

Book Review

In the Shadows of the Naga Insurgency

In The Shadows of Naga Insurgency: Tribes, State, and Violence in Northeast India. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018. 356 pages. Hardcover, £34.99. ISBN: 9780199485703.

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This comprehensive monograph is the result of intensive ethnographic fieldwork over roughly two years, particularly in the villages of Phugwumi (pseudonym) and Noksen which are located in the western and eastern parts of the Indian state of Nagaland respectively. This book offers both a historical and contemporary context of the still unfolding Naga struggle for the right to self-determination, a struggle that violent erupted in the 1950s. Not just Nagaland, but places across Northeast India have endured protracted political conflict since decolonisation. Discussing the Naga struggle from a people's perspective, Wouters describes the everyday sufferings of the Naga, as well as discusses how Naga villagers perceive and experience the enduring political volatility and violence. The concept of 'insurgency complex' is introduced to show the repercussions of insurgency and counterinsurgency in shaping the everyday social lives and mentality of ordinary Naga people.

The introduction offers a historical account of the formation of Naga identity, which is based on the coming together of smaller identities, namely that of village, clan and tribe. It then shows the progression of Nagas' sense of nationalism, which resulted in a claim for independence. The first unified Naga organisation was the Naga Club, which was formed in 1918 and followed by the Naga National Council (NNC).

The book's second chapter breaks down and discusses Naga identity, particularly the identities of clan, village and tribe. It shows how these identities are very strong and lie at the root of factional rivalries that emerged within the Naga Movement, as well as in a general problem of tribalism. The author uses both historical and ethnographic insights to explain why the Naga Movement began to stagnate and split along tribal lines, arguing that tribal identity often supersedes projections of a singular Naga national identity.

The third chapter is titled 'ceasefire as conflict' and provides a very critical discussion of what is unfolding during the ceasefire. The Indo-Naga ceasefire is viewed "as a complex and contentious social reality that saw the continuation of conflict by other forms and means" (p. 29). He also introduces the idea of 'post-ceasefire recruits', which refers to 'national workers', as cadres of the Naga underground are called, with no personal experience of struggle and who often indulge in extortion and corruption in the name of the Naga Movement. Their behaviour and actions has agonised many Nagas, who feel that the Naga Movement has denigrated after the ceasefire, which was signed in 1997.

The fourth chapter discusses the emergence of Nagaland state in 1963, as part of India. The author argues that the present-day functioning of this state is influenced and shaped by an embodied

experience of state violence (p. 128). As the creation of Nagaland state did not end Naga insurgency, India's central government resorted to a 'policy of seduction' by granting huge development funds to Nagaland, but not so necessarily to effectuate development and good governance, but with the explicitly political intent to tie the Naga elite to the state. The next chapter shows Nagas' response to this policy of seduction, which comes in the form of a moral economy of corruption in which many people do not see it as morally wrong to pilfer development resources given to them by the state. Hence the author puts it that, "to situate corruption in its historical and political contexts seems especially relevant for Nagaland" (p. 173).

The penultimate chapter of the book discusses the disputed demand of Eastern Nagas to form a separate state from Nagaland. Their argument is both historical and contemporary. The historical argument is that eastern Nagas unlike western Nagas were never formally incorporated into the British Raj. The contemporary argument is that eastern Nagas feel dejected and deprived by western Nagas in terms of government employment, development, and other state benefits. This brings to the last chapter of the book which focuses on how Nagas engage with modern democracy and electoral politics. The chapter offers an exploration into how democracy and the election process are being 'vernacularized' by Nagas in their context of villages and clans. Wouters provides substantial ethnographic accounts to demonstrate how the democracy process is subject to loyalties of clan and village, as well as is influenced by what is locally known as the 'underground factor.'

The book ends with an epilogue which reflects on the possibility of Nagas moving beyond the shadows of Naga insurgency after the anticipated signing of a final political deal. Wouters argues that the success of any political treaty will not just depend on the deal itself, but on the unravelling of the 'insurgency complex.' *In the shadows of Naga Insurgency* is an excellent political ethnography which probes the shadows of insurgency as experienced and embodied by ordinary Naga villagers. This book is of great interest to South Asia scholars (anthropologists and sociologists) who are engaged in the study of politics, ethnicity, state, resources, neo-development and nationalism. Moreover, this book will also be of an interest to general audience who are keen to learn about the politics in Northeast India.