlining what it means to participate in this study, who to contact to better understand the study, and other such details. I discussed this in detail with the staff members, and put up a copy each in the three rooms that make up the office. These copies remained on the walls till the day I left Dimapur to return to Tromsø.



Figure 27: Information sheet for the study pasted in the newsroom during the four months of interviews conducted in the office.

As mentioned before, the Dimapur office was organised through three groups. The most important group of interest to this study was the editorial team, which consisted of people from 25-50 years of age, male and female, all of whom live in Nagaland. This was the team of reporters, correspondents, sub-editors and the editor who engaged with, wrote, chose and edited the material (from Dimapur) that came to be published in *The Morung Express* at the time of the first phase of this study, that is, in 2020²³⁵. One of the things that changed between 2020 and 2022-23 was the constitution of the team. The editor of the newspaper had changed, and a new reporter had been added to the team. I included neither the new editor nor the new employee as part of the group discussion with the editorial team because they were not part of this team in 2020. I interviewed them separately. My questions to the editorial team traversed the complications that arose in terms of putting the newspaper together in 2020, primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which had arrived in Nagaland from March that year, and then moving on to their reflections on some of the topics under study in this dissertation.

It was no easy job to get the editorial team to sit together, or for them to give me the requisite hours to go through the material in question thoroughly. These are all journalists who have their own work hours, which do not always overlap with each other. Often, the only overlap was in the late hours of the day when they are busy working on the news and the newspaper and therefore were unable to talk with me. Before the evening shift, each of them has other responsibilities they must fulfil, at times in regard to the newspaper and at other times with their lives outside it. Challenges of time apart, infrastructural conditions meant that the Dimapur office had to work with hours of electricity cuts, with a generator insufficient to supply the electric power an industry like the news media needs; the news staff continued to work on beeping batteries and phones, using much more time and strain to produce the news. Team members often travelled for hours to make it to the office. Traversing all these

²³⁵ I did not include correspondents from the rest of Nagaland, particularly Kohima, as part of this study. Their views may have added different depths and directions to the chapter. This exclusion was strictly due to the paucity of time on my part.

conditions, we finally agreed on a couple of Mondays that could accommodate us to come together, in the afternoon, when editorial team members were not occupied with news gathering and selection. Apart from my general overview detailed on the information sheet, I did not provide them with any further information or any questions I would ask them about during the group discussion. My only brief to them, apart from the bare basics of the study, was that these are topics they are used to reflecting upon daily as part of their work at the newspaper. They generously made time and got the chaotic situation to work, sharing sharp insights on matters of concern.

The second group I interviewed consisted of individuals who ‘set the tone’ of overarching approaches to the work at *The Morung Express*. While the hierarchy this implies may not be something they aspire towards, these individuals – who are 40-60 years of age, male, and live in Nagaland – lay out the rubric(s) which enable reading the material in this newspaper both along its grain, and against it. I include three of my interviewees in this group – Aküm Longchari, the current editor and publisher of *The Morung Express*, Nepuni Piku, the president of *The Morung for Indigenous Affairs and Just Peace* (also known as the Morung Foundation), and John²³⁶, a non-journalist and non-staff regular contributor to *The Morung Express*. To them, I posed similar questions as to the editorial team, but often the conversations were either about their broader interests in setting up the newspaper, or in consistently highlighting certain themes that they think the newspaper’s audience ought to read. While I discussed the case studies with them, I was aware that they were not involved in the day-to-day production of the news (in 2020), thereby taking them further away from the journalistic process but keeping them closer to concepts that the newspaper is founded upon, some of which circulate in the newspaper. I did not share any questions with them beforehand either, briefing them only about the generic interests of the study. It was easier to spend a lot more time with each of these individuals, either at their homes or at *The Morung Express* office during the morning off-peak hours. Some of these conversations became rather

²³⁶ Name changed on request.

heated as participants in this group, much like participants in all other groups, are also former colleagues, mentors, and friends²³⁷.



Figure 28: A part of the newsroom of The Morung Express in Dimapur, Nagaland, in December 2022, when students at a Bachelor's degree programme in mass communication at the local Patkai Christian College were visiting to learn about the newspaper and its work.

Both these groups readily consented to being on record, that is, for our conversations to be recorded on a sound recorder. They also consented to be identified by name²³⁸.

²³⁷ Many anthropologists who have worked with the Nagas have spoken about their friendship with them (possibly common among anthropologists elsewhere). In his first book on the Nagas, Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf (1978 [1933]) wrote 'Impartiality is difficult to maintain while writing of friends...the memories of joyous experiences overshadow less pleasant impressions and the tendency to idealize one's far away friends is inevitable' (viii). Anthropologist Vibha Joshi (2012) addresses the issue of friend-as-participant category in social sciences research, and particularly through differences based on indigeneity and religion that may enter the equation in friendships between persons who have differences such as Naga and Indian birth origins. Since these kinds of differentiation were rarely applied to me in the newsroom, I do not go into the details of these aspects. My relations with different people at *The Morung Express* were sometimes based on common interest, sometimes on common experiences of class, sometimes in trying to understand our differences in upbringing, sometimes hierarchical, and sometimes argumentative. We were ultimately professionals in a news industry, worked with our situation and related accordingly.

²³⁸ In September 2023, I wrote to all those who are named in this study to ask if they were still open to being named. Barring one participant, who requested anonymity, all others re-iterated their consent.

However, I will use my discretion while naming the participants. At the time of the interviews, there was no way for any of the participants (or me) to fully understand the final analysis I would make based on their comments. They should not be held responsible for how the chapter takes stock of their reflections or my conclusions. All conclusions, drawn from these conversations and examples from the newspaper, are mine.

Finally, the third group of individuals that I interviewed were various individuals, from 30-70 years of age who live in Nagaland and neighbouring Assam, who work at *The Morung Express*, including those who handle management, administration and other logistics in the Dimapur office. These individuals did not want to be named in the study. Some, I spoke to individually. As a group, I spoke to the ‘graphics team’ at the newspaper that designs the pages, which are later sent to the printing press that physically produces the newspaper each day. The questions I asked them did not pertain to the news published on the pages, but to broader questions on the material conditions of their work at the institution, the routes through which they came to work at *The Morung Express*, and how they think about their work at the institution. Their responses are not etched out here explicitly in terms of analysis, but the views and information they shared with me provided a well-rounded perspective and a context in which the discussions on matters like indigeneity, religion, Naganess and others took place.

The group I completely left out was the working class – the maintenance staff, printing press workers, drivers, distributors and hawkers. Though their labour is just as important as the above groups and individuals, I did not have enough time or scope to accommodate them. Since I conducted this fieldwork towards the end of the research period due to the COVID-19 pandemic, time set crucial limits on this study and brought about the decision to focus on language and its articulations through the printed text. Interviewing those who transport the newsprint to *The Morung Express*, those who maintain the offices and those who print and distribute the newspaper would have brought much broader material conditions under focus. However, this chapter focuses on how knowledge workers articulate Naganess, indigeneity and religion in

conversation with me about the themes laid out in the previous chapters of this dissertation, namely the morning calendars and debated prohibitions.



Figure 29: Members of the editorial team working in the Dimapur newsroom on editing an issue of The Morung Express in 2023 to be published the next day.

5.3 COVID-19

To understand the immediate context of putting together the news in 2020, conversations with the editorial team started with the COVID-19 pandemic.

As stated in chapter two, the newspaper had to take drastic measures to handle the restrictions and state led lockdowns that were promulgated to check the spread of the virus. Journalists spent the greatest amount of their time, once the pandemic hit, in curbing the ‘spread of rumours and speculation’²³⁹. When the Indian Union went into official lockdown, one of the first editorial decisions the newspaper made was to reduce the number of pages from 12 to eight, and then to four, during the worst days of the

²³⁹ Interview with editorial team conducted on 19 December, 2022.

lockdown. The newspaper was only circulated as a PDF document to subscribers, or distributed online for free²⁴⁰. My first assumption was that this was done predominantly as a result of state bordering practices, like lockdowns, that disallowed newspapers to be distributed in their usual physical format. Several workers at *The Morung Express* told me that due to the state led lockdowns, the newspaper's circulation completely dwindled, leading eventually to plummeting revenue from advertising. The state did not provide any subsidies for the newspapers to survive. Digging into their savings and having to borrow, the newspaper also had to become a 'local info sheet' to address the most pressing issues connected to the pandemic. Even this became difficult as physical circulation was restricted; urban and rural villages refused to let distributors enter their areas. This was not new for communities in Nagaland, said an editorial team member, Veroli Zhimo (henceforth, Veroli), referring to the practice of *Püsa Küsü* in her Sümi community. When faced with diseases, either the village is isolated, or the sick are. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was the state but also the villages that restricted journalists and non-journalists from moving from one site to another, both between Assam and Nagaland as well as within Nagaland. With these restrictions, while *The Morung Express* became hyperlocal, the PDF copies and the internet made the newspaper's 'hyperlocal' news global. This is one of the ways in which the pandemic affected not just the published material in the newspaper, but also how it became accessible to readers like me in Norway who could attempt a research study like this in 2020.

5.4 Morung Calendar

In chapter three of this dissertation, I explored how Naganess is articulated through calendrical events in *The Morung Express* in 2020. I classified these events that recur in

²⁴⁰ The publisher of *The Morung Express* has expressed previously that the founders had aspired for the newspaper eventually to become free for distribution to readers. However, financial constraints have not made this possible yet though its webpage is an open and free resource (like all other newspapers in Nagaland). In a way, the buyers of the physical newspaper pay the 'tax' (Rs. 5 per issue) to keep the web resources to continue to be generated, free and distributable.

The Morung Express into three different calendars based on the material studied in the 2020 editions:

1. Nagaland for Christ calendar
2. Incredible Nagaland calendar
3. Global Naga calendar

What did the workers at the newspaper think about these classifications, and the issues they point towards? The excerpts²⁴¹ that are presented here are from a discussion that was conducted on 19 December 2022.

5.4.1 Nagaland for Christ calendar

Some of the issues of interest in the ‘Nagaland for Christ calendar’ were the Naga national days, like Naga republic or independence days, that get consistent coverage in the newspaper. Even as the COVID-19 pandemic had led to the reduction of pages, *The Morung Express*, possibly like all other newspapers in Nagaland, carried whole speeches about Naga sovereignty from the leaders of the various movements that call themselves Naga National governments. Why were these important to carry at such a time as this, when a pandemic raged and the newspaper’s pages reduced, I asked the editorial team? At first, some members from the group said they didn’t think articles on nationalism were any more important than anything else published; they didn’t think twice about it – the coverage was automatic. What would happen if they didn’t carry these speeches then, I asked. One member said the ‘primary reason’ was that there were instances in the past when representatives of the Naga revolutionary governments had called up the newspaper office asking for justifications on why their statements had not been published. Further, others said,

Imlisanen Jamir (henceforth, Sanen): I guess subconsciously we feel that we should carry it since we are the only ones who would carry it in terms of giving

²⁴¹ Though they are edited out excerpts from much longer conversations, they have not been edited for language.

them coverage. We, in the sense of not just *Morung*²⁴² but newspapers in Nagaland, are the only ones who will provide them space for what they want to say.

Moalemba Jamir (henceforth, Moa): One of the objectives of *The Morung Express* is to give space to Naga historical struggle.

Sanen: That's why we give precedence to speeches on Naga Republic Day than a speech given by an Indian minister sent to us.

Through the Nagaland for Christ calendar in *The Morung Express*, I analysed the articulations of God and nation in building Naganess as a 'Land of God'. Through the interventions of the editorial team, it seems that their concerns relate to:

1. The objectives of newspapers like *The Morung Express* to frontline the 'Naga historical struggle' over others.
2. The general consciousness among journalists in Nagaland that newspapers/news outlets anywhere else would not give Naga national messages any space, as they would an Indian minister.
3. The consequences of not publishing them are ambiguous, sometimes signifying considerable insecurity²⁴³.

Though my research linked 'Nagaland for Christ' to a geo-religious idea, wherein Naga historical migrations and settlement in the region is connected to God's choice (Longkumer 2021: 138), for the knowledge workers at the newspapers, anything related

²⁴² Morung is used in italics with a capital 'M' to indicate when someone uses it to refer to the newspaper, *The Morung Express*.

²⁴³ In chapter two, I have mentioned how the fourth wall of Nagaland's media is rather permeable with the audience sometimes influencing the news, expressing strong dissatisfaction over how their press releases are presented in the newspapers and so on. In a heavily militarised society with little democratic accountability and protection for freedom of the press, journalists cannot be sure of the consequences of such dissatisfaction. Though one among many deciding factors, the comment by a member about receiving 'phone calls' probably alludes to this.

to Nagaland for Christ is a taken-for-granted common notion that anything related to it must be taken seriously and published without question.

A trope related to this calendar was ‘Nagas are unique’. In both these instances – Nagaland for Christ, Nagas are unique – the editorial team members stated that the newspaper attempts to clarify that the newspaper is reporting what others have to say about such tropes. On the topic, one member of the editorial team said, ‘being indigenous or being a Naga, or being unique, for me, starts with my identity’. This intervention led to a flurry of discussion connecting indigeneity, identity and Naganess.

Sanen: On a surface level, it is a good thing for indigenous communities to be proud of their culture, but for me, I think that entire narrative... like xenophobia.. comes under the ‘Nagas are unique’ narrative. That also contributes to us being more isolationist. Even in the way we treat people from the mainland; we treat them well, but many have their own prejudices. For me, I am very uncomfortable with the entire ‘Nagas are unique’ thing. This is a catchphrase for every union.

Aheli: So, it is a useful term?

Sanen: It is a useful term. It is a political term and appeases a large portion of Naga people. But people fail to realise that it is a slippery slope.

Aheli: You used the term indigenous...

Sanen: Indigenous.. we also throw that term around casually without really thinking about what indigenous really is. Indigenous means... who are indigenous people of Dimapur – but am I indigenous to Nagaland?

Aheli: The larger question, of course, has to do with Naganess...

Moa: The biggest problem with Naga identity or Naganess, let’s say, is that we always speak about doing something since time immemorial. That we have been doing this or that since time immemorial. One of the most popular arguments is that Nagas were honest and hardworking, or a very resilient people. That is

accepted but when we look back, we were supposed to be a village republic in that time immemorial, and in that time we lived in a cohesive society and within that everyone was living well so honesty exists, but we have failed to transform those virtues into the Naga community.

Several contestations show up as a result of the articulation, in this discussion, of Naga uniqueness to identity. Indigeneity and uniqueness are linked to xenophobia and isolationist tendencies, as well as recognised for its usefulness for some quarters as a ‘catchphrase’. Naganess is linked to temporal identity markers like ‘time immemorial’, an infinite timescape of romantic village republics, honesty and cohesion. While these also speak about shared futures (Kikon 2015, Longkumer 2020) that entail ‘transformations’, for one of the participants in the discussion, the articulation of Naganess to Christ related uniqueness enables Naga revolutionary groups to mark a distinction from Communist and ‘Marxist things’; a separation from a Maoist ideological past where Naga ‘national workers’ were trained by the Republic of China’s People’s Liberation Army (See Shimray 2005, Thomas 2016: 146-150, Longvah 2017, Longkumer 2018b, Haksar and Hongray 2019, Baruah 2020). Instead of ‘simultaneous time’, the articulation puts a wedge on historical continuity. It maintains political control through grafting the past to Christian strands enabling, among other things, the development of ‘Christian socialism’ in Nagaland (Shimray 2005, Longvah 2017, Longkumer 2017a). This re-articulation of history is made possible, among other processes, through publishing regular news on ‘Nagaland for Christ’ related events, applicable across scales at various events local enough to be covered by the news media, and global enough to be understood both as something general (for Christians) and specific (for Nagaland).

One of the shorter sections within this calendar that I explored with the editorial team was also ‘martyr days’. To me, these seemed to fall well within the domain of the Nagaland for Christ calendar, as shown in chapter three. Two members offered two further examples: ‘NSF Martyrs Memorial Trophy’, a football championship hosted by the Naga Students’ Federation, and ‘Matikhrü’, a ‘black day’, both observed to

commemorate human rights abuses perpetrated by the Indian armed forces in Naga areas. None of the team members thought of such days as ‘Christian’ but more as, according to Veroli, ‘continuing a tradition’. This notion of ‘tradition’ was furthered by Akangjungla (henceforth, Akang), who said, ‘if it was started in someone’s tenure and someone didn’t follow it, they would be in trouble’. So, such news often makes it to the newspaper because, as Moa, the former editor, indicated, it is ‘user generated’. This means that journalists do not always go out of their offices to cover these events, but information about them are sent through ‘press releases’ by institutions that observe the events, which are then edited and published as news in the newspaper. Observation and commemoration as ‘tradition’ and their transmission through the news makes martyr days become, using James L. Cox’s term, important links in the ‘chain of memory’ (Cox 2018: 171). This ‘chain’, however, does not begin with an unknown past of remote ancestors but, as in the last two instances, through the Indian state’s denial of human rights in a recent past that ought to be remembered. There is little second-rung information crosschecking applied to such events as they are trusted and understood by the editorial team as important to transmit. However, Sanen pointed out how the newspaper ought to add quotation marks to words like martyr so it is clear that ‘we haven’t coined the term’²⁴⁴. This led to a discussion on how the word is now applied across the board, including for those who died protesting the women’s reservation law in Nagaland in 2017²⁴⁵, making it distinct from its ‘legitimate’ use in marking the dead in incidents like Matikhrü²⁴⁶ or Oting where the Indian army killed 14 Naga civilians

²⁴⁴ Also emphasising how the ‘martyr’ language came from the use of the term predominantly by military forces and the Army.

²⁴⁵ The Government of Nagaland tried to hold elections to the urban municipal councils with 33 percent reservation for women in 2017. However, civil society organisations led by men objected to the elections citing that Nagas have no concept of paying tax to the state on their properties, and that Naga customary practices do not allow reservation for women in political office. The protest against the election that followed led to the death of two young men, who were declared ‘martyrs’, and the cancellation of the elections. In 2023, the Government of Nagaland passed an updated law to hold these elections in 2024 with the women’s reservation intact but property tax removed. See <https://nwmindia.org/gender-lens/gender-media-elections/nagaland-passes-historic-legislation/> Accessed on 23.11.2023.

²⁴⁶ <https://unpo.org/article/16355> Accessed on 26.07.2023.

but the government refused to hold the perpetrators to account legally (ACHR 2021). Thus, martyrdom is used and disseminated for specific and different purposes, particularly in cases of unaddressed injustices. It is not necessarily connected to God, and can be connected to tradition. Though not always considered ‘legitimate’, news about the martyr events is always published.

Further, I asked how Christmas and Easter are related to ‘Nagaland for Christ’?

Moa: Nagaland for Christ is used to remind people about something. *Tui khan inaka kori asse but Nagaland for Christ asse dei!* (You people are indulging, possibly in ‘sinful’ acts like drinking alcohol, but remember that we are committed to ‘Nagaland for Christ’!²⁴⁷)

Nagaland for Christ, during events such as Easter or Christmas, moves across scales. Team members noted how the phrase steps in as a ‘moral, theological, spiritual’ framework for ‘mothers, pastors and preachers’ whose use of it to build ‘devout, spiritual Christians’ is applicable on an individual and familial scale. Meanwhile the Naga National Council (NNC)/National Socialist Council of Nagaland/Lim’s (NSCN) use of it as ‘our God given right to freedom and independence’ becomes applicable on a national scale. At both these scales, an obedient Naga citizenry is aspired to that, in some sense, uses the Bible as a constitution. As a preamble to Naga citizenship, the use of ‘Nagaland for Christ’ extends from an individual scale of reprimands, to, as a constitution²⁴⁸, the legitimation of a national cause through NNC/NSCN²⁴⁹-ordained and acceptable public norms. Its scope is large enough to be applicable to Nagas everywhere. It is applied by, say, the Nagaland Baptist Church Council during Easter or Christmas at local events to reach individual citizens, but also upscaling its reach to the national and global scales through such acts as promising 10,000 Naga missionaries to travel to other countries to conduct evangelical missions (Longkumer 2018c, Longkumer 2021:

²⁴⁷ My translation from Nagamese to English.

²⁴⁸ In the absence of any other Naga ‘national constitution’ in the public domain.

²⁴⁹ And, consequently, their respective governments.

138-139, Khamrang and Wouters 2022). These act as a ‘covenant’ (said Akang) that ‘connects it (the NBCC) to the masses’ (said Moa) by also ensuring its downscaled application through individual actors who say, ‘we are Christians so we should be Christ-like’ (said Moa). It possibly makes for a tight system of common Naga governance. Furthermore, it may be stated from these conversations that by recognising their significance, giving them automatic coverage in the local press, and sometimes even critiquing them, these terms of reference are transferred to everyday use through the local newspaper rendering them a common resource.

5.4.2 Incredible Nagaland calendar

In one of the many published articles that I studied in *The Morung Express* in 2020, an author refers to a ‘new religion’ in contrast to Moatsü that I infer as an ‘old religion’. In order to talk about the data I had gathered using the ‘Incredible Nagaland calendar’, I started our group discussion with this description of Moatsü. Apart from Veroli and me, everyone else in the editorial team belonged to the Ao Naga community for whom Moatsü is a big event. Unanimously, they said, ‘It is not a religion’. Surprised by the unanimous opinion, I asked, why not?

Sanen: No one says Moatsü is a religion since we are so Christianised. For me, it’s more like this cultural thing that we do. There is nothing negative about that, nothing wrong with that. But very few people would look at Moatsü in terms of religion. It’s now more about something that brings together a particular community, celebrating a community.

Akang: Before Christianisation, Moatsü, Tsüngremmong and other festivals were some kind of rituals, worship, sacred things. That aspect was there but since we don’t do those things anymore, I don’t consider it as a religion.

Moa: It is a fusion of new religion and old practices. In a cohesive manner, preserving the cultural aspect while the terms of reference have changed. For example, during Moatsü, now we don’t pray to Lijaba. We pray to Almighty. That’s how it has changed. Traditional purists and Christian purists might

question such practices, but it is well established now that they can co-exist cohesively.

Overall, while the ‘sacredness’ of Moatsü was considered, it was not a ‘religious’ practice equal to Christian practices. The former could be a ‘festival’ but not the latter, an observation that I made in my analysis in this section of the chapter. In our editorial team discussions, Moatsü was a ‘cultural thing’ and not a ‘sacred’ thing anymore. However, a sacred past and religious present ‘co-exist’ through a ‘fusion’ entailing a movement from Lijaba to Almighty. To understand this, I recall another story.

In January 2023, I happened to be seated next to a lecturer from a local government college on a flight from Kolkata to Dimapur. She wanted to know what I was reading, which got us talking about my work, and hers. When I said ‘indigenous religion’, she told me about a course they taught in ‘religious philosophy’ with a paper on ‘tribal religion’. She pointed out that this paper was easier to write for, say, Zeliang²⁵⁰ students, some of whom practice Heraka²⁵¹, than for Ao students who need to look for this in books, often written by theologians. She repeated what two participants in the discussion with the editorial team had, ‘we do not follow Lijaba anymore, we only follow God Almighty’. This movement from one entity to the other was made possible through missionary translations, amongst other processes, and the displacement of Lijaba to the realm of the ‘ancient’. For instance, the ‘neutral concept with no specific attributes’ of Tsüngrem was translated by American missionaries to the Christian God, sidelining other ‘spirits’ in the Ao pantheon, such as Lijaba²⁵² that were clearly defined, and which demanded, amongst other things, sacrifices (Eaton 1984: 23-30). Lijaba worship was attached to ‘priests’, and procedural lapses could lead to dissatisfaction; it is ‘no more practiced due to the intervention of Christianity’ (Jamir 2012: 1, 165-166). An Ao theologian, Panger Imchen, describes ‘Lichaba’ in his book on ‘Ancient Ao Naga

²⁵⁰ A Naga group in Nagaland State consisted of two tribes, Zeme and Liangmai.

²⁵¹ An indigenous socio-religious reform movement among a section of the Nagas which began in the 1930s. See Longkumer 2016.

²⁵² Also spelled Lichaba, Lizaba, etc.

Religion and Culture'. Imchen lists Lichaba as one of many 'Typolog[ies] of God' with 'distinct jurisdiction' in Ao 'tradition'; and as the 'creator' who is also responsible for 'natural calamities' (Imchen 2021: 49-51). This is exemplary of theological attempts to articulate religion and indigeneity in Nagaland today. Imchen dedicates the book, in brief, to 'Those who lived in Time Immemorial...', a register of global indigeneity (Wilmer 1993: xi, Béteille 1998: 187, Dhamai 2014: 10). Being some of the first to move to Christianity among the Nagas, the Ao intellectual community has paid considerable attention to connecting an 'Ao past' to a 'Christian present' (Tzüdir 2019, Talilula 2023: 152-4), differentiating 'traditional/Ao religion' from 'religion' (Tzüdir 2019: 268-71), and suggesting a seamless continuity between two religious epochs. Indigeneity and religion are often articulated in such literature in ways that suggest the establishment of an Ao theology or Ao Christianity. The festivalisation of some Ao practices (like, Moatsü without Lijaba) over others, established by early pioneers of the Christian movement in Nagaland – thereby separating it from 'religion' – and appropriation of others (like, Lijaba without Moatsü) by late followers – thereby connecting it to 'religion' – could be understood as both the development of contextual theology (Kraft 2022: 43-8) as much as contextual secularity/ism (Bhargava 2010: 99) as strategically useful (Wenger 2009: 249) enablers of articulations that use context to challenge boundaries (Opas 2019: 1072) that were made doctrinally, and legally, rigid in the colonial and postcolonial era.

These focal points lend themselves to the need felt to establish an upscaled 'Naga theology', by those who 'set the tone' at *The Morung Express*. All three individuals featured in this section mentioned this to me in independent interviews. The editorial contributor, John, speaking about what is, or is not, 'unique' about Nagas, said, 'even after 150 years of Christianity, Nagaland or Nagas do not have something which we call Naga Christianity. Nagas still follow western Christianity.'²⁵³ Emphasising the lack of 'solid foundations' both in terms of indigeneity and Christianity, Aküm Longchari, the publisher of *The Morung Express*, said, '...we don't have a Naga theology after 150

²⁵³ Interview conducted on 9 January, 2023.

years...something which we can say is ours and not coming from the west'²⁵⁴. Nepuni Piku, President of the Morung Foundation, spoke about Nagas 'celebrating 150 years of Christianity in their homeland'²⁵⁵, becoming some of the 'highest constituents of the World Baptist Alliance' (contributing a large number of members), yet the Nagas have 'accepted' the Bible with the 'cultural content' of American 'white society'²⁵⁶. The content produced in, and by, *The Morung Express* may be understood as articulating 'indigenous' aspects of local society to 'religious' aspects of the Bible most applicable here for the purpose of harnessing 'Naga theology' also as a way to 'organise social life' (Opas 2022: 61) that is specific to context, but not seamlessly so. Though being specific to context is the work of newspapers everywhere, my attribution of a theological bent to their work is addressed through a re-articulation of *The Morung Express* as morung, a 'modern indigenous educational institution'. I will return to this point in the next chapter.

Since the link between 'culture' and 'religion' in Nagaland is sometimes described as being broken by the coming of Christianity (Haksar and Hongray 2019: 317), I asked the editorial team about the difference, in their thinking, between 'religion' and 'culture'? Former editor, Moa, said, culture is a 'custom or festival' that has been followed 'since time immemorial'. Albeit common among indigenous people, the trope is gaining traction in other movements among neighbouring communities who have not associated with global indigeneity (at least not yet). For instance, the Jain Samaj (community) in Nagaland used the term 'since time immemorial' in a press statement in January 2023²⁵⁷, protesting the government declaration of a Jain 'sacred site' as a 'tourist spot'. I asked a leader of the Jain community in Dimapur if all Jain press statements on the issue across the Indian Union used this language. He said this was

²⁵⁴ Interview conducted on 11 March, 2023.

²⁵⁵ Interview conducted on 12 January, 2023.

²⁵⁶ Piku used the example of wearing white gowns, veils and tuxedos at weddings, an example that John also used, of what they consider to be 'western' or 'culture of white society'.

²⁵⁷ <https://easternmirrornagaland.com/jain-community-in-dimapur-protests-decla/> Accessed on 28.07.2023.

used only in Nagaland and went on to associate ‘since time immemorial’ with theological writings in Jain scriptures; he explicitly told me this is a ‘religious’ concept. Jains are described as a religious community in India, closely associated to the Hindus. This shows us the new communities that come to be attached with terms like ‘time immemorial’ which do not necessarily render them ‘indigenous’ but certainly ‘religious’²⁵⁸.



Figure 30: The Digambar Jain Temple in Marwari Patti, Dimapur, Nagaland, was first built in 1947, and has been renovated over the years.

Who, or what processes, decides what is ‘religious’ in the Indian Union and in Nagaland? One could be the Jain Samaj in Dimapur in the context of their protest to protect their pilgrimage sites, but another instance may be understood through an

²⁵⁸ Arkotong Longkumer has written on how Hinduism has been claimed to be the ‘largest indigenous tradition/religion’ in the world. Longkumer, A. (2017b). Is Hinduism the World’s Largest Indigenous Religion? *Handbook of Indigenous Religion(s)*. G. Johnson and S. E. Kraft. Leiden, The Netherlands, BRILL: 263-278.

editorial team member's intervention when I asked if Moatsü could be termed a 'thanksgiving programme [or event]' since that was a term used in the report published in *The Morung Express* in 2020.

Akang: We have Moatsü which was a spiritual thing before Christianity. We had certain words, certain gods that we were praying to, thanksgiving was not an event but just a word or expression unlike the American Thanksgiving which we don't have. After Christianity, we have left the worshipping of an unknown god. But we have carried over our costumes and dance. Most communities have done away with symbolism of headhunting even in the costumes. And even the songs and dances – some dances are for celebratory, for heads, and we don't do these practices because we have come to the realisation that we should not be doing that. Even the songs that we sing, the original songs are glorifying Lijaba or gods and things like that but now most of the songs have words that are contextual, and even Christian words are used. Same tune, same melody but lyrics have been changed. Over time, we have evolved in this manner. There is no clear separation, but as Moa was saying, it is like we have carried over the culture in a Christianised way and we have left out the spiritual aspect.

Aheli: So, what is religious or not religious is decided by Christianity?

All: Yes, yes.

In the section on the Incredible Nagaland calendar in chapter three, I explored how the state and civil society are key to how something becomes 'religious' or not in Nagaland, thereby producing Naganess in the mode of the 'Land of Festivals'. From the above conversation I gather that 'christianity' is also a deciding factor in what is considered 'religious' or not. Moreover, religion and non-religion are made concrete today for Nagas by newspapers like *The Morung Express* (as it is done, among the Jains in Nagaland, for instance, by the Jain Samaj, their articulations also made available by newspapers in Nagaland). For instance, pages like the Faith Leaf that carries Christian

discourses²⁵⁹ in *The Morung Express* every Sunday was said (by an editorial contributor) to be there as pedagogical material for an audience who ‘cannot go to church’²⁶⁰. Nepuni Piku told me that the ‘faith leaf’ page was created to avoid the use of horoscopes – ‘parochial superstitious culture’ – in the newspaper, choosing Christianity over astrology because ‘it is the biblical context and values that matter’ to Nagas²⁶¹. Christian discourses raise ‘critical consciousness’, Aküm Longchari told me, while explaining the presence of biblical discourses in the newspaper. To him, Christianity has become ‘ritualistic’ in Nagaland; it ought to be about ‘decolonising Christianity’, the ‘teachings of Christ’ and about ‘prophetic imagination’. This specific work can also be seen to be done by pages like faith leaf²⁶², becoming a legitimate participant in building a Christian epoch in Nagaland today, as well as showcasing how boundaries are drawn and moved, in this case, between ritual and religion (Opas 2019: 1090-1) in order to stress the local need for decolonising.

²⁵⁹ While some pieces on this page are written by local, non-journalist, contributors, the majority of the content on the Faith Leaf page is gathered by a page editor (Akan said she is most often responsible for this page) from websites like Patheos, Charisma Magazine, Christianity Today, Cross Walk, Christian Post, Church Leaders, UCA News, Desiring God, Religion Online, and others. These examples are drawn from a random sample from Sunday pages of *The Morung Express* in 2020.

²⁶⁰ However, some workers at *The Morung Express* said that the ‘faith leaf’ page was superfluous because ‘those of us who need to read that sort of stuff already have access to it through the church’. They thought this page was not needed because the news in Nagaland was already ‘Christian heavy’ from the ‘revivals and underground news’. Interview on 12 February, 2023.

²⁶¹ Other newspapers that were in competition with *The Morung Express* earlier carried horoscopes, which was one of the reasons that distributors gave to explain the wider readership of these newspapers over *The Morung Express*. Newspapers had a younger audience at the time when the newspaper started, and despite market pressures, the board of the newspaper refused to carry horoscopes.

²⁶² As also by institutions like the Forum for Naga Reconciliation that uses these terms to introduce new politics and articulations, presented in detail on the pages of *The Morung Express*.



Figure 31: People stand in queue to cast their votes for the Nagaland State Legislative Assembly elections held in February 2023. The voting booth is at a government school next to a Baptist church in Dimapur, separated by a gated boundary wall. It is not clear if the boundary wall was constructed by the church or the school.

Such boundaries, and their movement and stability, were pointed out by the editorial team too. They told me that while Christianity is important, there remained ‘old customs’ that were maintained in the village through ‘traditional ways’ and kept completely separate from ‘Christian practices’. Many of these, I was told, include inter and intra village relations that have been kept separate both from Christian as well as State practices. This does not mean they have not been altered or updated over the years, but possibly through other negotiations that are not studied in this dissertation. These boundaries are, thus, maintained or moved in *The Morung Express* because its knowledge workers know where they are drawn; and through a clear ‘demarcation’ from ‘Christian religion’, as Moa pointed out, they ‘co-exist’. Though such a co-existence has been termed ‘syncretism’ (Joshi 2012: 3) in the Naga context, indigenous and religious things do not just ‘blend’ but are mindfully grafted indicating the presence of a secular sphere (King 2011: 51-2) where practices classified as culture, tradition, custom, politics

– most recognisable as ‘indigenous’, even ‘indigenous religion’ – are separated from Christianity that is kept in the domain of ‘religion’. Classification is no indication of separation, but the separation raises new perspectives on the processes and actors who may modify boundaries between indigeneity and religion (Opas 2017: 131). Indigeneity and religion interact, and are articulated, in *The Morung Express*, each keeping the other from absolutism, but only under certain conditions do these articulations amount to ‘co-existence’.

The Hornbill Festival is one such example. With contestations both by church and civil society actors in Nagaland State, the festival seems to ‘co-exist’, even flourish despite contestations, in a ‘Christian state’ (Longkumer 2017c: 114-5). One of the platforms where this can be seen is the news in *The Morung Express* – I wondered how the editorial team thought about the Hornbill Festival.

Veroli: It is an event, not necessarily a Naga festival. It is not at all a Naga festival.

Aheli: Why not?

Veroli: It was started by the state government.

Sanen: It is not a Naga festival since it was not historically a Naga festival.

Akang: For me, Moatsü is my festival. It is my community (Ao), so it is mine, but I cannot express the same for Hornbill.

Sanen: It is not a Naga festival, though it may be becoming a Naga festival for some people.

This is how a long conversation started about the Hornbill Festival, contested by the editorial team for its claims to being Naga. *The Morung Express* itself claims to be a voice of the Naga people. What was the difference? Some members of the editorial team pointed to the ‘cynicism’ attached to the Nagaland State. Their coverage of state affairs throughout the year portrays the state’s operation through corruption, the siphoning of funds meant for development, and collapsing infrastructure. The state attempts to put on

a show at the end of the year that ‘everything is okay’ and legitimises this through public displays of Naganess through dances and shows that attract participation. Articulation of Naganess to indigeneity by the state through exotic displays (dances, games etc.), while useful for many actors like entrepreneurs and tourists, is critiqued by journalists at *The Morung Express*. This critique is no less based on how the festival is organised – ‘by a select group of people from the state’ (Sanen), or the hyper elite, perpetuating a growing capitalist control tightly linked to the state.

I spoke to Aküm Longchari, the current editor and publisher of *The Morung Express*, on the topic²⁶³. He reminded me that the Hornbill Festival emerged from an earlier Naga Week, which was led by civil society and held in December 1993 in Kohima to bring attention to the International Year for the World’s Indigenous Peoples through a declaration of the Naga people to live as one Naga nation (Lotha 2016: 198-205, Longkumer 2017c: 108). According to Gam A. Shimray, Secretary General of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, this was one of the first expressions of global indigeneity on Naga home ground²⁶⁴. The entry of global indigeneity into Nagaland coincided with India’s economic liberalisation in the 1990s that brought new questions and possibilities to identity (Mohanraj 2002) and labour movements (Uba 2008) in the subcontinent. Connecting more to identity than labour, when Nagaland State appropriated the Naga Week and instated the Hornbill Festival in 2000, said Longchari, it restricted the participation of ‘peoples’ to the ‘tribes’ of Nagaland State. This enabled a commodified state-defined indigenous identity to be set in motion. In 2008, the Government of India declared the Hornbill Festival a ‘national event’²⁶⁵, in 2009 a ‘festival of festivals’ or one among many in India, and in 2012, the Nagaland State government itself gained Naga national legitimacy by holding it under the banner of ‘unity’ to acknowledge the efforts of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation. Talking about this, the publisher said²⁶⁶:

²⁶³ He was also the publisher of the newspaper in 2020.

²⁶⁴ Brief interview held on 19 July 2023, on the sidelines of the 16th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Geneva.

²⁶⁵ A national event of India, not a Naga national event.

²⁶⁶ Interview conducted on 11 March, 2023.

It is appropriate if the (Nagaland) state government had said that we are organising the Hornbill Festival for all Nagas. If they had the political wisdom as well as the will to say that we are, but we also acknowledge that there are Nagas who live across and beyond the borders of Nagaland, so this is a festival without borders.... say that we are bringing Nagas to celebrate the Hornbill Festival. Wouldn't that be an idea that helps foster a new kind of imagination? It lacks that kind of spirit.

Longchari points to questions of scope and scale, and how this changes what the Hornbill Festival is claimed to be, and who benefits from it. When the state establishes the Hornbill Festival with its massive resources, it delimits the scope of Naganess to state boundaries, and, by extension, to 'tribes'. As a register of contested indigeneity (Xaxa 1999), 'tribe' does the work of restricting Naganess to the historical particularity of states in the Indian Union, thus identifying Naganess with only Nagaland State as a form of identity and citizenship. Once restricted in this way, the Hornbill Festival cannot become a Naga Week, applicable 'across borders'. When the Naga civil society, although without the resources to continue such an annual programme, created this event in 1993, its scale began from 'all Nagas everywhere'²⁶⁷. By extending the scope of Naganess, Naga Week presented potentials of movement in various directions, moving and contesting state boundaries.

These contestations, extending scope, challenging borders and bordering practices are important points of engagement for *The Morung Express*, enabled by the Hornbill Festival. However, there are other important drivers of engagement with the Hornbill Festival that keeps its news on the pages of *The Morung Express*:

²⁶⁷ On the other hand, the Hornbill Festival includes non-Naga Scheduled Tribes in Nagaland State, like the Dimasa, who also put up morungs, dances and games at the festival site in Kisama.

Akang: ...as a newspaper, we should consider that we have the business aspect too. The amount of advertisements that come in during Hornbill.. we are not obligated, but there is a certain understanding that...

Moa: If it is an event, as a newspaper we have to carry it whether we like it or not. We can comment on it in an editorial and other op-ed pages but since it is happening within the state, we have to cover it as a newspaper.

Economic considerations as well as ‘objective’ practices of journalism also govern the news formation at *The Morung Express*, which sustains itself from the advertising revenue drawn from state events like the Hornbill Festival²⁶⁸. Without accessing such financial resources (Amin 2014: 124), the newspaper would struggle to publish, and maintain its articulative potentials in the ways highlighted in previous chapters. But is the market a determining factor in what the newspaper publishes? Small and medium newspapers in India depend on state and private advertisements²⁶⁹ to sustain themselves. They have to strike a balance between the material pushed by economic and political factors²⁷⁰ and their own aspirations; a balance also struck through asserting ‘objective’ approaches. As in the case of such market determinants as the Hornbill Festival²⁷¹, the festival is challenged on the pages of *The Morung Express*, bringing opportunities to tackle issues of state governance, history of state formation in the region, what that means for collective movements, and so on, but also becoming an important source of income through news and advertisements from, and about, the festival.

²⁶⁸ The state as well as non-state actors like entrepreneurs advertise across news platforms to inform citizens and tourists about events and products on display or on sale at the Hornbill Festival.

²⁶⁹ These advertisements are also a form of information for readers.

²⁷⁰ The government largely controls the news media through strict circulation and advertising regulations that have been discussed briefly in chapter two.

²⁷¹ Or, indeed, the 2023 Nagaland state legislative assembly elections when advertisements are big both in terms of size and revenue.

There are festivals in Nagaland that serve neither of these purposes but are still on the pages. While on fieldwork, for instance, I was invited to a festival called Chüthüni on 7 January 2023, held in Dimapur’s Mao Colony. People who spoke at the event not only used terms like gods, blessings, Almighty God, peace, and love, but also addressed an ongoing conflict by calling on the unity among Nagas with ‘common heritage’²⁷².



Figure 32: 2023 Chüthüni celebrations underway in Mao Colony, Dimapur, as a journalist takes photographs to distribute to news outlets in Nagaland and elsewhere.

This festival was given wide coverage across Nagaland’s media, including in *The Morung Express* that published both digital and printed content based on the event. There was no advertising revenue attached to these, but the inclusion of such festivals in the news keeps the newspaper’s articulative potentials alive, that is, it articulates Naganess to indigeneity and religion through its choice of editorial stance on such matters. In terms of revenue, it is the collective revenue of small advertisements by individuals and institutions as well as big ones connected to the state that contribute to

²⁷² Festivals that focus on ‘fostering unity’ among the Nagas are also celebrated among other Nagas, like Nagas of Manipur who celebrate Lui-Ngai-Ni, led annually by the United Naga Council. For more, see Mawon, S. (2017). Continuity and change in Hao Naga festivals. *Nagas in the 21st century*. J. P. Wouters and M. T. Heneise. Kohima, Thimphu, Edinburgh, The Highlander Books: 169-184.

the newspaper remaining marginally free from a total market-state takeover of the news, as well as enabling it to keep its own approach ongoing through ownership, alternative claims and journalistic coverage. These are ways to participate in the negotiation of rules (Amin 2014: 127) with the state and market forces²⁷³.

So, while festivals like Chüthüni and Moatsü are considered ‘ours’ – the former by Mao people and the latter by Ao people – the Hornbill Festival was not given the same entry into the fold. Members of the editorial team expressed worries about how the state had established ‘Mini Hornbill Festivals’ recently. Many festivals which were celebrated by communities have now been brought under the ambit of state funding, enabling these communities to establish a link to the Hornbill enterprise and draw revenue in the process. However, the Hornbill enterprise belongs to the state that decides who gets the funds, what rules regulate the festivals and so on²⁷⁴. According to the publisher of *The Morung Express*, such a move further separates communities from their practices, allowing the state to decide what these may be and how they may be determined. According to him, what used to be ‘shared’, to be celebrated across a national landscape, now comes to be connected to a ‘tribe’ and a state-limited scale of indigeneity; boiled down to a single and fixed format stipulated by the state. This festivalisation of practices by articulating them as ‘Mini Hornbill Festivals’ further restricts indigeneity through state funding and individual entrepreneurship to the Nagaland State. The branding of Nagaland as ‘incredible’ models the state as attractive for tourism and investment through a ‘narrow’ indigeneity which is nonetheless recognisable on a global scale.

²⁷³ One staff member of *The Morung Express* (who wished to be anonymous) lamented how reporters refuse to do ‘market news’ at this newspaper while other newspapers have risen to success through catering to ‘what the market wants’. According to them, this has made *The Morung Express* more difficult to sell to advertisers than some of its competitors.

²⁷⁴ In effect, these are regulated cultural shows that serve as auditions for the main Hornbill Festival in Kohima in December and spreads out the Hornbill franchise across the state to address the problem raised by other districts that the Hornbill Festival is too Kohima-centric. Several rules have been put in place to ensure this spread across Nagaland’s districts. See <https://morungexpress.com/pda-cabinet-approves-mini-hornbill-festival-celebration-all-districts> Accessed on 23.11.2023.

Moving further, I was interested in minority ‘festivals’ like Id, Diwali, Durga Puja, Chhath and a few others that were given coverage in the newspaper in 2020, even if the coverage was primarily of government notifications regarding COVID-related restrictions on them. Everyone on the editorial team asserted that it was the presence of these ‘other’ festivals that made the newspaper a ‘secular’ product, and that they didn’t give any more coverage to Christmas or Easter than they did to these events. News on most of these non-Christian events were published in the newspaper as a result of press releases and photographs sent to *The Morung Express* by the respective communities or as notices from the government.

I spoke to a contributor to *The Morung Express* who argued in an editorial in October 2020 that the state should cancel the Hornbill Festival for the year to avoid complications related to the pandemic. The editorial also pointed out the violation of state-regulated Standard Operating Procedures during Durga Puja (a Hindu festival) with respect to COVID-19. I wondered why the contributor didn’t make the same arguments for Christmas. He responded that cancelling Christmas would be ‘sin’. The contributor is one among a few editorial writers who makes biblical arguments in *The Morung Express* to address issues in Nagaland. For him, Diwali and Hornbill are festivals, but Christmas is not a festival. He attributed this demarcation to the ‘essence’ of Christmas being the ‘birth of Jesus Christ’ not ‘shopping, feasting, Santa Claus and decorations’ which marked celebrations for most people, nonetheless. There was a clear difference in how he and I approached the subject, and perhaps other members of *The Morung Express* too. I counted the whole of December as Christmas, with news on carnivals, debates around shop closures, biblical statements made by individuals and institutions filling the pages of the newspaper. For Christian members of the newspaper, perhaps there was a separate ‘essence’ at work that I had not considered as a non-Christian, and this looms large over my analysis in the previous chapters. The publisher of *The Morung Express* reminded me that 25 December is always a day off at this and all other newspapers in Nagaland. This was the basis of the claim that Christmas is no more important than any other news. Yet, the newspaper was also closed on Durga

Puja²⁷⁵, and little about it generated news or commentary in October barring COVID-19 related restrictions²⁷⁶. It was this ‘essence’ that the editorial team perhaps suggested that they do not make an added effort to cover as journalists, extending this ‘essence’ to all other ‘festivals’ like Durga Puja, Id or Chhath. Here ‘essence’ refers to an assigned core of, in this case, religions – birth of Christ is articulated as the essence of Christmas, as dipping in a river before sunrise has been made essential to Chhath and the deity of a mother goddess to Durga Puja, photos of which are carried each year as descriptors of these festivals (in Nagaland and elsewhere). While the editorial contributor compares Hindu ‘festivals’ with the Hornbill Festival from a Christian perspective, journalists at *The Morung Express* critique the Hornbill Festival (or use it to critique other aspects of governance) and rarely engage with the festivals of other religions. There is an ownership over both Christmas and the Hornbill Festival that allows for critical engagement with them throughout December; a critical, secular, distance is maintained from non-Christian, non-indigenous ‘religions’ by keeping their coverage to their ‘essence’ as displayed on festival days²⁷⁷.

²⁷⁵ All newspapers in Nagaland are closed on Christmas, New Year and one chosen day of the Durga Puja. This closure is primarily for the non-Naga Hindu employees of the newspapers, majority of whom work the printing presses.

²⁷⁶ This would be different on the pages of a newspaper, say, in West Bengal where Durga Puja is one among the primary events celebrated in the state. Christmas is relevant but not a prime focus.

²⁷⁷ Such a distance is not necessarily maintained by the Hindu majoritarian Bharatiya Janata Party-led central government which declared December 25 as ‘Good Governance Day’ to be observed across the Indian Union each year. Christian organisations, particularly from the Northeast, protested against this decision. <https://thewire.in/politics/north-east-church-bodies-oppose-good-governance-day-christmas> Accessed on 24.12.2023.



Figure 33: The Morung Express annual Christmas and new year messages in 2020, carried on 23 December and 31 December respectively.

5.4.3 Global Naga calendar

It was not until we began to discuss the global days of interest on the pages of *The Morung Express* that our discussion moved more towards ‘indigeneity’, and not necessarily restricted to ‘essences’. This took our conversation in other directions that embroiled us in discussions of who or what is indigenous, who defines it and even comparisons with societies elsewhere.

To approach the few issues I discuss through this calendar in my data chapter, I began discussions with the editorial team about International Human Rights Day, an event which *The Morung Express* covers each year. Why so?

Akang: There is a need to create awareness among our people.

Sanen: It is important given our history.

Aheli: Global days are also ways to talk about local issues?

Moa: Global days, but local context. That way, Human Rights Day is very contextual to the Naga struggle, so we concentrate on that. Like that, we also focus on PLHIV²⁷⁸ and HIV/AIDS issues, International Women's Day – these are some of the days in which we deliberately do stories to highlight our issues. We do stories on World Environment Day, but on such days newspapers here are inundated with press releases so we don't need to do stories of our own. We Naga people tend to celebrate days.

This is one of the categories of news where news persons do interviews to publish feature stories on the issues that the 'global days' help address in the local scenario. On some of these global days, such as women's day or environment day, journalists do not have to make an added effort since many non-government organisations observe them and send press releases to the newspaper. All of these are given special importance due to their recognition for 'awareness, history, local context'. On most occasions, UN mandated themes – drawn from its website – are followed each year. In 2020, the UN's global focus was on the COVID-19 pandemic, as was the focus in *The Morung Express*. To this, *The Morung Express* added the 'right to belief' in its report on Human Rights Day. I wondered what the editorial team thought on this addition but none of them remembered this aspect of the report. The conversation moved to the International Women's Day which is also a topic I discussed in my chapter:

Aheli: On International Women's Day, the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights attended a programme [event] and said we need to revive 'indigenous traditional knowledge' and 'Naga traditional knowledge'. Are Naga and indigenous the same thing?

Sanen: No! I don't know what indigenous is. What is indigenous?

²⁷⁸ People Living with HIV/AIDS.

Moa: For me, it's the same thing.

Aheli: Why?

Moa: Because indigenous is something that is original to us. Some of these traditions, education and traditional knowledge are unique to us.

Aheli: It is unique, meaning it doesn't exist anywhere else in the world?

Moa: I would claim that.

Akang: There can be similarities but..

Moa: ...but it is unique practices to us. One clarification, I was criticising 'time immemorial' before but surprisingly, while reporting on something, I saw on the UN Indigenous Peoples Forum website, it is written 'time immemorial'. I was quite surprised that they are also using this! I thought the 'time immemorial' thing may have become old, but that is not the case.

Veroli: Regarding uniqueness, I think most of the time we tend to take it within the Indian context, when we talk about our uniqueness, not necessarily comparing to other indigenous people. That is the general tendency. Even when we speak about cultural context, we tend to read it within that context. I don't think that is very helpful for us, but that is the context.

Moa: The nearest point of similarity with other indigenous people is the oral tradition. That is the example. Since time immemorial we have oral, land ownership etc.

Sanen: Headhunting.

A few things happened in this conversation. First, I didn't interrogate the line between 'indigenous knowledge' and 'traditional knowledge' to understand the Naganess that was stated to be the constant amongst these two variables. Instead, I asked if Naga and indigenous are the same thing without specifying the context in which a representative

of the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) had brought the subject up in the news report. This led to the inevitable generic discussion where apprehensions were expressed about the term ‘indigenous’, while there were clarifications to assert Naga uniqueness. In the second interview with the editorial team, Imkong Walling (henceforth, Imkong) said there is ‘no such thing as indigenous on this planet, if you go according to Darwin’. This idea did not generate discussion in the team; articulations of indigeneity and science are rare in Nagaland, and its newspapers. Meanwhile, there were comparisons made with other indigenous people on the basis of oral tradition, land ownership, inhabitation period, and headhunting, a language some said they picked up from platforms like the United Nations where such tropes as ‘time immemorial’ also seemed to circulate²⁷⁹.

But these do not only come from distant global platforms. I asked the publisher why so much effort is made in *The Morung Express* to highlight indigenous people and their struggles²⁸⁰. He said:

The kind of issues that were being articulated by the indigenous world correlated to what the Nagas were talking about. Human rights issues, the question of land, biodiversity, relationship between land and people, questions of self-determination.

He made a distinction between these approaches and those taken on similar issues by organisations like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch that focused on ‘just human rights violations per se’ without placing them in the context of the post-colonial, yet colonised, worlds that made the struggles of indigenous people relatable and

²⁷⁹ Previous chapters of this dissertation show some of the online networks through which news and analysis of events among other indigenous people are re-published in *The Morung Express*. These networks include *Cultural Survival*, *Democracy Now*, *Thomas Reuters Foundation*, *Yes Magazine*, *Mongabay*, *Asia Times*, *The Irrawaddy*, *Polygon*, *Down To Earth*, *Waging Nonviolence*, and others. The examples are taken from a random sample published on different days on opinion pages of *The Morung Express* in 2020.

²⁸⁰ The pieces published in the editorial or op-ed pages of *The Morung Express* on indigenous people’s struggles are often put together by the publisher-editor.

recognisable to each other. By publishing the struggles of the globally relatable-and-recognisable, *The Morung Express* provides the language, and potential, of upscaling Naga struggles from local to global, even as it connects global indigeneity discourses to local concerns.

5.5 Debated prohibitions

In chapter four, I explored how Naganess is presented through debated prohibitions in *The Morung Express* in 2020. I classified these events in *The Morung Express* into two debates on state prohibitions applied to items of human consumption:

1. Alcohol prohibition through the Nagaland Liquor Total Prohibition Act, 1989 (NLTP Act).
2. Dog meat prohibition through an administrative ban on trade of dog meat in 2020.

These two prohibitions were debated extensively in *The Morung Express* and the material produced as a result was helpful in terms of understanding actors who participate in these debates, and what it says about how lines of indigeneity and religion are drawn while debating these prohibitions. What did the members of the newspaper think about these issues?

The excerpts of the interview presented here, with the editorial team, was conducted on 16 January 2022.

5.5.1 Alcohol prohibition

In the chapter on this subject, the alcohol prohibition is presented in *The Morung Express* as an internal issue for Nagaland State, and even more so for the Nagas themselves, and done so by articulating the issue to Christianity. I presented how individuals, Naga unions and churches participate in the debate to lift or continue the NLTP Act in Nagaland. To members of the editorial team, I asked why this issue is so important for *The Morung Express*, and if the alcohol prohibition is seen as an issue of political economy, or as a Christian issue?

Akang: ...as we all know, for *Morung*, we dedicate ourselves to a particular issue or topic and make it more visible in the public space. There are some issues on which people have an opinion but sometimes we feel that the voice and opinion is not going beyond a certain circle. For *Morung*, we have to create public opinion so it will lead to policy making or have some impact. That is why we consistently cover it. Not just prohibition, we also cover other things consistently. Friends from Kohima who attend the assembly sessions say that the legislators also refer to *Morung* reports, so it makes us feel that what we are doing also impacts the opinion making process.

Apart from the news, thus, *The Morung Express* is seen as a platform that, as per Akang, builds public opinion on matters of public importance. *The Morung Express*'s engagement with the NLTP Act made the newspaper, and its allied programmes, an important actor in the debate. The Morung Lecture²⁸¹ it held in 2020 on the alcohol prohibition, and reported as a lead news item on the front page of *The Morung Express*, was described by Veroli as an effort to reach a 'middle point' on a debate that was 'always about good or bad'. Participants in the discussion told me they felt that economics and morality must 'mingle more' to widen the debate. This work, some felt, was done by extensions of the newspaper, namely the Morung Lecture²⁸², which, Akang said, gave 'space to the public to participate in an open debate' in a context where these conversations happened only in church circles or at home. One of the most prominent voices in the debate was Kahuto Chishi Sumi, a citizen and regular public commentator in Nagaland. He argued for the lifting of the alcohol prohibition (analysis of his articles published by *The Morung Express* are also part of my chapter analysis). Apart from such

²⁸¹ The Morung Lectures are a public discussion platform instated by *The Morung Express* in 2015. Their format entails an opening statement by a speaker on a topic decided by *The Morung Express* team, followed by a discussion on the topic with an audience present on the site where the 'lecture' is held. The first Morung Lecture was delivered by the Naga anthropologist Abraham Lotha on the topic 'understanding Naga ancestral journey through DNA studies'. See <https://morungexpress.com/rugged-journey-shared-future> , <https://easternmirrornagaland.com/understanding-it-through-dna-studies/> Accessed on 30.12.2023.

²⁸² *The Morung Express* also has a YouTube channel through which it telecasts these, and other events. This was not mentioned during our interactions, nor did I study the content on this platform.

commentators, editorials and news are often carried on the subject. Why was it so important?

Moa: According to me, whenever I write on these issues, I write it with an intent to express my.. I support it, but my uneasiness that there is an NLTP Act but the reality is different. There is prohibition but liquor is available everywhere. There is uneasiness. It makes a mockery of the existing Act. If that is the case, what's the point of having the Act? In the context of personal choice and liberty, everyone who wants to drink should be allowed to drink. There is no point restraining them. We have seen many stakeholders – they will publicly oppose the Act but drink at home. There is a very big double standard in the issue, that is why I am uneasy and want it to be lifted.

Much like the newspaper discourse, here too our discussion flowed into 'double standards' on what ought to be, and what is. If there is a 'moral economy' at work, the issue of 'personal choice and liberty' was also considered by editorial team members. As per the material assessed in chapter four, it is the Naga unions (civil society), churches and state who assert control by working together on the alcohol prohibition. To understand these connections, I asked the team, who may lose power if the alcohol prohibition is lifted?

Moa: The church will lose its moral authority because they are exerting [it].... it is a huge moral victory for them to be able to execute prohibition in Nagaland. Even if they are involved or not, because it's a church backed prohibition, they always claim that 'this is one of the works we have done'. If you are NBCC general secretary, when you give your report next year, if the report says that prohibition has been changed to partial prohibition, it reflects that he or she has failed to uphold church concerns.

Going in this direction, we arrived at a point when several team members said that the alcohol prohibition is about 'religious sanctity' which was equated with 'moral sanctity'; that 'in Naga society, morality and Christianity are the same thing'. So, as

opposed to Scott's moral economy articulated to subsistence peasantry (subsistence ethic), and revolution, in upland Southeast Asia (Scott 1976: 3-4), today's moral economy in Nagaland is articulated to Christian codes built by local bodies. To understand if the connections I draw in chapter four between Christian bodies, unions and state in Nagaland, elongate the scope of such articulations, I asked the team if, and in what way, articulations to such tropes as the 'unique history of Nagaland' matter here. One person described it as an 'overused phrase', limiting its potentials. Another team member stated that the state government 'assumes' that it will lose power if they revoke the NLTP Act.

Aheli: What's the assumption based on?

Imkong: Divine wrath.

Aheli: Would you then define the state as a religious body in Nagaland?

Imkong: Yes, it is peopled by religious people.

Moa: Prohibition was partially lifted in Mizoram. The concerned home minister stated that 'whatever supposed punishment is meted as a result of lifting of prohibition, I am ready to take the risk from God'.

Aheli: So, what did God do?

Moa: God brought Congress to power, after which it was promulgated again. That's what Christian people will understand!

In the previous calendar section of this chapter, I found that some calendrical events in *The Morung Express* became opportunities to challenge the state and its narratives. Through the alcohol prohibition, however, the state is closely intertwined with the church, giving a state 'peopled by religious people' a legitimacy in governance that

otherwise would be questioned; this makes Nagaland comparable to Mizoram²⁸³. It is the politics of the day that ultimately determines how religion remains connected to the state, in this case through the alcohol prohibition²⁸⁴. Such a network between the state, the churches and civil society²⁸⁵ also retains control over the market by the state and its representatives who decide how alcohol is traded, who is able to trade, and who profits from it. Alcohol continues to circulate despite the prohibition, and it is these entanglements that journalists were keen to address by making the NLTP Act debatable.

In a separate conversation on the subject, editorial contributor, John, commented on his many editorials on the subject over the years; these were also published in 2020. He said that the concerns of the ‘elderly generation and the clergy in the church’ would be on ‘religious’ lines given the history of how the alcohol prohibition came about in Nagaland, which made him bring Christian arguments to the table on the NLTP Act, a prohibition he supported. I also had a long conversation with the publisher of *The Morung Express* on the subject. We started out with talking about who regulates newspapers in Nagaland, which took us through discussions on indigeneity and Christianity, and the regulatory capacities of the unions, churches and state in the period following the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) and the Government of India in 1997. The alcohol prohibition has made borders move, he said, and not just discursively. According to the publisher,

²⁸³ Mizoram State was constituted as part of the Indian Union in 1986 through the provision of Article 371-G that is a much smaller, but almost identical, version of Article 371-A made for Nagaland State in 1962. Similar to its counterpart, Article 371-G entails a policy of Indian parliamentary distance from ‘religious and social practices of the Mizos’, ‘Mizo customary law and procedure’, ‘administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary law’, and other clauses. Much like Nagaland State, Mizoram State is home to a Christian majority (87.16%) alongside its majority Scheduled Tribe population.

²⁸⁴ The journalists also give the example of Indian institutions, including campuses of the Indian para-military or military forces in Nagaland, that house Hindu temples, which is state bias towards one religion (Hindu) over others, despite the Indian state’s explicit secular claims. Nagaland is ‘unique’ in so far as it does not make any secular claims, and announces an open connection to Christ. In effect though, the Indian and Nagaland states produce the same effect, with explicit state biases towards their chosen religions.

²⁸⁵ I do not take into account the other big actors that form a part of this network, including members of the Naga revolutionary groups, or how alcohol circulation becomes significant during state elections.

Dimapur's neighbouring town of Khatkhati in Assam used to be a distant location. Today, it has proliferated and become much closer to Nagaland, its growth spurred by the NLTP Act in Nagaland. Traders from Assam, where there is no prohibition, set up alcohol shops in Khatkhati to cater to the needs of those who cross the border from Nagaland to Assam to buy alcohol, building an economy that has made Khatkhati a thriving town, and also a major 'stakeholder' in the alcohol prohibition in Nagaland, but this is a connection that is never really made in public discourse. Main stakeholders are always presented as churches, the state and unions that work as 'civil society organisations' that react and respond to an Indian and hostile 'outside' from a Naga, and tribal, 'inside' (Tunyi 2018, Robert and Walling 2023). Bringing capital and market into the analysis disturbs these clean inside and outside lines, as the example of Khakhati here exemplifies. This approach does not take capital and market into account as 'stakeholders', revolving the discussion only around an internal realm of prohibition and civil society, which obfuscates and mystifies what the issues are projected to be.

In a report on the Morung Lecture about the NLTP Act in 2020, the publisher, Aküm Longchari, had said that 'people' must be the 'primary stakeholders' in the debate on the alcohol prohibition. I asked what he meant by 'people' since not everyone can sit at a table with the regulators to debate the issue. People are the 'rights holders' in a democracy, he said; those who are supposed to be represented by the bodies in question, namely the unions, churches and the state. The language of stakeholdership, he said, has become common²⁸⁶ through the capital of tourism (and extractive industry). Capitalism driven tourism practices enable market stakeholders like corporations and contractors to be on the same table as 'rights holders', like citizens, creating an impression that both have equal rights to land and resources, and thus decisions about them. Rights holders

²⁸⁶ An entry that, he said, was made through the language of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), which has proliferated in Nagaland. These are institutions reliant on funding from an outside source, and not the same, in his opinion, as 'what we used to term Mass Based Organisations like Naga Hoho, Naga Mothers' Association and Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights'. Today the latter are often classified as 'civil society', a fuzzy mix to which NGOs are also added making the 'stakeholder' game a much more complex issue than this dissertation can address.

inevitably lose out, however, given their unmatched access to capital, losing more of their land, resources, rights, ‘voice’, and ultimately their self-determination (Longchari 2016: 132-133). When the media in Nagaland reports uncritically on such matters, it becomes ‘an instrument of their (right holders’) powerlessness’, he said.

I read these comments as reflective of how *The Morung Express* coverage of the news puts a wedge into this process of continuing ‘powerlessness’ by, for instance, debating the alcohol prohibition as part of public discourse. The news reports, editorials and Morung Lectures have both a historical and rights-based approach to the issue, and attempt to dis-entangle the bodies of governance like the unions, churches and the state in a way that each of them becomes more accountable, as democratic institutions of governance. Editorial team members do the same by invoking, at least in response to my questions, secularity connected to the Indian Constitution. Whether or not the NLTP Act will be revoked as a result of these interventions cannot be established, but it certainly makes *The Morung Express* an important actor in this debate that re-articulates Naganess in ways that render the newspaper not just indigenous media, but also a site of struggle over the production of collective meanings from a position of rights. I will discuss this further in the next chapter. This understanding of the newspaper helps me read it as a space that enables both cooperation with the status quo and its contestation, where differential powers participate to negotiate the rules of epistemic control.

5.5.2 Dog meat prohibition

In my analysis, the debate in the newspaper on the dog meat prohibition articulates Naganess to ‘indigeneity’ drawn from Article 371-A of the Indian Constitution. ‘Religion’ is used in some of the articles to reflect on the ‘imposition’ of an administrative ban like the one on the trade of dog meat in 2020, sometimes to point out the difference between ‘Hindu India’ and ‘Christian Nagas’.

Since I read both the cases through the category of ‘debated prohibition’, I asked the editorial team members if they read the state administrative ban on the trade of dog meat as a ‘prohibition’. One member, Imkong, said, ‘the dog meat ban was purely a PR

exercise for the government’ and has nothing to do with ‘prohibition’. While I use the term as an umbrella category to understand how contestations emerge in the newspaper, for the editorial team, prohibition is largely considered a Christian term. The debate on the dog meat prohibition is described as a ‘nonissue’ in Nagaland by a member of the editorial team, but it is the ‘dog lovers’ who make it an issue. Immediately, another team member positioned themselves as a ‘dog lover’ and described the consumption of dog meat as a ‘very big problem’. Though morality was linked to religion in the discussion in previous sections, the question of ethics here is not linked to religion. This prohibition is also debated in the newsroom, showcasing that whether Christian and ‘sacred’, or statist and ‘secular’, most restrictions on democratic freedoms stand contested by journalists. But in what ways?

I asked the editorial team if dog meat consumption is a ‘customary right’, as classified by one of the commentators in *The Morung Express* in 2020?

Veroli: Yes, among the Angami and Chakhesang, the wrestlers are given a diet of dog meat. Traditionally, it has always been practised. Among Sümis too, though stopped long time back. When a hunter dies, their hunting dog is killed and their fellow hunters eat the meat. That sort of cultural context is there.

Customary right, here, then is articulated to hunting, tradition and culture in some contexts. Under the Indian Constitution’s Article 13, custom is law²⁸⁷ and is accorded to all religious communities in India if they can show ‘ancestry’, or continuity, in the practice of those ‘customs’. So then, I wondered, if dog meat consumption is connected to religion?

All: No, dog meat was and is never about religion.

Aheli: Why?

²⁸⁷ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/134715/> Accessed on 28.08.2023.

Moa: Because drinking alcohol is prohibited by religion but it doesn't prohibit eating dog meat.

Imkong: We have to go back to the Bible – is dog meat prohibited in the Bible?

Dog meat is 'never about religion' because the Bible does not say so. The 'custom' of the Indian Constitution's Article 13 related to religions is not necessarily the same as what applies in Nagaland; neither do biblical citations transfer automatically into public discourse. It is also the connections and collaborations that 'religion' depends upon in Nagaland that makes the alcohol prohibition influential, and the dog meat prohibition questionable. As Akang explained:

If the dog lovers were to make an argument from a moral ground, in that if you eat dog, you will go to hell or face the wrath of God, then maybe that will engage the church and it will generate a different kind of discussion. That is why NBCC also uses 'unique Nagas' thing. Even for prohibition, in our village, we had a lot of drinkers. By evening 5-6 it gets dark and we didn't feel comfortable to go out. This was 8-9 years back. What happened was the mothers initiated this thing that they wanted to do something for these people who were drinking, not to outcast or punish them, but to rehabilitate them and give some support. So, the church and the civil society bodies collaborated and successfully improved the lifestyle of...last year they said 80 people have stopped drinking. They drink, but they don't abuse alcohol. Now, even when it's dark, we feel safe to go to the neighbour's house because people are not shouting around the neighbourhood. Our village will never talk about prohibition but more like how it is not helpful for family and people. For the dog meat ban too, if there are a group of people protesting against the dog ban, they would never get that sort of support from the mother's organisation. It is completely different. Both are prohibitions but completely different. And, also the consequences. We are made to believe that dog meat has health benefits.

A collaboration of unions and churches is important at the village level, and their unionising is based on biblical, cultural and health lines. This is what makes the alcohol ‘prohibition’ ‘completely different’ from the dog meat ‘ban’ – the church does not associate dog meat eating with sin, mothers attach health benefits to dog meat and its consumption has not had a negative impact on health or safety in Akang’s village. Some commentators in the newspaper frame the dog meat ban as a ‘Hindu India versus Christian Nagas’ debate, but the editorial team members maintain that it is not related to ‘religion’ because it is not related to ‘divine obligation’. The same is not true of alcohol as its prohibition is clearly linked to such obligation. Rice beer provides a good example. Drinking it was a ‘cultural practice before it was demonised by Christian missionaries’ (Imkong). With the consumption of rice beer common across the Naga areas, its declaration as ‘sin’ was evenly applied, making a state sanction of it later more feasible and uniform. On the other hand, dog meat eating, like customs, ‘vary from tribe to tribe’ (Imkong). This variance is stabilised through Article 371-A that guarantees the protection of ‘Naga customary law and procedure’. However, no such common ‘Naga customary law and procedure’ exists as a legal document, and what is to be considered within its domain must be debated on a case-by-case basis. Only in its defence through invoking this guarantee as common law does ‘dog meat consumption’ become ‘Naga’ in the first place. And though Moa notes how ‘ironic’ it is that ‘the Constitution of India is protecting the uniqueness of Nagaland’ in this way, it is also the case that people and processes have to discursively produce dog meat consumption as a ‘Naga custom’ to be able to access these protections.

Based on the conclusions I drew in the previous chapter, I asked Aküm Longchari why citizens who contested the trade in dog meat ban in a court of law did so based on economics and fundamental rights²⁸⁸ rather than the often argued for ‘customary

²⁸⁸ Those who filed a case in the Kohima bench of the Gauhati High Court against the Nagaland state government’s ban on the trade of dog meat contested the ban based on violation of fundamental rights under articles 14 (right to equality), 19 (right to freedom) and 21 (right to life and personal liberty) of the Indian Constitution, and for the violation of the principles of natural justice. See

practices' guaranteed by Article 371-A. Longchari reminded me that the Article was inserted into the Indian Constitution following what is known as the '16 point agreement' of 1960²⁸⁹. Following years of struggles for independence led by the Naga National Council, this agreement was signed between a group of leaders under the banner of Naga People's Convention²⁹⁰ and the Government of India. It was the first ever document that listed the terms on which Nagaland was to become a state of the Indian Union. According to Longchari, the 'agreement' was not a politically negotiated settlement of the Indo-Naga conflict but an imposed one²⁹¹. Highly contested, it laid the basis for the bifurcation of the Naga movement for self-determination as well as of the Naga lands. As the Naga movement continued with issues unresolved, there was little concrete engagement with Article 371-A²⁹². Its ambiguities remained intact till it came

https://desikaanoon.in/gauhati-high-court-order-on-ban-on-sale-of-dog-meat-in-nagaland-quashed/#google_vignette Accessed on 26.11.2023.

²⁸⁹

https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/IN_600726_The%20sixteen%20point%20Agreement_0.pdf Accessed on 16.05.2023.

²⁹⁰ The Naga People's Convention consisted of a group of leaders from the then Naga Hills of Assam who wanted to settle the Indo-Naga political issue with the Government of India without a demand for independence from India, which the Naga National Council made. The 16 points that the Convention drafted was adopted as a 'resolution' by its working committee in 1959, which were then presented as a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India in 1960. Apart from suggesting that a 'pure Naga word' be used in place of 'Nagaland' (which the Naga leaders could not produce at the time) and some discussions on reserve forests and integrating Naga areas from other states into the proposed area of Nagaland State, the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, gave the 16-point memorandum a stamp of approval. However, those who continued the struggle for Naga independence accused the Government of India's Intelligence Bureau of dividing the Nagas by using government employees to engineer the 16-point memorandum and used it as a basis to form the state of Nagaland within the Indian Union. See <https://nagalandpost.com/index.php/formation-of-the-naga-peoples-convention/> , <https://ukhrultimes.com/naga-peoples-convention-brainchild-of-a-few-treacherous-nagas-nscn-im/> Accessed on 18.12.2023.

²⁹¹ Nepuni Piku made a similar point during our discussion, noting that the 16-point agreement was 'imposed' not 'agreed' on, making its legitimacy, and therefore the Indian state's link with Nagaland State, questionable.

²⁹² Article 371-A did not cover all the political 'agreements' reached between the Naga People's Convention and the Government of India. For instance, the 16-point agreement provided for a three tier 'local self-government' including village councils, range councils and tribal councils that would be instated and governed through customary laws. While the range councils were never created, the village councils double up as 'village courts' that adjudicate customary laws. Traditional bodies like the Ao 'putu menden' is also considered a village council as per a law that legitimates village councils in Nagaland, namely the Nagaland Village and Tribal Council (Fifth Amendment) Act, 2022(1978). Tribal

into discussion in the past few years. According to the publisher, the Article does not guarantee anything that fundamental rights of the Indian Constitution do not already guarantee and is open to interpretation²⁹³. The 16-points ‘memorandum’, as Longchari termed it, does not ‘alter’ the relation between Nagas and India, instead, enabling Indian state and judicial structures to maintain epistemological boundaries through Article 371-A. He noted that the issue is how the term ‘Naga’ is used, and not necessarily as a ‘political identity’. Further, he said:

It (Naga) is the collective, common, public character and identity of so many different nations who have agreed, who have chosen, for themselves, to be called as Nagas...when we say dog, some communities don’t eat dogs. Then, here, the use of the word Naga is an error. Ok, rice beer is common by and large, so it is ok to say that rice beer is Naga. Likewise, the morung is Naga. It is commonly shared and experienced by all Naga villages. But there are other things that we cannot generalise as Naga. Sometimes, that is where the contradictions seem to emerge.

This balance of specificity and generalisation in articulating Naganess remains an ongoing struggle. This is similar to a point Imkong made earlier on rice beer being a common feature of Naganess as is its Christian prohibiting, today extended to the public by the state in collaboration with civil society and churches. The dog meat

councils are considered to be the ones that have been described in this dissertation as ‘civil society organisations’ or Hohos. While customary laws operate at the level of the village, it is not clear what kind of powers ‘tribal councils’ have in legal terms even though they have tremendous influencing power. Many of these points are under discussion now, particularly after the controversy surrounding the 33% reservation of seats for women in local urban councils. See <https://nagalandpage.com/nagaland-govt-revisits-past-controversial-agreements/> Accessed on 25.11.2023.

²⁹³ As mentioned earlier, this is secured on a case-by-case basis and often through community-led struggle, including in the cases of protesting oil extraction from the state, opposition to women’s reservation in urban governance and contesting the dog meat ban. A Nagaland state representative said recently, in the context of quashing the Nagaland Municipal Act, 2001, that the state will now proactively interpret Article 371-A. For more, see <https://www.eastmojo.com/nagaland/2023/04/27/nagaland-govt-to-interpret-art-371-a-form-panel-for-new-municipal-act/> Accessed on 08.06.2023.

debate constitutes dog meat as related to Naganess for Indians who make it a racial issue²⁹⁴ and the state that prohibits it based on this, not the legally instated ‘Naga customary law and procedure’ as per Article 371-A. These practices of constituting Naganess through missionising and racialising are contested through the pages of the newspaper – an animal rights framework invokes ethics that are argued to be applicable to customary laws and practices; a democratic rights framework is used to contest the enclosure of the alcohol prohibition to only a few stakeholders. Individual rights for all citizens remain paramount in either case. While ‘Naga customary law and procedure’ applies well on the concrete scale of the village, and perhaps at times on the scale of tribes (Jamir 2012: 90-104, Wouters 2019: 155-157), its lack of specification leads to its arbitrary application in law and practice on an abstract Naga scale (Hausing 2018). Article 371-A enables collectives to challenge prohibitions, but also the Nagaland State government to prohibit the rights of citizens, and restrict the collective and political scope of Naganess, enabling the Indian Union’s structures to retain epistemic control²⁹⁵. The contestations to these are made available to a discerning public through the journalism of newspapers like *The Morung Express*.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on reflections of editorial decision-makers, in conversation with me, at *The Morung Express* on themes that were published in the newspaper in 2020, and analysed as a part of previous chapters of this dissertation. Considering the journalists and editors as ‘knowledge workers’ helps me understand their work not just as mechanistic time and space constraints that fill up of newsprint/pages (as information), but as practices of journalism related to the local context that shape the

²⁹⁴ <https://scroll.in/video/1043792/do-you-eat-dog-meat-snakes-artisan-from-nagaland-complains-of-racist-questions-at-ncr-fair> Accessed on 27.07.2023.

²⁹⁵ It must be remembered here that references to ‘customary practices’ are only to those issues that are reported in the public domain of the newspaper. Many such practices remain within households, clans and villages (governing such things as inheritance and conflict at this scale), shielding them from becoming ‘knowledge as commons’, or making them available in a way that these may be subject to these particular public debates and discussions (though they are parts of other contemporary debates and discussions known to the community members of these collectives).

material published in the newspaper. Their use of context and consideration help me study new directions in articulations of Naganess, indigeneity and religion, which produce knowledge as commons – uniqueness, hornbill, moatsü, human rights, customs, and ethics as public, sharable, contemporary and contestable collective understandings presented through the medium of the newspaper and its journalism.

With the COVID-19 pandemic becoming an additional regulator of news activities in 2020, the newspaper industry in Nagaland was further restrained through local and national restrictions on media professionals, news circulation and market distribution. As local infosheets, newspapers like *The Morung Express* became even more important as trusted sources of information and articulation in Nagaland. Events related to the ‘Nagaland for Christ calendar’ remained on its pages for its historical significance, but also because local institutions depended more on the slogan as their own source of legitimation, both to disconnect from a Maoist past and to build a Naga rights framework applicable in daily life and across multiple scales. Events related to the ‘Incredible Nagaland calendar’ provided me with an opportunity to take a closer look at ‘religion’ and what it meant for practices to be separated and secularised. This helped understand our conversations in the editorial newsroom in terms of the lines that separate indigenous practices from ‘religion’, the contestations of these lines, and attempts to sometimes re-draw them through journalism, drawing new types of separations, such as between Moatsü, Hornbill and Chüthüni festivals. The ‘Global Naga calendar’ led to conversations on how these other discussions relate to global indigeneity through a rights-based discourse that also indicates the reading of *The Morung Express* as indigenous media. The ‘debated alcohol prohibition’ enabled a discussion on the links between church, civil society and state in Nagaland that brought out the problems with such linkages. Through the ‘debated dog meat prohibition’, our discussions led to the realisation that such linkages are crucial for successful campaigns if matters need resolution beyond the Indian judicial system.

Re-articulations of Naganess here help me analyse how knowledge workers give coverage to, and challenge, topics related to ‘Naga uniqueness’. In some instances,

religion's boundaries are stated to be set by Christianity. They contest the presence of a steady, seamless time, space and identification that is undisturbed by historical events and changes. Several journalists prefer a 'secular' posturing, making their work recognisable as journalism, not proselytisation. Through our conversations I was able to pick up on some new processes that enable indigeneity and religion (and not-religion) to relate in ways that do not pit 'sacred' against 'profane' but more in an 'across borders' sort of way that attempts conversations and disruptions between 'sacred' and 'profane', suggesting also the development of a 'contextual theology' that may or may not be recognisable as 'indigenous religion'. A relational secularity, different from ecumenical approaches that lay down pre-conditions for relations with and between 'religions', emerges from and in the newspaper. It enables the use of Indian and European secularisms for the purposes of journalism, questioning the conditions under which the state, church, market and civil society are connected, as in the alcohol prohibition, and the conditions under which Naga food choices are challenged by Indian citizens as in the dog meat prohibition, enabling new subjects (dog lovers, anti racism campaigners) to participate in debates. This is certainly not to suggest that a 'secular age' (Taylor 2007) of Naganess has come about nor that it is a time when 'Naga society is far from secularised' (Wouters 2021: 654) in a way that treats secularity as a decline of religiosity. Nor do I suggest the formation of 'Naga Indigenous Religions (NIR)' (Shohe 2020: 23) articulating an old 'religion' specific to each Naga tribe, modeled on James L. Cox's 'minimum definition' of 'Indigenous Religions' as orally transmitted religious beliefs and practices of self-contained societies related to kinship and ancestors (Cox 2007: 61, 69). Shohe's NIR seeks non-teleological representation in the Indian religions paradigm so as to have their 'traditions' taken seriously 'within' their 'own sacredness' (Shohe 2020: 24)²⁹⁶. I suggest no such disconnected sphere of tradition, kinship and ancestors. Instead, I use articulations of Naganess to show how – in what contexts and

²⁹⁶ From 1872-1951, India's census records the category of 'tribals' as one among several 'religions' in India. Post 1951, this category was replaced with 'others', clubbing together all 'minor religions' under one umbrella. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/sharp-tongue/killing-by-silence-the-census-neglect-of-indigenous-peoples-in-india/> Accessed on 10.08.2023.

conditions – things that may be classified as ‘indigenous’ and those that may be classified as ‘religion’ come to be articulated, and related, in the printed text of *The Morung Express*, produced through the labour of its knowledge workers for readers to know and engage with. Knowledge thus produced as commons use the technology of the press and the practices of journalism to mediate what is made known. *The Morung Express* does not produce only common knowledge, but knowledge as commons – renewable, non-commodified, public resources that are journalistically and editorially mediated through publishing reports and issues not always addressed on other (particularly Indian and mainstream) public platforms and news media, but also challenge taken-for-granted shared understandings by re-articulating notions related to Naganess, religion and indigeneity. In the next chapter, I explore the ways in which the founders and journalists define and describe this institution called *The Morung Express* and some conditions set on the practices of media and journalism in Nagaland today.

6 The terrain of struggle at *The Morung Express*

This chapter explores how the founders of *The Morung Express* describe this institution vis-à-vis questions on how they and journalists reflect on notions related to, and through distinctions between, indigenous, religious and secular media. With a conceptual focus on ‘morung’, the chapter traverses the terrain of struggle that this institution inhabits today, particularly in terms of how boundaries around journalism and activism are negotiated within one historically located institution. I ask the founders about the special stories that the newspaper covers, why they chose this particular name for the newspaper, noting how they articulate indigeneity and religion. Reading the institution as an example of an ‘indigenous newspaper’, I explore the extent to which journalists see indigeneity and media as connected. As ‘christian morung’, I explore the distinctions drawn between religious and secular media, and journalism, but also lines between ‘new’ and ‘old’ religions. The following section is an example of the kind of stories and context that *The Morung Express* most often presents as part of its journalism.

6.1 Building a terrain

On 10 January, 2018, the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) conducted what was known as the ‘Naga Day’ with the theme ‘Nagas Without Borders’, hoping for it to become an annual event. In a booklet published before the occasion, the FNR described Naga Day as part of Indigenous Peoples’ aspirations in the 21st century to ‘open new horizons and thrive with the rest of the human race’ (FNR 2017: 1) and, as Nagas, to ‘be genuinely connected to others’ through God (ibid: 5). Three of the organising members of the event are also the founders of *The Morung Express* (more on this in the next section). As part of its news team in 2018, I was one among several journalists who gave the Naga Day a starry-eyed coverage, of Nagas coming together in Kohima to celebrate a shared sense of Naganess.

Naga Day did not recur as an event again, nor did it get any subsequent media attention except from *The Morung Express*. In 2023, it published a front-page anchor story, on 11

January, on how the idea had ‘failed’²⁹⁷. Though Naga Day in 2018 got wide coverage in the news media, the impending Nagaland State elections, the post-1997 ceasefire ‘solution before election’ sloganeering around the Indo-Naga negotiations and related politics had a cumulative effect of several important Naga institutions backing out from participation on the day. The FNR’s move to go ahead with the event nonetheless raised questions of legitimacy for its members and the Forum. Despite the FNR’s articulations of Naganess to indigeneity and religion, in a way that my analysis in previous chapters has suggested as having an ultra pro max scope²⁹⁸ – as ultimate, definite, stable, most special of special – it didn’t quite work out.



Figure 34: Front page anchor of *The Morung Express* on 11 January 2023.

Why did *The Morung Express* choose to ‘remember’ the controversial Naga Day at all, I asked the journalist who did the story, and the current editor who commissioned it. The journalist said it was an opportunity for him, and the political leaders in Nagaland,

²⁹⁷ <https://morungexpress.com/remembering-naga-day-a-missed-opportunity-for-the-nagas-says-rev-dr-wati-aier> Accessed on 03.07.2023.

²⁹⁸ For instance, as in the case of Nagas as a nation ‘in Christ’. See chapter three.

to ‘critically think’ about current conditions through the ‘socio-cultural healing and reconciliation’ lens of leaders like Wati Aier, convenor of the FNR’s Naga Reconciliation Process. For the editor, the story was important because:

- The idea of ‘Nagas without borders’ continues to be relevant.
- The perspective of the event as a ‘failure’ needed to be in public domain.
- The conditions that led to this situation in 2018, when Nagaland State elections took precedence over an Indo-Naga political solution, prevailed in 2023²⁹⁹, and should continue to be examined.

Even in its ‘failure’, the ‘Naga Day’ presented opportunities for *The Morung Express* to establish links between conditions that persist from the past through engagement in the present in at least two ways. First, to remind the audience that Naga history did not end, nor did it find a resolution, with the formation of the Nagaland State in 1963. Expanding the scope of Nageness ‘beyond borders’ is to recall Naga emancipatory politics vis-à-vis the Indian and Myanmar unions, and to resist liquifying these politics. Second, social and political movements are also grounded in, led by and learn from, goals (like reconciliation) they are unable to reach, enabling an audience to engage with conditions that prohibit the articulation of Nageness in every discursive, space and time direction. These forces are as much ‘internal’ as they are ‘external’, which need to be examined by reading publics, and in the light of democratic politics introduced by the state and market that demand their participation in claiming Nageness today.

The practices at *The Morung Express* bring together activism and journalism in a manner that contests state ideologies by building counter-hegemonic notions, particularly to intervene on the question of ‘what is to be done’³⁰⁰. *The Morung Express*

²⁹⁹ The Nagaland State elections were announced and held in February 2023 under similar conditions as 2018 – the sloganeering of ‘solution before election’, the conduct of elections despite calls to boycott them, and the formation of an ‘opposition less government’ where all parties came together and agreed to govern the state, an unheard-of political experiment anywhere else in the Indian Union, was seen in Nagaland as a dangerous experiment with non-democracy.

³⁰⁰ As opposed to waiting for a spontaneous movement to erupt out of nowhere, it prepares the ground for intervention in relation to, as a response to, existing conditions.

becomes a historical force by getting involved in political questions through the newspaper's work, or practices of journalism that enable contradictions to emerge, as have been discussed in the previous chapters. However, contradictions here also enable processes through which *The Morung Express* is re-articulated 'in the course of pursuing its own reproduction within that society' (Wayne 2009: 262); how people and practices decentre parts of 'the old', but also resist categorised identification with global categories (indigenous media) and empirically overdetermined categories³⁰¹ (christian morung). Through this chapter, I lay out some of the ways in which a 'journalistic paradigm formalisation' establishes the autonomy and legitimacy of *The Morung Express* as a newspaper, on the one hand – by laying claims to universal journalistic norms – while a 'journalistic paradigm reconsideration' establishes it as response to local and global interests – by laying claim to counter-hegemonic political assertions (Vos and Moore 2020: 23-8).

6.2 *The Morung Express* → morung → a 'place of learning'

I met Nepuni Piku at his home in Mao Colony in Dimapur on 12 January 2023. President of the Morung for Indigenous Affairs and Just Peace, now known as the Morung Foundation, Piku was gracious with his time and indulged my questions. The three founding members of the institution, Nepuni Piku, Aküm Longchari and Gentleson Vashum³⁰², have been associated with the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights since the 1990s and are also members of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR). Each brought different expertise to the table – Piku through his work with the International Alliance of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests, Vashum through his grassroots work with the Naga Students' Federation, and Longchari from his work in conflict transformation with the Eastern Mennonite University (US) and

³⁰¹ An empirically overdetermined category in this case is one derived from sticking too closely to the material presented in this dissertation, making it too specific and thereby closing it to the possibility of abstraction; but also general enough to be understood and articulated in potentially contradictory directions.

³⁰² Gentleson Vashum and I were unable to coordinate our schedules in a way that we could sit down for a discussion on this, which is why his opinions are not reflected in this dissertation.

University of New England, Armidale (Australia)³⁰³. In 1997, a ceasefire agreement was signed between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim; the two entities started negotiating the terms of co-existence in 2001³⁰⁴. However, several groups remained outside the ambit of the ceasefire while new groups also emerged. Armed in-fighting ensued between the rival groups even as the Indian army operated in the region with the fundamental rights of citizens severely curtailed (Kikon 2005, Kikon 2009, Kikon 2019, Kikon and McDuie-Ra 2021). In this scenario, said Nepuni Piku, the trio engaged in information dissemination, human rights awareness, and forging a reconciliation process through peace-building workshops while travelling the Naga areas in the early 2000s to ‘strengthen the minds and belongingness of the people’. It was in this context that themes such as ‘Nagas without borders’ emerged through measures like the eventually formalised Naga Reconciliation Process³⁰⁵. These horizontally organised interventions came together in the formation of the Morung Foundation in 2004, with the aspiration to further its principles through the newspaper, *The Morung Express*, which was established in 2005. Current editor and publisher, Aküm Longchari, referred to building ‘critical consciousness’³⁰⁶ among Nagas, in a separate interview, while speaking about their former work with the Foundation as well as the work they do at the newspaper. Brazilian Christian socialist and liberation theologian, Paulo Freire, popularised the term ‘critical consciousness’ through the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and laid out the ‘praxis’ of ‘reflection and action directed at structures to be transformed’ (Freire, Ramos et al. 2014: 126), such as in education (Thong 2018: 77), thereby becoming a ‘practice of freedom’ (Freire 2013: viii). Locally, this praxis was a starting point for articulations at, and through *The Morung Express*,

³⁰³ I highlight here only specific strands of interest to me among the many areas of expertise each of these individuals specialise in.

³⁰⁴ Referred to as the Indo-Naga peace process or negotiations, it continues to this day.

³⁰⁵ <https://nagalandpost.com/index.php/the-long-journey-of-hope-and-reconciliation-engaging-the-past-present-and-future/> Accessed on 13.07.2023.

³⁰⁶ There were references made to ‘critical consciousness’ throughout our conversation. I understood it as a critical understanding of a political situation that challenges a ‘status quo’. An editorial in *The Morung Express* published in 2011 was termed ‘Naga Consciousness’ that brought most of Longchari’s ideas that he shared with me during the interview together.

<https://morungexpress.com/naga-consciousness> Accessed on 15.06.2023.

becoming an exercise in the right to self-determination (Longchari 2016: 52), and can also be read as ‘resistance’ to ‘dominance in the socio and political sphere and the field of education’ (Kikon 2003: 240-1).

In the light of this context, my main question was why Piku and his *thembas*³⁰⁷ had chosen ‘morung’ for the name of their institution and the newspaper. Why not The Naga Express, for instance³⁰⁸? Initially, said Nepuni Piku, the team had considered ‘The Independent’ as a title for the newspaper, but this was already a registered newspaper, so a secondary name, *The Morung Express*, was proposed. The work they expected the newspaper to do was build ‘oneness’ and ‘reduce violence’ among different communities who claim to be Naga, but whose historical experiences, immediate realities, struggles, aspirations, material conditions are different – ‘some want a car, some want Delhi rice,’ said Piku. With the state making these needs and interests vertically governable through ‘define and rule’ (class struggles added to those along tribes, for instance), he said, *The Morung Express* aspired to be ‘a sort of consciousness movement within the larger society so that we do not drift’. The term ‘morung’ was chosen to focus on both the specific circumstances from which it emerged and the processes it hoped to put in place. Piku told me,

³⁰⁷ I attempted a translation of the Mongsen and Chungli (Ao Naga dialects) term ‘themba’ along with Imkong Walling and considered ‘friends’, ‘peers’, ‘comrades’, and a few others. *The Morung Express*’s print line states that its printing press is registered as ‘Themba Printers and Morung Publication’. In this context, I read themba-relations as a friendship and trust emerging from collective experiences of building movements, facing personal and political hardships, and the emergent forces that drive a collective approach of a particular group towards an institution such as this. I mention ‘particular group’ because the term themba, according to Walling, is associated with an ‘age/peer group’ – membership to a village morung is often divided into age groups, which become your ‘peer group’, the group with which all collective action is conducted in Naga villages and cities throughout life, from youth to the end. In this modern media formation, morung and themba are conceptually connected.

³⁰⁸ This was not my contention when I began this study, but having read articulations in the newspaper, and the potentials it posed for this institution, I wondered if the ways in which indigeneity and religion were presented and articulated in the newspaper had anything to do with its formation.

Most of the Naga communities have their village morungs. Morungs are the centre of education. In the past³⁰⁹, there was no specific education schools in communities. Those days, the youth stayed and helped families during the day, but they come back to sleep in a dormitory which is the morung. That is where the norms of life...the values, norms of how the elders have lived their life, and what the ancestors have passed on. The morung is a centre of knowledge-sharing. From one peer group to another, the knowledge and experiences are shared. During cultural festivals, we celebrate together. They sing folk songs, and that is where the legends of tragic happenings in the past, or romanticism and others are shared. It is not an empty space. A lot of activities go on here. It comes not just with knowledge but wisdom of experience. When I started drafting the first Morung Foundation, I just put morung because of my past activism and adventures.

As a ‘knowledge-sharing’ space, and not just as information, Piku connects the past and the present through the morung. He renders the morung political by locating it at the scale of the village. The late Naga writer and academic, Temsüla Ao termed a village the ‘real essence of our Naga-ness’ (Ao 2014: 8); a ‘village republic’ from which the Naga political struggle emerges, connecting it to the production of culture and legends (Wouters 2018: 55). As Morung Foundation, the morung is made urban, active, organised and located in recent ‘activism and adventures’ including in peace-building, human rights and reconciliation work. It is also through an articulation to Piku’s own experiences that the old morung becomes a modern ‘Foundation’³¹⁰. From this starting point emerged a newspaper that, for Piku and his team, ‘helped people to strengthen ties, culture of belongingness and stand together for peace’. It is the last part, ‘peace’, that makes the morung break from a past where it was most often articulated by administrators and missionaries as a site for the conduct of war and related headhunting

³⁰⁹ Piku is possibly referring to a ‘past’ before the 19th century when formal schools began to be set up by American missionaries and the British imperial administration.

³¹⁰ First registered as a ‘society’ under the Societies Registration Act in India.

‘rituals’ (Elwin 1969, Thong 2012). This sort of re-articulation from war to peace has potentials for disrupting some old (dis)continuities and identification linked to them, demonstrating the organising of the site, morung, for transformative politics in a historically war-torn land. Re-articulation and rupture become modes of survival, struggle and legitimation.

When the decision was made to establish a newspaper to continue the work on a larger scale, the term ‘Express’ was added. ‘Morung is an idea, a vision. Express is in terms of motion – something that is in motion, not static’, Aküm Longchari said about the title. As an ‘extension of the Foundation’, Longchari told me, *The Morung Express* is ‘not a local newspaper’ but a ‘national newspaper of the Nagas’. ‘Express’ captures a movement from the local to the national, refusing a localised distinction within the Indian Union³¹¹ as a small/regional/hyperlocal example of an Indian whole, positioning itself as a main example of a Naga whole. Yet, *The Morung Express* is also a small newspaper as categorised by the Registrar of Newspapers for India that makes it comparable to ‘alternative’ newspaper models in India. The masthead of the newspaper carried this name, and initially a logo that read ‘MEx’. This was too ‘abstract’, said Longchari, later replacing it with a logo designed by an art studio in Dimapur called the Little Village.



Figure 35: Logo of The Morung Express.

³¹¹ Regions in the Indian Union are often distinguished as north, south, central, east, west and northeast.

The design includes the nib of a pen encased within the structure of a morung. I was first trained as a journalist in Mumbai at *The Indian Express* in 2003. Being one among only a few old newspaper institutions in India, also known for its ‘journalism of courage’³¹² and, later, as an erstwhile alternative to the mainstream *Times of India*³¹³, the logo for *The Indian Express* is also a pen, in this case held up by a hand³¹⁴.



Figure 36: A former logo of *The Indian Express*.

It is both the ‘Express’ and the logo that make the two newspapers recognisable in the Indian media/journalism space, comparable through similarity of their ‘alternative’ or non-mainstream products³¹⁵. It is the ‘morung’ incorporating the nib of a pen that makes

³¹² *The Indian Express* is best known for carrying a blank editorial in 1975 to protest the state of Emergency declared by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, that flouted fundamental rights. In 2015, three newspapers in Nagaland, including *The Morung Express*, did the same to protest the state militarisation threatening the freedom of the press in Nagaland.

³¹³ The time of a few ‘national’ newspapers ruling media space in India is now in the past with, first, the expansion of several regional newspaper media companies entering the national space/capitalist competition across the Indian Union, and the growth of regional newspapers to cater to a local audience; second, the technological access to broadcast media, and its proliferation, through television across middle class homes in the country; and, third, the rise of social media and YouTube journalism accelerated by the spread of cheap internet and smartphone technology across the Union. For more on the last segment, watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTsNGA0FmWA> Accessed on 06.07.2023.

³¹⁴ The logo has recently been modified, showcasing only the three red lines.

³¹⁵ *The Indian Express*, started by Ramnath Goenka in 1936, was much larger in scale, run as a corporation across the Indian Union, than *The Morung Express*. For more, read <https://web.archive.org/web/20150924042427/http://www.india-today.com/itoday/millennium/100people/goenka.html> Accessed on 29.06.2023.

The Morung Express distinguishable from this context and, to me, also relatable to a global indigenous context too. The locally recognisable morung in the logo could be aesthetically comparable to a Lakota tipi or Sámi lávvu, enabling me to read it as a logo associated with global indigeneity. This recognition is, possibly, enabled by a ‘vocabulary of assumed similarities’ drawn from ‘architectural structures or decorations (e.g. ahu, lavvu, morung, palm roofed Bribri houses, Pithora paintings)’ that ‘collectively constitute a dynamic pool of resources, comprised by connected inventories, repertoires, and vocabularies, that through various assemblies enable articulations of indigenous religion’ (Kraft, Tafjord et al. 2020: 186-7). In the next section, I will reflect on how morung may have been assembled or articulated in the past as an example of heathen/primitive/indigenous religion, how it may be described through studies such as this as ‘indigenous media’, and how practitioners reflect on these articulations.

The Morung Express logo was aimed at a particular audience. The newspaper started out targeting a ‘young audience’, from 25 to 55 years of age, since ‘they would be the next generation of leaders’, Longchari told me. This logo, the team thought, would appeal to them. Instead, when the newspaper started printing, it was ‘people above 60’ who became their predominant audience. According to him:

This was the generation that had lived through difficult times, who knew about struggle and what it meant to live in a situation of conflict... The market also shaped who your readers were... You realise at the end of the day, to run a newspaper, you have to have your own ecology, an ecosystem – from news to distribution, it had to be your own system rather than depending on others.

Two points stand out here in asserting the autonomy of a newspaper:

1. Relations: *The Morung Express* was relatable to older generations who experienced the Indo-Naga wars during which the Indian army burnt down many significant sites, including village granaries, gates, morungs and logdrums (Longkumer 2018a: 472). The physical loss of such spaces which held

significance for older generations shaped some of the ways in which they related to the state, albeit on ambiguous terms (Wouters 2018: 124-161). Historical associations were different for younger people who grew up in an age of factions and ceasefires, in a Christian and secular age of the neoliberal state. I will return to this generational point later.

2. Capital: The newspaper was started by activists with an idealist notion of what it would be, and could do. It spun out of their control as they realised that it was capital and the market, for instance, advertisement, distribution and hawker networks, that also determined the news and who was able to subscribe and get access to the newspaper, and if, and how, the newspaper could reach them.

The corollary is that being a newspaper with a niche older audience helped *The Morung Express* keep some autonomy from market forces to address issues articulated through a global indigenous alliance³¹⁶. ‘You are not Naga because you are indigenous. You are indigenous because you are Naga. The Naga is your identity, and we defined indigenous in terms of being descendants of ancestors from pre-colonial times,’ Longchari said, referring to the UN definition of the category ‘Indigenous’ that Nagas have joined as part of their global politics (Smith 2004: 404). It was in the context of these ‘pre-colonial’ times that the village came to be described as the ‘reservoir’ of ‘soul force’ among Nagas (Mills 1935), as also the location of morung – a composite site of ritual, education, regulation, social engineering – prohibited and displaced by the chapel³¹⁷

³¹⁶ By being non-profit oriented, the newspaper is not driven by the ‘breaking news’ model. News designated as ‘breaking news’ is more likely to end up as a front page anchor in *The Morung Express* while long form stories by its reporters or even on indigenous people from elsewhere are designated as lead news items on page one.

³¹⁷ Anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf wrote a dissertation titled ‘The Religions of the Most Primitive Tribes’ (1990: 5). He worked with the Nagas, among others, between 1935 and 1988, studying ‘the system of sacred chiefs’, customs and beliefs of the Konyak Nagas. He remained concerned with how ‘missionaries encourage their converts to disregard tribal laws and customs even in spheres not directly connected with religion’ (1978[1946]: 52). He blamed the American Baptist Mission for introducing a cash economy (by replacing rice beer with tea, for instance), individualism and replacing ‘one system of taboos and rites with another’ (ibid: 55-6), or the village morung with the village chapel. On the other hand, Haimendorf wrote about how British administrative policy in the region was protecting Nagas (culture, tribal custom) from market exploitation (from merchants from the neighbouring plains/valleys).

(Fürer-Haimendorf 1978 (1946), Fürer-Haimendorf 1990, Chowdhury and Das 2022). When *The Morung Express* was set up, its main approach was to broaden an existent discourse on Naganess that was, according to the publisher, ‘very well defined, very narrow and concrete, but also state centric’ by asking, ‘whose stories are you telling, for whom and for what purposes’. He told me:

Naga is just a form. It is not the essence. There are many essences that fill up the form that we term Naga. Without the essences, Naga will not exist. When you look at morung, the idea of the morung is one of the many essences that constitute being a Naga. Morung as an institution, a place of learning, a heritage, a carrier of stories, a carrier of cultures, a carrier of tradition, but also a maker of leaders, crafting new thoughts, crafting new worldviews in the sense that they are not static. It is always growing. Morung as an institution, in many ways, is one of the essences of being a Naga. For us, when we relate it to the idea of mass communication, the idea of morung and its role in the modern context as a medium of creating critical consciousness; as a medium of providing and facilitating information and news. That’s how we thought that the name morung is relatable. It’s something concrete but abstract, and also abstract but concrete. A place of learning.

Linking morung to Naganess in this manner is crucial. Morung is not relegated to the past. It is made historically present through its articulation to heritage, culture, tradition, worldview – tropes connected to indigeneity – and secularised through its description as a ‘place of learning’, a placeholder in the present time, but, as a newspaper, also a pedagogical site of news and information that raises ‘critical consciousness’. This re-articulation draws a relation between *The Morung Express* as a newspaper and the morung by ‘rooting them in the experiences of popular communities from which they draw their strength’ (Hall 1993: 108) and which ‘resists its being constantly made over as low’ (ibid.) or, as in the case of morung, made ‘ritualistic’ (Tiasunep and Solo 2020: 272-274) in Christian times (Thong 2018: 67) and thereby redundant. The morung of ‘old times’ had its uses and connections, disrupted by missionising and imperialism in

their attempt to reform the Nagas by articulating morung to ritualistic headhunting (Fürer-Haimendorf 1978 (1946), Tinyi 2017, Wilkinson 2017, Longkumer 2018a). A new ‘natural’ bond between morung and Naganess has to be re-established in these ‘New Times’ (Hall 1996: 235) when the morung re-emerges as a Foundation, a newspaper, a site useful to Nagas and the globally connected world they inhabit, and participate in, today.

However, a consequence of choosing ‘morung’ as the name for the newspaper was that people and ‘the market’ could not immediately identify it as a ‘Naga newspaper’, said Aküm Longchari. The newspaper did not have a state (Nagaland) or region (East-Northeast) common signifier³¹⁸. The market did not recognise a relationship between Naganess and morung. But it is recognisable elsewhere, said Longchari. ‘Morung is global’, in the sense that ‘all indigenous societies’ have them. As a ‘dormitory system’, these institutions have been described in colonial anthropology as ‘common’ but ‘distinct’ features of some ‘cultural, racial and linguistic groups’ also identified as ‘ethnic tribal populations’ (Daimai 2023: 2). By articulating morung as indigenous, Longchari lifts the locally relevant to a global conceptual level but not to arrive at separation, but relation and a comparative approach driven by ‘articulated, rooted *and* cosmopolitan practices’ (Clifford 2013: 65). The ‘morung’ is *articulated* with ‘express’ signifying a historicised movement between past and present; it is *rooted* in both the land (village) and the past but not to ‘primitive/ethnic’ constructions nor to capitalist-technocratic futures; it is *cosmopolitan* in its usage of local, regional and global networks of the day to remain contextual and relevant. Today, it is well recognised as a Naga newspaper in Nagaland, in Northeast India and among many English speaking circles in mainland India who are interested in the Northeast. *The Morung Express*, the publisher noted, is ‘local-micro’ in the sense that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is ‘global-macro’. ‘We are indigenous as a people’, he said, suggesting a ‘natural relationship’ with the ‘affairs of indigenous

³¹⁸ Other English daily news sites in Nagaland had or have names like Nagaland Post, Nagaland Page, Eastern Mirror, Naga Banner, Nagaland Tribune, etc.

peoples’ because although ‘our aspirations and political context may be different, our experiences are the same’. Even if ‘natural’ suggests an automatic linkage based on experiences between Nagas and global indigeneity, this relationship and link must be established and made known. One way in which *The Morung Express* does this is through the publication of articles in its editorial pages about indigenous people elsewhere, relating them to relevant legal mechanisms as provided by the UNDRIP. These editorial and op-ed pages form the ‘core’, said Longchari, of the newspaper. Local readers are given the opportunity through its pages to relate universal mechanisms that address the rights of collectives as indigenous people, or to the right to self-determination of the Kurdish and Kashmiris, with the Naga situation, added Nepuni Piku.

Both Longchari and Piku bring rich experience of working with global and regional issues related to indigenous people to the newspaper. However, not everyone who works at *The Morung Express* has this experience. They suggest other ways of thinking about the newspaper and their work here, bringing attention to how *The Morung Express* is an articulated site of struggle.

6.3 *The Morung Express* → articulated site of struggle

John and I have been friends and colleagues a long time. As editorial contributors to *The Morung Express*, we shared many conversations over the years on his areas of interest, including Greek philosophy, Christian theology, Naga sociality, and the ‘Naga soul and spirit’. During my fieldwork, he presented me with a conundrum I had not yet considered. It was towards the end of a tiring three-hour conversation over dinner³¹⁹ where both of us challenged each other to think and re-think our questions and answers. My initial question to him was if he thought of *The Morung Express* as a ‘modern morung’. He said he thought of the ‘Naga kitchen’ as a ‘modern morung’ but not

³¹⁹ Interview conducted on 9 January 2023.

‘strictly’ *The Morung Express*. Morung, he said, is a ‘sacred space’ but not in the sense that a church is one.

If one is sacred (church), the other is profane (morung). Sacred cannot always be taken as something that is religious or institutionalised as a holy place, but sacredness as in a place where you learn so many things, and therefore it is to be considered as a place that one should revere, and have respect for. That kind of sacredness, not the religious sort of sacredness. The religiosity and holiness attached to church is different from the sacred attached to the morung relating to the respect that is demanded of an institution from where one learns about values and skills of life. Like, school is a place where we learn various forms of knowledge and we are taught to behave in a certain manner at a school, and that is done out of respect for the knowledge you are to gain. When you associate sacredness with church, it is not simply about the church or building but has more to do with God. There is a fine dividing line between the sacredness of morung and church.

John articulates the ‘sacredness’ of morung to knowledge and learning³²⁰. It is ‘profane’ in that it has no ‘god’ as a church does; morung thus becomes mundane, banal, every day, but it is ‘sacred’ through values, life skills, and as a school transferring public knowledge. The ‘fine line’ between sacred and profane, largely drawn by American Baptist ‘protestantism’ in Nagaland (Lotha 2009: 256,265,271, Joshi 2012: 248, Thomas 2016: 36-7), also helps me understand how Naga Baptists like John describe

³²⁰ That the morung is more special than other institutions was also exemplified by the outrage that erupted over an ‘Indian Army Morung’ set up at Naga Heritage Village, Kisama, during the Hornbill Festival in 2023. Reminding readers of the atrocious human rights record of the Indian Army in Nagaland, the report cited the Naga Students’ Federation as terming such a morung an example of ‘cultural misappropriation and insensitivity to deeply rooted traditions and values of the Naga people’; the Global Naga Forum called it out for being part of ‘the unending drama of India’s grim gift of democracy and modernity to the Naga indigenous people’. <https://morungexpress.com/nsf-gnf-object-to-indian-army-morung-at-naga-heritage-village> Accessed on 05.12.2023.

the ‘new’ institution of the morung. *The Morung Express* is not morung³²¹; a ‘Naga kitchen’ is a modern morung – an assumed private inner sphere of a house where important discussions are held between insiders. *The Morung Express*, on the other hand, has a clear public presence and function – mass communication – that is not linked to a sacred inside. It is only in a colloquial way that *The Morung Express* is locally referred to as a ‘morung’.

In the previous chapters, the ‘morung calendar’ and ‘debated prohibitions’, I observed the ways in which *The Morung Express* establishes links between, for instance, land and God or festivals and gods, and the articulations of Naganess to indigeneity and religion in these instances, the scope of these articulations and the scales through which they are activated. However, I had not explicitly considered which articulations may not be made nor why these could not be made³²². Based on the articulations already studied, I thought of the newspaper as indigenous, but also Christian/religious, media. In my conversation with journalists, instead of using the term ‘media’ I used the colloquial term of local reference to *The Morung Express*, that is, morung, to refer to it, in the second instance, as a ‘christian morung’. This gave rise to a motley of discussions when I asked journalists at *The Morung Express* about these categories:

1. Do you consider *The Morung Express* an ‘indigenous newspaper’?
2. Do you consider *The Morung Express* a ‘christian morung’?

6.3.1 Indigenous media

Morung (not the newspaper) has been described as local and ‘traditional media’, and contrasted with global ‘mass media’ (Newme 2016: 134-5). Extending this description of morung to the newspaper, I asked members of the editorial team if they thought of *The Morung Express* as an ‘indigenous newspaper’. Some suggested that indigeneity is not unique to the Naga people, but ‘others elsewhere’ have similarities with ‘us’; like

³²¹ Though John admitted that it ‘mirrors’ the institution of the morung, or reflects some aspects particularly related to ‘morung as a medium that teaches people’.

³²² Except marginal discussions on topics like why festivals are not always linked to God.

other indigenous people, Nagas also have ‘oral tradition, relating your identity with your land and history’. Journalists kept the possibility open to cover stories related to, as they said, the ‘philosophy of indigenous’ as articulating marginalised peoples’ conditions but asserted that they also have a responsibility to report on similar conditions faced by non-indigenous people and communities.

Some members said they were not sure what it meant to be ‘indigenous’ while working from the cosmopolitan city of Dimapur (Kikon and McDuie-Ra 2021) and operating a newspaper³²³. Most of the workers at *The Morung Express* printing press are not Naga nor indigenous in a global sense though editorial workers are; they recognise these differences that mark their life and living in Dimapur that is home to a heterogenous population. There is no clear way in which either Dimapur or the newspaper could be only ‘indigenous’ in a nativist sense. One journalist said:

My understanding is if *Morung* is an indigenous newspaper... then we have biases towards a certain activist mentality, towards certain rights, land rights, that people perceive as indigenous rights. I would like us to critically analyse them and champion them if we editorially agree with any kind of activism regarding those rights. My understanding of being an indigenous newspaper would be having a certain kind of bias towards a certain kind of rights.

With several journalists agreeing with this approach, they maintained that *The Morung Express* is an objective source of information and opinion. Most in the editorial team also said they saw their workspace as a ‘learning institution’, where they learned about global issues they previously knew little about, like those related to other indigenous people, and were able to re-think issues that they had lived with their entire lives, like

³²³ Dimapur is a city of conundrums. Dolly Kikon and Duncan McDuie-Ra explore many of these conundrums as a starting point for many more. Located to the west of the Naga lands, the city breaks puritanical barriers of belonging and identity, facilitates economy and, often, unjust capital networks to flourish, and exemplifies what it means for a market – class, tribes, churches, village colonies – to operate in Nagaland in ways that may not be the same as in other cities in Nagaland. Naganess in Dimapur finds hyper modern means to survive the city’s material exigencies.

the Naga national issue. In being ‘people-oriented’, the newspaper gave its readers what they ‘should’ read rather than ‘breaking news’³²⁴ for the day, which re-aligned news orientations they had learned elsewhere³²⁵, learning to pay attention to rights-related issues, and keeping these on page one. This orientation includes both ‘official’ and ‘people’s views’, but these are often presented as separate stories to fit a daily newspaper model; objective but also paying attention to the local through an eye on global and regional developments. Working on the capitalist fringes, team members at a small newspaper such as this learned through their reports – including reports about the state government³²⁶ and women’s labour in producing and marketing the Naga handloom, for example³²⁷ – to recognise the system at large, who is left out of it, who needs to find a way in, the means to get there, and the responsibility of governance and civil society to address these needs. Being ‘too Naga’ would only be detrimental to publishing well-rounded reports on such issues as well as for revenue, said one journalist. Operating as a newspaper in Nagaland State that is fully dependent economically on the Indian Union makes the possibilities of ‘independence’ from market driven conditions slim.

Moreover, having worked on a daily basis with dogmatic notions of indigeneity in many situations, and being at a large distance from global platforms, journalists felt a sense of discomfort with becoming partisan to certain kinds of indigenous or Naga assertions. Examples of such dogmatic tendencies have erupted from indigeneity being defined strictly in terms of state borders (Baruah 2020: 81), or through ‘republican traditions of

³²⁴ News about crime and politics, said someone when asked.

³²⁵ Possibly journalism schools or their notions of journalism they developed before joining *The Morung Express*. When they come to *The Morung Express*, they are given a guide to journalism ethics at the newspaper, a document which is ‘for internal circulation only’ but does not differ vastly from what journalism means elsewhere in the world. The new orientation they learn at the newspaper is often during reportage of issues, particularly during times of conflict when the newspaper takes a neutral, or ‘peace’ based, stance (both on local as well as global conflicts). Besides this, much like the newspaper’s readers, journalists working at the newspaper learn about global indigenous issues from their own newspaper, particularly from the editorial pages whose content is often selected by the publisher, Aküm Longchari.

³²⁶ <https://morungexpress.com/taxes-tops-nagaland-governments-departmental-digital-initiative-assessment> Accessed on 12.10.2023.

³²⁷ <https://morungexpress.com/sovereignty-of-cotton-quest-to-reclaim-a-dying-naga-loin-loom> Accessed on 21.09.2023.

citizenship’ that use the individual as its ‘font of sovereignty’ and ‘focus of welfare’ pitting the insider against the ‘figure of the outsider’ (Barbora 2022: 85-91) in the Northeast and across the Indian Union. Such policies ‘submerge’ differences between exclusivist and inclusivist positions, say between the Hindu right and adivasi groups, by relegating the latter to a ‘generalized subaltern subject position’ as merely culturally different from other citizens (Baviskar 2007: 291). Such approaches have led to federal states in the Indian Union deciding who is indigenous or not through such measures as, in Nagaland, the Register of Indigenous Inhabitants in Nagaland (RIIN) (Ketoukhrie-ü 2023: 54-8), and, in India and other states, through the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) (Azad, Bhat et al. 2020, Bhatia and Canning 2021, Chatterji, Desai et al. 2021, Longkumer 2021: 268-75). Coming into contrast with Naga claims of nationhood, such measures as the RIIN are set to further entrench state borders crossing through Naga lands by linking indigeneity to state citizenship. The same is replicated at the scale of the Indian Union through the CAA and NRC which link indigeneity with religion and country citizenship. At this scale, Hindu (and ‘native’) insiders are pitted against Muslim (and ‘non-native’) outsiders; locally, they strengthen nativist ‘sons of the soil’ claims (Weiner 1978, Vandekerckhove 2009) that indigenous people in the Northeast will be overrun by ‘land hungry’ Muslims (Bhatia 2021). Most poor and Muslim locals and migrants are now accorded automatic illegality in the region (Achumi 2019, Chatterji, Desai et al. 2021), and whose experiences as a result of this status and protests to secure their rights are emerging only now (Dutta, Azad et al. 2022). In the Northeast, these nativist lines are not just between the Hindu and the Muslim though, but also between those claiming to be indigenous. In Manipur, for instance, groups claiming indigeneity have clashed historically³²⁸, and also as recently as 2023³²⁹, with the indigeneity of minorities (Kuki-Zo) linked to ‘illegal

³²⁸ <https://caravanmagazine.in/conflict/many-nationalisms-colliding-manipur-violence> Accessed on 12.07.2023.

³²⁹ <https://kafila.online/2023/06/18/on-the-current-turmoil-in-manipur-what-we-need-to-know-and-what-we-need-to-do-nefis/?fbclid=IwAR2HJGRWefpGeZmaUL241hCbNwy2M1Fu8cuBw164vpnCy5BaGYeejZ3ccy4> Accessed on 12.07.2023.

immigration’ and Christianity – recognised as Scheduled Tribes in India and indigenous on a global scale – contrasted with the indigeneity of majority (Meitei) followers of an ‘indigenous religion’³³⁰ (Sanamahi) – recognised as indigenous on a global scale but not as Scheduled Tribes in India.

Faced with such complexities, editorial team members of *The Morung Express*, who do not ascribe indigeneity only to the ‘common grounds’ based global and local activism (Barbora 2022: 4) of an earlier generation, have witnessed the growth of indigeneity in the region through increasingly right-wing assertions. This ‘generational’ point has also been made earlier to point to the audience of *The Morung Express* who, according to the publisher of the newspaper, are also from a generation who have lived through a period of struggle whose experiences also shaped global indigeneity in the postcolonial period. As knowledge workers in a time of connected local and global forces (Clifford 1997: 7), the Indo-Naga ceasefires (Kikon and McDuire-Ra 2021), the Naga reconciliation process³³¹ and neoliberal economics, journalists in Nagaland have been witness to, and part of, new opportunities, liberties, normalcies and hostilities, also resulting in migrations and movements (McDuire-Ra 2012b, Karlsson and Kikon 2017). Their experiences of working in mixed, often hostile, cities and myriad work environments make them move away from constructing *The Morung Express* only as a ‘Naga newspaper’ or even an ‘indigenous newspaper’ in a ‘sons of the soil’ or ‘nativist’ (Béteille 1998: 190, Clifford 2013: 65), essentialist, sort of way towards being mindful to the possibilities of articulating local issues to indigenous peoples’ rights through emancipatory frameworks (Karlsson 2013) and as regular news that most journalism institutions in the region, particularly in India, should be covering in any case. Their practices of journalism become part of the conditions that enable relations between, in this case, indigeneity and media/journalism/newspaper, keeping their knowledge producing practices grounded, historical, and part of the struggle that has led to the

³³⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_psVkjKECc Accessed on 14.07.2023.

³³¹ <https://www.thenagarepublic.com/discourse/decade-since-a-milestone-the-climb-uphill/> Accessed on 13.07.2023.

media in Nagaland being termed ‘an agent of change’ (Kumar 2023: 153-251). They do this, for instance, by creatively balancing, not always successfully or without bias, journalism with editorialising (editorials written by several different writers) in moments of sharp conflicts between indigeneity and justice.

6.3.2 Christian morung

Historically, anthropologists articulated morung to war, as previously mentioned, but also made it common to Nagas, in part, through defining (Furer-Haimendorf 1938, Jacobs, Harrison et al. 2012: 27-31, 53-67) and prohibiting it (Thomas 2016: 52). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, American Baptist missionaries termed the village morung as ‘heathen’ (Mills 1926: 419, Ao 2014: 38, Thomas 2016: 40), and its ‘rites and rituals’ were articulated to ‘the devil’ (Ao 2014: 37-8). Morung also became Naga (Baruah 2020: 105) during this period through its descriptions as an ‘ancient and important feature of Naga culture’ (Furer-Haimendorf 1938: 378). In its ‘shape and function’, morung made Nagas comparable to ‘certain tribes of New Guinea’ (ibid), thereby laying the initial steps towards a global grouping (Chidester 2014: 59-89) under the category of ‘primitive’ that eventually ‘became indigenous’ (Clifford 2013: 13-21). In translating diverse local institutions – the Ao *Arju*, the Konyak *Ban*, the Lotha *Chumpo*, the Rengma *Renshü*, the Chang, Yimsungr (*sic*), Sangtam drum and skull houses – into the Assamese term ‘morung’ (Furer-Haimendorf 1938: 377-8), neighbouring tribes were congregated as ‘Naga’. Or, an *ancient* morung located within the spatial confines of a *village/clan* was made an ‘essential core’ (Hall 2003: 116) of Naganess, through its association to headhunting and related taboos, rituals, and rites. Colonial policies of taking over the administration of these lands, and the discursive move of relegating morung to the past, and to the rural, enabled missionaries and administrators to get rid of their choice of associations; American missionaries could replace animism with Christianity, British administrators could replace headhunting/war with law, order and taxes. Only in recent history has morung re-emerged. Without this struggle, morung would not be what it is today. Morung continues to be described by contemporary researchers as a ‘ritual centre’ (Aier 2004), as value containers of ‘Naga

culture’ (Pongener 2011), associated with ‘tribal practices’ like animism (Changkija 2007); as a site for civic training through custom and tradition (Jamir 2012: 28-29); and as something so ‘unique’ and small, they are ‘close to being extinguished’ (Goswami 2022). As ‘indigenous’ and ‘free from a science hegemony’ (ibid), morung is made comparable to other ‘youth dormitories’ like the Mizo *Zawlbuk* (Lalchhanhima 2020) that, like its morung counterpart in its pre-Christian time, was described both as ‘religious’ and ‘dangerous’ for guiding ‘the everyday life of the people’ (Lalngakthuami 2016: 104).

The historical continuity of morung – both as rural artifacts and for urban reawakening – is a case in point of resisting foreign pressure in the face of annihilation, and an example of an ‘assemblage’ that could potentially be identified as ‘indigenous religion’ (Kraft, Tafjord et al. 2020: 186-7). Such an assemblage sits in relation to its presence on a largely Christian landscape. To understand this, I proposed the term ‘christian morung’ as an assemblage of a pre-Christian past and a Christian present. The term emerged from the study of the text in *The Morung Express* that had large quantities of Christian notions/actors (like God and Nagaland Baptist Church Council) connected to indigenous notions/actors (like land and clan unions). I presented it to the editorial team at *The Morung Express*, and their responses came in two directions:

1. Those who understood ‘christian morung’ as emphasising morung, or the old morung of descriptions I have presented above, or *as* ‘indigenous religion’. One of the editorial team members said an outright and immediate ‘no’ to the question of whether they thought about *The Morung Express* as a ‘christian morung’. They qualified this with – ‘a morung is never about religion, it is not a spiritual institution’. It is a ‘a place of learning...where you learn life skills, culture, things like that’. Another said they cannot ‘give a convincing reason why’, but the classification is ‘inappropriate’. The terms ‘christian’ and ‘morung’ could not be articulated.
2. Those who understood this as a point about *The Morung Express*, or *not as* ‘indigenous religion’. To use a term like ‘christian morung’ for a ‘press

organisation' is 'offensive', said one editorial team member. Though they understood 'why we carry articles about faith and Christianity', they have 'always taken the *Morung* as a place of learning, but it is a newspaper, a part of a global coalition of the free press'. Another journalist said there was nothing 'offensive' about 'christian morung' because 'like a government', *The Morung Express* has to 'play by the likes, the choices and taste of the people. It has to sell'. And, thus, 'the religious material that we carry has an inclination towards Christian ideology' because that is popular amongst the mainly Christian audience.

The above points re-iterate the premises from which this dissertation takes off – that such concepts as indigeneity and religion are unsettled, flexible and challenging. Contingent conditions can lead to the articulations of 'indigenous' with 'religious' (as also seen through chapters three and four of this dissertation). There is no autonomous domain of indigeneity, religion or indigenous religion, only articulated ones of indigeneity and religion. For the morung of the past, Christian missionaries articulated it as bad/heathen or primitive religion, a disconnected domain that could be replaced with 'civilisation'³³². Some journalists perceive morung as a 'not spiritual' entity in a common sense way. 'From a Christian perspective', said one editorial team member, 'what went on at the morung was x-rated. It stopped with Christianity because it was associated with sin'. Switching from the Naga 'morung' to the Ao 'arju', the member continued, 'It was not only a place where you imparted the Ao way of life, sübaliba, but also where you learn everything – conduct, etiquette, how to relate. It encompasses everything, and you learn all that at the morung'. This learning came with 'great pots of sweet rice-beer' (Fürer-Haimendorf 1978 (1946): 51-61) accompanied by dances, feasts, sacrifices led by 'sacred chiefs' on architectural sites that included sexually explicit wood carvings (ibid: 98-109) – some of the many practices and displays that

³³² It is not the articulation of such terms that led to colonial intervention on sites such as morungs. It was primarily colonial control of land and resources that led the British administrators, followed by American missionaries, to the Naga Hills. The articulation of the inhabitants and their practices as heathen/primitive/bad followed as a result.

the American Baptist Mission termed ‘heathen’³³³ and, the journalist, ‘x-rated’. Some journalists at *The Morung Express* seem to clearly understand these lines that demarcate the ‘pre-colonial’ from colonial pasts and re-cast them into a relevant present. One member re-iterated, ‘it (morung) is a mixture of religion, life skills and way of life’. In other words, morung is not necessarily segregated along distinctions between religion and secular (non-religion), but completely dissolving the line between religion (Christianity) and indigenous religion (morung) is considered ‘inappropriate’.

Designating *The Morung Express* as a christian morung, as suggestive of only its ‘religiosity’ makes it problematic in a regional and global atmosphere of a ‘secular’ and ‘free’ press, where what is religious and what is secular is often understood by ideological secularists as separated domains (Mahmood 2009: 858). While recognising the ideological relevance of secularity as objectivity, journalists also understand when to relate the two domains in the newspaper. For journalists of a secular dispensation, the ‘Faith Leaf’ page of *The Morung Express* should be information on all religions, not used as proselytisation for one. For news pages, journalists are reluctant to cover ‘revivalist’ events – loaded with maximal presentations of religion, including mass prayers, projections of ‘evil’, and trances – in terms of uncritically reporting their messages in the ‘voice of god’. They said they routinely censor ‘evangelical’ messages when writing and editing news pieces. News about these large gatherings makes it into the newspaper nonetheless, through press releases (user generated) and because they cannot be ignored ‘if we want to survive’, said a journalist, alluding to the readership. On the other hand, they also see the importance of covering ‘reconciliation’ messages connected to ‘truth’, ‘forgiveness’, amongst other ideas, to forge new Naga politics, even though led by Christian actors (eg.: FNR). Revivals, as always religion, and

³³³ Anthropologist Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf thought this was overkill on the part of the Mission, who, he suggested, could have kept most of the Ao practices, prayers and festivals intact by introducing an ‘appropriate Christian prayer’ for, say, the prosperity of crops. Haimendorf may have been surprised by how much of this strategy is put to work at festivals today; however, most festivals today have become cultural artifacts as many have replaced traditional crops on their land with monoculture plantations or stone mines to support their economy.

reconciliation, as not always religion but also politics, are lines journalists recognise and draw; they report both in the newspaper nonetheless. Keeping both these genres of Christian news on their pages is also a way to be economically independent through revenue drawn from selling the newspaper to local readers, most of whom are Christian and may be interested in both these sorts of events. The contradiction between the two is resolved by journalists invoking the boundaries of journalism through reportage of such events in a neutral voice³³⁴.

When I asked Aküm Longchari, the current editor and publisher, about a ‘christian morung’, he did not reject the idea nor separate Christian from morung. Instead, he suggested that this assemblage of ‘christian morung’ is an outsider’s category. He said:

In terms of christian morung, perhaps some people may say that, but that is looking at it from the outside. When we look at it from within the Christian lens, people will say that the kind of Christian articles that we publish are actually quite radical to the situation. There are Christians who will say that *Morung* carries articles that are not Christian enough from their point of view. Even though we are carrying Christian articles, they would be about justice and peace, about equality, about rights. These are voices that challenge the status quo even though they could be Christian writers, or it could be theological in nature.

So, the content in *The Morung Express* is described as operating in a Christian realm relating to the ‘status quo’, and as ranging from ‘radical’ to ‘not Christian enough’. This ‘radical’ linking to local issues also hints at the many christianities that operate in Nagaland today, making them interconnected with local issues, both through conservatism and liberation theology. John, the editorial contributor and my interviewee, notes that *The Morung Express* is ‘sensitive to others’ but is not a secular newspaper. He accounts for the Christian content in the newspaper as disseminating ‘the

³³⁴ These boundaries invoked by objectivity cannot always be maintained. For instance, see <https://www.morungexpress.com/40-days-of-revival-an-invitation-to-heal-nagaland> Accessed on 06.11.2023.

message of the need to create bonds between Nagas, among certain family members, and in the process reach out to communities and therefore create neighbourly relationship between communities’ that will ultimately lead to the ‘liberation of the Naga society, Naga mind and Naga soul’ by ‘speaking truth to power’. According to Nepuni Piku, ‘It is the biblical context that connects us (Nagas) to the larger humanity’. He separates ‘faith’ from ‘religion’, connecting the former with what the Nagas now practice as ‘Christian faith’ and the latter as what the colonisers brought which was ‘American or European’. Aküm Longchari referred to the earlier missionary era as ‘religion’ through peace mission, medicine and education. For non-journalists, religion and its registers are important drivers of reporting local events to the public and ‘speaking truth to power’ – the production of knowledge with the general goal of building ‘bonds’ between Nagas and their neighbours from a Christian standpoint.

6.3.3 Articulated media paradigm

Both journalists and non-journalists build the journalistic paradigm at *The Morung Express*. This ‘paradigm’ may be understood in two ways:

1. Journalists and editorial team members assert the need for objectivity, a free press, but also the need to sustain a reader driven revenue model of doing the news. I read their descriptions of *The Morung Express* and their work therein through Vos and Moore’s journalistic ‘paradigm formalisation’ wherein journalists use broad enough terms like objectivity, free press, or distance from indigeneity and religion to ‘gain legitimacy for the field’ but also balance it out with revenue and reader needs and interests that allow ‘disparate interpretations to coexist’ (Vos and Moore 2020: 25) such that revivals and reconciliations are both included in the paradigm of the news.
2. Activists – the founders and an editorial contributor – assert the need for an ‘explicitly counterhegemonic’ discourse in the building of journalism at *The Morung Express*. I read this through Vos and Moore’s journalistic ‘paradigm reconsideration’ wherein indigenous and Christian connections are explicitly made, the institution is described as ‘morung’, providing an ‘alternative’ space

to ‘mainstream’ journalism; claiming a ‘more intimate relationship with audiences’ (Vos and Moore 2020: 27-8) for whom the historical, Christian and indigenous context is important. Articles like the one presented in the beginning of this chapter on Naga Day is a case in point of the presentations of such alterity through journalism that do not feature as parts of any other news media, in Nagaland or elsewhere.

Though Vos and Moore traced these sorts of journalistic paradigm shifts over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries in the United States of America, I find their ‘paradigm’ thinking useful to conceptualise an articulated media paradigm – that may, in this case, be specifically termed a ‘morung media paradigm’ – that involves the negotiation of these multiple ways of developing the practice of journalism within one media institution that has historically evolved from the global practices of journalism, and journalism as a response to local historical context³³⁵. Through the two ways mentioned above, *The Morung Express* helps read a ‘morung media paradigm’ whose practices make it comparable, to some extent, to a ‘Sámi media system’ that works semi-autonomously within institutional frameworks of nation-states (Rasmussen, Sara et al. 2021: 33). *The Morung Express* relates to an ‘indigenous journalism culture’ (Hanusch 2013), embodied by the likes of *Cultural Survival*³³⁶, by reporting from indigenous

³³⁵ An Oxfam India 2022 study, and a Reuters-Oxford 2021 study, have used the terms ‘alternative’ and ‘hyper-local’ to describe this type of media. In India, such alternative media are reported to ‘ensure the representation of ethnic minorities within the journalism industry’ by filling the ‘socio-political regional journalism gap’. The Oxfam India study cited the example of *Khabar Lahariya* and *The Mooknayak* as mainland Indian examples of media that have changed the way notions of caste and women are covered; it also used a new YouTube channel called *EastMojo* as an example of alternate media in the Northeast. The report failed to explore any historic and serious news media that claim to do alternative work in, and have done so in the precarious conditions of, Northeast India for many years. This could possibly be due to them not having entered even ‘alternative’ capitalist competition on India’s media landscape. Meanwhile, the Reuters-Oxford study cited a ‘local Scandinavian broadcaster’ as an example of ‘alternative’ media, without naming the broadcaster. <https://www.oxfamindia.org/knowledgehub/workingpaper/who-tells-our-stories-matters-representation-marginalised-caste-groups-indian-media> ; <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/changing-newsrooms-2021-hybrid-working-and-improving-diversity-remain-twin-challenges-publishers> Accessed on 28.12.2023.

³³⁶ A web portal that reports news, commentary and multi media programmes related to global indigeneity. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/> Accessed on 05.12.2023.

experiences for an indigenous and non-indigenous audience. It may be compared to a ‘religious media’ like *Christianity Today*³³⁷ for publishing Christian content for a Christian audience for ‘religious edification and education’ (Grem 2014: 338), but also to a secular media like *The Indian Express*³³⁸ in the Indian Union for adhering to objective journalistic norms. Much like the global and regional conditions of all these media institutions, limitations to Nagaland’s media are set by their material and historical conditions. Specifically, it is this morung media paradigm through which the myriad articulations emerge, but also renders the media institution itself a dynamic and articulated site of struggle.

The Morung Express and the articulated media paradigm it inhabits has an additional dimension apart from the two points mentioned above – applicable to other newspapers/media outlets in the world, in the Indian Union and in Nagaland State – that is, regulation. The newspaper is regulated by the market, acquisition of newsprint, a printing press, and access to distribution networks. It is also regulated by Indian journalism regulators like the Press Council of India, and through the Indian government’s use of anti-terror laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA) which incarcerates journalists critical of its policies. The law’s use has ‘stigmatised’ journalists and produced a ‘chilling effect on the profession (journalism) at large’ across the Indian Union³³⁹. Added to this are the Indian armed forces and multiple national security agencies that operate in Nagaland, monitor and regulate the local media with impunity. The Nagaland State government does not have any laws or regulations to protect journalists and a free press; instead, journalists are actively pressured away from issues of state accountability³⁴⁰. A free press is not in the interest

³³⁷ A web portal that reports Christian news and commentary for a global audience.

<https://www.christianitytoday.org/who-we-are/our-ministry/> Accessed on 04.12.2023.

³³⁸ A secular newspaper and website in the Indian Union. <https://indianexpress.com/> Accessed on 06.11.2023.

³³⁹ 16 journalists in India are currently charged under the UAPA. <https://thewire.in/media/16-indian-journalists-have-been-charged-under-uapa-7-are-currently-behind-bars> Accessed on 24.12.2023.

³⁴⁰ Journalists in Nagaland also face pressure from families and their communities if and when they investigate issues of financial irregularities and corruption in state governance.

<https://mokokchungtimes.com/plight-of-journalists-in-nagaland/> Accessed on 24.12.2023.

of the state. Community control is entangled with the state, but also operate with relative autonomy through Naga village, revolutionary and civil society authorities. These ‘regulating’ bodies and practices – from whom the state should provide protection to the media but does not – form a third pillar of the articulated media paradigm. Some instances of ‘regulations’ discussed with me included how a church preacher once threatened to boycott *The Morung Express* throughout their networks in the Northeast in reaction to a news piece published by them. When the newspaper published an article critical of the actions of a Naga Indian Administrative Services officer, the officer’s village council asked for an explanation and an apology from the then editor and the publisher of the newspaper, which also entailed apologies from their respective villages. In its early years, *The Morung Express* was banned from a part of Nagaland by a Naga revolutionary group. Finally, the newspaper has been challenged several times, including with other newspapers in Nagaland on one occasion, by an Indian paramilitary force called the Assam Rifles that accused the newspapers of ‘taking sides’. The newspapers collectively fought back and defended their credibility and the right to report by providing ‘equal space’ to all (objectivity) in conflict situations³⁴¹. In this terrain of struggle, which I have termed an articulated media paradigm generally, or specifically a ‘morung media paradigm’, *The Morung Express* survives through mixed strategies that enable the articulations of indigeneity and religion, as presented in this dissertation, in ways that produce ‘knowledge as commons’ for the use of readers as ‘rights holders’ through practices of journalism whose limits are also set by the market, state and community regulatory practices.

6.4 Conclusion

Moving on from discursive articulations in the newspaper that I discussed in the first part of this dissertation, in this chapter I bring attention to the newspaper itself, and the

³⁴¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34841210> , <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/nagaland-govt-s-silence-over-assam-rifles-notice-is-unacceptable/story-8kjU3M6XcTGZFYohWJTnN.html> Accessed on 13.07.2023 and 25.12.2023 respectively.

contradictions emergent when its descriptions are discussed. As daily news and print technology, *The Morung Express* as ‘morung’ brought new potentials for expanding scope and scale of the ‘local’, making new articulations of Naganess possible on regional, national, global scales in post-ceasefires Nagaland. Whatever the direction in which articulations are enabled or disabled, *The Morung Express* presents opportunities towards ‘rupture as progress’ (Amin 2014: 95) through critical engagement with present time (Bose and Varughese 2015). Discussions prompted me to think of this chapter as a ‘terrain of struggle’ (Kellner and Durham 2006: xxxiii, Amin 2014: 130, Grande 2015: 16) that *The Morung Express* currently traverses as one that makes it a newspaper, even a homegrown ‘alternative’ newspaper in the Indian as well as in the global/international mediascape, that relates and responds to current conditions. But it is also a ‘morung’ through its re-drawing of relations, or re-articulation, as a secular site of critical pedagogy and liberation, disconnecting it from a ‘heathen’ past and ‘nativist’ present, enabling new political tendencies that are nonetheless connected to, and establish articulations between, Naganess, indigeneity and religion.

The articulations studied in previous chapters have already shown the relations that constitute them, but here also how they shape *The Morung Express* as a historical force (Hall and Morley 2019: 238). Categories like ‘indigenous newspaper’ and ‘christian morung’ help me reflect on why certain articulations are not completely accepted. Contemporary politics of linking indigeneity with state borders and human rights only for some, for instance, has made journalists question an automatic linking between indigeneity and media/journalism (as an ‘indigenous newspaper’); however, they are not opposed to the kind of journalism that establishes connections with issues of neighbouring communities related to indigenous and non-indigenous people, as journalism in a ‘secular’ mode. The category of ‘christian morung’ emerged from the data that formed part of this research study. Some journalists and editorial team members rejected this articulation for insinuating the newspaper could be categorised as ‘religious’ media, while others reflected on the emergent potentials of such a category. Christian notions were important for the founders and an editorial contributor for the ‘bonds’ that the newspaper set out to ‘build’. Both the journalists and non-journalists

contribute to the formation of an articulated media paradigm, or a morung media paradigm, wherein global journalism and local needs are addressed through the medium of the newspaper and in the course of the articulations it produces by claiming objective practices of journalism, by claiming to be counter-hegemonic in strategy and through limits put on their work through market and state regulations entangled with community control.

7 Conclusion

This dissertation is centered around *The Morung Express* – a newspaper published from Nagaland State in India and considered to be ‘alternative’ and ‘people oriented’ with a strong interest in issues of justice and human rights, particularly related to Naga and indigenous people. The first part analysed articles with a focus on articulations of indigeneity and religion; the second part addressed questions pertaining to this newspaper’s work and position in relation to notions of religious, secular and indigenous media.

The main concepts under study were Naganess, indigeneity and religion. Theoretical approaches to articulation and scales helped me study how these concepts are linked, in what contexts, by whom, for what purposes, and with what results in regard to new (or renewed) connections, their meanings and potentials for usage. I have used a mixed methodology based on content analysis, targeted interviews, and contextual knowledge from my practice as a journalist with the newspaper. This combination of sources and approaches helped me problematise the concept of ‘indigenous media’ as an automatic categorisation of any media or journalism produced by indigenous people, as well as how we are to understand Christianity vis-à-vis ‘traditions’, and the boundaries between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ media in the Naga context. Thinking of the produced ‘knowledge’ – articulations produced through a news editorial process – as ‘commons’ enabled me to formulate an ‘articulated media paradigm’, wherein notions of a free and counterhegemonic press enable practices of journalism at a newspaper regulated by the market, community and state mechanisms. Through this, the journalists and founders of *The Morung Express* negotiate their practices at the newspaper from different standpoints.

This research was guided by three overarching concerns: the ways in which indigeneity and religion were connected to Naganess in *The Morung Express* in 2020; how its journalists, editors and other contributors reflected on these connections in 2022-23; and

the extent to which, or ways in which, they related to established boundaries between indigenous, religious and secular media.

In the following sections, I present the main results and findings.

7.1 Research Question 1

*In what ways are Naganess, indigeneity and religion articulated in *The Morung Express* through select cases in 2020?*

One of the main findings of this study is that Naganess is articulated to indigeneity and religion on different scales. Articulations enabled me to determine how these scales are linked. Practices of scaling – articulating local and global concerns – showcase the ways in which Naganess is shaped and extended in specific cases, situations and by particular actors. Though the scope of articulations is extendable, drawing from local towards the global, the global scale of articulations links the local scale of articulations to indigenous and Christian notions of individual and collective human rights. The themes of the ‘morung calendar’ and ‘debated prohibitions’ in chapters three and four showcase the specific ways in which Naganess is articulated to these scales with differing scope. I encapsulate these articulations through four broad and connected scales that I observed in *The Morung Express* in 2020:

Local: Villages, city colonies, their activities in regulating their ‘jurisdiction’ and celebrations articulate a bulk of Naganess from the ground up in *The Morung Express*. Upscaled, as Scheduled Tribes within the Indian Union, Naganess is articulated in the newspaper through festivals tied into a funding loop with the Nagaland State. 17 such Scheduled Tribes in Nagaland are recognised through ‘essential characteristics’ that, for the Indian state, include ‘primitive traits’, ‘geographical isolation’ and a ‘distinct culture’. Festivals connected to the tribes reinforce such ‘traits’ when state actors articulate them as distinct, ancestral and timeless, even as they celebrate them in cities and towns. Historicity is almost never accorded to these events, but they are located on land, related to the current agricultural harvest and are connected to traditions and culture by local actors. Festivals like Moatsü and Ngada are governed by tribe unions

(e.g., Ao Senden, Rengma Public Organisation) and state agents (e.g., Deputy Commissioner, Chief Minister), not priests or shamans. Tribe unions list features of such festivals, and ritualise them, while also relating them to contextual COVID-19 restrictions. By classifying them as ‘festivals’ on the one hand and connecting them to Christian notions like reconciliation, thanksgiving and ‘the almighty’ on the other, indigeneity and religion are articulated and carried forward as ‘custom’ and ‘tradition’. The dog meat prohibition presents arguments on how ‘customs’ should also be connected with ‘ethics’ at large, like animal welfare. Scheduled Tribes in Nagaland State are also congregated and showcased as part of the Hornbill Festival, the maximally indigenous event of this (local and sub-national) scale that is, however, presented as neither sacred nor customary. Naganess is ‘incorporated’ into a sub-national scale within the Indian Union through the special provision of Article 371-A of the Indian Constitution which articulates Naganess to ‘Naga customary law and practice’ (indigeneity) on the one hand, and ‘social or religious practices of the Nagas’ (religion) on the other. Yet, life choices like dog meat consumption must be defended through fundamental rights of the Indian Constitution as these articulations of Naganess are not established in law, and there is no stable ground on which they stand except through the festivalisation and ritualisation of tribe-related festivals. Even if legally fluid, the local scale is supported through organising of polities through villages, clans and tribes that are all connected and become the basis for any other upscaling move.

National: The presentation of the Naga Independence Day in *The Morung Express* is a good example of how institutions articulate Naganess through a Naga national scale linked to a global legal regime of human rights. Three institutions, in 2020, are presented as key: the Global Naga Forum, the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, and the Naga Scholars’ Association. Naganess is articulated to a common history of the Indian army’s burning of Naga villages, the emergence of ‘new’ things related to this, including cultural renaissance, Christian conversions, and a shared, political, future Naga citizenship as constituting a ‘just peace’. Self-determination is stressed as a human right of all Nagas in many of the newspaper articles. Nagas are compared to ‘Indigenous Peoples’ through articulating customary law as social contract but are also termed

unique with a ‘collective selfhood’ articulated to Naga culture, worldview, history, flag and constitution. These associative practices lead to identification and comparison with national movements among the Kashmiris or the Kurdish. Institutions like the Naga Mothers’ Association also harness this national space by advocating varied ‘national’ positions in order to support an alcohol prohibition and protest a dog meat prohibition through the moral and health concerns expressed by mothers of the nation. *The Morung Express* is on this list of institutions that connects the local and global scales on its pages through claims to represent Naga history, the technology of the printing press and the practices of journalism. The news it produces becomes openly available ‘knowledge’ for its readers – shared, articulated and debated. This constitutes *The Morung Express* as ‘national’ entity, also facilitated through the descriptions of its constitutive term, morung, as an ‘essence’ of Naganess. On this national scale, *The Morung Express* mediates articulations between indigeneity and religion, connections between other national institutions, and provides conditions for formulating and discursively stabilising the abstract national scale by articulating Naganess to tribe festivals, to ‘Nagaland for Christ’ and to global indigenous networks. In a way, while it continues to be regulated by Indian press guidelines and laws, the newspaper often bypasses the Indian ‘national’ scale (but reports on this scale too) in lieu of a Naga ‘national’ scale.

Global-Indigenous: Global indigeneity is brought to local readers of *The Morung Express* through stories about distant Indigenous Peoples. The newspaper’s text indicates that reports are brought together from various international websites, such as *Cultural Survival*, that relate to a specific set of human rights pertaining to indigenous land, biodiversity, and self-determination. These articulate Nagas as members of the global indigenous community. On United Nations’ mandated days like World Indigenous Peoples’ Day, individual non-journalist commentators articulate Naganess through ‘Indigenous Political Systems’ (voting systems) from a romanticised immemorial past to assert a future on Naga, not Indian, terms. International Women’s Day brings together notions of ‘indigenous science’ and ‘resilient futures’ with the ‘Naga traditional knowledge’ of women farmers, enabling new collaborations between institutions with different historical trajectories, like the Naga Peoples Movement for

Human Rights and the North East Network. Both these institutions have a presence on global indigenous platforms of the UN, but not the same focus on local issues. The Nagaland Baptist Church Council's women's ministry is added to this indigenous milieu as *The Morung Express* presents news on Christian notions of equality using globally recognisable indigenous women's labour objects like the loom used for the production of local textiles. Articulating Naganess at this scale enables participation in a global coalition of Indigenous Peoples, relate to international mechanisms that are relevant for local needs, and draw distinction from neighbouring peoples and communities based on a specific set of rights and mechanisms. Such sharing of global knowledge resources was studied through, for instance, the presentation of stories on COVID-19 pandemic carried on the important editorial pages of the newspaper.

Global-Christian: Naganess is regularly articulated to global Christianity – God given rights, sacrifice, holy week, birth of Jesus Christ, reconciliation, and missions. They are applied to particular cases and closely linked to the national and local scales. In *The Morung Express*, they are presented through events and days that connect martyrs, monoliths, prayers and Christ as land agents and contracts that will facilitate a promised nation and citizenship as understood by Christians globally. They are presented in the newspaper as means to political ends (for instance, prayers and fasting will enable a Naga nation). Naganess is linked to 'God the Lord' by revolutionary governments and affiliated groups in Nagaland that connect specific villages as singular and autonomous to a shared notion of unity and co-dependence through 'Nagaland for Christ'. Events reported in the newspaper entail globally recognisable activities like reading Bible verses combined with locally recognisable ones like raising the Naga flag and calls for independence (from India and Myanmar) at Naga independence and republic days. Martyrdom connects Nagas beyond borders of the Nagaland State (in neighbouring states) into futurist notions of common belonging in a Naga nation. Global Christian news and opinion platforms like *Christianity Today* become resources for presenting distant, but relevant, Christian discourses through editorial pages such as the Faith Leaf in *The Morung Express*. Christmas and Easter are occasions to establish the significance of God/Christ as the guarantor of the nation, the ultimate and stable universal, as

separate from unstable, local ritual and entertainment. Organised through various institutional conglomerates like the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (and its tribe affiliates), Catholic Association of Nagaland, Christian Forum Dimapur and others, Christian work is reported to be in action through the involvement of seminaries like the Kohima Bible College whose students participate locally in regulating the alcohol prohibition in collaboration with urban governance councils and civil society institutions. Together, they demarcate lines between good and evil, and claim control over the market and over individual conduct. The global-Christian scale is used to garner a degree of autonomy for Naganess that is otherwise dependent on regional and international legal norms to claim national legitimacy. Other minority, and neighbouring, religions also find space through this global route, through a coverage of festivals also celebrated in Nagaland, like Id (Islam) and Diwali (Hindu).

7.2 Research Question 2

How – in in what ways – do knowledge workers of The Morung Express reflect on these cases retrospectively in 2022-23?

I use the term knowledge workers to take stock of the intellectual labour of the journalists and editors who work every day to produce *The Morung Express* from its headquarters in Nagaland's commercial capital, Dimapur. Trained as journalists in a largely secular mode, they are also committed to local news for all, making their reflections on regular matters in the Nagaland media noteworthy alongside those of the newspaper's founders and a non-journalist editorial contributor. They point me towards the limits set on shared understandings as well as the ways in which they are challenged through their work. I summarise their interventions through four main supposed contradictions:

Religion and not religion: For the knowledge workers local festivals, such as Moatsü, are not and can never be 'religion'; one said it belongs to the 'spiritual' pre-Christian past. As a 'culture' attached to particular communities, festivals such these as are described by some as a 'fusion' of new (Almighty) and old (Lijaba). Knowledge workers point to a protected domain of 'tradition' which co-exists with Christian modernity (for

instance, ceremonies related to elections within village polities) by being kept separate; rarely presented in the news, these distinctions are unrecognisable to readers like me. The boundaries to decide how this ‘fusion’ works, what becomes culture, custom or religion are often set by religious actors, both Christian and non-Christian, who sometimes assign ‘time immemorial’ characteristics to culture, custom and religion. Some knowledge workers acknowledge that tropes like ‘since time immemorial’ are reserved for the romantic past and present-day customs associated with them that relate Nagas to global indigeneity, but whose domain is separate from religion. Pages like Faith Leaf in *The Morung Express* help maintain these boundaries by publishing ‘biblical truth’ (Christianity/religion) as more relevant for Nagas as a ‘decolonising’ framework, said the founders, than ‘superstition’ of horoscopes/astrology (not religion). One observer indicated that tropes like Nagaland for Christ (religion) are also ways to draw separation from a ‘Marxist past’ (not religion) by Naga revolutionary groups who trained in Communist China but now distance themselves from it in lieu of the more popular ‘Christian socialist’ present. Christianity and Christian institutions also hold the power to demarcate ‘sin’ (alcohol) from ‘not sin’ (dog meat) enabling them to exert more control over one prohibition than another. These demarcations enable power enough that the alcohol prohibition is never contested in a court of law, while the dog meat prohibition is contested (and overturned) in a court of law for infringing fundamental rights. Knowledge workers note how politicians latch on to this source of power by drawing from notions of ‘divine wrath’, with the latter (religion) often setting the condition on relations with state and civil society (not religion) in Nagaland.

Unique and distinct: Nagas are ‘unique’ (beyond comparison) through history but ‘distinct’ as members of a global order (in comparison). ‘Nagaland for Christ’ as a slogan for uniqueness, knowledge workers say, gets automatic coverage in the newspaper. The proponents of this slogan, Naga revolutionary leaders, have no other space but local newspapers to have their claims of Naga uniqueness connected to Christ published. Nagas, some knowledge workers say, have traditions and knowledge that are ‘original’ and ‘unique’, but also others that are similar to other indigenous people; uniqueness is also a way to draw a distinction from the neighbouring ‘Indian context’.

A distinction is often presented between Nagas through their regional belonging (east, west, north south) even when congregating for the purposes of Naga ‘unity’ on Christmas. The founders of *The Morung Express* and an editorial contributor note that Nagas are not unique enough due to the lack of a ‘Naga theology’ which is different from ‘western Christianity’. Christian prohibitions – such as the one on alcohol – not only emphasise uniqueness, but are also opportunities to intervene on social issues, such as alcoholism, and question market forces through the notion of a ‘moral economy’. Distinction is also established through protests against the dog meat prohibition, a food choice as distinct custom of Scheduled Tribes in the Indian Union; some knowledge workers find it ‘ironic’ that ‘Naga uniqueness’ is protected by the establishing ‘Naga customs’ through the Indian Constitution.

Good and bad indigeneity: Indigeneity is not presented by knowledge workers as inherently good, bringing into focus issues that crop up during discussions of indigeneity. I divide these into ‘good indigeneity’ and ‘bad indigeneity’. Cultures, costumes, dances are examples of good indigeneity as long as they are linked to ‘our’ festivals like Moatsü, Chüthüni or Naga Week. Discourses related to global indigeneity, rights to self-determination, discussions on biodiversity and resilience are also examples of good indigeneity for the solidarities they foster. Bad indigeneity, in the context of this newspaper, includes a past ‘symbolised’ by ‘unknown gods’ and headhunting which may inhabit the present if festivals like Moatsü become ‘religion’ again. Making profits through the commodification of Naganess during the Hornbill Festival, with the state ignoring problems of poverty and development in the state, is also an example of bad indigeneity. Policies that entrench Nagaland State borders by linking them with citizenship and promoting isolationist approaches and xenophobia are critiqued in *The Morung Express*. Discussions bring the historical problems of, and opposition to, the 16-point agreement which led to the Article 371-A of the Indian Constitution that ensures a special set of rights to preserve distinction by fixing Nagas (in Nagaland State) to ‘narrow’ state indigeneity. The category of Scheduled Tribes enables rights and resources as part of the Indian Union – and thus are sometimes considered good – but which drives a governance model restricting the scope of Naganess to go from sub-

national to national scale across state borders. Such indigeneity discourses are presented in *The Morung Express* that also mediates lines between good and bad, making such mediation an ideological rationale for its journalism, thereby also its unique selling point.

Ideology and capital: As much as *The Morung Express* emerged from the ideological standpoints of human rights, global indigeneity and Christianity, I was consistently reminded of the economics of sustaining this media institution as a newspaper that must negotiate the ‘power’ it has. Enabled by a small pool of capital, the newspaper’s production becomes possible by catering to an audience to whom both indigeneity and Christianity (more than secularity) remain relevant. Furthermore, to sustain as a news and journalism product connected to the market, and monitored by Indian media regulations, such events as the Hornbill Festival – even if critiqued – must be kept on the pages, as must be other religions and their festivals, both to draw revenue and readers, and to adhere to objective and secular practices that present all types of relevant information and opinions to a reading audience. It is also this revenue that enables the newspaper to stay afloat and retain its potentials to articulate Naganess for its intended audience and purposes. Ideology and capital are, thus, linked in the production of the newspaper, and to the articulations of indigeneity and religion in *The Morung Express*.

Through these four points, knowledge workers help me understand how articulations are not a process ‘internal’ to the discourse of a printed text, such as a newspaper, but also related to its ‘external’ conditions. Though journalists try to challenge shared and taken-for-granted concepts and starting points, these struggles are not always visible while studying articulations in the printed text of *The Morung Express*. Journalists and editorial contributors point towards re-articulations that inform how they participate in the mediation of Naganess, indigeneity and religion through the news over time (not just the period under study).

7.3 Research Question 3

To what extent – and in what ways – does The Morung Express relate to established notions of indigenous media/journalism, and to distinctions between religious and secular media?

Not all articulations are acceptable, I find out, as journalists and founders reflected on my description of *The Morung Express* as an ‘indigenous newspaper’ and a ‘christian morung’. Journalists conduct, and protect, their work by invoking a universal and shared journalistic paradigm that is nonetheless a product of local conditions and responses that are made public through the newspaper and its founders’ claims to an ‘alternative’ and counter-hegemonic position. Regulated by local actors, the market and state media guidelines, an articulated media paradigm, or specifically a ‘morung media paradigm’, helps me understand the ways in which *The Morung Express* disturbs the strict lines of separation between notions about indigenous, religious and secular media; it relates to each category to a certain extent, and in the following ways:

Indigenous media/journalism: This category is useful to study *The Morung Express* for the ways in which it articulates indigeneity on its pages, as presented in the two sections above. Its founders have organised this institution based on their history of work on human rights issues in Nagaland, later articulating it to indigenous peoples’ rights, and particularly the right to self-determination. Though they set out to name it ‘the independent’, they settled on ‘morung’ by noting its emergence from their activism, and as a common, collective, central, widespread, and knowledge-sharing space for Nagas. Morung is described by the newspaper’s founders as an ‘essence’ of Naganess, as a carrier of heritage, stories, tradition and culture. Historical descriptions articulating ‘morung’ to a ritualistic and headhunting past enabled both its prohibition (by missionaries) and a comparison with other ‘primitive’ people in the neighbourhood and across the world that structured colonial policy. Instead of disappearing, the morung has re-surfaced and is used as a modern institution in comparison with distant selves (Indigenous Peoples), and to draw a distinction from near others (Indians). The newspaper is specifically termed ‘people-oriented’ and ‘alternative’ on its website and

does not follow a 'breaking news' pattern of presenting the material. It is described by its publisher as a 'local' practice of the 'global' United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

However, the institution is headquartered in the cosmopolitan city of Dimapur and depends on both indigenous and non-indigenous labour to produce *The Morung Express*. For journalists, a classification as an 'indigenous newspaper' denotes bias for an institution that reports both 'official' and people's stories on its pages to heed to objective practices of journalism. Issues of public concern include a range of issues from language to health, from reconciliation to factional feuds, festivals to development. Journalists emphasise the importance of their publication being classified as a 'newspaper' that pays necessary, even if insufficient at times, attention to the reportage of issues that present the complex terrain of indigeneity in Nagaland and the Northeast India, or even on distant lands, to its readers.

Religious media: Despite suggestions that 'a morung is never about religion' (in response to my question, is this a christian morung?), *The Morung Express* publishes a large amount of religious material on its pages. Christian discourses and a biblical context are described by the publisher as raising a 'critical consciousness' that challenges the 'status quo', moving Christian practices from a 'ritualistic' to a 'radical' mode in Nagaland. Decolonising Christianity is brought into relation with notions of national identity, rights, justice, peace, equality, as creating local and global bonds for liberating Naga 'society, mind and soul'. While journalists find the newspaper's classification as 'religious' offensive for its insinuation that it is not a 'secular' and thereby free press, they also concur that Christian content has to be in the newspaper in order for it to sell in Nagaland. They draw distinctions between 'revival' (as always religion) and 'reconciliation' (as not always religion, and also politics) events based on relevance. Each of these events are nonetheless covered as part of the news, they suggest, but not presented in the 'voice of god'.

Secular media: Though secular is not a term often associated with Naganess, it is the presentation of the non-Naga Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jain – the 'other' – that justifies the

newspaper as ‘secular’, a domain that automatically legitimises media as objective. This qualifies *The Morung Express* as part of a ‘global coalition of the free press’. The founders and journalists frame the ‘morung’ as a secular site of pedagogy – a place of learning. They disentangle it from its location in the past and link it closely to a Naga present, as a site for the production of knowledge as commons, using the technology of the printing press and their practices of journalism to mediate what is made known and available for others to further use. As a Naga secular media, *The Morung Express* intervenes by questioning established connections between church, state and civil society (as in the case of the alcohol prohibition debates). Such questions are critical to any form of journalism that is invested in democratic questions of who governs and how. It is the daily labour of knowledge workers, or the journalistic middle class, that keeps a critical eye on both the neoliberal turn (by critiquing, for instance, the model of economics around the Hornbill Festival) as well as limits a return to primitivist articulations (by critiquing, for instance, a nativist turn to pure indigeneity).

However, *The Morung Express* does not necessarily break or question boundaries between religion (Christian, new religion) and indigenous religion (morung, old religion). Though the newspaper’s publisher asserts that the two ought to be related, Christian institutions and slogans like ‘Nagaland for Christ’ remain beyond critique and are taken for granted in the printed content of the newspaper, with some editorials even using biblical arguments to address local issues. Protestantism delegated lines between the sacred and the profane are not always disturbed.

7.4 Further questions

This study demonstrates that ‘indigenous media’ is a possible starting point, and useful in pointing to articulations that some news media make in regard to concepts regarding indigeneity; how they are connected to other concepts (like religion or secular), the ways in which they establish connections, and the conditions that their articulations relate to. One further question to ask going forward entails how, and in what ways, other news platforms in Nagaland and Northeast India, faced with similar conditions, articulate similar notions? A cross sectional analysis of all/some media networks in Nagaland may

help to understand comparatively an even wider range of articulations, and their limitations, of Naganess (/others), indigeneity and religion. There are news institutions that articulate indigeneity to more conservative notions like bloodlines, while other news media articulate them to more progressive notions like gender justice.

In another direction, it may also be helpful to compare *The Morung Express* with other 'indigenous media' networks around the world like the NRK Sápmi. During my research, I often saw differences between them particularly in terms of their structures, and conditions of journalism, but they served the common purposes of news media, and of connecting and mediating global indigeneity. A comparative exercise may be useful to study how these indigenous media relate to each other, as well as to their different local and historical conditions.

The Morung Express is a good source for understanding the ways in which contextual theology and indigenous religion(s) are concurrently developing in Nagaland today. I have not explored this in any detail, although I have noted how the founders and an editorial contributor mention the lack of a 'Naga theology' to replace 'western Christianity'. What is considered Naga and what is western in an enmeshed world? Who decides, and how? Are Naga/indigenous (Christian) theology and indigenous religion(s) comparable? This is a direction worth exploring for its general popularity, and to possible links to globalising discourses on indigenous (Christian) theology.

This dissertation is deeply set in the study of language. Although I note that articulations can only emerge from material conditions, it was not possible, within this study to describe or analyse these conditions in detail. I do not consider questions such as: how do the neighbouring Hindutva and Buddhist nationalisms drive politics on their peripheries (in Nagaland) to rely more on birth assigned identities of indigeneity and religion? How do neoliberal economics build an entrepreneurial class in a way that middle grounds become opportunities to fall back on these identities, moving further away from questions of poverty, unemployment, lack of schools and hospitals? In what ways do the media (local or global) relate to these questions? What does media ownership say about how these relations are drawn and presented? How do 'consumers'

think about the news they get, and in what ways do they influence the news (I have briefly, albeit insufficiently, addressed this)? What does it mean for knowledge resources generated by newspapers like *The Morung Express* to be free on the Internet even as web news portals turn to subscription models? A multi-dimensional analysis along some or several of these lines, and their correlations, must be taken seriously in terms of how indigeneity and religion have become important, even unavoidable, categories of interest in Nagaland, and among indigenous people (or other marginalised communities) everywhere, and how their articulations are circulated, shared, debated or sustained over time.

Pursuing these directions would add to the contribution I have made through this dissertation on how the print news media in Nagaland, particularly *The Morung Express*, is a rich site for the study of both stable and dynamic articulations of Naganess, the ways in which indigeneity and religion in Nagaland come to be related across scales through the mass media of a daily newspaper, and the struggles and practices of journalism in Nagaland today.

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