

# Globalizing an Indian Borderland Environment: Aijal, Mizoram, 1890–1919

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## Abstract

The borderlands of India's northeast are often seen as historically isolated, remote and inaccessible. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness that such areas were much more open than hitherto assumed. This article tracks dynamic historical change in the Lushai Hills District, or what is today the state of Mizoram. Taking the upland colonial headquarters of Aijal as its vantage point, the article looks closely at the coerced construction of a network of thoroughfares that underwrote new commercial, ecological and missionary presences in the region, and that allowed both the development and dodging of new regimes of state control and surveillance. A borderland—rather than state-centred approach reveals vibrant trans-regional trails of money and information, trade and technology, migrants and labourers, plants and animals. While colonial agents in the early twentieth century sought to congeal longstanding flows of guns and people, restrictive measures were often met with subterfuge and evasion, producing new opportunities and corridors for movement. Understanding Aijal's position as an entrepôt of pluricultural exchange and as an intensifier of regional circulation draws attention to ranges of human experience that stretch beyond the usual state-focussed boundaries of historical inquiry. This article seeks to contribute to a growing literature that challenges the idea of northeast India's remoteness.

## Keywords

Northeast India, Mizoram, borderlands, globalization, ecology, environment, labour, trade, colonialism, connected histories

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## Introduction

In the British Raj, colonial ethnographers often depicted ‘remote’ forest and mountain borderland regions as being closed systems. In recent years, there has been a growing awareness that such areas were much more open than hitherto assumed.<sup>2</sup> Imperial boundaries could be vibrant thoroughfares. Inhabitants often moved through and beyond these regions, and dynamic networks of traders, migrants, wandering healers, mendicants and others permeated boundaries. Movement was often at the walking pace of humans or animals, with the outside state having comparatively little presence.

In this article, we shall examine historical change in one such region on the eastern borderlands of northeast India—that of the Lushai Hills District, or what is today the state of Mizoram—with the building of a network of thoroughfares that allowed both the formation and evasion of new regimes of state control, as well as new commercial and missionary presences. The focus here is on movement into and out of what came to be designated as the colonial headquarters of the territory, Aijal, showing how a particular settlement became variously linked to trans-regional and global networks. Understanding Aijal’s position as an entrepôt of pluricultural exchange and as an intensifier of regional movement expands our perception of lived experience in these colonial borderlands, and helps to better situate the twentieth-century solidification of a ‘Mizo’ identity, as well as the later creation of an ethnically and religiously defined ‘Mizoram’ (‘Mizoland’) state, in dynamic and cosmopolitan historical perspective.

### *Zawmzur and the Tethering of the Lushai Hills District*

In 1890, the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, D.R. Lyall, recommended building roads across the nascent administrative territory to his east, the Lushai Hills District—a part of the world possibly stateless throughout history until that year. Lyall argued that it was ‘absolutely necessary, in order to control the people, that there be a route fit for mules and coolies to *every* village’.<sup>3</sup> While the new territory’s external limits would remain nebulous for decades (officials disagreed about how, where or if to translate its theoretical boundaries into

<sup>2</sup> On Sylhet, for example, see Ashfaque Hossain, ‘Historical Globalization and its Effects: A Study of Sylhet and its People, 1874–1971’, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2009; on the Dangs, see David Hardiman, ‘Power in the Forest: The Dangs, 1820–1940’, in *Subaltern Studies VIII*, ed. David Arnold and David Hardiman (Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1994), 89–147; on Orissa, see Ravi Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2009); for a trans-regional and path-breaking perspective on the history of Mizoram, see Joy L.K. Pachua and Willem van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness: A Social History of Mizoram* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015); crossing borders to Yunnan, see Bin Yang, ‘Horses, Silver, and Cowries: Yunnan in Global Perspective’, *Journal of World History* 15, no. 3 (2004): 281–322.

<sup>3</sup> D.R. Lyall, 12 January 1890, Assam Secretariat, Political and Judicial A, Foreign Progs., August 1890, Nos. 44–47 (quoted in Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam* [Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1942], 26).

physical, swath-cut borders in the forest), an internal cohesion via an infrastructure of control was sought from the start.<sup>4</sup>

The new thoroughfares, like the district, were to be developed on the cheap. Tens of thousands of local male Mizo villagers were put to work on coerced roadwork gangs supervised by soldiers. Mizo *kulis* (coolies) were compelled to serve 10 days a year (and more if demanded) for meagre cash pay.<sup>5</sup> In 1902, for instance, the local Public Works Department, the Military Police and the Political Department together drafted some 29,997 Mizo corvée labourers, many as porters for colonial officers on tour.<sup>6</sup> Of this number, 17,251 were press ganged into tracing, cutting and levelling new infrastructure through the forests and mountains, and made to ‘push the work on as rapidly as possible’.<sup>7</sup> Thousands of tonnes of earth had to be moved: a 6-foot-wide road from Aijal to Lungleh alone necessitated levelling a 102-mile stretch mostly through forest.<sup>8</sup> Mizo footpaths, some following trails carved by elephants through the jungle and all lower maintenance by design, were smoothed and expanded if deemed efficient or else bypassed by traces cut by *kuli* bands.<sup>9</sup> Officials were keen that ‘[v]illage roads and communications’—the vernacular circulatory system of forest paths—be ‘link[ed] up’ with government roads.<sup>10</sup>

By 1899, officials could boast that where only a few jungle trails had existed before, there was now no established village in the ‘administered portion of the sub-division [that] cannot be visited on horseback’.<sup>11</sup> By 1915, it would take three pages to list the tapestry of new roads, paths and bridges that interwove within district borders and that stitched into networks beyond.<sup>12</sup> Most significantly, Mizo villagers availed themselves of the new roads, too, and a public footfall on freshly laid routes was often instant.<sup>13</sup> Later articles written in Mizo language marvelled at how the ‘roads these days are comparably better’, and opined that travelling had been ‘made easy’.<sup>14</sup> As the administrative region flickered into existence in

<sup>4</sup> Shakespear to the Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Assam, 13 October 1900, Mizoram State Archives, Aizawl (hereafter MSA) CB-2, R-20.

<sup>5</sup> J. Shakespear, ‘The Making of Aijal’, 1939, unpublished manuscript. I am grateful to Upa Hualkunga for sharing this file with me.

<sup>6</sup> Annual Report of the Lushai Hills, 1902–03, MSA CB-7, G-88, 10. For a discussion of forced labour regimes in neighbouring Naga Hills, see Lipokmar Dzüvichü, ‘Empire on their Backs: Coolies in the Eastern Borderlands of the British Raj’, supplement, *IRSH* 59, no. S22 (2014): 1–24.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Memo’, F.R.S. Collier, 28 August 1897, MSA CB-6, G-70, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Collier (1897), MSA CB-6, G-70, 1.

<sup>9</sup> J.M. Lloyd, *History of the Church in Mizoram* (Aizawl: Synod Publication Board, 1991), 119; Shakespear, ‘The Making of Aijal’, 1.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Introduction of New Circle Scheme’, Administration Report for Lungleh, 1901–02, MSA CB-8, G-91, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Administration Report for Lungleh (1898–99), MSA CB-8, G-96, n.p. See also ‘Introduction’, 1902, MSA CB-8, G-91.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Part III, Lushai Hills District: Supplementary Notes’, *Assam District Gazetteers: Supplement to Volume X* (Shillong: Assam Secretariat Press, 1915), 1–3.

<sup>13</sup> Administration Report for Lungleh (1903–04), MSA CB-8, G-103, 9; Pachuau and van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, 161, 163, 164.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Zosaphluia lawma inkhawm’ [Celebratory service of D. E. Jones], *Kristian Tlangau* [Christian Herald], September 1922, trans. Lalthansangi Ralte, 129.



**Figure 1.** A New Mission Road is Cut into the Hill above a Government Road, Serkawn, 1913

**Source:** Used with permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

the minds of British officials, new government roads began channelling people and forest resources in increasing numbers, within the district and beyond.

The coerced infrastructure boom was so unprecedented to locals that new words were required to describe its felt effects. The Mizo transitive verb *zawmzur* ('connect') came to convey the sensed linking of space that specifically attended roads, bridges and telegraph lines.<sup>15</sup> Far from neutral social or cartographic 'facts', roads—the spaces of *zawmzur*—joined people and ecologies in unpredictable and uneven ways, linking new trades in tangible and intangible goods.<sup>16</sup> Such links were doubly encouraged by the Aijal administration's appointment of star bureaucrats to village headmanship in the early 1900s, installing more villages in a landscape of space already connecting.<sup>17</sup> From 1902, *melvengs* (Mizos permanently

<sup>15</sup> J.H. Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language* (Calcutta: Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1940), 562.

<sup>16</sup> Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, Orders 7 and 12 in MSA CB-16, G-196. The superintendent wielded theoretical authority over the establishment of all new villages via the 'Rules for the Regulation of ... the Lushai Hills', 29 November 1906, MSA CB-10, G-126, 1.



**Figure 2.** Two Mizos Walk a Levelled Road, n.d.

**Source:** Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram, India.



**Figure 3.** Public Footfall on a Lower Government Road, and Upper Mission Road, Serkawn, 1913

**Source:** Used with permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

employed as road-repair workers) were assigned throughout the district to keep inter-village travel open. Village heads were expected to maintain portions of road directly under their care and were heavily fined if they did not.<sup>18</sup> Santal, Mugh and Mizo workers and contractors joined others from Tipperah, Bengal and Punjab in maintaining thoroughfares.

What spadework can *zawmzur* do if sharpened into an analytical tool? Thinking with and through local idiom stresses place, and can forge an approach to interconnectedness attuned to local everyday life.<sup>19</sup> *Zawmzur* excavates a ‘globalization’ from a dynamic, non-Western starting point, attending to A.G. Hopkins’ call for scholars to recognize the ‘non-Western forms of globalisation [in which] encounters with the West produced a world order that was jointly, if also unequally, created’.<sup>20</sup> It is malleable enough to encompass sociologist Anthony Giddens’ oft-cited definition of globalization: ‘local transformation’ alongside the ‘lateral extension of social connections across time and space’.<sup>21</sup> However, crucially, it is intensely concerned with the systematic brutality and context of domination in which some such connections have occurred. In a recent call for papers, the International Institute of Asian Studies lauds the ‘new vogue’ for research that trespasses across regional boundaries, but laments an attendant analytical neglect of authority structures.<sup>22</sup> *Zawmzur* is unambiguous here. Unfree men made, and reviled making, the coerced corridors that set in motion, variation and interrelation the direct objects (money, information, personnel, seeds and so on) that made *zawmzur* a transitive verb. What was a decentralized vernacular circulatory regime resembling, in terms used by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a ‘rhizome’, was becoming the more centralized and hierarchical system suggested by *zawmzur*. New sorts of connections were structured in a way that allowed outsiders partly to order, mediate and control, and yet with which local people could engage on their own terms in dynamic ways.<sup>23</sup> This article seeks to elucidate the quality and volume of these processes in this region.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Mat Suspension Bridge’, Administration Report for Lungleh, 1898–99, MSA CB-8, G-96, n.p.; ‘Old Standing Orders’, in *Lushai Hills District Cover*, Baptist Church of Mizoram Centennial Archive, Lunglei, Mizoram (hereafter BCMCA), 22; ‘Order No. 14 of 1909–10’, H. W. G. Cole, 9 September 1909, MSA CB-14, G-177, 1.

<sup>19</sup> On globalization and everyday lived experience, see T.H. Eriksen, *Globalization: The Key Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> A.G. Hopkins, ‘Globalization—An Agenda for Historians’, in *Globalization in World History*, ed. A.G. Hopkins (London: Pimlico, 2002), 2.

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 64.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Sharpening the Edges: Instating State and Power in Indian Ocean History’, International Institute for Asian Studies, [www.rethinking.asia/event/sharpening-edges-instating-state-and-power-indian-ocean-history](http://www.rethinking.asia/event/sharpening-edges-instating-state-and-power-indian-ocean-history) (accessed 25 March 2015). Historian Sarah Hodges likewise argues that ‘the embrace of the “global” authorises a turning away from analyses of power in history-writing’ in ‘The Global Menace’, *Social History of Medicine* 25, no. 3 (2011): 720.

<sup>23</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); see also the introduction to David Hardiman and Projit Mukharji, *Medical Marginality in South Asia: Situating Subaltern Therapeutics* (London: Routledge, 2012).

## Into Zawkhawpui

In 1903 invitations to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII were dispatched from Fort Aijal, and broadcast along roadsides and villages by village criers (*tlangau*). The Aijal superintendent (or *bawrhsap*, a Mizo take on the Bangla বড় সাহেব, or *bara saheb*) welcomed Mizo *lals* (village heads) with feasts of hill buffalo (*mithan*) meat and rice beer. Less familiar attractions included gramophone music, formal speeches and a play staged by Bengali bureaucrats in a theatre hall with scenery imported from Dacca.<sup>24</sup> The King's Proclamation was read aloud to crowds in Mizo, English and Nepali, while Nagas, Santals and others performed dances alongside acrobats in roads 'thronged by a procession of all nationalities' and led by a bagpipe band.<sup>25</sup> On display was cosmopolitan Aijal—*Zawkhawpui*, the 'Great Settlement'.



**Figure 4.** The Administrative, Northern End of Aijal, 1896

**Source:** Used with permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

<sup>24</sup> A.R. Giles, 'Description of the Ceremonies...', 18 March 1903, MSA CB-8, G-98, 1–3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



**Figure 5.** 'Photograph of the Mission Land, Aijal', n.d.

**Source:** Mizoram Presbyterian Church Synod Archive, Aizawl, Mizoram, India.

Founded in 1890 on an abandoned village site, Fort Aijal was initially home to two columns of the Chin-Lushai Expeditionary force barricaded behind stockades of locally harvested teak trees.<sup>26</sup> The Silchar Police Battalion was soon sent to the Fort, which gradually outgrew and discarded its palisades to stretch out nearly a mile along the mountain ridge. G.H. Loch and a Khasi contractor expanded the settlement, installing bungalows and barracks made from locally quarried stone—buildings still standing in today's Aizawl (Aijal's modern spelling).<sup>27</sup> Oak trees brought from eastern Champhai were planted along the roads.<sup>28</sup> The Tlawng River, flowing northwards from its source near Lungleh, was blasted free of sandstone boulders. This riverine highway was now pliable up to Sairang, and shopkeepers upstream at the previous terminus of Changsil immediately relocated. Only at this historical moment, recalled the region's superintendent, did 'the Aijal bazaar [become] really important'.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Shakespear, 'The Making of Aijal', 1.

<sup>27</sup> Shakespear, 'The Making of Aijal', 3. For a guide to historical buildings in Aizawl, see the *Built Heritage in Mizoram* (Aizawl: INTACH, 2015). I am grateful to H. Vanlalhruaia for sharing the unpublished manuscript with me.

<sup>28</sup> Shakespear, 'The Making of Aijal', 6.

<sup>29</sup> Shakespear, 'The Making of Aijal', 2.





**Figure 6.** Navigating the Tlawng River, Glass Lantern Slide, n.d.

**Source:** The Baptist Church of Mizoram Centennial Archive, Lungei, Mizoram, India.



**Figure 7.** Sairang Bazaar, 1896

**Source:** Used with permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

## Zawmzur, Tangibles and Intangibles

With the opening of the Tlawng and new circulatory regimes, officials in the Lushai Hills noticed the ‘growing abundance of money in the country and of an increasing knowledge of its value as a purchasing medium’.<sup>30</sup> In years prior, cash was often less valued locally than salt or even buttons. Coins were more likely to be fashioned into necklaces or hammered into bullets than to play any meaningful role in financial transactions.<sup>31</sup> Money—the thing and the concept—arrived gradually at first, the transition period revealed by official reports that struggle to choose a verb tense: ‘the Lushais have, or had, very little idea of money’.<sup>32</sup> In 1900, Mizo households in the south of the district were still almost twice as likely to pay their house tax in rice than in cash.<sup>33</sup> Officers dreamt up schemes for cash injections into the economy, whether through establishing a more ‘regular import trade with Bengal’ or via potential exports like wood, honey, cinnamon and beeswax.<sup>34</sup>

Trade, even across long distances, was nothing new. For instance, upland Mizo women wore as ornaments the shells of bivalve marine molluscs (*kepui*) imported ‘many years ago’.<sup>35</sup> However, trust in the idea of money as the basis of regional trade required time to deepen: a villager travelling to sell crafts in the Aijal bazaar had to believe that the concept of money would hold worth.

Wily traders or soldiers could exploit inexperience. In 1903, the Chief Commissioner of Assam had to warn officers in the Lushai Hills and Manipur about merchants passing off foreign coins from the distant Straits Settlements (the British Crown colony on the Malay Peninsula) on unsuspecting traders.<sup>36</sup> In the south, sepoys traded copper coins with Mizos in return for whole rupees, Mizos valuing the former more (perhaps for aesthetic reasons, or for other, in-kind economies invisible to the archive—as legal tender, the coins were hardly worth a sixth of a rupee).

As the money economy began to stand on its own, Aijal became the hub of a roaring trade. Mizos used the emergent road network to converge on Aijal’s regular bazaars for umbrellas, knives, thread, tea, brass cooking pots and utensils. Bengali merchants sold salt in bulk until local Christian missionaries were temporarily awarded the monopoly.<sup>37</sup> The most popular item, white cloth, arrived in equal

<sup>30</sup> ‘Introduction’, 1902, MSA CB-8, G-91, 7.

<sup>31</sup> See, for instance, A.G. McCall, ‘Accounts of Lushai’, draft, n.d., Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, British Library, London (hereafter BL), Mss Eur E361/91, 15.

<sup>32</sup> R.G. Woodthorpe, ‘The Lushai Country’, 1889, The Royal Geographical Society Manuscript Archive (hereafter RGSMA), London, mgX.291.1, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Administration Report for Lungleh, 1900–01, MSA CB-7, G-81, 5, 6.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Introduction’, 1902, MSA CB-8, G-91, 7, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*, 245.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Circulation of Straits Settlements Coins: Circular No. 20J’, 9 May 1903, MSA CB-8, G-101, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> On the missionary monopoly of the Lushai Hills salt trade, see my ‘Hearing Images, Tasting Pictures: Making Sense of Christian Mission Photography in the Lushai Hills District, Northeast India (1870–1920)’, in *From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme*, ed. Maya Kominko (Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2015), 454–55.



**Figure 8.** Market Day at the Lungleh Bazaar, with Mizo Villagers' Vegetable Stands alongside Shops Run by a Hindu and a Muslim, 1914

**Source:** Used with permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

measures from Japan, India and Manchester to be sold by shopkeepers from Sylhet and Arrah.<sup>38</sup> The Aijal *bawrsap* arranged trade fairs at which villagers from across the land could display craft wares for potential export to the plains bazaar at Silchar.<sup>39</sup> Nagas, Chins and Lushais stocked up in Aijal on 'beads, knives, and similar commodities'<sup>40</sup> to carry for days southwards, peddling their wares in the main bazaar and broader subdivision of Lungleh (Figure 8). Certain colonial jetsam was highly prized, like the Europeans' discarded ink and vinegar bottles reused by Mizos.<sup>41</sup> Aijal also flowed with a 'considerable trade' in the home brews of both 'Lushais and foreign settlers'.<sup>42</sup> Rum, though expensive, was available for anyone to purchase from the central Battalion Canteen, as was

<sup>38</sup> 'Census Report of Lushai Hills District', 1911, MSA CB-1, C-1, 9; Annual Report, 1902–03, MSA CB-7, G-88, 3.

<sup>39</sup> 'Hringchar Dawrpui kai thu' [The Big Bazaar at Silchar], *Mizo leh Vai Chan Chin Bu* [hereafter *Mizo leh Vai*], February 1905, 1 (quoted and trans. in Joy L.K. Pachuau, *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging in Northeast India* [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014], 96 n. 20).

<sup>40</sup> Administration Report for Lungleh (1898–99), MSA CB-8, G-96, 20; also see the Annual Report for the Lushai Hills, 1906–07, MSA CB-11, G-144, n.p.

<sup>41</sup> See note on the reverse of the photograph entitled 'A Lushai woman carrying water', c. 1910, Denbighshire Archives, Ruthin, Wales, DD/F/48.

<sup>42</sup> Loch to the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills (hereafter Superintendent), 24 May 1905, MSA CB-10, G-128, 2.

zu—the Mizo rice beer—for a time, though most liquor was purchased from Gurkha migrants on the outskirts of the settlement.<sup>43</sup>

Traders from faraway lands crisscrossed the Lushai Hills, and came to Aijal to offload high-value merchandise. Travelling westwards from the Tyao River at the Chin Hills border, officials Fowler, Shakespear and Hodgkins thrice came across groups of Burman traders from distant Gangaw and Mandalay ‘who had been as far west as Aijal to sell amber necklaces to Lushais’.<sup>44</sup> It proved a lucrative venture for the traders: ‘[o]ne party of four informed me that they had realized over Rs. 1,200’.<sup>45</sup>

The surging volume of cash in the Hills blurred older economies and social boundaries in unpredictable ways. Early *dak* (postal) routes offered to groups of Mizo men could pay a combined 120 rupees per month. Superintendent Shakespear advertised positions personally, telling one Mizo boy that if he ‘took the *dak* for one month he would get enough rupees to buy the prettiest wife in the village’.<sup>46</sup> Previously stable economies of bride price were blindsided by such randomized bursts of capital. For example, women of the dominant Sailo clan, some commanding dowry payments ten times that of other Mizo groups were suddenly within economic reach of randomly selected *dak* runners, or schoolboys chosen for government positions or mission patronage.<sup>47</sup>

Forest economies, too, were refracting in the crystallizing cash economy. As was general practice in the hill districts, Aijal put prices on the heads of wild animals. Hunters responded. In 1906, 87 bears, 20 dogs, 17 tigers and 11 leopards were killed and consigned, exhausting Aijal’s annual 1,000 rupee cash grant four months before the year was out.<sup>48</sup>

Besides shaking forest ecologies, commodification challenged social conventions. For example, certain Mizos had always been able to transform themselves into tigers—indeed, the entire Fanai sub-clan descended from such a blurred genus.<sup>49</sup> Some tigers came ‘in the shape of a man’; some men really were bears.<sup>50</sup> Mizo hunters refused to shoot gibbons, for, reversing the polarity of the Darwinian theories of the day, the monkeys had human ancestors. Qualitative risk analyses were the spontaneous result: tigers were the richest paying, but it was most ‘difficult to know who was a “tiger-man” and who was not’.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, some animals unable to shape shift became fairer game than ever. In 1903, Deputy

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> E.O. Fowler, ‘Summary of Events in the Chin Hills’, 4 October 1902, MSA CB-8, G-97, 1.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Diary of J. Shakespear, 7 to 13 June 1891, BL Mss Eur Photo Eur 89/1, 1.

<sup>47</sup> J. Shakespear, ‘Marriage’, n.d., MSA CB-19, G-238, 2, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Annual Report for the Lushai Hills, 1906–07, MSA CB-11, G-144, n.p.

<sup>49</sup> J.M. Lloyd, *On Every High Hill* (Liverpool: Foreign Mission Office, 1952), 13.

<sup>50</sup> Kapi [Mrs. Parry], ‘People and Places in Assam’, n.d., Cambridge Centre of South Asian Studies Archive (hereafter CCSASA), Cambridge, Parry Papers, Microfilm Box 5, No. 40, 263–68; J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1912), 177–78. N.E. Parry, *The Lakhers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1932), 449.

<sup>51</sup> Kapi (n.d.), 263 (‘On many occasions a tiger will get off “scot-free” in case it should prove to be ... a “tiger-man”’).



**Figure 9.** ‘Friends we Meet in the Jungle’, Two Men with Flintlock Guns Hunting Tigers, c. 1910

**Source:** Denbighshire Archives, Ruthin, Wales.

Rangers reported that rhinoceros horn was suddenly by far ‘the most valuable thing in our Lushai Forest’, fetching 100 rupees per seer—25 times the value of elephant tusk.<sup>52</sup> Hunting proclivities could be both obfuscated and overblown by monetary incentives.

Nonmaterial ephemera moved in parallel trades. The itineraries of song, ideas and information are harder to trace than those of physical objects. Invisible, weightless and constantly refashioning, they are carried in hearts, minds and on the tips of tongues.<sup>53</sup> Gossip and rumours could circulate about cures affected or not affected by the new technologies of both colonial dispensary and Christian prayer, forcing Mizos to scabble for vernacular neologisms to describe them.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> A seer is a unit of weight slightly less than a kilogram. Deputy Ranger to the Superintendent, 22 October 1903, MSA CB-8, G-101, 1.

<sup>53</sup> On the historical study of ideas on the move, see Karin Vélez, Sebastian R. Prange and Luke Clossey, ‘Religious Ideas in Motion’, in *A Companion to World History*, ed. Douglas Northrop (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 352–64.

<sup>54</sup> ‘The Report of Lushai Hills, 1899–1900’, in *Reports of the Foreign Mission of the Presbyterian Church of Wales on Mizoram, 1894–1957*, ed. K. Thanzauva (Aizawl: The Synod Literature and Publication Boards, 1997), 9; Lorrain, ‘Our New Mission in the South Lushai’, *The Missionary Herald* (London, 1903), the Angus Library and Archive, Regent’s Park College, Oxford, UK (hereafter ALA), 359.

A foot operation in 1895 catalyzed a Mizo word for chloroforming, which facetiously meant to be temporarily killed; much maligned vaccination programmes were labelled with the verb *ban zai*: ‘to slice an arm’.<sup>55</sup>

Weightless as the new verbs, songs too reverberated across the hills. By 1905, the Christian hymns introduced by Baptist and Welsh Calvinistic Methodist missionaries were noticeably widespread. On remote tours, missionaries were ‘astounded to hear two little boys playing on a swing singing a hymn’ introduced back in Aijal.<sup>56</sup> Taking on a life of their own, the hymns were then as likely to be sung by those unaware of or uninvolved with what the missionaries preached as by the few Mizo Christians.<sup>57</sup> In addition, as melodies moved, missionaries lost control of them. Vernacular musical modes remixed the European eight-note diatonic scales into the Mizo five-note pentatonic.<sup>58</sup> For some, hymns made fine *zu* drinking songs.<sup>59</sup> In 1908, the catchy *puma zai* refrain ricocheted from village to village, subverting in *zu*-fuelled parody Christian teetotalism and stoic hymnology. The song and its revelries ‘spread like wildfire’<sup>60</sup> and quickly enjoyed a reach equal to that of the missionaries’ hymns until a regional rice famine in 1911 put *zu*-brewing and thus *puma zai* on the rocks.

## Zawmzur and People

As the cash economy enveloped the Hills, Mizo fathers were increasingly eager to send their sons beyond the familial village. Their petitions can still be found in the colonial archives: ‘Vanhnuaihuma of Ruangtlang wants to send his two sons to school in Aijal if they can get rations.’<sup>61</sup> These first generations of Mizo schoolboys (for, enlarging the masculine sphere of society, the earliest students were exclusively male) were the first to come face to face with the globe—both metaphorically, through the self-consciously global curricula of the Welsh mission in Aijal, and literally, via world maps and imported globes. Later classes featured globetrotting lessons on China, England, Japan, Canada, Egypt and the ‘Esquimaux’, and contrasted hill trades with industries in other countries.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>55</sup> On chloroform, see J.H. Lorrain, 13 March 1895, *Logbook*, ALA, 46.

<sup>56</sup> Lloyd, *On Every High Hill*, 47.

<sup>57</sup> F.W. Savidge, ‘The South Lushai Mission’, Annual Report of the Baptist Missionary Society, 1904, ALA, 50; Report for 1899–1900, Thanzaiva, ed. (1997), 9.

<sup>58</sup> Joanna Heath, ‘“Lengkhawm Zai”: A Singing Tradition of Mizo Christianity in Northeast India’, Master’s Dissertation, Durham University, 2013, 59; author’s interview, Joanna Heath, Aizawl, Mizoram, 25 May 2014.

<sup>59</sup> ‘E.R.’s [Edwin Rowlands’] letter of 20/9/99’, Trans. J.M. Lloyd, Zosaphara Chungchang (J.M. Lloyd’s documents), J.M. Lloyd Archive, Aizawl Theological College, Durtlang, Mizoram (hereafter JMLA), 2.

<sup>60</sup> J.H. Lorrain, ‘Arthington Mission in the South Lushai Hills’, report for 1908, BCMCA, 2.

<sup>61</sup> W.L. Scott, ‘Vanhnuaihuma...’, 24 April 1919, MSA CB-2, Edu-30, 1; see files under MSA Education Department.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Curriculum for North Lushai Schools’ (Aijal: Welsh C. M. Mission, 1918), J.M. Lloyd’s Documents: Education, JMLA, 6.



**Figure 10.** ‘Three “Foreign Missionaries”’, Mizo students and Christians Vanzika, Savawma and Taitea set out for Manipur, c. early 1910s

**Source:** Denbighshire Archives, Ruthin, Wales.

Spatial ideas of the Lushai Hills District as a single political unit were reinforced as students reproduced maps thereof.<sup>63</sup> Lessons on roads, the telegraph, the telegram, the post and the bullock wagon, taught students (like those depicted on a journey in Figure 10) about conduits of communication already possible within the Lushai Hills. Lessons about railway lines in Assam taught them about the distance-demolishing technologies in use beyond it.<sup>64</sup>

The mission school was not merely an instrument to transmit western knowledge; it was the actual means to create a new Mizo generation for whom the spherical globe was a potential unit of thought. In 1902, the newly literate mission student and village headman R.D. Leta wrote an article in Mizo entitled ‘Other Countries and Peoples’ (*ram leh hnamdang thute*), introducing a spherical earth and sea *kaptens* (‘captains’), and likening ocean topography to *zo ram* mountain ranges submerged in water.<sup>65</sup> The consumption of such print media could be unpredictable: Mizo craftspeople lined bamboo hats with newspaper articles in place of the traditional *hnahtial* leaf, and in 1915 the *Kristian Tlangau* periodical had to urge readers to stop smoking its pages. However, when used as directed

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 8, 11.

<sup>65</sup> R.D. Leta Khiangte, ‘Ram leh hnamdang thute [Other Countries and Peoples]’, *Mizo leh Vai*, March 1903, Trans. Rodi Lalammawi, 7–9.

and read aloud in villages, print media challenged conventional modes of thinking via young male students like Leta, its authors and orators.<sup>66</sup> Articles spanned geographies horizontally from Boston to Japan, and vertically from the bottom of the Grand Canyon to the top of the Matterhorn.<sup>67</sup> Contemporary church news from Korea, or references to historical smallpox outbreaks in London, appeared along with lists that situated the elevations of mountains in the Lushai Hills in global scale.<sup>68</sup>

Such students in Aijal also rubbed shoulders with a broader South Asia. The sons of Indic Indian soldiers and traders stationed at Aijal attended the government-funded mission schools alongside Mizo boys.<sup>69</sup> Mizo boys in Aijal fervently collected castoff ammunition boots from local sepoys.<sup>70</sup> Some Mizo students learnt Khasi translation skills in Shillong, while others stayed in Aijal to learn Hindi.<sup>71</sup> Welsh missionaries applied for scholarships to send Gurkha and Mizo students to Jamuna High School in Allahabad, under the condition that the students would return to Aijal as Hindi teachers for the sons of Gurkhas stationed in the district.<sup>72</sup> Aijal was not just a military outpost home to aloof European officials. A community of Khasi families and carpenters lived in its Khasi Veng ('Khasi locality' or neighbourhood), along with a community of Punjabi carpenters and contractors, and a 'Naga Lane', where generations of Naga government sweepers lived. Some identified solely with the district. In 1934, the Naga sweeper Barailu, born in Aijal to his father Chingling, wrote that his 'family members [have] no other family & cousins & relative in other countries or in the country of Naga, except in this Lushai Hills'.<sup>73</sup>

By 1902 an uncontrolled stream of trans-border migrants was flowing into the settlement.<sup>74</sup> Some brought their cattle, too, paying grazing fees and house tax. Within two years, the influx of 'foreigners' was so great that the Aijal government started cracking down on those it deemed most troublesome, particularly the 'casual loafers' fencing in plots of land and refusing to do coolie labour.<sup>75</sup> Government attempts to control long-established settlers could reveal how deeply many once-migrants felt for the country. When in the southeast of the district the long-established 'Non-Lushai Inhabitants of Lungleh Subdivision' were told to

<sup>66</sup> David Vumlallian Zou, 'The Interaction of Print Culture, Identity and Language in Northeast India', PhD Dissertation, Queen's University, Belfast, 2007, 206, 219, 137; Hlova, 'Lekha Zial Zuk Pawi-mawh Thu [Implications of Smoking]', *Kristian Tlangau*, September 1915, 147, Trans. Zou (2007), 207.

<sup>67</sup> 'Khawshak dan mawi [Manners and Etiquette]', *Kristian Tlangau*, September 1912, 139–40; 'Thu nawi [Quick Facts]', *Mizo leh Vai*, September 1908, 132, 130.

<sup>68</sup> 'Korea rama Biak-in shak zia [How Churches are Built in Korea]', *Kristian Tlangau*, December 1911, 3; Thanga, 'Ban-zai thu [Regarding Vaccination]', *Mizo leh Vai*, September 1908, 154.

<sup>69</sup> Browning from Major I. A., 30 August 1909, MSA CB-1, Edu-14, 2.

<sup>70</sup> Lorrain, 16 December 1896 and 26 January 1897, *Logbook*, 58, 59.

<sup>71</sup> Hmara to the Superintendent, 11 January 1914, MSA CB-2, Edu-24, 1; Index to Shakespear's diaries, 1901–02, MSA CB-8, G-95, 4.

<sup>72</sup> F.J. Sandy to Superintendent, 4 September 1919, CB-2, Edu-27, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Barailu to Superintendent, 26 April 1934, MSA CB-1, HD-7, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Shakespear to Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Assam, 9 June 1902, MSA CB-8, G-89, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Shakespear to Secretary to Chief Commissioner of Assam, 23 July 1904, MSA CB-10, G-133, 1.



move to Thenzawl or Champhai, these residents appealed to multi-generational roots and their ‘an earnest love for the land’.<sup>76</sup> The Lushai Hills was home.

Mizos mixed with and learned from people who did not speak Mizo as a first language. Mizo apprentice carpenters learnt under Punjabi contractors how to construct new styles of residences.<sup>77</sup> Gurkha soldiers supported tax-assessment tours from Aijal, and mixed with Mizos in far-flung villages, ‘singing songs round a fire, with laughing and applause’.<sup>78</sup> North Indian photographers, Goanese bandmasters and wandering folk healers from the plains moved through the district.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, some 6982 people living in the Lushai Hills in 1914 had not been born in the Lushai Hills—a full 7.6 per cent of the total population.<sup>80</sup> Recalling his early years in Aijal, superintendent J. Shakespear noted that such cross-cultural contact could have spontaneous outcomes: in Aijal ‘[c]aste was creeping in’.<sup>81</sup> In one instance, a ‘Lushai assaulted another Lushai for touching his food’ because the supposed offender was a government sweeper and had ‘defiled it’.<sup>82</sup> The caste-minded Mizo confessed to authorities that the Mizo sweeper’s trade had ‘caused the defilement’, and was himself sentenced to a week’s worth of sweeping.<sup>83</sup>

Though quietly ignored in the region’s history writing, the Hindu *mandir* in today’s Aizawl predates the pioneering church in the region, the Mission Veng Chapel (*biak in*), by nearly a decade.<sup>84</sup> The Kali *mandir* at Sairang is said to be even older.<sup>85</sup> In 1906, the only officially recognized holiday in the Lushai Hills District was Sivaratri.<sup>86</sup> Durga Puja was celebrated from at least 1896, and ‘sight-seers from villages came to watch’; Captain F.K. Hensley ordered 30 ‘he-goats’ for later celebrations—celebrations that quietly continue today.<sup>87</sup> In 1911, Hindus outnumbered Christians in the Lushai Hills by almost one-third, though historians parsing history into ‘Mizo’ and ‘British’ components have so far only had time for the Christian religious minority.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>76</sup> ‘Non-Lushai Inhabitants of Lungleh Sub-Division’ to Superintendent, 12 December 1909, MSA CB-13, G-167, 2.

<sup>77</sup> Supervisor to Superintendent, 8 August 1913, MSA CB-2, Edu-24, 2.

<sup>78</sup> F.C.T. Halliday, ‘Peregrinations of a Peripatetic Policeman’, 1898, vol. 1, BL Mss Eur C407/1, 77.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Peregrinations’ (1898), 78; F.J. Sandy, ‘Lushai—the Land and its People’, July 1916, *Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru*/National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, Wales (hereafter LLGC/NLW), CMA 27,187, 3.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Table IV: Birthplace, Race, Caste and Occupation’, *ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>81</sup> Shakespear to McCall, 25 June 1934, BL Mss Eur E361/5, 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Author’s interview with P. Chakraborty, 4 December 2011, Shakti Mandir, Aizawl, 2010.

<sup>85</sup> M.C. Goswami, ‘The Kali Temple at Sairang’, *Centenary Puja Souvenir* (Aizawl: Hindustan Club, 2004), 39–41; I am grateful to members of Aizawl’s Hindustan Club for sharing files with me.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Rules’, 29 November 1906, MSA CB-10, G-126, 3.

<sup>87</sup> Pachuau and van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, 139; Lloyd, *History of the Church*, 41; F.K. Hensley to Superintendent, 2 September 1915, MSA CB-6, G-71, 1; David M. Thangliana, ‘Aizawl Club in 101st Year...’, *The Telegraph*, 11 October 2005, [www.telegraphindia.com/1051011/asp/northeast/story\\_5342939.asp](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1051011/asp/northeast/story_5342939.asp) (accessed 28 March 2015).

<sup>88</sup> ‘Table III: General Statistics of Population’, *Assam District Gazetteers: Supplement* (1915), n.p.



**Figure 11.** Gurkha Soldiers Ready to Kill a Buffalo in Aijal, as a Diverse Crowd Looks On, 1896

**Source:** Used with permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford, United Kingdom.



**Figure 12.** A Gurkha Interpreter with Mizos and a Dog, 1894

**Source:** Used with permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent's Park College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

## Zawmzur and Evasion

Colonial surveillance, tax and agriculture regimes were designed to clot flows of nomadism and of trade deemed illicit. However, these restrictive measures themselves often produced new opportunities and corridors for movement, subterfuge and evasion. In 1905, a whole village in west Lushai Hills crossed the border to avoid house tax.<sup>89</sup> To the south, Mughs who settled in the Lushai Hills-administered Mara village of Tongkolong slipped away when Lungleh officials demanded they appear for defaulting on tax demands.<sup>90</sup> Some villages camped on the nebulous northern boundary, professing to live in Cachar but paying tax to neither administration.<sup>91</sup> Other villages crossed borders to avoid *kuli* work or gun registration.<sup>92</sup> Sometimes villages stayed put and pretended they had not received orders.<sup>93</sup> Mara villages concealed their numbers from enumeration officers.<sup>94</sup>

Colonial restrictions on guns proved a special site for subterfuge and non-cooperation. In the western village of Pukzing, a man called Zika concealed an unregistered gun for some eight years before he sold it, boasting to the purchaser that ‘the Saheb had asked for it frequently but that he [Zika] had always said he had none’.<sup>95</sup> Lai hunters with unlicensed guns killed elephants in the district, sold the tusks and then disappeared into unadministered territory before they could be apprehended.<sup>96</sup> Spies sent into villages on government business to confiscate illicit firearms were told that the gun trade would start up again ‘next rains after the Sahibs had gone away’, suggesting the rhythms of two offset circulatory regimes—official tours and the gun trade.<sup>97</sup> When licensing began in earnest, Mizos seem to have started trading away firearms en masse across the Chin Hills border.<sup>98</sup> Such guns were often mid-nineteenth-century European castoffs. Made obsolete in Europe with the rise of percussion cap guns, many had been shipped to Chittagong and Rangoon for sale and were carried higher into the hills on the wings of war and trade.<sup>99</sup>

Trades deemed licit by the Mizo, but illicit by the state operated creatively in the margins of *zawmzur* networks. When the government attempted to stop the cross-border gunpowder trade between Mizos and dealers in Chittagong and

<sup>89</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Church*, 119.

<sup>90</sup> J.H.G. Buller to Superintendent, 23 April 1910, MSA CB-2, R-18.

<sup>91</sup> Report of 1902–03, MSA CB-7, G-88, 3.

<sup>92</sup> On the evasion of *kuli* labour, see Pachuau, *Being Mizo*, 100; on firearm registration, see Gordon to the Superintendent, 21 May 1912, MSA CB-16, G-200, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Administration Report for Lungleh, 1900–01, MSA CB-7, G-81, 2.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Report on the Census of the Lushai Hills’, 15 May 1901, MSA CB-1, C-1, 6.

<sup>95</sup> ‘Order’, 6 June 1899, MSA CB-1, Pol-4, 1.

<sup>96</sup> C.B. Drake-Brockman, ‘Report on the Disarmament of the Chin & Lakher Villages...1899–1900’, MSA CB-7, G-76, 5.

<sup>97</sup> H.W.G. Cole to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, 9 April 1900, MSA CB-7, G-76, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Shakespear to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, 16 April 1900, MSA CB-7, G-81, 3.

<sup>99</sup> On firearms in the region, also see Jangkhomang Guite, ‘Civilisation and its Malcontents: The Politics of Kuki Raid in Nineteenth Century [sic] Northeast India’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 48, no. 3 (2011): 339–76.

Cachar, Mizos began to obtain the ingredients instead. Weak but effective saltpetre could be made by adding sulphur sourced from Burma to manure ‘in large funnel-shaped baskets which hang up outside the houses. This manure is strongly impregnated with urine, and the liquid draining through into receptacles beneath is afterwards evaporated, and crystals of saltpetre are obtained.’<sup>100</sup>

Colonial practices and settlements alike were exploitable by highly mobile opportunists. *Dak* runners carrying military police wages could be robbed en route.<sup>101</sup> In 1906, a Mizo called Vailala posed as an official from Aijal, and toured the vast subdivision of Lungleh ‘dressed in the uniform of a chaprasi’.<sup>102</sup> Vailala worked within colonial idiom, ‘assessing’ a given village’s tax rates and demanding payment accordingly.<sup>103</sup> When Vailala bungled the illusion by failing to present a formal, written order (suggesting that a local headman was even more literate than Vailala in the ritual of taxation), Vailala was apprehended and awarded six months’ rigorous imprisonment in Aijal. Forty-two kilometres away, the district’s westernmost bazaar town at Demagiri was witnessing a spate of break-ins. Villagers from the Chittagong Hill Tracts arrived by night in dugout boats for smash-and-grab missions in the riverside town, disappearing back across the jurisdictional border before Lushai Hills Military Police officials could apprehend them.<sup>104</sup>



**Figure 13.** A Section of the River Port Demagiri, 1913

**Source:** Used with permission of the Angus Library and Archive, Regent’s Park College, Oxford, United Kingdom.

<sup>100</sup> Woodthorpe, ‘The Lushai Country’, 24. Gunpowder manufacture was later prohibited (at least theoretically) by H.W.G. Cole in 1909; ‘Order No. 19’, 17 October 1909, MSA CB-14, G-168, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Report of 1902–03, MSA CB-7, G-88, 9.

<sup>102</sup> Notes for Administration Report, Lungleh, 1906–07, MSA CB-10, G-130, 6.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

Village heads could actively wield colonial borders as a new means to control local resources or to penalize other leaders. This had social consequences. When a group of families from the Chin Hills crossed the Tyao (Tiau) River into the Lushai Hills in 1899, headman Thinshuma complained to Aijal.<sup>105</sup> Each of the migrants' houses was fined 20 rupees, and told to leave after the next harvest; a colonial officer burned their settlement when they did not. Another local headman received compensation after informing authorities about villagers from Haka collecting lac—a resin secreted by *kerriidae* insects and essential to the production of shellac—on the Lushai Hills side of the new border.<sup>106</sup> One *lal* pointed out a neighbour's violation of a colonial boundary (itself declared only earlier that year) and asked 'whether we may fine them a big *gyal* [hill buffalo] according to Lushei custom'.<sup>107</sup> The shrewd *lal* could protect resources via delineated territorial regimes, and leave violence to the state. The lesson here was clear enough: the people on the other side of the river (who officials branded 'Chins') were 'others' who did not belong on this side of it.<sup>108</sup>

A similar message was understood gradually in the sphere of mission education. Early on, government (*sawrkar*) positions for graduates seem to have been legitimately available. In a September 1904 public notice, Shakespear could promise that mission school graduates 'will be able to work on different jobs', claiming that 'even a chief's son will want to work under the government when he grows up'.<sup>109</sup> However, by 1919, missionaries were noticing that educated Mizos felt 'that the doors of employment are not thrown open to them as widely as in the plains, and they naturally resent if existing vacancies in the offices of their district be filled by non-Lushais'.<sup>110</sup> More Mizo graduates were vying for fewer employment opportunities in the colonial regime, and perceived categories of ethnicity and delineated territory were ossifying in antagonistic ways. Government orders that targeted 'non-Lushais' (such as one in 1909 that aimed to move all non-Lushais out of Demagiri and resettle them in Champhai or Thenzawl) also served to highlight these 'others'.<sup>111</sup> If exploited rather than evaded, colonial apparatuses—borders and mission education alike—could have important social implications.

## Zawmzur and Ecology

Biogeographical boundaries in the region could blur without human involvement. For example, a Bengali clerk stationed in the Lushai Hills recorded the local

<sup>105</sup> Cole to Secretary to the Chief Commissioner Assam, 29 August 1899, MSA CB-8, G-96, 1

<sup>106</sup> Report, 1906–07, 3.

<sup>107</sup> Drake-Brockman, 'Zaienga...', 12 December 1898, MSA CB-6, G-61, 1.

<sup>108</sup> On colonial constructions of regional identity, see Bianca Son-Doerschel, 'The Making of the Zo', PhD Dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2013, esp. chapter four ('The Expeditions and the Borders of Inclusion and Exclusion'), 216–70.

<sup>109</sup> Shakespear, 'Skul Thu [Regarding School]', *Mi Zo leh Vai*, September 1904, Trans. Tetei Fanai, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Sandy to Superintendent, 4 September 1919, 3.

<sup>111</sup> 'Non-Lushai Inhabitants...', 1909, 1–2.

effects of an 1896 cyclone: ‘The strangest thing I saw [the next] morning was a large flock of sea birds—sea gulls, curlew, and so forth’<sup>112</sup> blown in from the Bay of Bengal. Biologist Alan de Queiroz has recently argued that such ‘chance dispersal events’ have across the *longue durée* altered the biogeography of the entire planet.<sup>113</sup> As elsewhere, though, human actions were of far greater consequence to the Lushai Hills biota. Here we trace the rise of a ‘creole ecology’<sup>114</sup> through anthropogenic botanical movement along *zawmzur* lines.

As historian Stanley F. Stevens has pointed out in another upland context, the diffusion of imported plants and animals can be difficult to track.<sup>115</sup> Introduction, movement and reception articulate along with many variables. Nevertheless, it is clear that in early-twentieth-century Lushai Hills, a profusion of imported biological taxa took root in the soil and in the Mizo language. British-imported plants were often denoted with the prefix *sap* (invoking the polyglot honorific *saheb*): *sap bete* (the garden pea), *sap bawkbawn* (tomatoes), *sap pardi* (celery) and *sap thei* (passion fruit). The prefix *vai* (which came to denote Indic Indians) helped form compound nouns for imported okra, carrots and peanuts, and the prefix *kawl* for sweet potatoes and guavas from Burma.<sup>116</sup> By 1908, cultivation experiments were underway with wheat, pulses, Pennsylvanian tobacco (so ‘appreciated by the Lushais’ that it was soon cultivated across some 100 villages) and ‘English vegetables’.<sup>117</sup> By the late 1920s, periodicals could report orange orchards near Aijal boasting 811 mature orange trees.<sup>118</sup> Animals also arrived. Crates of ducks came from Silchar.<sup>119</sup> Imported ponies (some from Burma) and bullocks became pack and plough animals, and sometimes tiger prey.<sup>120</sup> Chinese *langhan* chickens were imported as trial egg-layers. Chittagong cocks and hens travelled from Cox’s Bazaar on the Bay of Bengal up into the Lushai Hills by special order. Mizo villages jealously kept such imported roosters. The attendant thriving egg trade was restricted in principle to certain villages only, in hopes of creating a purely imported cohort to ‘improve’ local stock.<sup>121</sup> Introductions soon seemed perfectly banal to those British officials accustomed to them elsewhere: the local missionary might not even notice the double novelty of a pony ‘grazing quietly...under an orange tree’.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>112</sup> Article loose inside ‘Peregrinations’ (1898).

<sup>113</sup> Alan de Queiroz, *The Monkey’s Voyage: How Improbable Journeys Shaped the History of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 16.

<sup>114</sup> J.R. McNeill coins the term to refer to ‘a motley assemblage of indigenous and invading species, jostling one another in unstable ecosystems’; McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23.

<sup>115</sup> Stanley F. Stevens, *Claiming the High Ground: Sherpas, Subsistence, and Environmental Change in the Highest Himalaya* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 218.

<sup>116</sup> See Lorrain, *Dictionary of the Lushai Language*.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Agriculture and Material Progress’, Report for the Lushai Hills, 1908–09, MSA CB-13, G-160, n.p.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Hlimen Khaw Chanchin [News from the village of Hlimen]’, *Mizo leh Vai*, June 1929, 139; I am grateful to Vanlalchhawna for this reference.

<sup>119</sup> Beatrix Scott to Mother, 24 August 1919, Lady Scott Papers, Box II, CCSASA, 2.

<sup>120</sup> Notes for Administration Report, Lungleh, 1900–01, MSA CB-7, G-81, 21.

<sup>121</sup> Report for the Lushai Hills, 1908–09, 2, 3.

<sup>122</sup> E.L. Mendus, *The Diary of a Jungle Missionary* (Liverpool: Foreign Mission Office, 1956), 76.

In broader scope, the creative introduction of botanical species was nothing new to the region. For instance, in 1900 villagers remembered an astonishing case of biological warfare waged some seventy years prior near Pukzing village: ‘in this attack...the Chuckmahs [Chakma] were supposed to have fired out of their cannon the seed of that noxious plant the wild Heliotrope, which has now spread all over the hills’.<sup>123</sup>

What colonial imports added was sheer scale. Two thousand orange trees from the Khasi Hills arrived on district orders in 1908, with plans for a bulk import five times that. The following year, some 50,000 imported rubber seedlings had been distributed for seedbeds across the Hills, with some 28,000 rubber trees ready for further distribution and 18,000 planted in the government plantations below Aijal.<sup>124</sup> Vernacular magazines offered procedural instruction, and village writers reported weekly during germination (and monthly thereafter).<sup>125</sup> The Mizo clerk Dosathanga masterminded rubber operations across the district from Aijal and issued 10 *kuli* exemption chits per village for those maintaining the plantations.<sup>126</sup>

The crops of empire were astonishingly diverse. In 1913, Bengali boatmen manoeuvred up the cleared Tlawng with five wooden crates packed with some 106 plants and grafts.<sup>127</sup> Originating in Bengal’s Bagmar Nursery Garden, the flora had travelled to Calcutta’s Sealdah railway station, journeyed northeast by rail to Silchar railway station, were carried by porters overland to Silchar Ghat and then sailed on this botanical life-raft to Sairang, as close to Aijal as the river was navigable. The boat was a veritable Ark: custard apples, guavas, papaya, figs, mulberry and loquat intermingled with cucumber, grapes and pear trees. Plum, peaches, pineapples and varieties of mangos sat in the shade of young cypress, evergreen and apple trees. The plants travelled towards Aijal by oxcart, destined for propagation in government farms.

Botanical changes were undergirded by a host of trans-regional networks. By 1911, the Aijal government was channelling *lals* and graduates from the Lushai Hills to the Naga Hills, Shillong, Tezpur and to the Department of Agriculture in Dacca to learn potato and rubber cultivation and permanent agriculture techniques.<sup>128</sup> The son of Mizo headman Khamliana (one Dohleia) and a Khasi clerk (one Kishon Roy) attended courses on lac and fruit cultivation at the Agricultural

<sup>123</sup> J. Shakespear, ‘Census note 2: The Thangur’, 3 September 1900, MSA CB-7, G-76, 6.

<sup>124</sup> J.C. Arbuthnott, ‘Copy of Inspection Note...’, n.d (c. 1909–10), MSA CB-14, G-176, 3.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Thialret phun thu [Regarding Rubber Tree Planting]’, July 1906, *Mizo leh Vai*, 99–103 and ‘Thialret thu’, October 1907, *Mizo leh Vai*, 181–85, trans. in Pachuau and van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, 174, 175.

<sup>126</sup> H.W.G. Cole, ‘Order for Commencement of Rubber Cultivation’, 11 June 1907, MSA CB-2, R-25, 1, 2.

<sup>127</sup> In 1914, an empty boat could be manoeuvred in the cold season from Silchar to Sairang in about eight days; ‘Supplementary Notes’ (1915), 3.

<sup>128</sup> Agricultural Supervisor, Eastern Bengal and Assam to the Superintendent, 10 June 1911, MSA CB-2, R-27, 1; Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas*, 45; Lorrain to Lewin, 16 October 1915, University of London Archives and Manuscripts (hereafter ULAM), United Kingdom, MS 811/IV/63, 7; Annual Report for the Lushai Hills, 1906–07, MSA CB-11, G-144, n.p.

Research Institute in Pusa, linking the Lushai Hills District with Bihar in knowledge transfer.<sup>129</sup> Three Angami Nagas from Kohima arrived in Aijal and Lungleh to teach permanent agriculture.<sup>130</sup> Mission schoolboys received instruction locally in the cultivation of ‘certain new crops now being introduced in the hills’.<sup>131</sup> Older students went to the government farm at Chitelui to manage experimental plots, and to the government garden on the Hmuifang range to learn potato cultivation.

Within the district, colonial botanical schemes assumed grandiose scales. In 1904, superintendent Shakespear wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to account for an ongoing experiment in wet-rice cultivation on the eastern, river-side plain (*phai*) of Champhai—at some 54 square kilometres the largest of the few plains in the district. In 1898, Shakespear had misappropriated Santal coolies from the government transport corps. These he marched to Champhai as cultivators, along with some ‘borrowed’<sup>132</sup> government transport bullocks. He sourced rice seed from across the North-East Frontier, from Naga Hills and Manipur primarily, as well as from Silchar and Sylhet, and routed it via Aijal to Champhai. A Mizo ‘who had recently been on the plains, and in whose family there was a tradition that their forefathers had grown rice in Champhai’ was put in charge of the oxen, the Santals and the experiment.<sup>133</sup>

The plain was soon abuzz with new migrants and languages. In 1904, it boasted 70 houses of Mizo settlers, alongside communities of Nepalis, Santals and Bengalis, each cultivating sections of the plain. Shakespear tried to restrict further migration, even as he made plans to begin cropping wheat and—at the suggestion of the Nepalis—pulses for making *dal*. The rice crop supported the cultivator families as well as the Champhai military outpost, with surplus destined to cross the Burmese border to Falam. From 1904 to at least 1911, the government turned a blind eye towards questions of land revenue and house tax on the plain.<sup>134</sup> Even the customary Mizo *fathang* tax was suspended: such plains were the only regions in the Lushai Hills District in which villagers did not owe baskets of unhusked tribute rice to their village headmen.<sup>135</sup> The *phais* were special economic zones.

Besides human settlers, the intermont plains of North and South Vanlaiphai were home to an emergent mosquito community: indeed, to grow wet-rice in a tropical climate is also to grow mosquitoes.<sup>136</sup> Irrigated acres of warm, shallow,

<sup>129</sup> H.W.G. Cole, ‘Note on Technical Education in the Lushai Hills’, 22 September 1910, MSA CB-2, Edu-20, 2.

<sup>130</sup> Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas*, 45–46.

<sup>131</sup> Sandy to the Superintendent, 4 September 1919, 3.

<sup>132</sup> Shakespear to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, 6 April 1904, MSA CB-2, R-22, 1.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> Shakespear to Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, 23 July 1904, MSA CB-10, G-133, 1; J.C. Arbuthnott to the Superintendent, 27 June 1911 MSA CB-2, R-28, 1.

<sup>135</sup> J.C. Arbuthnott to the Superintendent, 27 June 1911, 1.

<sup>136</sup> On the links globally between wet-rice agriculture and malaria see McNeill, *Mosquito Empires*, esp. 57; for Indian case studies see, for example, Elizabeth Whitcombe, ‘The Environmental Costs of Irrigation in British India: Waterlogging, Salinity, Malaria’, in *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*, ed. David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 237–59; N. Singh, O.P. Singh and V. Soan, ‘Mosquito Breeding in Rice Fields



stagnant waters become ripe with the bacteria, algae mats and covering aquatic plants that some species of mosquito larvae thrive on (in this region, for instance, the *Cellia* subgenus *Anopheles minimus*).<sup>137</sup> Plough animals and human settlers served respectively as food for mosquitoes and microbial way stations for parasites. Movement took place in systems within systems. Humans settling near rice fields had malaria plasmodia settle in their livers and migrate into their red blood cells; human migrants out of the regions could carry the process afield.<sup>138</sup>

On a regional scale, the geographical scalene triangle formed by the district's wet-rice cultivation nodes (Champhai and the Vanlaiphais, the latter at slightly lower elevations more conducive to mosquitoes) and feverous Demagiri worked alongside rising human populations and their migratory habits to move malaria around, just as the humid environment helped propagate it seasonally. Colonial water projects, whether open-air tanks in Aijal or blockaded springs in Lungleh, were ideal incubatory niches for mosquitoes further to the natural pockmarks of standing water (in the 1910s, local rainfall was some four and a half times today's global over-land average).<sup>139</sup> Hospital records available from 1921 reveal that malaria was the most commonly hospitalized condition that year.<sup>140</sup> The youngest were struck hardest. Dubbed the most 'lethal agent' in the district in 1905, malaria inadvertently began to drive Mizos towards new colonial institutions (Figure 14 depicts one journey towards a dispensary). Feverous patients checked themselves into colonial hospitals and thousands clamoured for the quinine distributed via regional Sunday School networks.<sup>141</sup>

Perhaps the most wide-ranging colonial ecological introduction, though, was the white potato (*sap yam*).<sup>142</sup> In 1909, an enormous first shipment of seed potatoes arrived by boat in Demagiri, the western riverine bazaar town. This cargo had travelled eastwards across the roof of India from Nainital, a hill station in the Himalayan foothills to Delhi's northeast. Mizo and Santal labourers were forced to carry the seed on their backs the 42 miles to Lungleh, where it was distributed via a network that interfaced village-level representatives of the colonial

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and its Role in Malaria Transmission in Mandla District, M.P.', *Indian Journal of Malariology* 26, no. 4 (1989): 191–98; V.P. Sharma, A. Srivastava and B. N. Nagpal, 'A Study of the Relationship of Rice Cultivation and Annual Parasite Incidence of Malaria in India', *Social Science and Medicine* 38, no. 1 (1994): 165–78.

<sup>137</sup> See Vanramliana and H. Lalramnghinglova, 'Anopheline Diversity in Undivided Aizawl district of Mizoram, India', *Science Vision* 13, no. 1 (2013): 35–39. Today, ponds, rivers and rice fields remain the key incubators of mosquito populations in Mizoram, see, for example, Vanlalhrauaia Khawlhing, Senthil Kumar Nachimuthu and Guruswami Gurusubramanian, 'Diversity and Abundance of Mosquito Species in...Mizoram, North Eastern Himalayan Region', *Acta Tropica* 137 (2014): 1–18.

<sup>138</sup> McNeill, *Mosquito Empires*, 52.

<sup>139</sup> From 1912 to 1918, an average of 128.5 inches of rain fell in Serkawn each year; 'Record of the Rainfall of Serkawn Station, 1912–1946', British Library, Endangered Archives Programme 454/8/25, n.p.; McNeill, *Mosquito Empires*, 55–56.

<sup>140</sup> I am grateful to the staff of Christian Hospital, Serkawn for sharing this record with me.

<sup>141</sup> B.C. Allen, *Gazetteer of the Khasi & Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1906), reprint Delhi: Gian Publications: 1980, 44 ('lethal agent'); 'B. M. S. Mission in the South Lushai Hills, Assam, India: Report for 1915', ULAM MS811/IV/64, 1.

<sup>142</sup> Pachau and van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, 173.



**Figure 14.** Two Men Carry an Ill Person along a Village Road, c. 1910

**Source:** Denbighshire Archives, Ruthin, Wales.

bureaucracy with the machinations of *corvée* labour. Mizo government officials identified villages large enough to support the experiment; able-bodied males were commanded to collect the seeds from Lungleh. Headmen were then ordered to select 15 per cent of villagers as *aluvengs*, the noun a colonial neologism that fused the Bengali আলু (*alu*, the white potato) with the Mizo *vengtu* (a custodian or keeper). Colonial orders for potato cultivation offered an incentive, too: ‘*Aluvengs* will be exempted from all coolie work during the time of cultivation and for 6 months afterwards if their crops are successful’—a prize so significant that it is still remembered in village lore today.<sup>143</sup>

The *aluveng* regime of the early 1910s evinces the emboldened governmental agricultural interventionism typical of the decade. Here, the broader aim was to nudge traditional Mizo agricultural forms towards what was seen as civilized permanency—to move mobile Mizo women and men cultivators from ‘the forest to the field’.<sup>144</sup> An attendant rhetoric of agricultural work drew upon older colonial tropes of the ‘lazy’ Mizo (who perhaps simply valued leisure time to a

<sup>143</sup> Vanlalchhawna’s interview with Zakhuma, Hortoki, 24 February 2015.

<sup>144</sup> Ismo Björn, ‘Life in the Borderland Forests: The Takeover of Nature and Its Social Organization in North Karelia’, in *Encountering the Past in Nature: Essays in Environmental History*, ed. Timo Myllyntaus and Mikko Saikku (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), 59 (‘forest to the field’); ‘Extract from... Inspection Note of Assam Forests’, 22 April 1912, MSA CB-16, G-196, 2.

greater extent than did colonials).<sup>145</sup> The imposed cultivation of potatoes clearly impacted everyday life as well as the normal agricultural cycle. Articles written in Mizo recorded a general feeling that ‘this planting of potatoes is just coming in the way of doing normal things’.<sup>146</sup> Grievances seem to have been rampant: ‘Many think that the rule of the Superintendent is all about planting potatoes and rubber. Some say that we cannot even do what we have to do’, for all to the extra responsibilities.<sup>147</sup>

Did the potatoes take root? Indeed, the tuber originally from the New World thrived under mandatory cultivation regimes and in the high altitudes and cooler nights of northeast India.<sup>148</sup> Cultivation was cosmopolitan and increasingly comprehensive. Besides the *aluvengs*, Mizo and Santal workers tended government potato fields in South Vanlaiphai, Darzo, Thualthu and elsewhere.<sup>149</sup> White potatoes fit into older dietary regimes of edible jungle tubers and nightshades, but were more easily preserved with their lower sugar content. Harvestable only 60 days after planting, potatoes were the most efficient local crop in converting labour and capital into nutritious food.<sup>150</sup> They also serendipitously fortified the traditional rice diet, delivering higher quality proteins when eaten alongside rice and filling in nutritional gaps in essential amino acids. Skyrocketing wet-rice production on the *phais* and the plethora of new fruit and vegetable crops meant new sources of more varied nutrition, as well as important nutritional stopgaps towards the end of the dry season or in moments of rice scarcity.<sup>151</sup> This all supported in part the region’s population growth across the early twentieth century.<sup>152</sup>

Potato cultivation also had subtle social side effects. Villagers began leap-frogging the authority of their chiefs. Since *aluvengs* were beholden to the Aijal government, villagers often petitioned the colonial authority directly, bypassing the traditional authorities of Mizo village leaders and their *ramhual* (swidden

<sup>145</sup> On colonial stereotypes of the ‘lazy’ Mizo male, see Jackson, ‘Hearing Images, Tasting Pictures’: on the rationalization of forced labour regimes in the Naga Hills, see Dzüvichü, ‘Empire on their Backs’, esp. 9–11; on leisure time, see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 79–81.

<sup>146</sup> Rodanga, ‘Alu thu [Regarding Potatoes]’, December 1910, *Mizo leh Vai*, 220 (quoted and trans. in Pachuau and van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, 173).

<sup>147</sup> Chawng-bial CI, ‘Mahni in hman fel-na [Self-sacrifice or Dedication]’, September 1908, *Mizo leh Vai*, 155 (quoted and trans. in Pachuau and van Schendel, *The Camera as Witness*, 175).

<sup>148</sup> The extension of crops was an uneven process. For instance, potatoes seem to have made only little headway in the region of the Maras: in 1932, N. E. Parry recorded potato cultivation in only ‘one or two villages’ there; Parry, *The Lakhers*, 82; James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 224.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Copy of order...’, 14 March 1909, MSA CB-13, G-164, 1; Leta to Cole, 7 February 1911, MSA CB-16, G-192, 1.

<sup>150</sup> Jennifer A. Woolfe, *The Potato in the Human Diet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1; Stevens, *Claiming the High Ground*, 227.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Zakhuma.

<sup>152</sup> Woolfe, *The Potato in the Human Diet*, 30; Paul H. Li, *Potato Physiology* (London: Academic Press Inc., 1985), xiii, 346. On nutrition, potatoes and population growth see, for instance, Thomas McKeown, *The Modern Rise of Population* (New York: Academic Press, 1976) and Sumit Guha, *Health and Population in South Asia* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

agriculture advisors).<sup>153</sup> Furthermore, and not unlike the communal village graveyards increasingly common by the 1930s, mandatory potato cultivation was an anchor against nomadism. While official boundary letters (*ramri lekha*) in theory curbed movement by holding certain chiefs to certain lands, the mundane bother of the mandatory potato field did similar work more subtly: not migrating meant not having to clear and till a fresh field. In some small way, the Mizo villager did not domesticate the potato as much as the potato domesticated the Mizo villager.<sup>154</sup>

## Into the Wider World (War)

Scholars have recently been applying a more panoramic perspective to the history of the First World War.<sup>155</sup> European battlefields were also full of Africans and Asians. Indeed, the War catalyzed an unprecedented mass movement of Indians to the west.<sup>156</sup> France alone received some 90,000 Indian officers, soldiers and personnel. In the spring of 1917, the Indian Labour Corps in France demanded an additional 50,000 labourers to come alongside some 96,000 workers from China, as well as smaller groups from Egypt, South Africa and the West Indies.<sup>157</sup> To fulfil the quota the government of India turned to the hill tribes of Assam and Burma. As historians Radhika Singha and Lipokmar Dzüvichü have shown, the highly localized corvée labour regimes of the North-East Frontier were retrofitted to operate internationally: villagers were re-imagined as global *kulis*.<sup>158</sup>

The administration in the Lushai Hills was well aware of the unpopularity even of localized *kuli* labour. A back-door strategy was devised. The government approached the Baptist and Welsh missions to lend their travelling Mizo evangelists (*tirhkoh*)—‘well known all over the country and...trusted everywhere’—to the recruitment drive.<sup>159</sup> Thus, highly mobile mission-military

<sup>153</sup> For example, ‘Miscellaneous: Case No. [—the document is torn here]’, 28 February 1909, MSA CB-13, G-164, 1; Leta to Cole, 7 February 1911, 1.

<sup>154</sup> On a similar theme, see Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (Toronto: Signal/McClelland & Stewart, 2014), 147–68.

<sup>155</sup> See, for example, Heike Liebau, Katrin Bromber, Katharina Lange, Dyala Hamzah and Ravi Ahuja, eds, *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); James E. Kitchen, Alisa Miller and Laura Rowe, eds., *Other Combatants, Other Fronts* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011); and a recent special issue of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 4 (2014).

<sup>156</sup> Claude Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’ Experiences in France during World War I: Seeing Europe from the Rear of the Front’, in Liebau et al., *The World in World Wars*, 34.

<sup>157</sup> Michael Summerskill, *China on the Western Front: Britain’s Chinese Work Force in the First World War* (London: Summerskill, 1982), 163 (quoted in Markovits, ‘Indian Soldiers’, 34).

<sup>158</sup> Radhika Singha, ‘The Recruiter’s Eye on “The Primitive”’: To France—and Back—in the Indian Labour Corps, 1917–18’, in James E. Kitchen et al., *Other Combatants*, 199–224; Radhika Singha, ‘Finding Labor from India for the War in Iraq: The Jail Porter and Labor Corps, 1916–1920’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 2 (2007): 412–45; Radhika Singha, ‘The Short Career of the Indian Labour Corps in France, 1917–1919’, *International Labour and Working-class History* 87 (2015): 27–62; Dzüvichü, ‘Empire on their Backs’.

<sup>159</sup> Lorrain to Mrs. Lewin, 21 July 1917, ULAM MS811/IV/65/7, 2.

envoys led war recruitment in the district. The hated *kuli* regime was twisted to work in their favour, for recruits were promised lifetime local exemption upon return from global service. After a successful first intake, the government repeatedly approached the Welsh mission for a further draft.<sup>160</sup> However, an uprising in Haka against further recruitment there, and ‘much grumbling’ in the Lushai Hills, saw the plan scrapped.<sup>161</sup> In total, some 2100 men were shipped out of the district.

Contrary to the mono-ethnic tunnel vision that today constricts much of the region’s history writing, it was not only ethnic ‘Lushais’ who formed the Lushai Labour Corps. Graveyard registration documents reveal Santals from Aijal who joined up alongside members of the Limbu tribe of Nepal. Gurkhas from the Lushai Hills can be found buried in modern-day Turkey and Iraq. On the labour gangs abroad, members of the Lushai Labour Corps and Army Bearer Corps rubbed shoulders with a truly global cross-section of workers. In France, they salvaged metal, dug trenches and constructed ammunition dumps alongside German prisoners, Chinese labourers and Canadian soldiers and engineers.<sup>162</sup> Some carried out demolition work in Arras alongside Naga, Pathan and Chinese workers. Some served four years in Mesopotamia.<sup>163</sup> Others were shipped to Greece, to Lucknow and to the Ottoman *vilayet* of Basra.<sup>164</sup> In the lattermost, ‘[c]oolies and artisans came in from China and Egypt, and from the East and West Indies, the aboriginal Santals and Paharias from Bengal, Moplahs, Thyas, and Nayars from the West Coast, Nepalise quarrymen, Indians of all races and creeds, as well as the Arabs and Chaldeans of the country’.<sup>165</sup> This babel of tongues amidst conflict must have been alarming: despite the translation efforts of Welsh missionary D.E. Jones and mission-educated Mizos, most members of the company would never have understood their orders firsthand.<sup>166</sup>

Updates were initially hard to come by back in the Lushai Hills. Missionaries translated news articles and posted them outside shops on market days, the information fanning out to distant villages by word-of-mouth.<sup>167</sup> However, mail about the condition of Mizos in France was soon arriving in Aijal from Welsh mission directors in Liverpool. Letters were translated and republished in Mizo vernacular newspapers.<sup>168</sup> Such reportage was ‘read all over [the] hills’, and the war entered daily conversation even as it drove up local prices (the rising cost of thread in

<sup>160</sup> F.J. Sandy to Williams, 26 November 1917, LLGC/NLW CMA 27,335.

<sup>161</sup> Margaret Sandy to Williams, 15 Dec 1917, LLGC/NLW CMA 27, 335, 2.

<sup>162</sup> W.L. Scott, ‘The 27th Lushai Labour Corps...’, 13 February 1919, MSA CB-2, M-17, 1.

<sup>163</sup> Lianthawma to Superintendent, 7 January 1920, MSA CB-21, G-260, 1.

<sup>164</sup> See, for instance, *ibid.*; Liandonga to Superintendent, 7 January 1920, MSA CB-2, M-17, and J. Meirion Lloyd, *Nine Missionary Pioneers* (Caernarfon: Mission Board, 1989), 51.

<sup>165</sup> E. Candler, *The Sepoy* (London: J. Murray, 1919), 217 (quoted in Singha, ‘Finding Labor from India’, 416–17).

<sup>166</sup> Lloyd, *History of the Church*, 168.

<sup>167</sup> ‘Report for 1915’, reprinted in *Reports by Missionaries of Baptist Missionary Society (B.M.S.), 1901–1938* (Serkawn: Mizoram Gospel Centenary Committee, 1993), 130.

<sup>168</sup> F.J. Sandy to Williams, 5 November 1917, LLGC/NLW CMA 27,335, 1.

Aijal, for instance, vexed Mizo women learning to weave on imported looms).<sup>169</sup> The emotional distance could be bridged by technologies relatively new to the region: in 1915, village schools were displaying photographs of the first Mizo medical workers to go abroad.<sup>170</sup> Requests for prayer sent eastward from Mizos in France were circulated in hardcopy to the villages and answered in the budding churches.<sup>171</sup> One English-speaking Mizo in France wrote westward instead, and received English newspapers from acquaintances in Swansea.<sup>172</sup> Tangible goods travelled too. Mizo comforts were hand-delivered to France by Lushai Hills missionary J.H. Lorrain (Pu Buanga), who arrived with 18,000 *Zo* cigarettes and 53 cigars, to be enjoyed along with a host of lanternslides produced back home.<sup>173</sup>

The eventual return of the labourers in 1918 buoyed the population of the district by some 2 per cent. The returnees dispersed new cultural baggage, sporting short hair—revolutionary for men in contemporary Mizo society—and European dress. The experience abroad seems to have turned the returnees' attention to so-called 'progress'—the *hmasawwnna* on offer by government and mission alike. Letters to the mission from Mizos in France read, 'I should like you to teach my wife reading and writing, as well as household works, and to put on clothes neat and tidy.'<sup>174</sup> Contemporary print culture mirrored this drive towards an urbanized progress: author Lalsailova's 1918 article in *Mizo leh Vai* asks rural readers to consider moving to Aijal for the purpose of 'progress' (*hmasawwnna*).<sup>175</sup>

Returnees also generated an unprecedented cash injection; their combined wages and final settlements totalled over 571,592 rupees.<sup>176</sup> The archives are full of the petitions of mourners scrambling for what was owed them; for example, the family of the Mizo army bearer Aihraanga, who died in Delhi's Lady Hardinge Hospital in the summer of 1918, received a money order for some 227 rupees.<sup>177</sup> There were biological consequences, too, for the returning labourers carried seeds. In today's Aizawl, vegetable vendors stock green bundles of *feren* (France) *antam*, a popular mustard whose seeds accompanied labourers and enabled a Mizo-French culinary fusion, the most modern of post-war cooking.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Lorrain to Mrs Lewin, 7 August 1916, ULAM MS811/IV/65/1, 6 ('read all over'); Hezlett to Inspector of Schools, 8 November 1916, MSA CB-19, G-238, 1.

<sup>170</sup> 'Report for 1915 [B. M. S.]', (reprint, 1993), 132.

<sup>171</sup> Pashena, 'Lekha thawn [Letter]', *Kristian Tlangau*, July 1917, 122–23, and Dara and Sawnga, 'France ram atanga lekhathawn' [Letter from France], *Kristian Tlangau*, February 1918, 25–27; Vanlalchhuanawma, *Christianity and Subaltern Culture* (Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2006), 232.

<sup>172</sup> Margaret Sandy to Williams, 15 December 1917, 2.

<sup>173</sup> Lorrain to Mrs Lewin, 9 August 1917, ULAM, MS811/IV/65/8.

<sup>174</sup> Margaret Sandy to Williams, 22 July 1917, LLGC/NLW CMA 27,335, 2.

<sup>175</sup> Lalsailova, 'Thing tlang khua a leh Aizawl vel a mi in Biakna [Conversations in Villages and Aizawl]', *Mizo leh Vai*, December 1918, 178–79 (quoted and trans. in Pachuau, *Being Mizo*, 166).

<sup>176</sup> Copeland to Superintendent, 23 December 1919, MSA CB-2, M-24, 1.

<sup>177</sup> I.M.S. to Superintendent, 28 August 1918, MSA CB-2, M-22, 1. For other petitions, see MSA CB-21, G-260.

<sup>178</sup> Author's interview, H. Vanlalhraua, Champhai, Mizoram, 22 June 2014.

However, if for the historian the end of the war was a catalyst to globalization and a particular brand of modernizing sensibilities in the Lushai Hills, for most members of the Lushai Corps it was the end of a terror. At war's-end, those not left behind in French hospitals sick or injured, or buried in Port Said, Suez, Old Cairo, Basra or Marseilles, rejected an offer to see the *khawpui*, the 'great city' of London.<sup>179</sup> They are recorded doing so in Mizo pun, choosing instead to see the *arpui*, the family hen.<sup>180</sup>

## Conclusions

A wider-angle lens sees through the reified isolation of India's Northeast. In the case of the Lushai Hills, it allows us to glimpse more than our usual, bifocal perspectives on the 'British' and 'Mizo', the 'hills' and 'plains', or the 'animists' and 'Christians'. The eye methodologically freed to wander can see in the Lushai Hills imported foodstuffs and revolutionizing diets alongside the rise of global sensibilities. A methodologically unstopped ear can hear the music of Goan bandmasters and the birdsong of curlew. A thickly described Lushai Hills is an interconnected and interdependent one, and does not merit the 'off-map' status that modern histories of South Asia often relegate it to, or the homogenizing shorthand of the 'Tribal Northeast'. History can help us avoid essentialism here, for this is not a region excluded (or indeed 'Excluded') from dynamic processes happening elsewhere. Mandalay, Allahabad, Calcutta, Rangoon, Port Said, Nainital, the Straits Settlements and locales even farther flung all reached in significant ways into the hills.

A focus on a layered, coerced and unpredictable *zawmzur* allows us not only to observe the 'push-and-pull between authorities and lived practice', but also to see new spatial linkages unmediated by Aijal and thus to understand the globalization of this region as more than a 'westernization' driven solely by a colonial motor.<sup>181</sup> In the first decades of the early twentieth century, the average person living in the Lushai Hills district was becoming more likely to travel outside of his or her village, to eat different foods, to be called into distant headquarters and to think and live in terms of distant places. In both their patronage and evasion, new institutions (borders, schools, churches, *kuli*, house tax, regulatory orders, surveillance, evangelistic troupes) functioned as stir sticks of humanity. Movement ebbed and flowed according to social milieus and specific historical moments and within contexts of command that ossified certain boundaries over decades. Infrastructure was thus no neutral fact or mere 'public good'. So-called 'Public Works' were created by, but not for, a forced public.<sup>182</sup> Undertaken under a colonial rhetoric of control, security and improvement, new regimes of circulation formed pathways

<sup>179</sup> 'Report for 1918 [B.M.S.]', (reprint, 1993), 145.

<sup>180</sup> Lorrain, n.d, *Logbook*, 101.

<sup>181</sup> Vélez et al., 'Religious Ideas in Motion', 355 ('push-and-pull').

<sup>182</sup> For a critique of the terms 'Public Works' and 'infrastructure', see Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire*, esp. 9, 31, 79–113.

of conscious domination and of unconscious ‘slow violence’ (calamities ‘slow and long lasting’, whether corridors of deadly malaria, the everyday anticipatory dread of forced labour demands or the long-term destruction of animal populations and the disruption of ecosystems).<sup>183</sup> Paying attention to a felt phenomenon like *zawmzur* historicizes roads, making them answer for more than mere ‘technocratic progress’.<sup>184</sup>

Though *zawmzur* stresses place and compulsion, it shares with Stuart Hall’s classic conception of globalization the capacity to erode some local identities, and to bolster or even produce others.<sup>185</sup> Today, the borders of modern Mizoram have hardened into a ‘permanent arena’ for historical analysis.<sup>186</sup> Here, the subaltern pasts of those who migrated across these borders are all but ignored by scholars.<sup>187</sup> While the resultant histories are often very rich, they miss much by telescoping mono-ethnically onto, for instance, the 1911 appearance of the ‘first Lushai [Mizo] shopkeepers in Aizawl’ or Lungleh, when archival sources reveal that there were already many stores in both—just stores owned by migrant ‘others’.<sup>188</sup> Indeed, the reified study of ‘Mizo history’, artificially plucked from a cosmopolitan past, is not only a false and artificial ontology, but also has a human cost, further marginalizing minority groups also indigenous to the region. In 2011, an *Aizawl Post* editorial publically questioned the validity of a Mizoram-born, non-Mizo Chakma scholar presenting a paper to the Mizo History Association.<sup>189</sup> Today, the ‘History’ room in the Mizoram State Museum speaks only to a ‘Mizo’ past, quarantining Lai, Bru, Chakma and Mara peoples to the ‘Anthropology’ room across the hall. Everyone else is ignored altogether.

In the early 1930s a young Burmese Catholic traveller arrived in Aijal styling himself ‘Globe Trotter’.<sup>190</sup> Having walked from Burma to China, and from Siam to Assam, he paused to recalibrate in Aijal, aiming for Europe via Afghanistan. The sheer scope of his story shatters myopic frameworks of historical research. The marine trace fossils today exposed in the rock strata of bustling downtown Aizawl do likewise. Unlike historians, geologists see Aizawl not as a borderland mountaintop city, but as a once lowland delta plain: these trace fossils were

<sup>183</sup> On slow violence, see Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (London: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>184</sup> Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire*, 3.

<sup>185</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘The Question of Cultural Identity’, in *Modernity and its Futures*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held and Anthony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), esp. 308.

<sup>186</sup> I borrow the term from Marc Edelman, ‘A Central American Genocide: Rubber, Slavery, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Guatusos-Malekus’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 40, no. 2 (1998), 381; the phenomenon is called ‘methodological territorialism’ in, for instance, Willem van Schendel and Ity Abraham, eds., *Illicit Flows and Criminal Things* (Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press, 2005), 39.

<sup>187</sup> Joy Pachuau notes that such local pasts ‘form a silent category and only appear as figures or statistics of empire’; Pachuau, *Being Mizo*, 107.

<sup>188</sup> J. Zorema, *Indirect Rule in Mizoram, 1890–1954* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2007), 82.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Mizo history leh culture zirnaah Chakma chanchin [Chakma History in the Study of Mizo History and Culture]’, *Aizawl Post*, 25 November 2011, 1.

<sup>190</sup> Pasena to Mendus, 19 October 1934, LLGC/NLW CMA HZ1/3/39, 6.



interred in beaches.<sup>191</sup> Now pushed up some 1100 metres above sea level, this same ridge tracks southwards, eventually plunging into the ocean at new beaches on the Myanmar coast. The undersea ridge, itself like R.D. Leta's submerged *zo ram* mountains, occasionally peeks above water to form the Andaman and Nicobar Islands; where it does not, the sea is plied by *kaptens*. Analyses of the eastern borderlands of the British Raj must too consider 'Other Countries and Peoples', bigger scales and wider horizons.

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<sup>191</sup> Kapesa Lokho and Birenda P. Singh, 'Ichnofossils from the Miocene Middle Bhuban Formation, Mizoram, Northeast India...', *Acta Geologica Sinica* 87, no. 4 (2013): 801–40.