HIMALAYA
The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies

Research Article

# Elephant in the Room: Tracing culture as a strategic resource in food-politics, racism, and resistance in contemporary Naga social history

Aditya Kiran Kakati

*University of Amsterdam, London University and Leiden University*

**DOI**: https://doi.org/10.2218/himalaya.2023.8044

## Abstract

The Nagaland government's July 2020 announcement of a ban on the sale of dog-meat stimulated a flood of articles on various aspects of the debate. The war of words pitted animal rights activists against the defenders of cultural rights. This article highlights the persistent circulation of 'culture' and unpacks its strategic potential for resistance due to its fluidity in the dog-meat debate and in other issues affecting present-Nagas and Northeast India. We trace and disambiguate the use of 'culture' in resistance narratives which have circulated through binary oppositions and racialized caricatures to re-animate discussions on race, cultural nationalism and citizenship politics. While anthropology has critiqued culture, we identify how the concept still circulates as a strategic resource and as a trope in contemporary Naga social history. We identify new itineraries of culture's circulation that are otherwise muddled in recent public debates, which received an impetus after the reinvigoration of discussions on racism in mid-2020. This was sparked by the dog-meat ban and the release of a film in mid-2020, and the global anti-Asian racism triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic that year. We highlight the contestations in the domain of race, representation, and citizenship that have emerged in Northeast Indian Himalayan contexts in the last decades, due to twenty-five years of indefinite ceasefires with major armed groups. Tensions arise with the regional aspirations, engaging their position of belonging within India but also globally oriented agendas fuelled by new forms of capital and mobility. Such tensions are playing out in the domain of food-politics and human-animal relations that straddle different rights regimes. We underline this caution around culture's essentialism and its circulation as a historical trope due to its divisive potential in scripting narratives of social history and minority citizenship, at a time when Indian nation-building projects in the region are changing.

## Keywords

Cultural nationalism; dog-meat; human-animal relations; indigeneity; citizenship

## Recommended Citation

Kakati, A. K. (2023). Elephant in the Room: Tracing culture as a strategic resource in food-politics, racism, and resistance in contemporary Naga social history. *HIMALAYA* 42(1): 78-97.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License.

## Introduction

The controversies sparked by the Nagaland state government's ban on the sale of dog-meat in July 2020 generated a spate of writings and public debates. Several commentators in the media, including anthropologists, have highlighted the complexity of this issue which encompasses cultural, economic, legal, moral, and political aspects, as well as matters of personal taste. This provides therefore a rich tapestry of interrelated dimensions that provoke further conversations. Recognizing the various aspects of the problem is important, ideally inspiring more meaningful discussions and understandings of social justice and minority rights. However, this article analyzes a major oversight in these conversations—the unqualified use of 'culture' which must be considered in light of the concept's strategic use in Naga social history. This is important because we argue that situating 'culture' as evident through such debates on food and eating in discourses of Naga nationalism (or, more accurately, resistance to hegemonic majoritarianism) reveals new trends in contemporary social histories of ethnic self-representation, racial tensions, and cultural nationalism of minorities in Himalayan contexts. These new trends we discuss specifically pertain to the mobilization of culture with relations to non-humans, which is also reflected in recent scholarship (Pachuau and Schendel 2022). Moreover, the prism of human-animal relations seen through food habits in approaching the problem reveals the complicated and otherwise muddled dimensions of current debates about race, resistance, and cultural nationalism, allowing us to view a seemingly local problem and its imbrications in the context of larger global discourses and practices.

The dog-meat ban debate is a compelling entry point because it allows an examination of how nationalism, culture, multiculturalism, minority rights, animal rights, and colonial histories of human-animal relations have become intertwined. Questions of animal rights, especially dog-meat have the potential to internationalize the issue and thus transcend 'national' scales of politics. East-West civilizational binaries are mobilized in such contexts that encompass racial hierarchies premised on cultural differences that, for instance, came to the fore in response to the late twentieth-century emergence of Asian economies like South Korea (Walraven 2002). Simultaneously, dog-meat carries the ritual and symbolic potential of mobilizing indigeneity and notions of a primordial past attached to a territorial locality. Dog-meat is more potent for contestation due to the racial hierarchy that underlies it, which is in stark contrast with Nordic nations' consumption of whales where the indigenous or cultural right claim is not racialized in the same manner. This is because dog-meat consumption is historically charged with anti-Asian civilizational and racial logics that we elaborate in the following paragraph. Dog-meat consumption thus allows a study of the issues at hand due to the strategic mutability, multiple rights, and discursive regimes it can straddle simultaneously. Therefore, this optic enables unpacking the circulation of cultural discourses in resistance narratives, including their global and local dimensions. International activism has been a recurring strategic asset in Naga politics,[1] which first became evident in the Naga political desire for self-determination as a nation-state after the Second World War (WWII). Since the late 1970s, a new strand of internationalism emerged in the realm of global indigenous politics in international organizations such as the United Nations and related forums attended by NGOs and activists (Karlsson 2001). Here, Naga self-representation invoked a self-image as an 'indigenous' group akin to First Nations or other such communities across the globe maintaining a traditional way of life and a distinct culture separate from the majoritarian groups of the nation-states within which their territory was subsumed.

The larger issue that the dog-meat ban exposes is the strategic use of culture against hegemonic nation-state building, which has a long history in the Naga context. Here, we view such histories

together by linking culture to animal-rights discourse, wildlife conservation, and strategic mobilization of tradition by minority groups. Thus, we focus on the intersection of debates about culture with racial, ecological, and environmental discourses. Ecological and animal histories are recent and growing subjects of inquiry in line with studies of the 'non-human' in shaping society, particularly in the Himalayan context (Yü and Maaker 2021, Aiyadurai 2021). Animals are locally entangled in multiple and complex forms of relatedness, marked both by violence and notions of care (Govindrajan 2018: 178). Racial hierarchies have historically positioned some colonial subjects and national minority citizens of Asian origin as being closer to animals and thus inferior (Saha 2021, Kim 2015, Neo 2012). Moreover, unpacking contemporary Naga food politics through relations with non-humans contributes to a deeper and more diverse understanding of race in India with regard to the politics of its Northeastern 'periphery' (Kikon 2015; 2021; 2022, McDuie-Ra 2013; 2015, Rai 2022, Haokip 2021). These discussions on race were revived in mid-2020 due to the dog-meat ban, release of a film on Netflix called *Axone* and the proliferation of conversations on anti-Asian racism that have coincidentally come to the fore in a new way since the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 (Gover, Harper, and Langton 2020, Palmer 2020, Zhang 2020).

In the above context, by discussing culture through human-animal relations and food politics in representations of Naga social history, we hope to illuminate the convergence of cultural nationalism, ethnicity, multiculturalism, indigeneity and minority citizenship (Hutchinson 2015, Herzfeld 2005, Leerssen 2006, Kymlicka and Donaldson 2014, Smith 1996, Kuper 2003, Lee 2006). This approach reveals how the binary ways of representing tensions with the majoritarian nationalist state can be challenged by showing how minority communities have appropriated and strategically mobilized 'culture' in the domain of eating animals through colonial, imperial, and international agencies to resist or invite attention in national and global forums. We see culture's mutability over time and present-day contexts that illustrate its value as a strategic resource rather than a collection of rights. We hope that the analysis through human and non-human (animal) relations in food and eating will further develop conversations beyond the use of existing binaries and anachronistic historical tropes to justify cultural arguments.

We proceed with a discursive analysis of public debates in media, including academic interventions, archived and public documents, and the use of selective interviews and information gathered from Naga field sites in Assam and Nagaland. Our intervention is not about the 'correctness' of the ban, but to critically examine certain strands of arguments prevalent in these discussions to expose the obfuscations caused by mobilization of culture, and its messy circulation in public debates. We acknowledge and depart from some of the rich debates in anthropology since the 1980s that critically engaged the culture concept, and their continuation in the more recent 'ontological' turn (Kohn 2015). While acknowledging this tradition, we identify the multifarious deliberate or unwitting uses of culture in Naga postcolonial history that became re-animated by the dog-meat debate. We hope to throw further light on the issue by sketching out its complex circulation in Naga social history that has reconfigured notions of culture to navigate politics at both local and international levels. On the one hand, it allowed greater political agency for national minorities. On the other, it exacerbates existing social fissures and promotes a vocabulary of binary opposition as evident in recent public debates.

## A dog-eat-dog world of cultural competition

In this section, we introduce the dog-meat ban and discuss some historical contexts of how colonial and post-colonial discourses described Naga culture. These discourses privileged binary representations of difference based on cultural eating habits, often linked to religion and rituals. On 4 July 2020, the state government of Nagaland

issued a notification banning the import and trading of dogs and dog markets and commercial sale of dog-meat in markets and dine-in restaurants.[2] This was accompanied by a call to draft an order for all districts in Nagaland for 'prevention of cruelty to animals', particularly 'stray domestic animals' and pets, meant to cover the non-commercial aspects of the Notification. It also cited the Food Safety and Standards Act 2006 and the Food Safety and Standards Regulations 2011, which listed the animal species that could be slaughtered for meat and did not include dogs. This Notification was ultimately challenged and stayed by the Guwahati High Court in November 2020 after a petition by meat traders in Kohima. In both cases, the Notification and the petition against it mobilized secular arguments about animal rights as opposed to fundamental human rights and the 'principle of natural justice' (Morung Express 2020). The petitioners' appeal also pointed out several other rights that the Notification had infringed upon, including the Right to Privacy, while the legal procedure by which the Notification was issued was also challenged for non-adherence to protocols. The issue sparked widespread debates on social and mainstream media, supporting or rejecting various aspects of the ban on dog-meat and the 'customary rights' of Nagas as protected under Article 371A of the Indian Constitution. The matter was largely fought on animal rights versus human rights in the legal battle. However, several commentators including anthropologists critiqued the ban as an infringement of Naga 'culture' and as an imposition of majoritarian norms. We seek to contextualize this notion of culture as a terrain of exception, a strategic resource, and a site of social conflict.

We continue the discussion of 'culture' by drawing selectively on broader historical and anthropological literature that unpacks the allure around culture and its relationship to nationalism, resistance and strategic mobilization (there were heated debates within anthropology that engaged Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism) (see Kuper 2003). We situate our discussion within Northeast India and, more specifically, Naga political contexts. Going further, we highlight how problematic notions of culture circulate and become embedded within other discourses privileging territorial, ethno-racial narratives and anachronistic histories that obscure other forms of exclusion. There is a long history of the use of culture as a trope that may trump other narratives as an unquestionable, static truth. For instance, it is echoed in rhetoric such as 'since time immemorial' or 'as our forefathers used to', which we often hear in public conversations where politics is viewed as infringing upon the terrain of 'culture', implying that the two are somehow separate. There is a greater need in public debates to recognize that cultural inclusion and exclusion boundaries have historically been and continue to be malleable. We demonstrate some continuities of this genealogy and connect it to the new avatars manifested in ways in which relations with animals are part of citizenship politics.

To contextualize the social standing of dogs, borrowing Govindrajan's 'relatedness' lens, we asked our interlocutors for some Naga terms used today for dogs. Sometimes different words are used for pet and hunting dogs, both of which are eaten. This also implies that dogs are not separately reared for consumption or trade. Angamis use *Tefü* (for pets) and *Chüwhuofü* (hunters); Ao's use *Azu* and *Ai* (in Chungli and Mongsen dialects respectively) to refer to all dogs; Sumis use *Atsü* (pets), *Shihatsü* (hunters) and *Atsüshi* (dog-meat); and Zemes use *Hetei* (pets) and *Teiguatei* (hunters). In most of these cases, dogs are considered to have medicinal value and are eaten if and when the owners wish to. We mention this to acknowledge the various roles of dogs in Naga society, ranging from pets to hunting companions to food items, where animal protein was scarce, and dog-meat in particular, was considered to have medicinal benefits. These roles may continue today, but the bone of contention in current controversies is linked to the cruelty involved in the mass trade of dogs.[3] In the Rongmei community,

in contrast to the above examples, dogs reared as companions were not eaten, as our Rongmei interviewee Ita suggested.[4] She opines that the commercialization of dog-meat was much more recent. Moreover, she added that it was illogical to focus only on inhumane practices in the dog-meat industry, since almost all animals reared for slaughter in India today are treated inhumanely. This was echoed by another interviewee, who explained that the possible outcry over dog-meat is because of their role as pets in contrast to other animals like chickens, goats and cows (interview, Hoihnu Hauzel).

In 2016, Humane Society International (HSI) produced a report on the cruelty with which the dog-meat trade was carried out in Nagaland. They also initiated a mass petition against the practice, asking the Nagaland state government to ban it. A petition on Change.Org equated this practice and the 'horrific fate' of dogs in India at par with China, South Korea, and other dog-meat-consuming parts of Asia (HSI 2016). Their criticism focused on the cruelty inflicted on the dogs, with their report stating that:

> [...] dogs packed in sacks with just their heads poking out, their mouth either stitched closed or bound tight with rope to keep them quiet, which is done to illegally smuggle them into Nagaland from neighbouring states. During transport and display in the markets, they are denied movement, food or water, before finally being clubbed to death. HSI/India gained unique access to one underground 'death pit' where dogs were seen being clubbed to death in front of each other, beaten multiple times in protracted and painful deaths." (HSI 2016)

Naga scholar Dolly Kikon in 2017 critiqued HSI's report for exceptionalizing Nagaland in consuming dog-meat as opposed to the rest of the country (Kikon 2017a). She considered it problematic given Nagaland's long history since 1958 under violent regimes of legal exception under martial laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)[5]. Kikon added that a lawyer issued a legal notice to the Nagaland government in 2016 calling for banning the dog-meat trade. Nationwide reactions to media images of the trade branded it as cruel and savage and Nagas in the cities faced racial stereotyping as dog eaters. Moreover, the issue became framed in the culture versus cruelty opposition by defenders of the practice and its opponents respectively as Kikon herself observed (Kikon 2017a). Richard Kamei (2017), promoted a more radical framing of the problem by naming his opinion-piece *For Dog Meat Nationalism*, and stressed the attachment of cultural identity to food for tribal minorities. His commentary, written in light of the mob-killing of two Manipuri men in Delhi for eating dog-meat, suggested the alternative possibility of adding dog-meat consumption as a private fundamental right.

The predominant Naga armed group known as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland [Isak-Muivah faction (NSCN-IM)] reacted to the dog-meat ban in 2020 by suggesting that it was the Nagaland state government's attempt to appease Maneka Gandhi, an animal rights activist and prominent member of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Central Government, which also comprises the ruling coalition government in Nagaland (Singh 2020). In recent decades, some Naga political groups have been somewhat less rigid in their approach to Naga sovereignty. The change appears to accommodate the ruling disposition at the centre, which supports an outwardly militant Hindu nationalist agenda. Moreover, it has come about despite apprehensions about the banning of beef in many other parts of India; or the move to 'secularize' Christmas in the Christian majority state of Nagaland under the guise of 'Good Governance Day' (Longkumer 2020: 141-42).

Eating dog-meat is a common practice and part of Naga rituals. This is despite the conversion of the majority of Nagas to

Figure 1: A severed dog head in ritual context in a Zeme Naga village in Assam. © Author

various denominations of Christianity which officially prohibits the consumption of some meats and rice-beer. Eating dog meat is still prevalent during non-Christian religious rituals like the animist Paupaise ceremonies in the Zeme Naga villages, as the authors observed during a visit to one of the few remaining settlements that still practice this religion. Moreover, in these Zeme animist communities, it is a gendered practice, dog-meat being taboo for women and only consumed by men[6] Arkotong Longkumer points to an essential distinction encountered in Zeme Naga contexts between religion and culture where certain objects, symbols, and food become prohibited and yet often transgress these limits by being classified as 'cultural' and not religious. Some practices, like drinking rice beer, were secularized in local forms of meaning-making. Cultural tradition became a way to navigate drinking rice beer with varying degrees of moral injunction in everyday life, justified by the popular slogan, 'loss of culture is loss of identity' (Longkumer 2016: 449).

In the following sections, we provide some instances of culture's multifarious appearances in Naga politics, that have been mobilized to legitimize or de-legitimize narratives. This resulted from a longer colonial legacy usually credited to anthropologists and administrators. In the post-colonial period, anthropologists like Verrier Elwin became advisors for tribal administration. He maintained protectionist arguments that, on many occasions, upheld the idea of cultural separation and the distinctiveness of the Nagas, as evidenced in his archived correspondences and other writings. India's Prime Minister since Independence, J.N. Nehru, said in his speeches in the mid-1950s in Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA)[7] that his government sought to help Nagas grow 'according to their own genius and tradition', and that their 'old habits and customs are good' and, thus, should be preserved.[8] These statements came from addressing tribal populations in NEFA at a time when political resistance against India had gained much momentum in the adjoining Naga Hills district. Moreover, Assam's governor during that period, J. Doulatram, also offered a comparison of a 'cruel' and 'barbarous' ritual practice among some Brahmin communities of Karnataka that involved the mass sacrifice of dozens of goats by tying up their mouths and then pounding them to death. He opined that tribal communities in the NEFA do not perform their animal sacrifices with 'as much cruelty and barbarism', which played up the reconciliatory tone.[9]

Ten years later, in 1962, Elwin referred to the cultural policy in Himalayan international border zone of NEFA, and observed that Sarvodaya movement (a movement for community uplift) workers had created resentment among tribal communities there by asking them to shun rice beer, calling them 'backward as animals' and rejecting the non-vegetarian food that was common in tribal hospitality.[10] This sort of alienation was undesirable in light of

the threat posed by Chinese occupation of neighbouring Tibet. These discussions illustrate the stakes and historical contexts in which tribal culture and custom were vigorously protected and justified in NEFA. Moreover, the Indian national integration project sought a non-Christian future for NEFA, in contrast to the Naga Hills District which was becoming mostly Christian. The formation of Nagaland state, including territory from eastern NEFA in 1963, meant strengthening Indian control in Naga areas. From the outset, Nehru communicated to the President of the Naga National Council (NNC), Sashi Sier in 1946 that Naga tribal areas should have greater autonomy so that they could live according to their 'own customs and desires' (Nehru 1993: 278-79). The trope of 'cultural uniqueness' coupled with armed violence by resistance groups has persisted in Naga claims for self-determination (Goswami 2007: 30). The above evidences some historical genealogies of cultural difference that still persists in the vocabulary of resistance against hegemonic and majoritarian pressures.

Colonial administrators and their successors in postcolonial India promoted the distinction between Naga culture and customs and those of other communities. Acknowledging this fact does not mean misrecognizing cultural differences between Nagas and other ethnic groups, or even among Naga communities. However, we find the persistence of specific ideas of cultural difference in recent debates, and compare it to the broader history of strategic mobilization. We selected some public writings by scholars whose work on Naga society regarding this issue we considered particularly influential for discursive analysis. However, by no means do we single them out nor is the article meant as a rebuttal to these viewpoints. Rather, we seek to disambiguate the messy nature of how culture circulates, and may exacerbate existing social faultlines. While the public debates and critiques of the ban are varied, we attempt to track the cultural argument in these writings because of its potential for further circulation, and to situate it in the broader socio-historical context and the politics of claim-making as minority citizens. Wijunamai and Menokhono argued that the ban and its accompanying public discourse indicated 'disturbing continuities' of colonial stereotypes and 'civilizational discourses', which is not untrue (Wijunamai and Menokhono 2020). However, it requires more nuanced understanding because the cultural difference argument also arises from colonial and postcolonial policies that continued deploying the idea that tribal culture was a sacrosanct domain, whose distinction had to be upheld. The writers saw the ban as an example of a 'habitual intrusion' into Naga society by the 'mainland', thereby reaffirming binaries of cultural difference. On the one hand, this argument attests to the history of political, racial, and socio-economic discrimination that Naga and other tribal communities from the region have faced in India, which betrays the larger insecurities of minorities in the country. On the other hand, relying on cultural notions of difference and using 'culture talk' (Mamdani 2002) risks de-historicizing how political identities are constructed quite malleably, and cultural identities can be used strategically or morally in perpetuating antagonistic narratives, with or without deliberate intention or design.

## Us, and them

Kikon had pointed out how the 'culture card' is applied to legitimize certain practices while assuming homogeneity among a cultural community (Kikon 2017a). Thus, culture is not neutral nor homogenous. However, this sensibility is underplayed in non-academic public debates, which often leads to discussions descending into a range of 'us versus them' binaries, particularly (but not exclusively) in the cultural sphere. These binaries are evident in social media responses after the ban that reinforced the ideas of difference between Nagas and 'mainstream Indians', on the issue of dog-meat, and, more generally, to Northeast cuisine. For instance, Ita encountered stereotyping about the food habits of Northeasterners in Delhi, not only for dog-meat but also concerning pork since the

latter was usually taboo within caste-Hindu majoritarian norms. Such tensions are quite common as discussed in the literature on racism in the region.

The recent film *Axone* (fermented soybeans) had centred such issues arising from eating norms that deviate from majoritarian norms. The latter meant to engage the problems of racism against Northeast migrants in big cities like Delhi, which has been a subject of scholarly attention in the last decade (McDuie-Ra 2013). However, the film is considered to have failed in achieving that goal and, worse still, to have reproduced stereotypes and antagonistic boundaries, as several reviews have pointed out (Techi 2020, Deka 2020). These binaries are heightened because people from Northeast have actually faced racialized stereotypes of civilizational differences emerging from colonialism. When mobilized as rights, culture assumes complex forms that are difficult to disambiguate. Culture-based claims for rights are particularly potent when mobilized in a manner that trumps all other arguments and drowns the scope for discussions.

In Kikon's opinion-piece after the ban, she pointed to the ambiguity of regulatory frameworks in which dog-meat occupies a grey area (Kikon 2020). She noted that the debate about dog-meat consumption is framed around cultural caricatures of cruelty and the tropes of primitivism, which, in turn, are based on the baggage of civilizational and racial hierarchies. Moreover, Kikon underlined that the argument against eating dogs is built around ideas of care and love, which distinguishes it from animal 'conservation' arguments (about, for example, the tiger or Amur falcon) aimed at preventing species extinction. Kikon's conclusions are useful in opening up the conversation on consumption and its regulatory frameworks. She views the problem as a tension between the symbolism of cruelty and that of 'local food habits', while noting that 'consumption becomes connected to the identity and culture' of those who eat and identify with specific foods (Kikon 2017b).

The notion of cruelty by Nagas can be contextualized within the longer history of colonial discourses of 'barbarism' applied to 'primitive' tribes, as we saw in the section above. In recent years, relationships with animals as a basis for representing social hierarchies in the India-Bangladesh-Myanmar zone have received some attention (Saha 2016; 2021, Bal 2007, Narayanan 2017; 2021, Jhala 2022). Stereotypes of 'barbarism' have tended to percolate into the domain of Naga food culture as a marker of racial and civilizational differences facilitated by migrations (Kakati 2015). Critics of the dog-meat ban have detected racial slurs of barbarism in the cruelty discourse, and their comments are not unjustified. Meanwhile, racial slurs, discrimination, and violence against migrants from northeast Indian states have been common occurrences, as noted in discussions over the past decade (Bora 2019, Baruah 2013, McDuie-Ra 2013; 2015). Civilizational and racial hierarchies embedded in these stereotypical tropes are not solely based on physical appearance (for instance, the use of the derogatory term 'chinky'). They have routinely invoked cultural markers of difference and purity such as the nature of the food, for example, 'smelly', 'dirty', 'unclean' and so on (Bal 2007). These remain part of the actual experiences of difference and discrimination for many. Some commentators viewed the ban as a 'civilizing' project, in which the 'mainland' populace has allegedly taken upon itself the moral responsibility to correct the other 'wild habits' of the Nagas that need to be 'rectified' (Wijunamai 2020).

Others, like the Delhi-based Naga lawyer and activist Sira Kharay, have taken a more radical stance. Kharay examined legal assumptions about the 'criminality' of killing dogs and concluded that 'every act of killing an animal does not amount to 'cruelty', and that 'purposive' killing of stray dogs for meat must be even more permissible because stray dogs have no 'ownership', nor do they fall under the category of 'wild' animals, and they are not 'scheduled/specified animals' requiring protection under the Wild Life Protection

Act, 1972 (Kharay 2017). These arguments challenged the legality of arresting two persons from Manipur residing in South Delhi for killing a stray dog. Interestingly, the author herself, perhaps unwittingly, deployed a cultural trope when she began her article by stating, 'Dog-meat is not a taboo. Dog-meat is exotic. It is one of the costliest culinary traditions of the Nagas and in parts of the Northeast' (Kharay 2017). The trope of 'exoticism' here can be read as a self-essentialization of culture, where articulating difference becomes a means of navigating asymmetric hierarchies of power and identity. A popular cookbook on the regional cuisine of Northeast India begins by quoting a joke by the author's North Indian friend, which goes, 'Catch a dog, kill it, roast it and eat it, and what you have is a Northeast delicacy'. The author clarifies that the food from the region is much more than dog-meat and boasts 'exotic delicacies' that are not a part of mainstream Indian fare (Hauzel 2003: 1). Hauzel clarified in an interview that her reference to 'exotic' meant delicacies or gourmet foods (sic) from the Northeast which demonstrated many techniques of cooking various parts of an animal. Like Hauzel, many of the interviewees for this article as well as Nagas cited in the opinion pieces (Kikon 2017a) echoed the idea that outcry against dog-meat relies on a perceived division between livestock and pets, while highlighting that almost all commercial practices related to the former are inherently cruel and inhumane. In Kikon's article, a dog-meat seller whose livelihood depended on the trade indicated that a ban would not stop the demand and consumption, but would only push it underground.

The air of mystery around the region's cuisine in other parts of India has become increasingly disambiguated in the past decade, mainly because of the bottom-up entrepreneurship that has created 'ethnic' Northeast Indian restaurants in big cities like Delhi. These restaurant enterprises have also witnessed the 'mainstreaming' of the cuisine under the rubric of ethnic minority cuisines that acknowledge differences and appropriate existing tropes and stereotypes to navigate that space (Kakati 2015). Thus, the inclusion of ethnic minority cuisine and the emergence of the ingredients associated with these cuisines like *akhuni/axone* (fermented soybeans; for more on *axone* see Agarwala 2020 and Kikon 2015), fermented bamboo shoots, and the widespread use of pork came at the cost of internalizing primitivist discourses and imagery (Kakati 2015). In spaces like 'ethnic' Naga restaurants, the 'tribalist' symbolism is invoked in the décor and food presentation, including motifs such as spears and 'naked' warriors. While there is a prominent commercial logic to deploying such imagery with or without reflection on the baggage they carry, one can read this as internalizing the 'hegemonic' perception of the so-called Indian mainstream.

Indeed, the history of the Naga demand for a separate 'homeland' has been premised on the difference from India and its inhabitants, in which 'nakedness' or 'bare bodies' (an allusion to their tribalist past) have been sites of culture, resistance, and defiance as the Nagas continue to retrieve and construct their past (Kikon 2011). However, this is not a one-way process, notwithstanding the inequalities of power relations, nor is it a binary that pits Nagas against others. Instead, it operates on a political spectrum where appropriation, collaboration, and antagonism are prevalent in various permutations. Much of the debate about the dog-meat ban was framed in a binary 'us versus them' manner, positing the multiple sections of Naga society against 'mainstream India', and again emphasizing cultural differences.

A large body of critical anthropological scholarship has shown that culture and identity politics are deeply intertwined, constituting each other. Jelle Wouters opines that the legal prohibition of a 'culturally validated' dish of a minority community can be interpreted as a dilution of multiculturalism and an invasion of the state into the kitchen (Wouters 2020). Wouters is right to point out that the dog-meat issue and activism calling for the ban acquired disproportionate national and local media

attention while, around the same time in July 2020, the controversial and ruthless AFSPA was extended in Nagaland, and largely ignored by the press. This Act's injunctions have enabled gross human rights violations, which Wouter's work has engaged extensively (Wouters 2018). However, the posturing of the dog-meat ban as drawing validation from cultural or customary rights rather than human rights is interesting. We speculate that foregrounding the connections between food and cultural habits as deeply attached to an authentic traditional identity may privilege an artificial division between cultural sovereignty as separate from the sphere of 'hard' politics. The private sphere has not been beyond the reach of the state in Nagaland, where AFSPA has routinely enabled violent intrusions into people's homes by the armed forces without a warrant and free of accountability for any atrocities committed. However, a desire for this separation could be contextualized in light of the significant anxieties that still haunt Nagas today regarding majoritarian invasive tendencies. Given the memories of severe violence at the hands of armed forces, the fear of the invasion of the Naga home and kitchen is understandably real.

Wouters opened a productive arena for future discussion by suggesting that the ban represented the entry of a seemingly separate cultural eating norm into the space of legal prohibition as dilution of multiculturalism. Here, we invite alternative readings of multiculturalism because if cultural sovereignty is considered separate, it can exacerbate notions of difference and social segregation. Over the last decade, critical approaches to multiculturalism have shown that the concept is inherently political-legal in practice and amenable to re-invention. Theorists recognize that older models of multiculturalism tended to see culturally defined groups as hermetically sealed, unchanging and self-contained with their own 'authentic' practices while ignoring processes of cultural adaptation and appropriation (Kymlicka 2009: 34). The older models also tended to favor the accommodation of minority cultures in the form of display of differences in cuisine, clothing, and music, which in turn become consumable goods for non-minorities, while neglecting issues of socio-economic inequality. Thus, treating culture as separate overlooks the danger of reducing multiculturalism to symbolic cultural practices or celebrating ethnic folk customs (Kymlicka 2009: 36-38). Kikon discussed how migrants from the Northeast Indian states to 'mainland' cities, experiences of discrimination due to consumption of 'smelly' food like *akhuni*, Western dress and music, and apparently, free social mixing of young men and women lead these individuals to seek dignity through alternative forms of identity that depart from majority Indian norms. In this situation, food politics may also challenge existing ideas of territorially bound sovereignty or self-determination and present new terrain for articulating identities and national citizenship (Kikon 2015). We suggest that such convergence may rally around eating certain foods, pan-regionally, like the idea of a Northeastern cuisine(s) as espoused in Hauzel's cookbook among others that can complicate multiculturalism approaches.

Kamei viewed the ban in 2020 as an Indian 'civilizing project' at the cost of Naga culture (Kamei 2020). He suggested that the ban is about 'showing Naga tribes as uncivilized'. One blogger reacted to Kamei, and by extension, public opponents of the ban by pointing out that the accusation of 'cultural imperialism' and 'food fascism' leveled at the supporters of the ban could be read as efforts to project the matter as a Northeasterner versus 'Mainlander' issue, which would deepen social fault-lines (Bhattacharjee 2020). The blog pointed out that the Nagaland cabinet took the decision, and it was not imposed from outside. It echoed a Twitter post by a Naga individual who questioned the tendency to blame outsiders in such a case. While Naga, or generally, Indian minorities' fears about policing of food norms on meat eating is not unfounded, the framework of cultural oppression might dilute the attention given to deeper politics, while boosting the strategic import of using culture for resistance.

We do not view the latter through a moral lens, and instead discuss the diversity and mutability of culture's strategic value in the next section.

As noted earlier, historically asymmetric cultural hierarchies informing civilizational and racial tropes have been part of discriminatory and oppressive experiences for many people from Northeast India. However, reading the dog-meat ban by the Nagaland government as a call to further harden and mobilize differences presents difficulties. For instance, Kamei suggested that 'a need to reclaim indigeneity must come forth and resist the cultural imperialism and racism leading to its dismantling' (Kamei 2020). While agreeing that cultural imperialism and racism are serious issues to be addressed, glorifying indigeneity agendas is less tenable due to its non-neutral nature. Dogs occupy a legal grey area, as mentioned earlier. Some legal scholars have suggested that under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (PCA), Nagas may have some leeway under 'indigenous religious' norms to contest the ban if 'peaceful death' and prescribed animal slaughter standards are followed (Shendye and Subramaniam 2020). However, the majority in Nagaland follow various Christian denominations (except Hindu migrants in urban centers), while some others follow the increasingly Hinduized Heraka religion, and there are only a few remaining practitioners of older 'animist' faiths. Notwithstanding the argument's legal efficiency, the lawyers seem to suggest that the traditional indigenous past can be instrumentalized, regardless of the actual bearing that religion might have upon eating dogs. In fact, in Naga society, eating dog-meat appears to have no doctrinal religious basis and occurs in personal, and sometimes ritual contexts. Moreover, the language of indigeneity also provides an opportunity to scale up the issue to that of a 'human right', based on the claim of tradition but not based on being an independent, secular citizen of a democratic nation-state.

## The problem with indigeneity

Indigeneity in the Naga context has received scholarly attention, particularly its relationship with, and as an alternative to, nation-state sovereignty, as we briefly outline below. Indigeneity has become a buzzword in circuits of Naga activism on various issues, many of which overlap with rights to the use of resources like land, material objects or artefacts and intellectual property rights and pertain to historical grievances. This contrasts with simultaneous other ground realities, such as the rampant illegal hunting of game and birds and the thriving endangered species trade in the region, including in Naga-inhabited lands and their international borders. The latter practices are often justified in the name of the 'cultural right' to hunt animals. Indigenism is often misconstrued as being 'progressive' and positive due to the attempts to re-scale politics at a translocal level as opposed to various 'localism' movements that seek to harden insider-outsider boundaries (Castree 2004). To simply formulate a healthy and complex body of literature, indigeneity is culture *plus* territory, especially in the way it applies to 'tribal' minorities in India (Karlsson and Subba 2013, Schleiter and de Maaker 2010). A broader discussion of indigeneity scholarship is beyond this article's scope. Still, in essence, the indigeneity discourse tends to reify the cultural content of communities instead of recognizing change over time, which becomes tied to territorial claims. This problem may be strategically useful when indigeneity is interpreted *as* a cultural right, thereafter equated as a human right. For example, lawyers viewed the human rights perspective of the dog-meat debate (as opposed to that of animal rights) as the 'indigenous rights' of the Naga community, that may be legally effective (Shendye and Subramaniam 2020). Culture can emerge as a strategic resource to negotiate co-existence with dominant societies (Wright 1998: 14).

The iconography of indigenous 'culture' and its performative mass consumption is evident state-endorsed Naga 'Hornbill

Festival' that attracts thousands of visitors, especially foreign tourists, every year (Longkumer 2015). Here we see how ideas of indigenous culture and ethnicity become entangled with global economic regimes, and is not solely a matter of rights. The production of 'ethno-commodities' opens up a terrain of interaction and re-invention, where subjects who identify as a certain 'ethnic' group (in this case, the Naga tribes) and cultural objects, along with biological genealogies compete for and claim authenticity and 'naturally' derived rights as intellectual or community property (Comaroff 2009). The 'primitive' iconography of the Hornbill Festival and the arrival of 'Naga cuisine' into the 'mainstream' consumption culture represent commodified Naga culture's strategic mobilization. In contrast, dog-meat consumption invokes a moral radar and re-deployment of civilizational hierarchies. The consumption of and the moral conversation around dog-meat are not exclusive to the Nagas, as we know. Globally, Zilkia Janer opines that the issue is posited as an 'East versus West' and 'primitive versus civilized' binary while employing the cruelty arguments. The historical weight of France, a European power with a sophisticated and celebrated cuisine, defends the consumption of *foie gras* (that involves questionable techniques rather than the type of animal meat) against accusations of barbarism and positions it as part of a 'high culture' (Janer 2012). For instance, this comparison can extend to French consumption of horses, which are often considered close to humans in Anglophone societies.

The civilizational concept of culture is hierarchical in food politics and is evident in the 'us versus them' narrative as discussed. Another concept of culture that circulates in Indian identity politics is the idea that multiple and co-existing 'cultures' exist as self-contained holistic, and thus, essentialized entities. Moreover, there is a tendency to equate tribal groups in India as indigenous peoples (Xaxa 1999). This opened up new terrain to discuss tribal culture and indigeneity in India within the framework of identity politics and competitive recognition. Swargajyoti Gohain has used the term 'relative indigeneity' to move away from the strategic essentialism framework to describe the asymmetrically competitive claims arising from benefits of politically mobilizing indigeneity discourse that she considers to be a unique feature of identity politics in Northeast India (Gohain 2021).

In indigenous politics, ideas of culture, territory, and ecological knowledge have become imbricated and formalized in legal mechanisms of international rights, generating new notions of 'place', and values for identity politics (Muehlebach 2001). Naga activism in transnational forums such as the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (UNWGIP) in Geneva has strategically adapted and used the vocabulary of culture. The Nagas have lobbied in the UNWGIP while not always considering themselves 'indigenous people' in the same sense as other groups attending the forum (e.g., the Ainu or the Sami). In 1987, Mowu Gwizantsu of the Naga National Council (NNC), attending his first UNWGIP meeting in Geneva, expressed concern that if the Nagas labeled themselves as 'indigenous', they would effectively downgrade their claim to sovereignty (personal interview with Petinu)[11]. Later, in 1993, Isak Swu of the NSCN-IM (that broke away from the parent NNC) reiterated this precise point, also at UNWGIP, and explained how the Naga case was different from that of other indigenous populations in India, marking continuity (Karlsson 2003). In fact, Naga indigeneity has been partly constructed in such institutional settings, with help from NGOs, and anthropologists to qualify for inclusion in the international fora without compromising their particular stances on local autonomy, statehood and sovereignty (ibid.). The NSCN worked flexibly with varied international actors like Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization Nations (UNPO) and the UNWGIP towards negotiating the ongoing landmark ceasefire with India since 1997.[12] The Naga international aspirations since 1950s to project themselves as 'modern' and capable of governing a sovereign nation-state, eventually evolved with the

global indigeneity discourse. Indigeneity allowed room for navigating global rights forums that would not be limited by lack of having a nation-state, which is the predominant organizational principle of most international organizations. Naga culture found a new fluid, but internally contested expression through indigeneity. Given this strategically mutable background, the mobilization of indigenous identity to defend food habits as suggested earlier may be effective legally, while being historically complicated and somewhat recent in its evolution as a category of cultural rights.

## The plasticity of culture

The processes that lead to particular assertions of culture are significant because they can illustrate how cultural performances are mobilized to shape social organization and enable access to specific resources. Groups seeking affirmative action like recognition as Schedule Tribes perform 'tribal culture' to convince state anthropologists of their claims (Middleton 2013). Using cultural arguments like indigeneity as a resistance narrative to defend the right to eat certain types of food, instead of viewing the issue as an expression of democratic freedom and personal choice can dilute the premise of democratic citizenship and produce differential access. As noted, the dog-meat case is even more complicated as it occupies a legal grey area. However, the rampant legal and illegal wildlife hunting in Nagaland and the idea that people in the state have the reputation of 'being willing to eat anything that moves' still informs cultural perceptions in Naga rural society (Sinha 2014). Bano Haralu, a wildlife conservationist in Nagaland, hailed for her work on conserving the Amur falcon, told us in an interview that hunting in Naga society today has little to do with tradition or survival; instead, it is often motivated by recreational needs, a certain machismo, and a desire to 'boast' on social media. While some perceive the dog-meat ban as an affront to 'age-old' traditions, hunting and selling illegal wild meats in local markets are a significant part of local consumer culture and may even become an unofficial part of tourist events. For instance, illicit meat hornbill was discreetly sold during the Hornbill Festival in 2018, which Mepet from Nzauna village told us in an interview.

In the following example of consuming protected wildlife, we present a case where resistance is not against the perceived hegemony of 'mainlanders' that appears in the racial discourse. More significantly, the instance refers to strategies employed by people in certain localities who can leverage a different form of violence, or, depending on interpretation, cruelty against endangered and protected species to gain the attention of national and international bodies interested in animal conservation and protection. By presenting an example that is not about direct use of the culture argument, it underlines how fixation on cultural caricatures can actually obscure the agency with which Naga persons navigate international legal norms to 'scale-up' local issues, and demonstrate a complex understanding of intimacies with animals as well as legal frameworks.

Anüng from Pangti where Amur falcons tend to congregate, told us how people in his village had publicly captured, killed, and consumed the migratory birds in the recent past, well aware that the act could bring international attention and allow them a powerful platform for airing their grievances. He said their actions protested against the misallocation of development funds intended for the Pangti locality by a politician who allegedly sent the funds to his own constituency instead. The informant was well-aware of the opportunities the Amur falcon conservation initiatives had brought to their locality and sought greater skill development and sustainable ways to support the local economy, which has changed since the Doyang dam and reservoir were built. This reflects the greater awareness and agency with which local Naga actors are able to express political expediency. The cultural emphasis and the resistance narrative tends to downplay agency and prioritize the 'victim' account of the Nagas, as recipients of the cultural imperialism that we saw earlier (while

recognizing the legitimate anxieties and respecting the actual racialized violence faced by many Nagas and Northeasterners). However, while it is undoubtedly true that power relations with the majority are unequal for Indian minorities such as the Nagas, greater community empowerment and equitable access are necessary to address the inequalities within Naga society. Such inequalities become starker under longstanding ceasefire politics, where states can become some resources for societies (Wouters 2018). Individuals from minority social groups in so-called 'peripheral areas', such as rural Nagaland, possess far greater political agency than is usually recognized in negotiating with state-based and transnational institutions.

Moreover, we also see that the tropes of barbarity and cruelty evident in the dog-meat debate did not drive violence against animals here. Such ideas are cultural stereotypes that others have historically imposed but, at other times, have also been appropriated by some Nagas, for instance, to self-caricature a 'martial' past as warriors who practiced head-hunting (Wilkinson 2017). For comparison, we take recent developments among the Idu Mishmis in Arunachal Pradesh, who have opted to replace the symbol of the *mithun*[13] with that of another species, the *takin*, in the motif of the Idu Mishmi Cultural and Literary Society (IMCLS) (Aiyadurai 2021). The *mithun* appears on the official emblems of both Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh state governments. An interlocutor explained the change in the IMCLS motif to Aiyadurai, stating that the *mithun* logo would make the community appear to be a 'carnivorous' and 'barbaric' people. Instead, the interlocutor, suggested that the *takin* logo highlighted their good conservation practices (Aiyadurai 2021: 114-15). This example reveals the malleability of local cultural identities, which international animal conservation discourses can influence. Human-animal relations are used here as a cultural resource to strategically position identities to make them more particular and distinct. In contrast, the attempts to make dog-meat consumption sacrosanct in Naga society by showcasing the role of dogs in folklore, ritual, and medical treatment may not only dehistoricize recent commercial practices, but could also potentially propagate performative cultural iconography that justifies its proliferation. In other words, dog-meat could be elevated to one of the symbolic markers of Naga nationhood, as has occurred with pork consumption (Kakati 2015). This could further stimulate dog-meat consumption.

At the level of local politics, there are underlying factors that have greater significance in explaining the logic and timing of the ban than cultural caricatures and binaries, which arguably divert attention from more pressing issues behind the ban. Naro, a wildlife activist we interviewed, opined that the ban was politically motivated and mostly oriented towards placating the influential animal rights activist and member of the ruling party at the Centre, Maneka Gandhi, an allegation also made by NSCN-IM (Singh 2020). While the sale and trade of dog-meat were prohibited under the proposed ban, consumption was not, creating a grey area where an illicit prohibition economy could thrive, and technically, someone could raise and consume dogs as they would other animals on a farm. Banning consumption, on the other hand, would be an even deeper layer of intrusion. Indeed, Süngdong expressed their opinion that the Nagaland government fell short of banning dog-meat consumption because it would set a dangerous precedent, namely that having banned one form of meat, they could be pressured to ban another, such as beef.

This article aimed to draw attention to and revive discussions on the strategic uses of culture and variations of it that have dominated the conversations on the dog-meat ban in Nagaland and the politics of minority citizenship, food, and racism related to it. We used this debate to enter a discussion illustrating the wider historical and contemporary ways in which culture has been mobilized in Naga identity politics and its relevance to the social history and politics of citizenship for Nagas and

Northeasterners. Moreover, the specific nature of dog-meat as a controversial subject that intersects with global moral sympathies and rights regimes allowed a fresh examination of the culture problem through new reconfigurations of human-animal relations, a subject of growing interest for scholars of the Himalayan region.

The above discussions explained why we push for viewing the dog-meat debate beyond the realm of cultural rights, by tracking certain genealogies of the latter. We argue this partly based on the complex and very sensitive issues involved, and partly because of the potential to reify (if not further propagate) the practice as a cultural right, which is likely to exacerbate tensions. We agree with the commentators on the debate who have argued for better legal provisions and enactment of regulations on health, safety, rearing, and trade, as well as for more humane approaches to treating animals. Moreover, we hope that this shift away from culture will allow us future research agendas to explore other rights frameworks, borrowing not least from the exciting emergent scholarship on human-animal relations and environmental humanities more broadly. Further, we would suggest that the alleged cruel practices in the Nagaland dog-meat trade (HSI 2016) should not be caricatured specifically as a Naga practice. These have probably developed with growing urbanization and an increase in the scale of the dog-meat businesses.

The article illustrated certain itineraries of culture because of the strategic essentialisms it can produce. We illustrated this by showing its constant mutability and mobilization historically and in contemporary times. While recognizing colonial era East-West and postcolonial binaries, we show how culture is repurposed in contemporary politics of citizenship, racism, and resistance to it. We proposed a novel engagement with minority cultural nationalism and the larger move towards non-human approaches in humanities and social histories from the region, including the implications for multiculturalism.

**Aditya Kiran Kakati** is an Early-Postdoctoral Mobility Fellow, Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) at the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and SOAS, London University. He is also an Associate Research Fellow, International Institute for Asian Studies, IIAS, Leiden, a Research Fellow (non-stipendiary), at The Highland Institute, Kohima, Nagaland, and an Associate Editor for The Highlander Journal. Aditya hails from Assam, India, and holds a PhD in International History (with Minor in Anthropology and Sociology) from the Graduate Institute, Geneva.

The author thanks all our interlocutors and interviewees, most of whom chose to remain anonymous. I have special gratitude to Catriona Child for her guidance and support for the research, as well as assistance in navigating the tricky terrain of local politics. The authors is also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable inputs and to the staff at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (with Atem Lemtur), International Institute of Social History (IISH), the Highland Institute and Pitt Rivers Museum archives for their kind assistance. Finally, I thank the editorial staff of HIMALAYA for their continued support.

## Endnotes

1. In this article, we do not unpack 'Naga' as an essential 'tribal' or 'ethnic' category for conciseness and simplicity. It refers to anyone who self-identifies as Naga. The use of 'we' for the authors is deliberate, to indicate the collaborative support of individuals who unfortunately did not wish to have their name listed as co-authors due to potential professional conflicts of interest and wider backlash, which may jeopardize their position in the local Naga communities.

2. Government of Nagaland, "Ban on Import and Sale of Dog-meat in the State", 4 July 2020.

3. This usually involves street dogs and local breeds as opposed to foreign pedigreed ones that are common as pets.

4. Several of our interlocutors chose to be anonymous given the sensitive nature of this debate within Naga society. This form of self-censorship is also telling of the politics of social policing within Naga societies and the fact that persons interviewed feel that the stakes of being identified are high. The broader concerns of anxieties of group belonging and loyalty are issues worth future interrogation. To respect this wish, we have used pseudonyms taking Ao Naga words for non-humans like star, moon, tree and so on, while clarifying that the respondents are not necessarily Ao, and the choice of this language is random. Non anonymized respondents appear with full names.

5. This notorious Act gives the military apparatus sweeping powers and impunity to arrest, search or even shoot persons on the grounds of mere 'suspicion' and has been in force in the Naga Hills since 1957–58.

6. Pitt Rivers Museum archives, Oxford, Ursula Graham Bower papers, Notebook, 'Food Taboos', undated entry.

7. Present-day Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh bordering China, Myanmar and Bhutan. There are several Naga tribal communities in NEFA, which bordered the Naga Hills. Many of these Naga groups were left outside of the British domain as 'unadministered' and 'excluded' areas.

8. Nehru Memorial Museum and Library archives (NMML), New Delhi, Verrier Elwin papers, no. 149, 'Extracts from Prime Minister's Speeches,' lectures and notes on NEFA 1948-65, undated.

9. NMML, New Delhi, Verrier Elwin papers, no. 149, Lectures and notes on NEFA 1948-65, 'Development of Tribal Religion' by Jairamdas Doulatram, 26th January 1955. Coincidentally, although quite different in context and time, the description of the Brahminical ritual sacrifice resembles the description of practices in the underground dog markets if that were to be taken as a standard of cruelty.

10. NMML, New Delhi, Verrier Elwin papers, no. 96, 'Letter from Keskar on Cultural Policy in NEFA', April 1961.

11. This information was conveyed to us in August 2020 in an interview with Petinu (anon.) who was a member of the delegation accompanying Mowu Gwizantsu in Geneva in 1987.

12. International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam, Yindee Lertcharoensok papers, ARCH03172 Item: 127, 'Statement by NSCN to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP)', 15th Session, July-August 1997.

13. Mithun are found across the wider eastern Himalayan and are often sacrificed in ritual feasts by Nagas and other tribal groups across highland Northeast India.

## References

Agarwala, Tora. "Explained: What Is Axone?" The Indian Express (blog), 18 June 2020. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/what-is-axone-fermented-soya-bean-nagaland-6463008/.

Aiyadurai, Ambika. 2021. *Tigers Are Our Brothers: Anthropology of Wildlife Conservation in Northeast India*. New Dehli: OUP India.

Bal, Ellen. 2007. *They Ask If We Eat Frogs: Garo Ethnicity in Bangladesh*. IIAS/ISEAS Series on Asia. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Baruah, Sanjib. 2013. "The Mongolian Fringe". *Himal Southasian* Vol 26 (1): 82–86.

Bora, Papori. 2019. "The Problem Without a Name: Comments on Cultural Difference (Racism) in India". *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42 (5): 845–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2019.1644476.

Bhattacharjee, K. "Critics of Dog-meat ban cry "racism" and "food fascism" on social media". OpIndia, July 05, 2020. https://www.opindia.com/2020/07/dog-meat-ban-nagaland-racism-food-fascism-cultural-imperialism-locals-mainlanders/

Castree, Noel. 2004. "Differential Geographies: Place, Indigenous Rights and "Local" Resources". *Political Geography* 23 (2): 133–67. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2003.09.010.

Comaroff, John L. 2009. *Ethnicity, Inc. Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Deka, K. (2020, June 13). "Axone Is a Story of Racism Told From the Eyes of the Privileged". The Wire. https://thewire.in/film/axone-movie-review-racism-privilege

Gohain, Swargajyoti. "Relative Indigeneity in Northeast India." Seminar, April 2021. https://www.india-seminar.com/2021/740/740_swargajyoti_gohain.htm.

Goswami, Namrata. 2007. "The Naga Narrative of Conflict: Envisioning a Resolution Roadmap". *Strategic Analysis* 31 (2): 287–313. https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160701391241.

Gover, A. R., Harper, S. B., & Langton, L. (2020). "Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality". *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 45(4), 647–667. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-020-09545-1

Govindrajan, R. (2018). *Animal intimacies: Interspecies relatedness in India's Central Himalayas*. The University of Chicago Press.

Haokip, Thongkholal. 2021. "'From 'Chinky' to 'Coronavirus': Racism against Northeast Indians during the Covid-19 Pandemic". *Asian Ethnicity* 22 (2): 353–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1763161.

Herzfeld, Michael. 2005. *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

HSI, Humane Society International. 2016. "India's Brutal Dog-meat Trade Exposed as Humane Society International Launches Campaign to End 'Nagaland Nightmare". Humane Society International. https://www.hsi.org/news-media/nagaland-india-dog-meat-trade/.

Hauzel, Hoihnu. 2003. *The Essential North-East Cookbook*. New Delhi; New York, NY: Penguin Books.

Hutchinson, John. 2015. "Cultural Nationalism." In *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism*, 1–5. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663202.wberen400.

Jhala, Angma D. 2022. "Farming and Eating in an Indigenous Asian Borderland: Histories of Botany, Agriculture, and Food in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, East Bengal." *Global Food History* 8 (1): 34–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/20549547.2022.2026182.

Janer, Zilkia. "Assamese Food and the Politics of Taste". Seminar, December 2012. http://www.india-seminar.com/2012/640/640_zilkia_janer.htm.

Kakati, Aditya Kiran. 2015. "For the Love of Pork: Eating in Ethnic Enclaves". In *Odysseys of Plates and Palates: Food, Society and Sociality*, 113–24. Leiden: Brill. https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9781848883246/BP000012.xml.

Kamei, Richard. "For Dog-meat Nationalism". RAIOT. https://raiot.in/for-dog-meat-nationalism/

———. "Barking up the Wrong Tree." The Indian Express (blog), 9 July 2020. https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/nagaland-dog-meat-ban-barking-up-the-wrong-tree-6496341/.

———. "Dog-meat Ban in Nagaland Is about Showing Naga Tribes as Uncivilised." EastMojo. Accessed 20 July 2020. https://www.eastmojo.com/opinion/2020/07/04/dog-meat-ban-in-nagaland-is-about-showing-naga-tribes-as-uncivilised.

Karlsson, B. G. 2001. "Indigenous Politics: Community Formation and Indigenous Peoples' Struggle for Self-determination in Northeast India." *Identities* 8 (1): 7–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2001.9962683.

Karlsson, Bengt G. 2003. “Anthropology and the “Indigenous Slot”: Claims to and Debates about Indigenous Peoples’ Status in India”. *Critique of Anthropology* 23 (4): 403–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/0308275X03234003.

Karlsson, Bengt T., and T. B. Subba. 2006. *Indigeneity In India*. Routledge.

Kharay, Sira. “We Love Dog-meat - So What?” RAIOT (blog), 29 August 2017. http://www.raiot.in/we-love-dog-meat-so-what/.

Kikon, Dolly. 2011. “From Loincloth, Suits, to Battle Greens: Politics of Clothing the ‘Naked’ Nagas”. In *Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*, edited by Sanjib Baruah. New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2015. “Fermenting Modernity: Putting Akhuni on the Nation’s Table in India”. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38 (2): 320–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2015.1031936.

———. 2017a. “Debating Dog-meat in Dimapur”. RAIOT (blog). 1 September 2017. http://www.raiot.in/debating-dog-meat-in-dimapur/.

———. 2017b. “Barking up the Wrong Tree: Why the Debate on Eating Dog-meat in India (and Globally) Is Hypocritical”. Scroll.In, 3 September 2017, sec. Opinion. https://scroll.in/article/849123/barking-up-the-wrong-tree-why-the-debate-on-eating-dog-meat-in-india-and-globally-is-hypocritical.

———. 2020 “The Politics of Dog-meat Ban in Nagaland”. Frontline. https://frontline.thehindu.com/the-nation/the-politics-of-dog-meat-ban-in-nagaland/article32082833.ece.

———. 2021. “Bamboo Shoot in Our Blood: Fermenting Flavors and Identities in Northeast India.” *Current Anthropology* 62 (S24): S376–87. https://doi.org/10.1086/715830.

———. 2022. “Dirty Food: Racism and Casteism in India.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45 (2): 278–97. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1964558.

Kim, Claire Jean. 2015. *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107045392.

Kohn, E. (2015). “Anthropology of Ontologies.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 44(1), 311–327. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102214-014127

Kuper, Adam. 2003. “The Return of the Native.” *Current Anthropology* 44 (3): 389–402. https://doi.org/10.1086/368120.

Kymlicka, Will. 2009. “The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism? New Debates on Inclusion and Accommodation in Diverse Societies”. In *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*, edited by Susanne Wessendorf and Steven Vertovec. New York: Routledge.

Lee, Richard Borshay. 2006. “Twenty-First Century Indigenism.” *Anthropological Theory* 6 (4): 455–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499606071597.

Leerssen, Joep. 2006. “Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture.” *Nations and Nationalism* 12 (4): 559–78. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2006.00253.x.

Longkumer, Arkotong. 2015. “‘As Our Ancestors Once Lived’: Representation, Performance, and Constructing a National Culture amongst the Nagas of India.’” *HIMALAYA* 35 (1): 51–64.

———.2016. “Rice-Beer, Purification and Debates over Religion and Culture in Northeast India.” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 39 (2): 444–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2016.1154645.

———. 2020. *The Greater India Experiment: Hindutva and the Northeast*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 2002. “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism.” *American Anthropologist* 104 (3): 766–75.

McDuie-Ra, Duncan. 2013. *Northeast Migrants in Delhi: Race, Refuge and Retail*. Amsterdam University Press.

———. 2015. *Debating Race in Contemporary India*. Palgrave Pivot. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Middleton, Townsend. 2013. “Scheduling

Tribes: A View from inside India's Ethnographic State." *Focaal* 2013 (65): 13–22. https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2013.650102.

Morung Express. 2020. "Nagaland Dog-meat Ban Challenged in HC," September 15, 2020, sec. online. https://morungexpress.com/nagaland-dog-meat-ban-challenged-in-hc.

Muehlebach, Andrea. 2001. "'Making Place' at the United Nations: Indigenous Cultural Politics at the U.N. Working Group on Indigenous Populations". *Cultural Anthropology* 16 (3): 415–48. https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2001.16.3.415.

Narayanan, Yamini. 2017. "Street Dogs at the Intersection of Colonialism and Informality: 'Subaltern Animism' as a Posthuman Critique of Indian Cities." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 35 (3): 475–94. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816672860.

———. 2021. "Animating Caste: Visceral Geographies of Pigs, Caste, and Violent Nationalisms in Chennai City." *Urban Geography* 0 (0): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2021.1890954.

Nehru, Jawaharlal. 1993. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru: Second Series. Vol. 15*. New Delhi: Oxford [etc.]: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund ; distr. by Oxford University Press.

Neo, Harvey. 2012. "They Hate Pigs, Chinese Farmers … Everything!' Beastly Racialization in Multiethnic Malaysia." *Antipode* 44 (3): 950–70. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00922.x.

Pachuau, Joy L. K., and Willem van Schendel. 2022. *Entangled Lives: Human-Animal-Plant Histories of the Eastern Himalayan Triangle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009215480.

Palmer, J. 2020. Don't Blame Bat Soup for the Coronavirus. *Foreign Policy*. https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/01/27/coronavirus-covid19-dont-blame-bat-soup-for-the-virus/

Rai, Rohini. 2022. "From Colonial 'Mongoloid' to Neoliberal 'Northeastern': Theorising 'Race', Racialization and Racism in Contemporary India." *Asian Ethnicity* 23 (3): 442–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2020.1869518.

Saha, Jonathan. 2016. "Milk to Mandalay: Dairy Consumption, Animal History and the Political Geography of Colonial Burma." *Journal of Historical Geography* 54: 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2016.05.016.

———. 2021. *Colonizing Animals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108990240.

Schleiter, Markus, and Erik de Maaker. 2010. "Indigeneity as a Cultural Practice: 'tribe' and the State in India | IIAS'. IIAS Newsletter, no. 53 SPRING. https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/indigeneity-cultural-practice-tribe-state-india.

Shendye, Shravani, and Karthik Subramaniam. 2020. "The Nagaland Dog-meat Ban Controversy: A Socio-Legal Analysis". Law School Policy Review (blog). 24 July 2020. https://lawschoolpolicyreview.com/2020/07/24/the-nagaland-dog-meat-ban-controversy-a-socio-legal-analysis/.

Singh, Bikash. 2020. "Nagaland Government Went for Dog-meat Ban Just to Please Some Celebrities: NSCN-IM." *The Economic Times*, July 25, 2020. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/nagaland-government-went-for-dog-meat-ban-just-to-please-some-celebrities-nscn-im/articleshow/77158931.cms?from=mdr.

Sinha, Neha. 2014. "A Hunting Community in Nagaland Takes Steps Toward Conservation". India Ink (blog). 3 January 2014. https://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/01/03/a-hunting-community-in-nagaland-takes-steps-toward-conservation/.

Smith, Anthony D. 1996. "Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism." *International Affairs* 72 (3): 445–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/2625550.

Techi, Nimi. 2020. "To the Cast and Crew of 'Axone': You Are Confusing Victim and Perpetrator in Racism Against NE". FPSJ Review of Arts and Politics, 13 June 2020.

Walraven, Boudewijn. 2002. "Bardot Soup and Confucians' Meat: Food and Korean

Identity in Global Context." In *Asian Food: The Global and the Local*, edited by Katarzyna Cwiertka and Boudewijn Walraven, 95–115. Richmond: Curzon.

Wijunamai, Roderick. 2020. 'With Dog-meat Ban, India Is Still Trying to "Civilise" the Nagas'? Scroll.In, 8 July 2020, sec. North East Politics. https://scroll.in/article/966757/with-dog-meat-ban-india-is-still-trying-to-civilise-the-nagas.

Wijunamai, Roderick, and Menokhono. 2020. "Reading the Dog-meat Ban in Nagaland." RAIOT (blog). July 14, 2020. https://raiot.in/reading-the-dog-meat-ban-in-nagaland/.

Wilkinson, Matthew. 2017. "Masculinity in the Margins: Men and Identity in 21st Century Nagaland." *The South Asianist* 5 (May): 140–61.

Wouters, Jelle. J. P. (2018). *In the shadows of Naga insurgency: Tribes, state, and violence in Northeast India*. Oxford University Press.

———. 2020. "Invasion of Naga Kitchens". The Statesman, 13 July 2020, sec. North-east.

Wright, Susan. 1998. "The Politicization of 'Culture'". *Anthropology Today* 14 (1): 7–15. https://doi.org/10.2307/2783092.

Xaxa, Virginius. (1999). Tribes as Indigenous People of India. *Economic and Political Weekly* 34 (51): 7–8.

Yü, Dan Smyer, and Erik de Maaker, eds. 2021. *Environmental Humanities in the New Himalayas: Symbiotic Indigeneity, Commoning, Sustainability*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003144113.

Zhang, Jenny G. 2020. Pinning Coronavirus on How Chinese People Eat Plays Into Racist Assumptions. Eater. https://www.eater.com/2020/1/31/21117076/coronavirus-incites-racism-against-chinese-people-and-their-diets-wuhan-market.