

# Memory Of A Lost Past, Memory Of Rape : Nostalgia, Trauma And The Construction Of Collective Social Memory Among The Zo Hnahthlak

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## Résumé

### **Mémoire d'un passé révolu, mémoire du viol : nostalgie, traumatisme et construction de la mémoire collective des Zo Hnahthlak**

La mémoire collective sociale est la force motrice de toutes les méta récits de l'identité nationale, elle est à l'origine du mouvement, que ceux ci soient composés de bons moments ou de mauvais moments. En fait, les souvenirs sont des objets qui se ruent de façon inattendue hors de l'esprit, reliant le présent avec le passé. Le lien entre les personnes, le patrimoine, le territoire et l'État est constitué par l'utilisation de métaphores botaniques. Le Zo / Mizo ou Zomi utilisent l'image d'un arbre pour lier leurs racines avec le territoire revendiqué, ils prétendent que leurs chansons et leurs folklores parlent d'un grand arbre, le Khampat Bungpui (ou Banyan), planté par leurs ancêtres avant leur migration à partir du village Zopui, à l'ouest de la vallée de Tiau au Myanmar. La mémoire du village Zopui, symbole de la grandeur de l'histoire des Zo est le fil conducteur de la mémoire sociale de la communauté Zo Hnahthlak.

Les horreurs de l'insurrection et de la contre-insurrection, les viols massifs de femmes et d'abus de mineurs restent intégrés dans la mémoire sociale de la population Zo / Mizo. Cette contribution étudie la question épineuse de l'enracinement de la mémoire et du traumatisme dans l'identité des Zo Hnahthlak.

## Abstract

Collective Social Memory is indeed the moving force of all narrations of identity, national or otherwise, displacement or movement, good times as well as bad times. In fact memories are objects that tumble out unexpectedly from the mind, linking the present with the past. The link between people, heritage, territory, and state is brought about strongly by the use of botanical metaphors. The Zo/Mizo or Zomi also use the metaphor of a tree to link up their rooted-ness with the claimed territory; the Zo/Mizo claim that their folksongs and folklores speaks of a grand tree- 'Khampat Bungpui' (Banyan tree) planted by their fore-fathers before they migrated from 'Zopui' village, west of Tiau valley in Myanmar. The memory of the ever blessed village 'Zopui' symbolic of the grandeur of Zo history serves the purpose of providing a unifying thread for the collection social memory of the Zo hnahthlak.

The horrors of the Insurgency and the Counter-Insurgency; the mass rapes of women and abuse of minors remain embedded in the social memory of the Zo/Mizo people.

*The paper attempts to accentuate the embeddedness of 'Memory and Trauma' on the vexing issues of identity among the Zo hnahthlak.*

Collective Social Memory<sup>1</sup> is indeed the moving force of all narrations of identity, national or otherwise, displacement or movement, good times as well as bad times. In fact memories are objects that tumble out unexpectedly from the mind, linking the present with the past.<sup>2</sup> In short memories or collective memories can represent ways that we believe our present society is or ways that our present society should be- a depiction of the present or the future. Finally, collective memory can be interpreted on the individual or the collective level: as social psychology or as collective representation.<sup>3</sup>

The mythical belief of the Zo *hnahthlak* (Zo/Mizo people) is that originally they came out from "Chhinlung" which means 'covering rock', which may perhaps be a place now called Silung in China, bordering the Shan State in the East. Several attempts have been made to rationalise the myth "Chhinlung. For instance, some argue that Chhinlung refers to the Great Wall of China; others argue that it is neither a wall nor a cave but the name of a Chinese Prince Chin Lung the son of Huang Ti of the Chin Dynasty, who built the Great Wall. The Prince incurred the displeasure of his father and left his kingdom and settled in Burma"<sup>4</sup> Whatever the case may have been, it strongly hints at forced migration across the region from Khampat. They are said to have planted a *Bung* (Banyan) tree at *Khampat* before the left as a sign that settlement was made by them.<sup>5</sup>

The Zo, in course of their migration moved further west into the Chindwin River and the Kabaw Valley and branched southwest and spread over in the present Rakhine (Arakan) State in Myanmar and Chittagong Hills Tract in Bangladesh. The major bulk of them continued to move westward, climbed the rugged Chin Hills and settled in its mountain fastnesses undisturbed from outside forces for a period long enough to establish their own pattern of settlement and administration, socio-cultural norms and practices, beliefs and rituals, myths and legends, folk tales, music and dance and many other customs and traditions which they handed down from generation to generation and to the present time. The further branching-off of the Zo people made them more and more isolated from each other and encouraged narrow clannish loyalty. Consequently, inter-tribal rivalries and wars marked the condition when the British came to the picture.

The inability of Zo people to accept a common nomenclature to represent their collective identity has result in them being identified as 'Chin' in Myanmar; 'Lusei' or 'Mizo' in Mizoram; and 'Kuki' in Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Tripura and Chittagong Hills Tract. The Linguistic Survey of India published in 1904 identified more than 40 Zo dialects of which the *Duhlian-Lushai* dialect, now known as 'Mizo twang', is the most developed and understood and is gradually evolving to become the lingua franca of the Zo people. Many tribes within the Zo group have also identified themselves as separate tribes and are recognized as such under the Indian Constitution. For

instance, in Manipur, though a good many of the Zo tribes have been listed as Scheduled tribes under the 1956 Tribe Reorganisation. A large section of Zo tribes such as the Anal, Lamkang, Maring, Monsang and Moyon who ethnologically and historically speaking belong to the Zo group, have politically inclined themselves with the Naga group and adopted the 'Naga Identity'.

The partition of the 'Zo territory' as a consequence of the colonial encounter led to the nostalgia about a lost territory. The memory of the lost territory was best represented by the romanticization and mythification of the great village Zopuii and the Zo territory Zoram. The memory of Zoram/Zopui became embedded in the collective imaginations and systematically entered into the debates and discourses of nation-building, identity, statecraft, insider-outsider, inclusion-exclusion, migration/trans-border movement and the whole process of 'Othering'. The issue of a territory, a boundary thus remained highly contested: 'A boundary does not only exist in the border area, but manifests itself in many institutions such as education, the media, memorials, ceremonies and spectacles.

The link between people, heritage, territory, and state in collective social memory is brought about strongly by the use of botanical metaphors. The Zo/Mizo or Zomi also use the metaphor of a Banyan tree to link up their rooted-ness with the claimed territory; the Zo/Mizo claim that their folksongs and folklores speaks of a grand tree- 'Khampat Bungpui' (Banyan tree) planted by their fore-fathers before they migrated from 'Zopui' village, west of Tiau valley in Myanmar. The memory of the ever blessed village 'Zopui' symbolic of the grandeur of Zo history serves the purpose of providing a unifying thread for the collection social memory of the Zo *hnahtlak*.

The horrors of the Insurgency and the Counter-Insurgency; the mass rapes of women and abuse of minors remain embedded in the social memory of the Zo/Mizo people. The paper attempts to accentuate the embeddedness of 'Memory and Trauma' on the vexing issues of identity among the Zo *hnahtlak*.

### **'Memory Of The Lost Territory, Lost Space': The Rootedness And Connectedness Of A People**

'Places have multiple meanings for their inhabitants. They are constructed spatiality... (and) need to be understood apart from their creation as the locales of ethnography... (More crucial is to) raise questions about how the anthropological study of place relates to experiences of living in places.'<sup>4</sup> Malkki (1990; 1992) shows how an identity between people and territory is created and naturalised through the visual device of the map, which represents the world of nations "as a discrete spatial partitioning of territory" with no "bleeding boundaries": Each nation is sovereign and limited in its membership. The enclosure, measurement, and commodification of space have been key for the production of the modern notion of a national territory bounded by frontiers that sharply distinguish *inside* from *outside* : Baptised with a proper name, space becomes national property, a sovereign

patrimony fusing place, property, and heritage, whose perpetuation is secured by the state.

This identity between people, heritage, territory, and state is also brought about by the use of botanical metaphors that 'suggest that each nation is a grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it'. The Zo/Mizo or *Zomi* also use the metaphor of a tree to link up their rooted-ness with the claimed territory; the Zo/Mizo claim that their folksongs and folklores speaks of a grand tree planted by their fore-fathers before they migrated from 'Zopui', west of Tiau valley. For instance, the *Kuki-Chin-Zo-Mizo Folklore* suggests that their 'family tree' is at 'Khampat Bungpui'<sup>7</sup> and that when the ariel roots of the great 'Bung' (Banyan tree) will touch the ground the children of Zo will return to the mother village 'Zopui' and the dispersed Zo clans will be re-united. The memory of the ever blessed village 'Zopui' symbolic of the grandeur of Zo history serves a purpose: a purpose of providing a unifying thread for the great collection of ethnic tribes living in and around present day Mizoram, Chittagong Hills Tracts, the Chin Hills in Burma to the areas around Tripura, Cachar (Assam) and Manipur. The memory of the lost village, lost territory directs the urgency to re-claim the lost land and re-establish the lost Zo heritage and 'Honour' of the once brave and powerful, *head-hunting, Pasaltha* that rode through the hills and valleys of the region of Zoram. The metaphor of a grand genealogical tree limits the membership of the shared memory to the Zo people alone and by the same logic serves the purpose of de-limiting the membership or proximity of the other tribal groups in the region. 'Myth-making'/'Myth-building' forms an important part of the ethnic-national identity building process as evident from the several theories of the origin and history of Zo/Mizo tribes.

The above metaphors like a map also configure the nation as limited in its membership, sovereign, and continuous in time. Maps are critical for conceptualising the state as 'a compulsory organisation with a territorial basis', as 'the stable centre...of [national] societies and spaces'. The partition of the 'Zo territory' and the memory and mythification of *Zoram/Zopui* became embedded in the collective imagination systematically entering into the debates and discourses of nation-building, identity, statecraft, insider-outsider, inclusion-exclusion, migration/trans-border movement and the whole process of 'Othering'. The issue of a territory, a boundary thus remained highly contested: 'A boundary does not only exist in the border area, but manifests itself in many institutions such as education, the media, memorials, ceremonies and spectacles.

These are effective expressions of narratives linked with boundaries and border conflicts and serve as reference to the other'<sup>8</sup>The spatial matrix materialised in the operation of the state system shapes the imagining of personhood as well as place. The bounding of the nation as a collective subject, as a super-organism with a unique biological-cultural essence, replicates the enclosure of national territory. Tropes of territorialised space are articulated with tropes of substance in the imagining of collective and individual national bodies. The Botanical metaphor that is the 'family tree' becomes symbolic of the cohesiveness of the group; it's imagined commonness and lived in memory. Here it is strongly emphasised that the

past not simply to posit a common origin but also to claim substantial identity in the present.' The connectedness of the Zo *hnahtlak* harps on reproduction as well as reformulation of a memory in a distant past with much emphasis on the rootedness of the community to a territory and memory of a 'lost past'.

### **Hybridization of the Memory: 'Zopui -Chhinlung' to 'Chhinlung-Israel'**

What really makes the Zo/Mizo construction of a 'Memory of the Lost Territory, Lost Space' even more interesting is the convenient hybridization of the 'Memory of Zopui and Chhinlung' with that of the 'Lost Tribe of Israel'. A small group of people living between Myanmar and Bangladesh have been practicing Judaism for more than 25 years. They call themselves *Bene Menashe*, descendants of the Tribe of Menashe, one of the ten lost tribes.<sup>9</sup> Also known as the '*Chhinlung-Israel*', the Bene Menashe relates their history of exile from the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C. across the silk route finally ending up in India and Myanmar.<sup>10</sup> The oral traditions of the Zo/Mizo tribes in special the Hmar oral sources appear to indicate their Jewish origin and on the basis of these sources, some writers even go to the extent of saying that Hmar and their brethrens, Kuki and Mizo could perhaps be one of the ten lost tribes of ancient Israel.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly the beliefs disseminated by European travellers, Jews and Christians, have been internalised by some of the ethnic communities in the region to such an extent that the 'myth' became an integral part of their ethos and identity.

In 1951, during a Revivalist Movement in an obscure village 'Buallawn', a local headman fell into a trance, and had a vision that persuaded him that the Zo/Mizo were Jews and descendants of one of the lost tribes of Israel.<sup>12</sup> A group of believers then set off on foot for the *Promised Land*, thinking it might be just over the horizon. Some went north, to see a train for the first time and got as far as Assam the neighbouring Indian state. Others went northeast and reached Nagaland. No one made it to Israel, but the story of the vision and the abortive journey to 'Zion' continues to inspire believers. The belief in the vision eventually led to the formation of a Mizo Israel Zionist Organisation (MIZO) in 1974 which sought the Israeli Premier to recognise their 'new-found identity'. Eversince, there has been a substantial following of the new found identity. The 1991 Census records 792 Jews in Mizoram and 373 in Manipur, and lists another 497 persons under "Enoka Israel" living in the area aptly named 'Salem Veng'. What is interesting about this is the "socio-political manifestation of the Zo/Mizo search for identity which reinforces their regional feeling to a great extent".<sup>13</sup>

The Zo Re-unification Organization (ZORO) demanded recognition of the Zo/Mizo scattered in various states of India and neighbouring countries as one 'ethnic race' and unite all Zo/Mizo under one umbrella. The demand was supported by the 'Mizo National Front' and the 'People's Conference Party' at different times.<sup>14</sup> This Zo-Reunification movement was paralleled by a movement to unite the Zo/Mizo with the state of Israel. Controversy exists, however, as to when exactly the Zo/Mizo first claimed ancestry from a lost tribe of Israel. What is known is that in the 50s, a villager in Northern Mizoram named Kawla visioned that 'an angel revealed to him that the Zo/Mizo were

descendants of the lost tribes of Israel and should return to the land of their forefathers.' Kawla developed a following and gradually the belief evolved among some of his followers that the Mizo should not only return to their ancestral land, but also practice their ancestral faith of Judaism.

The Zo/Mizo attracted special attention of a Jewish Rabbi, Eliyahu Avichail of Jerusalem, who had set up an organisation in 1975 called Amishav, to seek the return of the descendants of the lost tribes to Israel. Upon hearing the claim of the Zo/Mizo, the Rabbi began to teach them the rudiments of the Jewish faith, and prepare them for their return to Israel. Gradually a movement towards embracing Jewish practices grew and by 2003, thousands of Zo/Mizo had embraced the Jewish faith and/or had moved to Israel.<sup>15</sup>

The Chhinlung Israel People's Convention (CIPC)<sup>16</sup> founded by Lalchanhima Sailo<sup>17</sup> in 1994 uniquely combined two claims: one that the Zo/Mizo were the 'Lost Tribes of Israel' and the second, a call for independence. In 1994, the Centenary year of the first Christian Missionary visit to Mizoram, Lalchanhima Sailo met an old Mizo Sabbath observer Sanzoa, who strongly believed in the 'Israel Theory' and had always, preached that the children of Israel should be unified. Under his inspiration, Sailo decided to publish an advertisement in the newspaper calling all Zo/Mizo who believed they were the children of Israel to gather together.

Initially the CIPC called for establishing a 'State Human Rights Commission' in Mizoram and distributed magnetic cassettes purporting the claim of the Zo/Mizo as the 'Lost Tribe of Israel'. It campaigned against the Indian government on several economic issues and demanded waiver on loans made to the state of Mizoram. It protested against the inundation of Zo/Mizo territory by dams built across the border in Bangladesh and asked the Indian government to demand compensation. It helped refugees from Myanmar settle in Mizoram and in the rest of India and Zo/Mizo who wanted to move to Israel. The CIPC in 1994 submitted a thirty-page memorandum to the United Nations, India, Israel and a number of other countries. The memorandum demanded recognition of the Zo/Mizo as a lost tribe of Israel, on the basis of oral history, and political independence and unification of all Mizo areas in India and neighbouring countries. It also claimed that the Mizo were never part of British India or Burma as they had lived in a legally defined, 'excluded area' divided arbitrarily by the British and that as a separate administrative area it had a right to independence when the British de-colonised the South Asia region. The popularity of the CIPC surged after 1998, when the CIPC organised its 'identity referendum' in which thousands of Zo/Mizo from the adjoining areas voted in favour of the CIPCs 'Lost Tribe' identity and the call for independence and unification of the Zo *hnahthlak*.

As the CIPC grew, a nexus developed between its belief in descent from a lost tribe of Israel and Jewish movements.<sup>18</sup> Lalchanhima Sailo maintained a warm relationship with Rabbi Avichail and the Israeli embassy which eased the process of immigration for the Mizo to Israel.<sup>19</sup> Individuals like Lalchanhima and researchers like Zaihanchungi<sup>20</sup> continue to defend the lost tribes' theory, so much so that the 'Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity'

movement has mass appeal and is steadily contesting though not directly confronting the 'Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity'.

The Presbyterian Church's concern was not only that Zo/Mizo were adopting an Israelite and Jewish identity in large numbers. There was the fear that the Israelite identity movement would upset the status quo of peace and prosperity in Mizoram in the changed times. For instance, life in the post-Peace Accord Mizoram under India was good with large flow of finances into the state from the Central Government making Mizoram one of the wealthiest states in India. The multifold development in and around the capital Aizawl, and its elevation from a small town to a 'City' connected by air within a short span of the Peace Accord, impressed upon the Zo/Mizo people the positives of living with India.

The following stanzas from James Dokhuma's poem 'Aw Delhi' (translated in English by Rev. Zairema)<sup>21</sup> reflect the changed attitude towards New Delhi (Symbolic of India) :

**Aw ! Delhi (Oh ! Delhi)**  
*While nations poised for spoils,  
 Plan destruction for imagined wrongs;  
 Count their armies and cannons,  
 'Might is right' said they.  
 But you. O! Delhi, city of peace;  
 Sits serene indisposed to aggression;  
 Messenger of peace to all nations,  
 With your watch-word- 'peace on Earth'.*

...  
*Mizo, Naga, Garo and Khasi from the east,  
 Down to wave-tossed boulders of Kumari on the south  
 From the Gate of India on the West,  
 To the snowy mountains on the north.  
 With one Accord we march together,  
 We drink your nectar, oh how sweet!  
 Should your enemies attack you,  
 We shall sing a victory song under your flag.*

The growth in education and rise in literacy (second highest in India); the reservation policies in Medical Colleges, Engineering, the accelerated pace of development all brought about a mellowing down of attitudes at both ends. The Zo/Mizo constantly began to contrast the grim memories of the insurgency times and the continuing turmoil in the neighbouring North-Eastern states of Manipur and Nagaland with that of the changed wave of peace and development in Mizoram. The Church feared that call for an independent Mizoram by the supporters of the 'Lost Tribes' could develop into an insurgency like situation. The Church felt that Mizoram as an independent country would be weak and defenceless. Likewise, an independent Mizoram would weaken the Indian Union as a whole and it would set an example for other Indian states to follow.<sup>22</sup> The Church in Mizoram and the Indian State put a check on the Jewish missionaries in the

North-East India as it could affect Indo-Arab and Indo-Palestine relations. Individual efforts have also been directed to counter the *Chhinlung-Israel movement*. One such critical voice was that of P.C. Biaksiamia, who argued that 'there was no similarity between Mizo and Israelite custom'.<sup>23</sup> The belief about being a tribe of Israel arose out of a religious revival, out of a dream in a remote village in Mizoram. The Bible constantly spoke about the Israelites and the Mizo held them in high esteem. From this developed a tendency among certain Zo/Mizo to identify with the Israelites.

Lalchanhima Sailo countered Biaksiamia's criticism in a televised programme by arguing that 'the Mizos do have customs that resemble those of the Ancient Israelites'.<sup>24</sup> 'Building an independent Mizoram was possible by non-violence. The mistake of the Mizo National Front was that they had not used international law and diplomacy to achieve their aim. Lalchanhima argued that he was following 'the provisions of the Indian constitution, the United Nations and Gandhi. Resolution 242 could apply to the Mizos as a lost tribe of Israel and an independent Mizoram would not be landlocked. It would include the port of Chittagong in Bangladesh as well as the Arakan region of Myanmar.'

Over the years, the '*Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity*' has invited protracted arguments and counter-theorisations on lines of the '*Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity*'. The controversy over the 'lost tribes of Israel' is clearly visible from the newspaper and book stalls which continue to sell Biaksiamia's book '*Mizo leh Israel*' alongside the pro-Jewish newsletter, '*Israel Tlangau*' with pictures of Amishav's new President Michael Freund, a supporter of the lost tribe theory of the Mizos. The Zo/Mizo in the streets are divided over whether to adopt a '*Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity*' or a '*Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity*'.

Both contested theories of the '*Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity*' and the '*Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity*' remain open to contestations and newer interpretations. The tussle between an overtly Christian Identity and a Jewish Identity continues to resonate in public debates. The Biaksiamias and Lalchanhimas in Mizoram are yet to solve the riddle of Identity and the 'double helix' of the DNA continues to be a contested strand. Interestingly, both contested theories build up their narratives in and around the '*Memory of Zopui-Chhinlung*' (Traditional Myth-Memory of the Zo people). The 'Zomi movement' belongs to the genera of the '*Zo-Christian-Chhinlung Identity*' while the '*Zo-Israel-Chhinlung Identity*' stretches and links the '*Chhinlung Theory*' to that of the '*Lost Tribes of Israel*'; and provides a solution in the form of either creating an independent 'Israel State in and around Mizoram' or migrate back to the 'promised homeland'. Questions of racial roots aside, the Bene Menashe serves as an example and metaphor of subterranean crisis of identity.<sup>25</sup> The confusion over identity is plainly visible in the narrow and precipitous streets of Aizawl the capital city with streets and localities having names plucked randomly plucked from the entire Judeo-Christian spectrum such as Bethlehem, Salem, Cannan, Zion Street, Israel Point etc. and shops, schools, homes and institutions carrying names such as Israel Stores, Zion Tailors, Solomon's Cave, Exodus Press, Bethesda, Beer-seba, Nazareth School, Mount Carmel School etc. all exhibiting the contest between the New and the Old Testaments.



## **Embeddedness Of 'Memory And Trauma' On The Vexing Issues Of Identity Among The Zo Hnahthlak**

'The Memories of Insurgency, Violation and Rape' constitute the markers around which the community has been mobilised time and again. The horrors of the Insurgency and the Counter-Insurgency ; the violation of basic Human Rights ; and the mass rapes of women and minors remain embedded in the social memory of the Zo/Mizo people. The embeddedness of the memory is signified by the fact that the casual reference to the issue of rapes by the Army, CRPF was sufficient for our respondents to get charged: speak in a higher pitch, change in facial expressions, body language and occasionally with wet eyes.

Another instance, which supports the above argument of the embeddedness of memory of rape and violation is that as late as 2010 there was a strong public outcry demanding apology from the Government of India for all the atrocities committed during the troubled times by the CRPF, Indian Army and Civilian Police and also for the bombing of Aizawl on 4 and 5 of March 1966 by the Indian Armed Force in course of its counter-insurgency strategy.<sup>26</sup>

From the narratives of the past it becomes possible to understand how people or persons perceive their own victimisation and to what extent it comes as into conflict with the identity 'imposed' on them or the identity that they accept for themselves. 'It has been argued that, "a traumatised memory has a narrative structure which works on a principle opposite to that of any historical narrative".<sup>27</sup> A narrative is always related to a sense of the self and is told from someone else's own perspective and in this sense narratives concentrate on particular events in a particular space and time. In other words, "memory begins where history ends".<sup>28</sup> Even while receding into a past of over 40 years, the Insurgency and its memory remains a lived in reality, so much so that it becomes a metaphor for violence, fear, domination, difference, separation and the unsatisfactory resolution of the problems of the Zo people.<sup>29</sup>

'Buai kum a khan Mizo kanlo la mol amaeroh chu kan nun khan a rong lo' (during the insurgency times, we (Zo/Mizo) were really backward but we had our sense of humanity intact); 'Indian Army kha a rong zok' (the Indian Army had lost its sense of humanity) says Zaliana. They did not differentiate between MNF and the innocent civilians. Zaliana like many people who witnessed the troubled times blame the Assam politicians for Mizoram's misery. Zaliana concludes with anger :

*« Assam's politicians are to be blamed for they tried to impose Ahom identity and they felt the Indian Army's action to be a befitting response to the anti-Ahom response that they got from the Mizo Hills. Assam should be blamed because they sealed-off Mizoram and sent the armed forces to take maximum action. Neither entry nor exit from the territory was permitted during the turmoil. The Army was left at its free will to handle the situation. »<sup>30</sup>*

The interviews conducted by me further reaffirmed that the issue of rape remains largely difficult to document due to the social stigmas attached to it. It is difficult to identify the victims and their families because society does not want to name them so that their 'honour' can be safeguarded and in course of time those who were victimised would be 'healed' even though the memory remains (largely in public). Rape incidents during the insurgency were hardly ever reported to officials mainly because of fear and 'honour'. Zaliana observes:

« Rape is in the 'public Memory', it still hurts and that a living scar ('*sernung*') remains in the memory of those who still have the memory; the profound emotional pain and stigma attached to it, fear for the safety of family left behind and lack of ordinary support systems leave people without recourse. »<sup>31</sup>

The above observations well explains the hesitation or reluctance on the part of the respondents to open up. Most of my male respondents spoke in detail about the incidents and the shame, and pain of being a witness to the Army's high-handedness. An example of the type of physical violence that the men were subjected to besides beatings was the regular free service given to the Army in the form of supplying water/firewood every morning. Failure to do the task called for coercive action against the person and his family. The civilians were subjected to gross inhuman deeds. Anybody could be arrested on mere suspicion and someone who did get arrested found it really hard to come out alive without physical deformity.<sup>32</sup>

Another painful experience was the curfew which almost became a norm in Mizoram and Mizo life style. Zaliana narrates a personal account of the inconveniences experienced by him at the tender age of 11 in 1968 :

« *during one such curfew... A lady in my neighbourhood accidentally trapped her ankle in an animal trap that was set for hunting and she bled profusely... once inside her village people could not meet her nor provide her with necessary aid as because no one was allowed to light fire or gather in a group past the curfew siren...her family watched her...as she died at around 1 am early morning... people could not attend her funeral because of the fear of the Army. »*<sup>33</sup>

Another incident that he narrates was 'when the Army barged into his house in Champhai and hit his old father with the butt of a rifle because he was standing and helping with the family pray before meal while the Army was at a close distance. The period from 1966-75 was the most trying time for the Mizo/Zo people as a race', says Zaliana<sup>34</sup>

Rape is certainly a weapon of sexism, but is also a weapon of racism, and other forms of oppression and dominance as well. Effective institutionally, rape is used to target certain populations and to maintain the power

imbalance that exists. For example, the organised mass rapes of women in Mizoram led to the construction of the myth of the 'Vai Rapist'/'Sikh Rapist': which has been used in periods of Zo/Mizo history to target 'Vai'<sup>35</sup> men for sexual misconduct such as 'hnute deh' (fondling of breast). The issue of rape in any given society is a sensitive and touchy one. Silence or total outburst remains the obvious binary response to the question of rape. The image that the common man has of the 'Army', is that of a robust, Indian (mostly Sikhs) who raped 'their' women in full public display. For instance, Zaliana shares his memory of the rapes and public memory in Mizoram:

*« The Army deployed in a particular area in Champhai hounded all women in common places like the church (Biak in) and segregated the men with hands tied behind in schools and other buildings sufficient to hold them in large numbers. Men were mercilessly beaten and warned to confess their links with the MNF. While they raped the women in turns in full public-view sometimes in front of children; in a holy place like the Church. It was inhuman and painful for the people who watched it. The Army did not look like humans they had fallen to the state of animals. »<sup>36</sup>*

Zaliana gives detailed description of the mass rapes conducted by the Indian forces (Army, CRPF) in his village in Champhai :

*« The Indian sepoy rounded all villagers in the church (Biak in) and asked them to owe up their links with the insurgent group the MNF (Mizo National Front). When they failed to get the kind of response that they expected, they segregated the men, the old and the children and tied them up in one corner. Then they lined up the women in single rows and stripped them. This was followed by severe beatings of the men and the old. The failure to procure responses eventually led to the gang rape of the women. The Indian sepoy raped the women for hours in turns in the presence of all villagers. Some of the women were held back by the sepoy and let free after weeks of service to the sepoy. »<sup>37</sup>*

The rapes and abuse committed by the CRPF and the Indian Army remain to this day a prickly memory in the way of mellowing the everyday lived relations between the Zo/Mizo and the 'Vai'. The attitudes towards the outsiders are projected through the lenses of that memory of 'rape' and trauma. The question of the 'Vai' in the Zo/Mizo society has been highly contested and continues to channel the identity consciousness of the people in the region. The 'Vai' remains a category against which the Zo consciousness is bulwarked.

## Conclusions

The memory of 'Rape' and 'Violation' just as that of a 'Lost territory' remains embedded in the collective social memory of the Zo people. The testimonies of people who witnessed the entire process of insurgency and counter-insurgency<sup>38</sup>, show that women were subjected to victimisation for the simple reason that women were seen as 'repositories' of their communities or as 'territories to be occupied'.<sup>39</sup> The memory of 'Rape' and 'Counter-Insurgency' is given an interpretation and conveniently used as a trump card directed towards the construction of the '*Ideal Zo Christian state*'. The targeting or the objectification of Zo/Mizo women during the insurgency led to growth in a hegemonic masculinity in the Zo/Mizo society especially in the MNF's definition of masculinity, the need to protect 'our women'<sup>40</sup> and defend 'our honour'. Consequently the vision of the '*Ideal Zo Christian state*' was directed to the quest to find the enemy against the silhouette of the memory of rape and violence.

The 'Vai', the Army/CRPF/Assam Rifles and also the Police began to be projected as objects of condemnation. For instance, the Sikh community began to be equated to 'dogs in heat'; 'endowed with unimaginable manhood which had no control over itself' in other words a sexual enemy from whom 'our women' have to be saved.<sup>41</sup> The following line from one of the interviews conducted by me helps construe the attitudes towards the 'Vai' :

« (*'Sumdawngna kan kom reng mi kha nunna a kan kom thei lo. Vai hi kan ngai thei lo*). 'People with whom we have such deep economic ties- the 'Vai', can never be trusted and made a part of our lives'. 'We cannot get close enough to the Vai', 'they remain as permanent outsiders' »<sup>42</sup>

The 'trauma of loss and violation' in the social collective memory remains and embeds itself prominently on the vexing issues of identity among the Zo *hnahtlak*. While the issue of a 'lost territory' is romanticized and evokes strong sense of nostalgia among the Zo *hnahtlak*, the issue of 'rape' remains largely traumatic in the Zo public memory. Thus memory of a 'Lost Past' and memory of 'Rape' remains embedded in the entire process of the construction of identity and collective social memory(ies) among the Zo *hnahtlak*.

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## Notes :

1. The collective memory approach construes that history enters into social life through the means by which individuals, organizations, and states interpret, recall, and commemorate the past. See Fine, Gary Alan. (2001). *Difficult Reputations: Collective Memories of the Evil, Inept, and Controversial*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; Olick, Jeffrey and Joyce Robbins. (1998). "Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24:105-40. Most accept that the "facts" of history require interpretation, and few would argue that the "facts" of history are determined only by the needs of the present. The obdurate reality of the past and the interpretations of the present create collective memory. See Fine, Gary Alan. (2005). 'Collective Memory' in George Ritzer (Ed.). (2005). *Encyclopedia Of Social Theory*. Vol. I. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. pp. 116-117
2. Basu Raychaudhury, Anasua. (2004). Nostalgia of 'Desh', Memories of Partition. *Economic & Political Weekly*. December 25-31, pp. 5653-5660.
3. Olick (1999) distinguishes between two classes: what he terms "collected memories" and "collective memory." The former refers to the collection of memories of the individual; the latter to images of society itself, separate from what individuals believe. See Olick, Jeffrey. (1999). "Collective Memory: The Two Cultures." *Sociological Theory* 17:333-48. Schuman and Scott (1989) following Karl Mannheim opine that memory is linked to generational imprinting, what individuals have experienced in their early adulthood. Yet this is not the only possible model of memory. Just as Marx spoke of class consciousness as separate from the belief of any worker, so one might see collective memories as separate from the belief of any citizen. Memories belong to collectivities and not to minds. Collective memories, from this point of view, are a fundamentally sociological construction, rather than belonging to social psychology. See Schuman, Howard and Jacqueline Scott. (1989). "Generations and Collective Memory." *American Sociological Review* 54:359-81; Schwartz, Barry. (2000). *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Singh, S.N. (1994). *Mizoram- Historical, Geographical, Social, Economic, Political & Administrative*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications. p.6; Pudaite, Rochunga. (1963). *The Education of the Hmar People*. Sietmat: Indo-Burma Pioneer Mission. pp.21-22; Lalchungnunga. (1994). *Op.cit.* p. 27.
4. Chatterji, N. (1978). *The Lushais 1878-1889*. Aizawl: Tribal Research Institute; B.S. Carey & H. N. Tuck. (1896). (Reprinted 1976). *The Chin Hills- A History of the people, our dealings with them, their customs & manners, & a Gazetteer of their country*. Vol. I&II. Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Ltd on behalf of Tribal Research Institute, Aizawl, Mizoram; Lalhangliana, B. (1975) *History of Mizo in Burma*. Arts and Science University: Mandalay; Thanga, L.B. (1978). *The Mizos: A study in Racial Personality*. Guwahati: United Publishers; Zamawia, R. (2007). *Op.cit.*
5. Rodman, M.C. (1992) 'Empowering place: Multilocality and multivocality'. *American Anthropologist*. 94(3): 640-56 cited in Seemanthini Niranjana (2001). *Gender and Space: Femininity, Sexualization and Female Body*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
6. Zamawia, R. (2007). 'Bung-2, Kan Thlaltute Thlangtlak Dan' in *Zofate Zinkawngah: Zalenna Mei a Mit Tur a Ni Lo*. Aizawl: Lengchhawn Press. pp.12-13.
7. Paasi, A. (1996). *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness: The Changing Geographies of the Finnish-Russian Border*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. p.76.
8. Mukherjee, S.K. (1998). 'Jewish Movement in the Hills of Manipur and Mizoram' in M.N. Karna. (Ed.). (1998). *Social Movements in the North- East India*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company/NEICSSR, Shillong. pp.189-198.
9. See, Zamawia, R. (2007). *Op.cit.* Then Khatna, Bung-1, Mizo (Zo) Hnam Tobul Leh Thlahtute. pp.1-7.
10. Zaithanchhungi. (1990). *Israel- Mizo Identity*. Aizawl: J.R Bros offset Printer; Lalchungnunga. (1994). *Mizoram: Politics of Regionalism and national Integration*. New Delhi, India: Reliance Publishing House; S.K. Mukherjee in M.N. Karna. (Ed.). (1998). *Op.cit.*
11. Mukherjee, S.K. (1998). *Ibid.*
12. Lalchungnunga. (1994). *Op.cit.*
13. See, Sonawalkar, Prasun. (1990). 'Uncertainty grips Mizoram Govt.'. *The Times of India News Service*. Guwahati: 07 June. *The Times of India*. New Delhi: 08 June; *The Times of India*. (1990). 'JD decision shocks Mizoram'. *The Times of India News Service*. Aizawl: 16 June. New Delhi: 17 June.
14. Despite the lack of scientific evidences Israel is keen to bring Bene Menashe back to Israel. One of the evident reasons being that Israel is facing crisis of human resources and declining birth rate has raised its difficulties. The current birth rate in Israel is far below that of Palestine which has the highest birth rate in the world. It means Israelis fear to be dominated by growing Palestinian population in the coming decades. The Zo/Mizo are also suffering from an identity crisis in India. The protracted insurgency and the disgruntled-ness over the post-Peace situation made it a breeding ground for spiritual adventurers offering salvation, identity and the prospect of emigration and riches abroad. Given all these facts, it cannot be refuted that Israel is expanding its occupation, and involving other nations also in this game. New Delhi's 'don't disturb them' policy unfortunately fails to see the hidden agenda of the Zionists.
15. The Chhinlung-Israel Peoples Convention is campaigning across the state to change the name of the Mizo tribe to Chhinlung-Israel. It also talks of a greater Chhinlung-Israel state that would include the Mizos of neighbouring Burma and Bangladesh.
16. Lalchannahima Sailo a Shillong born, descendant of a Mizo chief, former employee of the Food Services Corporation of India, and holder of law and history degrees from JNU in Delhi and Osmania University in Hyderabad joined the Mizo People's Conference Party in 1990 (Brigadier T. Sailo's Party). In 1992, while attending an International Seminar on 'Studies on the Minority Nationalities of North-East India: the Mizos' (7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> April) at Aizawl, he argued against efforts by Indian intellectuals to

- assimilate Mizo identity with that of the Assamese. In 1993, he was initially projected as a candidate for the state legislature but the People's Conference withdrew its support, disgruntled, he was forced to run as an independent.
17. This became evident when Lalchanhima Sailo decided to adopt the faith of the Bet-Israel sect (a Jewish sect was founded by Jonathan Kahn an American Jew, who believed in the restoration of Israel and Jesus Christ). In 2000, an Indian Christian preacher, P.P. Job spoke in Mizoram on an invitation by Jonathan Kahn. Kahn blew the 'shofar' (the traditional Jewish ceremonial ram horn) in the Assam Riffle field of Aizawl. He said that, 'the stick of Ephraim and Judah should stick together', suggesting a connection between the Jews and Mizos. Sailo, who was till then a nominal member of the Presbyterian Church felt that Jonathan Kahn's talk on the restoration of Israel could be understood to mean the restoration of a lost tribe of Israel, the Zo/Mizo, in an independent Israelite state in South East Asia. The connection between Lalchanhima Sailo and the CIPC with Jewish movements was not limited to Jewish-Christians.
  18. Although Lalchanhima Sailo himself did not convert to Judaism, he did not deny that there was a possibility of him doing so in the future, saying, 'Let time tell who I am'. He admitted that his movement was a stepping stone for Zos/Mizos to convert to Judaism 'as our movement grew more and more people became Jewish or started to follow Judaism.
  19. Zaithanchhungi was a relative of one of the members of the original group that went to seek or reach Zion following the vision of the headman in 1951. Formerly a successful insurance agent and the wife of a state legislator, and a former teacher she went to Israel in 1983. There she met Eliyahu Avichayil, an Orthodox rabbi whose Amishav organization searches the world for descendants of the lost tribes. He showed immediate interest in her story, saying Jews had been scattered as far as China. He urged her to return to India to catalogue Mizo history. She came up with a list of apparent similarities, including the building of altars, the sacrifice of animals, burial customs, marriage and divorce procedures, a belief in an all-powerful deity and the symbolic presence of the number seven in many festivities. Zaithanchhungi saw other links in musical instruments and household practices. 'I was a non-believer, but after my research I now believe very firmly that the Mizo are of Jewish descent'. Yet she herself remains a Presbyterian.
  20. Khiangte, Lalluangliana (Ed.).(2002). *Mizo Songs and Folktales (Indian Literature in Tribal Languages)*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi. pp.62-65.
  21. These concerns of the Church in Mizoram further stand as proof that the Church is not against India and is not the cause of insurgencies and secessionist movements in the Northeast as commonly perceived by many Indians.
  22. In June of 2003, Biaksiana presented his report on the CIPC before the church elders in the Presbyterian Pastorate of Champhai. He claimed that the CIPC assertions, both about being a lost tribe of Israel and independence were full of lies. The elders who had become members of the CIPC were taken aback. Attacked harshly by Mr. Biaksiana, they said that they only sympathized with the CIPC call the independence and unification. P.C. Biaksiana continued his movement against an Israelite identity for the Mizos and the CIPC. He conducted a seminar at his home church in Cannon Veng area of Aizawl and in November of 2003, he published a book called, 'CIPC leh Mizo Israel' dissecting the positions of the CIPC and condemning them for their wrong teachings.
  23. Lalchanhima Sailo countered Biaksiana's arguments by pointing that 'the high priests did not sacrifice with pig and the lower priests who sacrificed with pig would not eat the meat. A kind of Sabbath was observed. They had a kind of circumcision as well. They buried their dead by first bathing and clothing the body before burial. 'They had always referred to Menashe who is Menashe, the son of Joseph, their great ancestor.
  24. Mona Zote. (2006). 'Heaven in Hell: A Paradox'. (Section IV: The Conflict of Identities) in Geeti Sen (Ed.). (2006). *Where the Sun Rises When Shadows Fall: The North-East*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press/ India International Centre.
  25. *Shillong Times*. (2010). 'Mizo Student body to seek apology'. Aizawl/ Shillong: 05 March; Gupta, Jayanta. (2010). '66 blitz a lesson on use of IAF'. *Times of India*. Kolkata: 09 April; Today News Service. (2010). 'The Most Tragic Day: Aizawl Bomb NI'. Zoram Today. Aizawl: 8 March; Hluna, J.V. (2010). 'Zoram NI'. *Zoram Today*. Aizawl: 08 March; Vanlalvena, K. (2010). 'India Sarkar-in Aizawl bomb chiang'. Zoram Today. Aizawl: 08 March.
  26. Chakraborty, Dipesh. (1996). Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition. *Economic & Political Weekly*. Vol.31, No.32 August 10, p.2143.
  27. Pradip Kumar Bose. (1997). 'Memory Begins Where History Ends' in Ranabir Sammdar (Ed.). (1997). *Reflections on the Partition of the East*. New Delhi: Vikas Publications.p.85.
  28. Professor F. Lalremsiana (Department of History, Johnson's College). *Personal Interview*. Khatla, Aizawl: 26 January 2008.
  29. Pu Zaliana (Senior Research Officer, 'Tribal Research Institute', Art & Culture Department, Government of Mizoram, McDonald Hill). *Personal Interview*. Zarkawt, Aizawl: 22, 23 & 24 January 2008.
  30. Pu Zaliana. *Personal Interview*. *Ibid*.
  31. *Ibid.*; Also, Pi Vanramchhuangi ('Ruaffelanu'), (Director HRLN Mizoram, Social Activist). *Personal Interview*. Chaltlang, Aizawl:28 & 29 January 2008.
  32. Pu Zaliana. *Personal Interview*. *Ibid*.
  33. *Ibid*.
  34. The concept of outsider is seen as prevailing across the North East, albeit under different names. The term 'Vai' is a Mizo word and refers to the people of India who have Aryan features. The term is derogatory and signals anger, scorn, and racist overtones. B.B Goswami looks at the construction of the Vai from the perspective of 'out-group'-'in-group' psychology. For the Mizos the term Vai as an out-group has three broad meanings. In one sense all non-Mizos including the British people are Vai. In another sense, all the people living in the plains of India are Vai. In the third sense the plains people of Burma are also considered to be Vai but in contrast to the Indian, the notion is more positive and traditional. For detailed reading on the Vai and 'in-group- out-group' problem in Mizoram, See B.B Goswami, "out-group from the point of view of In-group: A Study of Mizos", in Dubey, S.M. (1978). *North East India: A Sociological Study*. pp. 99-110. The category of the 'Vai' is again

- categorised as 'Vai chhia' (bad/inferior 'Vai') and 'Vai thra' (good/superior 'Vai'). The 'Vai' from Silchar/Cachar speaking Sylheti Bengali fall under the first category. The 'Vai' from North India and elsewhere with lighter skin tones fall conveniently under the second category. The 'Vai' thus also has racial overtones attached to it. In Mizoram, the term 'Vai' evokes mixed feelings of contempt, distrust, mockery and envy. The inflow of the 'Vai' in present day Mizoram has a strong colonial linkage. The gradual yet sure, entry of the 'Vai' into the Zo/Mizo economy; provided for a greater degree of interaction between the 'Vai' and Zo/Mizo women. The arena of economics, thus became the realm for the activities of women and 'Others', i.e. for all those who were excluded from the realms of *spirituality and politics*. The Zo/Mizo patriarchy under the impact of Christian traditions began to view economics and the notions of business and that of profit to be both sensuous and materialistic and linked them with the notions of '*original sin and sexuality*' and everything signified by the word '*Khawvel*' (worldly). See Chakraborty, Anup Shekhar. (2008). 'Manufacturing of Spaces: The 'Others' in Zo/Mizo Politics' South Asian Journal of Socio-Political Studies (SAJOSPS). Vol.9 No.1, July-December. ISSN 0972-4613; Chakraborty, Anup Shekhar. (2009a). 'Regulating Citizenship: Politics of 'Check-In' and 'Check-Out'' in Refugee Watch Online (A Co-Publication of Refugee Watch), 18 February.
35. Pu Zaliana. *Personal Interview. Op.cit.*
36. Pu Zaliana. *Personal Interview. Ibid.*
37. Pi Rochhungi. *Personal Interview*. Babutlang, Aizawl: 18 February 2008; *Personal Interviews: Zaliana. Op.cit.* Pi Vanramchhuangi ('Ruafelanu'). *Op.cit.*
38. Butalia, U. (1998). *Op. cit.*; D. Gilmartin. (1998). Partition, Pakistan and South Asian History: In search of a Narrative. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 57(4), November, pp.1068-95.
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40. *Personal Interviews: Zaliana. Op.cit.*; Pi Vanramchhuangi ('Ruafelanu'). *Op.cit.*; Professor Thangchungnunga (Department of Economics, Mizoram University, Main Campus). *Personal Interview*. Tanhril, Aizawl: 24 January 2008; Pu J. Lalhruaisanga (Lecturer, Department of Political Science, MICE). *Personal Interview*. Venghlui, Aizawl: 29 January 2008; Pu Lalchamlana (Sr. Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Pachhunga University College, Aizawl). *Personal Interview*. Tanhril, Aizawl: 8-11 March 2010; Pu Lianmingthanga (Senior Research Officer, 'Tribal Research Institute', Art & Culture Department, Government of Mizoram, McDonald Hill). *Personal Interview*. Zarkawt, Aizawl: 21 and 22 January 2008.
41. Pu Zaliana. *Personal Interview. Ibid.*

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