THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
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**Fit to be a Man: Women's Perspectives and Gender Relations among the Zeme
Nagas of Assam**

Amanda Jane Bowden

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School of Social Science

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No jointly-authored works.

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No contributions by others.

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None.

Published Works by the Author Incorporated into the Thesis

None.

Additional Published Works by the Author Relevant to the Thesis but not Forming Part of it

None.

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Abstract

In many indigenous societies worldwide we are witnessing an increase in gender inequality. Men's domination of women seems to be growing and women's labour is now exploited. Zeme Naga women of Assam are lamenting the loss of support from their husbands and the burden of labour wives must take up as husbands abandon their responsibilities. Husbands are becoming more controlling. This thesis seeks to understand some of the reasons behind the decline in men's reciprocal labour practices and the deterioration in what were once remembered as relatively egalitarian gender relations. By bringing critical, historical and feminist analyses to bear on the ethnographic data I attempt to show the ways in which women's increasing sense of inequality is linked to Zemes' growing marginalisation regionally and globally. I explore Zeme understandings of what makes a man 'fit to be a man' and the ways feminine and masculine identities engage the changes brought by colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Women's interests were once served by the Zeme patriarchal society. I found that women continue to expect reciprocal labour exchange that was based on social structures and practices that are now largely obsolete. Employing the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 2005a) it emerged that men's earlier practices allowed an opportunity for nearly every man to achieve the Zeme ideals of masculinity which involved the demonstration of caring behaviour towards women and other members of the community. Masculinity was largely based on access to resources that men delivered to the community according to what the people were perceived to need. The notion of women and children as men's 'property' entailed responsibility and self-sacrifice on behalf of men and a relatively equitable division of labour around child care. Indeed, the well-being of women and children was a constituent of Zeme normative masculinity.

However, Zeme engagements with what may be termed the agents of 'modernity': economies, religions, agricultural projects, schooling and the creation of Statehood, have contributed to devaluing Zeme livelihoods and cosmologies. This has had significant repercussions for Zeme gender relations, which include relations among men, and is changing the direction of the pursuit of masculine ideals. I argue that these transformations have contributed to sidelining a core component of Zeme hegemonic masculinity, the ability to 'provide what the people need' as well as creating inequalities of opportunities for men to demonstrate 'care' in this way. On the other hand, these processes are also presenting new opportunities for women to contest men's interests, and to make claims over community issues that were one avenues of prestige for men.

Keywords

zeme nagas, indigenous peoples, indigenous women, gendered labour, masculinities, modernity

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Fit to be a Man

Women's Perspectives and Gender Relations among the Zeme Nagas of Assam

Amanda Bowden

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFSPA	Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act
GOI	Government of India
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFI	International Financial Institution
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
N.C. HILLS	North Cachar Hills
NCHCRMS	North Cachar Hills Community Resource Management Society
NE	North East (referring to the northeast region of India)
NER	North East Region
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNC	Naga National Council
NPMHR	Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights
NSCN I-M	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (now Nagalim), Isak-Muivah
NSCN K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (now Nagalim), Khaplang (now Khole-Kitovi)
NSF	Naga Student's Federation
RAP	Restricted Areas Permit
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
ST	Scheduled Tribe
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad
ZLR	Zeliangrong

Chapter One

Introduction

We want the world to know that women and men are created equal. We've organised the Women's Society to make women equal with men. Not to dominate the husband, and the husband not to dominate the wife. Because women and men are all daughters and sons of God, so we are the same. When Kehapui is writing about all of this then some day it may be published and people may read that Zeme people are equal and Gaidinliu advised that women and men are to be equal and that this is not just Kehapui's opinion. (Mrs Takheule, Heraka Women's Society, Laisong)

The quotation above highlights the subject of this thesis. It also serves as its rationale. Inequality in gender relations was described to me (*Kehapui* or 'white woman') as the biggest problem Zeme Naga women of southern Assam now face. Women in other villages echoed Mrs Takheule and most discussions and interviews were centred on their deep dissatisfaction with men's increasing abdication of their responsibilities, and the decline in the position of women, especially as wives. Men were once dependable and much admired by women. They were regarded as the most heroic, powerful and selfless members of society. Traditional forms of patriarchy that once benefited women are rapidly changing. Many men are no longer seen by women as being 'fit to be a man'.

By wanting the world to know that "Zeme people are equal" Mrs Takheule also points to the sense of inequality that Zeme people as a whole experience in relation to neighbouring peoples and in the global hierarchy. Zeme women, men and even some children spoke in terms of their 'backwardness'. Their narratives evoke a perception of lack and inferiority socially, economically and politically, and a need to 'improve' to attain (or regain) equality with non-Zemes. These narratives suggest that the deterioration of relatively egalitarian gender relations and Zeme marginalisation are intimately linked.

Mrs Takheule's assertion is also one of equality and restitution. An ethos and body of principles called *heleuraube* is celebrated by many Zemes as that part of their cultural heritage which brings them to moral parity with others, or indeed, sets them apart and elevates them above other peoples who are presumed as lacking in it. *Heleuraube* may loosely be translated as 'acts of selflessness' (Longkumer 2010: 226), as well as the desire to act selflessly. It is the expression of respect for others through service, but more profoundly it is what binds Zeme society. It underlies cooperation and care for the well-being of others that is integral to Zeme relationships and has guaranteed their

survival over millennia. It usually inspires and takes the form of the reciprocal labour relationships that have ensured more or less egalitarian relations within the society. The Zeme form of patriarchy was based on gendered practices of *heleuraube* constituted by age-appropriate masculine and feminine ideals. However, women now accuse men of lacking in *heleuraube*.

I have attempted to understand the experiences of marginalised women in an indigenous society in a ‘Third World’ country and conducted fieldwork with the Zemes of North Cachar Hills, Assam, in 2001 and 2004. I attempt to understand the broader socio-cultural, political and historical factors that have contributed to changes in the patriarchy and the increase in gender inequality by exploring Zeme women’s perspectives. I have brought critical, historical and feminist perspectives to these issues which may also be relevant to other Naga societies and beyond.

A sustained analysis of Zeme gender relations has not previously been undertaken. This thesis contributes to the very small body of ethnographic literature about the Zeme Nagas and to broader discussions of gender and cultural change in indigenous societies. Worldwide, the literature suggests that as indigenous peoples engage with the intrusion of State and global economic and political agendas gendered identities are transformed. Certain similarities or ‘themes’ emerge despite cultural variations. Inequalities within communities have grown and men’s domination of women has increased (for example, Hodgson 1999, 2001; Knauff 1997; Silberschmidt 1992, 2005; Kelkar and Nathan 2003; Nongbri 2006; World Bank 2011). My aim is to understand some of the ways Zeme men and women experience and grapple with these changes. Why do Zeme women view many of their men as no longer ‘fit to be a man’? This is the question that has motivated and guided my research.

The structure of the thesis

The following chapter introduces the Zeme Nagas. I outline a history of some of the events leading to the marginal context the Zemes find themselves in today. Until very recently there have been very few, if any (to my knowledge) non-colonial histories of the Zemes and their kindred tribes. The work of Rongmei Naga (a linguistic group akin to the Zeme Nagas) historian Gangmumei Kamei (2004) has been especially helpful here as most accounts by Nagas tend to be authored by more politically dominant Angami or Ao Nagas who have had more education opportunities. I rely heavily on Kamei’s account, and also, to a much lesser degree, on Rongmei Christian Mr. Namthiubuiyang Pamei’s (2001) historical account. Throughout I make use of texts authored by Nagas and other indigenous academics from the Northeast. The work of Ao Naga, Arkotong Longkumer, who also undertook research with the Zemes, has been especially illuminating.

I go on to describe my theoretical approaches, terminology, as well as the socio-political conditions that made it possible for fieldwork to take place in Chapter Three. I also introduce the key figures in my research whose influence is present throughout the thesis.

The central problem of this thesis is further articulated in Chapter Four: why are husbands no longer discharging their responsibilities to family and community leaving their wives to shoulder the greater burden of labour? The chapter gives voice to women's increasing dissatisfaction and sense of exploitation. It documents a variety of Zeme women's comments before focusing on observations of the gender division of labour historically and at present. Women could previously expect to ascend the female hierarchy by the proper accomplishment of their 'duties'. Now, however, husbands have become a liability and women can no longer expect to enjoy the privileges of elevated status as they age but instead anticipate exhaustion and impoverishment.

Chapter Five gives an account of 'traditional' men's activities and highlights that until quite recently *heleuraube* and other 'caring' practices have been essential to Zeme constructions of normative masculinity and the well-being of their society in general. A fairly level field of opportunities was available as late as the early colonial period for men to 'provide what the people needed' and achieve these masculine ideals. Women continue to expect the values embodied in these former practices to be enacted by men today. The following two chapters also describe masculine practices that are constructed as providing for community needs.

In Chapter Six I focus on the patriarchal institution of marriage, through women's eyes. By recounting stories of two weddings, a divorce, and becoming a widow from several women's points of view I evoke an impression of subjective experiences. What sense is there of 'freedom' or 'autonomy' in the bridal exchange? What are the exit options from marriage and what of the custody of children? Senior men control and 'own' women and children as resources. Here I suggest that the condition of women 'belonging' to men, while underscoring their subordinate status, was largely experienced as receiving the care of the gerontocracy. The control men had over women came with responsibility and reciprocal acts of service, according to the ethos of *heleuraube*. The exchange of goods between seniors gave them authority over young husbands, thus protecting wives.

Chapter Seven explores the practice of 'fathering' as a core component of Zeme normative masculinity and is a crucial element in Zeme understandings of providing for the community through particular caring practices. It shows some of the ways in the past and present that Zeme men 'care' for children and adolescents. Parenting is a reasonably equitably shared domain for labour for men and women. Good fathering, according to Zeme constructions, is an expression of

heleuraube and social power. Women have largely experienced men's fathering practices as supportive.

The earlier chapters are mostly descriptive. In Chapter Eight I return to Mrs Takheule's suggestion that there is a connection between the increasing marginalisation of Zemes and women's growing sense of gender inequality within their community. I focus on some of the ways cultural, economic and religious changes have contributed to the recent emergence of inequalities amongst men destabilising the 'traditional' patriarchy in which authority resided with elders. Historical and present Zeme interactions with agents of 'modernisation': economies, religions, agricultural projects, schooling, and the creation of Statehood are discussed. I argue that these transformations have contributed to sidelining a core component of Zeme hegemonic masculinity, the ability to 'provide what the people need' as well as creating inequalities of opportunities for men to demonstrate 'care' in this way.

The analysis is continued in Chapter Nine with the focus shifting to women's engagement with the processes we might term 'modernity'. I examine more closely the interplay of the Zeme gender dichotomy of labour and some of the processes of modernity already described in order to better understand the reasons women accuse men of not fulfilling their duties. Despite the many constraints the customary gender division of labour imposes on women, it also offered them continuing benefits. However, I also have found that processes of modernity have devalued women's domestic labour in men's eyes, and in their own, and has feminised agricultural labour. Furthermore, the emergence of new religions has altered women's views of themselves, and therefore of gender relations. The decline in the view of women as 'exchangeable goods' has encouraged parents to send their daughters to school enabling education of girls, some of whom are reaching parity with, or exceeding, the level of boys. Men now fear domination by women and utilise and reinforce customary gender boundaries to exclude and constrain them. Women protest these configurations of masculinity in such ways as criticising men who claim customary rights to leisure and other privileges that 'warriors' are entitled to when conditions no longer provide the opportunities for men to 'protect' women and the rest of the community. I go on to describe how, as men lose control over their customary resources, women are increasingly taking control over community issues which were once avenues of prestige for men.

Chapter Two

The Zemes Nagas: Some Historical Context

The increase in gender inequality in Zeme society has been influenced by broader historical and socio-political processes. Here I provide some context for understanding the marginal situation the Zeme Nagas find themselves in today; or, as Mrs Takheule indicated, their sense that Zeme people are now considered ‘unequal’. Zeme Nagas have always interacted with other peoples as I show in this chapter. However, this thesis demonstrates that the relatively recent engagement with British imperialism and Indian neo-colonialism has had different outcomes for women and men. The historical events depicted here, some general to the region and some specific to the Zemes of Assam, continue to shape relations between Zemes and others, as well as gender relations within Zeme society.

The Zeme Nagas live in an area recognised as northeast India. ‘The Northeast’, as it is known, is regarded as marginal to the rest of India, and in many ways is quite distinct from it. Despite India laying claim to the region, ethnically and geographically, northeast India is part of Southeast Asia. It is a segment of a great tropical rainforest that stretches from the foothills of the Himalayas to the tip of the Malaysian Peninsula and the mouth of the Mekong River where it flows into the South China Sea (Hazarika 1994: xv). Immense cultural and biological diversity characterise the region (see for example, A. Aier and Changkija 2004: 333) and its distinctiveness from the rest of India has affected British colonial, as well as Indian neo-colonial, policies towards the region’s peoples. Assamese journalist Sanjoy Hazarika (*ibid.*: xvi) writes,

Ethnic coalitions, oral traditions and lifestyles based on respect for nature have mattered more in these regions than frontiers. Here men and women, with common origins but different nationalities, share a racial, historic, anthropological and linguistic kinship with each other that is more vital than their links with the mainstream political centres, especially at Delhi, Dhaka and Rangoon.

Northeast India, formerly colonial Assam, borders China (Tibet), Bangladesh, Bhutan and Burma and international relations have led to the region being characterised as ‘militarized spaces of mistrust’ (Baruah 2007: ix). The region is also considered a political and economic backwater by ‘mainstream’ (or peninsular) Indians and, indeed, the people of the region who are separated by the narrow Siliguri Corridor known colloquially as the ‘Chicken’s Neck’, call the rest of India ‘the mainland’. Like other directional place names (for example, ‘the Middle East’) ‘the Northeast’

reflects an external, rather than a local point of view, and is a significant administrative concept (Baruah 2007: 8). However, it is peripheral to the national imaginary (*ibid.*: 52). Feelings of being marginalised and neglected by the ‘Centre’ based in Delhi are often expressed in local newspapers. Hazarika (2009) states that “the rest of the country treats the North-East merely as an enclave for procuring timber, oil and tea. These commodities are taken out and nothing is put back into the region”. The Northeast’s reactions to what Hazarika (1994: xx) describes as “imperial, insensitive administrations, politicians and policies” have led to the great many insurgencies against the Indian State for which the region is perhaps best known.

Map 1 India showing Nagaland state <http://iptu.co.uk/content/india_map_nagaland_state.asp>
[retrieved November 9, 2011]

The Zeme are one of the diverse groups of Naga hill peoples who inhabit the ranges of the southern branches of the Eastern Himalayas that extend through part of northeast India and into Burma. The present Indian states of Arunachal, Assam, Nagaland and Manipur and the Burmese Sagaing Division and Kachin state are presently the home of the Nagas. Nagas number about four million (Kikon 2007: 374) and are distinct from what they call the ‘Plains’ people of India and Burma. These forested mountainous regions are cooler and attract high rainfall producing an abundance of

plant and wildlife which has supported their agrarian economies for millennia. The number of Naga ‘tribes’ is disputed (Yonuo 1974; Johnson 1986; Jacobs 1990: 20, 25; Rongmei and Kapoor 2005: 105; Saul 2005: 17) reflecting the changing political and administrative realities of the region¹. The word ‘tribe’ is somewhat misleading (and I shall discuss it further later). Before colonisation by the British there was no ‘tribal’ organisation that united the villages (Saul 2005: 99; also Johnson 1986: 12; Jacobs 1990: 20; Kamei 2004: 125). Rather, each village was an autonomous unit and occasional feuding characterised inter-village relations. Now, however, especially in international fora, it is common for people to refer in the singular to the ‘Naga Nation’ which is largely a political identity rather than a fixed entity (see also Longkumer 2010: 7). This is one of the ways that European expansion has marked the histories and identities of the peoples now known as Nagas.

Map 2 Northeast India. Zeme territory is roughly indicated by the red rectangle.
<http://www.northeastindiadiary.com/maps.html> [retrieved November 9, 2011]

Zemes are the western-most section of the peoples recognised as Naga (Saul 2005: 20). They have been known to outsiders in the past as Aroong, Arung and Kutcha, Kachcha or Kacha (with the

¹ ‘Naga’ is not a term these peoples used in the past to describe themselves. Rather, as Jacobs (1990: 17) explains, the British ‘created’ the Naga tribes as relatively fixed groups during their administration in India. See Stewart (1855 in Elwin 1969: 408); Chasie (1999: 17); Longkumer (2010: 6, 7, 132-133) and Saul (2005: 17) for discussions of the origin of the term.

Liangmai Nagas), Mejahme and Empeo, and are also now referred to as Jeme, Zemi, and Nzemi. *Zemena* means ‘human’ (see also N. Pamei 2001: 19; Longkumer 2010: 2) and it is from this word that ‘Zeme’ derives, as they refer to themselves. Some people prefer to use ‘Jeme’ to avoid being placed last in lists that use the alphabetical order of the English language. As with other Nagas the Zeme language is categorised as Tibeto-Burman, and although uncertain, there is a general consensus that the Nagas migrated in the distant past westward from what is now China (see for example, Sanyu 1996: 13; Chasie 1999: 18). They are part of the Tengimae group sharing a single origin and migration legend, and a common ancestor² (Joshi 2007: 543). From this ancestral place known as Makhel and believed to be near the Chindwin River in Burma (Longkumer 2010: 2), the tribes dispersed and the Zeme ancestors and their kindred tribes, the Liangmai, Rongmei and Puimei Nagas settled at Makuilongdi (*Nkuilua* in Zeme language) in what is now Manipur state. Rongmei Naga ‘social worker’ and historian Mr Namthiubuiyang Pamei (2001: 14) writes that Makuilongdi can be considered ‘the cradle of the culture and custom’ of these kindred peoples. They moved into this area more than four thousand years ago, it is said, and the rugged terrain which provided them shelter, sustenance and protection also physically isolated them from the outside world (Kamei 2004: 2). From here, “The 3 brothers who represented the Zeme, Rongmei and Liangmai decided to split up” (Kamei 2004: 3) and the Zemes headed west. Longkumer points out that the narratives of Makuilongdi (*Nkuilua*) “create strong bonds even today by helping people recreate strong unifying identities linking back to particular points in time” (2010: 3). The Zemes now occupy the steep hills and river valleys from the Haflong Subdivision of North Cachar Hills Autonomous District in the state of Assam in the west, to Peren District in Nagaland to the northeast, and Tamenglong District in Manipur to the south east. Zemes of North Cachar Hills number about 30000 and about 73 villages (Allan Jeme 2004). The fact that the diverse languages of Naga tribes are mainly mutually unintelligible, and that there are slight differences in dialect and accent even from village to village, seems to be evidence of the relative isolation of these tribes. However, Zemes have long had contact, albeit limited, with non-Zeme others.

² Joshi (2007: 543) includes the Angami, Chakhesang (a combination of Chakri, Kheza and Sangtam tribes), Rengma, Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Mao in this group. Angami Naga historian, Visier Sanyu, writes that the Maram also belonged to this group “who termed themselves...Tenyimia” (1996: 30).

Ahom kings, fought on their behalf, and intermarried (e.g., *The Zeliangrong Union*, n.d.). While these types of contacts of the past would have allowed the dispersion of cultural items such as ornaments, it is unlikely that they would have had sufficient impact to foster any significant changes to the prevailing social or linguistic order in the short term (Saul *ibid.*).

British imperialism and the Zeme Nagas

While the permeable boundaries of the various peoples of the Northeast constantly shifted, the coercive military power of the British to establish and maintain administrative control for their expansion of trade (namely the British East India Company's valley tea estates) had an unprecedented impact. In the 1820s the British added the Province of Assam to their empire and captured Rangoon. The Nagas, now caught between two British territories, had not been previously subjugated. Zemes had resisted previous incursions of others (such as Angamis, Manipuris and Kacharis) into their territory. Johnson (1986: 12) suggests that the colonial policy of the British in the Northeast may be divided into three periods: control by means of punitive expeditions; a short period of non-interference; and direct administration. These British policies towards Nagas mainly evolved to contain Angami expansion and aggression on the frontier of British territory as the response to the 'land grab' for tea production (Kamei 2004: 71; Baruah 2003: 325), but they affected the Zemes and other peoples who lived in contiguous territories. In 1839 the administration of North Cachar fell under Nowgong (now Nagaon in the valley regions of Assam some 260 kilometres north of Haflong) and an officer was posted in the Zeme village of Asalu, to "keep order among the Kuki settlements near Asalu, and protect Zemes and other peaceable hill men from the Angamis" (Kamei 2004: 72). For forty years this outpost was the headquarters of North Cachar (Bower 1952: 135) and it served mainly as an entry point for the administration of the Naga Hills. This probably marked the first contact of the Zemes in this region with the British, although Kamei explains that they did not interfere in the internal affairs of the tribes in their villages (Kamei 2004: 126). North Cachar was annexed in 1854 and the headquarters was shifted from Asalu to Haflong in 1880. It remained a subdivision of Cachar (annexed in 1832) throughout the rest of the British colonial period. The establishment of the Naga Hills District in 1866 and the British conquest of the princely state of Manipur in 1891 meant that the Zemes had been divided into three separately administered regions.

Kamei describes the British annexation of the territories of the Zeme and their related tribes (Liangmai, Rongmei and Puimei) as "a landmark in the history of the people" (2004: 124). In short, the colonial rule that followed this occupation was aimed at the extension of the British empire, control of Angami raids on these villages, the abolition of headhunting, collection of revenue to

meet the expenses of the administration, judicial adjudication of the disputes over land, property and crime, and the ‘civilisation’ of the tribes through welfare activities, education, health services and road communication (Kamei *ibid.*). In addition to the division of Zeme territories into separate administrations, the primary effects of British colonialism, still felt today, were the ban on the practice of headhunting, the imposition of taxes, the Kuki influx, and the unification of the Naga tribes.

Peace and taxes

According to Kamei (2004: 125), the greatest consequence of the colonial rule for the Zemes and their kindred tribes was the prevalence of peace by the abolition of headhunting. The Zemes had suffered terribly from raids by the Angami Nagas and welcomed their cessation. Zemes view this aspect of British imperialism positively and the power of the colonial government to implement this abolition contributes to their respect of Westerners today. The ban on inter-village and inter-tribe feuding also heralded the opportunity for the creation of pan-Naga entities which I shall describe shortly. However, it also triggered a change in the gender division of labour as the beginning of a shift from ‘men as warriors’, with ‘protection’ of the village and its inhabitants as their purpose, was initiated at this time. I discuss these shifts later.

Kamei writes that “the people would have been happy but for the heavy price of peace and order in terms of the payment of taxes to the British” (*ibid.*). In 1888 the Government noted the self-sufficiency of the Naga tribes and declared, ‘The multiplication of mutual wants, on which progress in civilization depends, is a process which has hardly yet had a beginning among the Naga tribes’ (in Jacobs 1990: 22). Taxation was viewed as a means of ‘civilizing barbarous savages’ (*ibid.*). The monetisation of the agrarian economy greatly affected Zeme barter trade (Kamei 2004: 129). Furthermore, Zemes and other Nagas were forced into labour and to give hospitality to the official representative of the State who ‘toured’ the villages with his entourage, which was as heavy a burden as the imposition of house tax of one rupee per year (*ibid.* 126). This was impossible for many families and some villages boycotted it. Paying the tax in cash forced households to look to the market economy and brought each household, at least in theory, under the direct control of a centralised authority for the first time (Jacobs 1990: 22). The imposition of the colonial economy meant the first Zeme experience of long-term ‘poverty’. I describe some further effects of the monetisation of the Zeme economy on gender and inequality in Chapters Eight and Nine.

The Kuki influx

The effect of the Kuki migration into Zeme territory is still strongly felt today. These Kukis, who include the peoples now known as Hmar, Vaiphei and Hrangkhawl, continue to occupy Zeme land

in North Cachar Hills (N.C. Hills), and relations are variously antagonistic and friendly. It is important to note that Kukis are also marginalised peoples who feel that they have been victimised by the colonial British, the Meiteis and the Nagas, amongst others (e.g., Kuki 2008: <http://kukiforum.com/2008/08/the-kuki-people-in-post-independent-india-a-burma-2/>. [Retrieved June 12, 2012]). Kukis too are seeking their own state within the Indian constitution, without success thus far. Zeme and other Naga narratives of Kuki aggression and land expropriation often belie alliances, such as the recently formed Indigenous Peoples' Forum (see below), the sharing of Christianity with most Nagas, as well as close personal friendships such as my research consultant, Adeule, enjoyed with a Vaiphei fellow university student. However, competition over scarce resources has meant, at least until recently, that narratives of enmity have predominated. Naga positioning of Kukis as invaders and as 'nomadic' peoples contrast Naga self-representations as settled and loyal to the village, thus serving the defence of their land.

Zemes Nagas increasingly suffer difficulties creating a livelihood from the soil depleted by over-population and over-cultivation. They feel that the British allowed Kuki settlement at their expense. In eastern North Cachar Hills, especially, some Zemes now feel that the Christian Hmars have received more resources, such as schools, than Zemes, resulting in comparisons and feelings of resentment and injustice at Hmar 'advancement'. Importantly here, the resulting impoverishment of the Zemes meant the demise of feast-giving by senior men which had ensured an equitable distribution of foods and other goods throughout the community. The cessation of this wealth-levelling device (though it finds a degree of expression in more recent practices), and the diminution in the importance of senior men, continues to contribute to material disparities within the community, and, as I will later show, to an intensification in gender inequality. Here I describe this influx of outsiders during the period of British colonial rule.

The Kuki people were pushed out of the Chin Hills (in Burma) by the Lushais (now known as Mizos) and began immigrating into Manipur in the seventeenth century. However, a great many more moved westward as far as Tripura in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Kamei 2004: 88). For the Zemes of North Cachar Hills, this immigration had dire effects. The Zemes, like most of the tribal peoples of the Northeast, practice rotational farming (or swidden/shifting cultivation), known in the region as *jhum* cultivation. Bower (1952: 136) explains that because of their intensely difficult country, the Barail Zemes of North Cachar Hills were forced to develop 'cycle-migration'. This meant that cultivable *jhum* land was too small to maintain a village of a viable size indefinitely. When a stretch of land became exhausted they left it, village and all, and cultivated a second and distant tract while the first recovered (*ibid.*). Nagas are pre-eminently builders of permanent villages (Bower 1946: 50) and to give up the land and village site, with its ancestral

graves, memorised landmarks and property buried by their hearths for future householders “was unthinkable” (Bower 1952: 136). It usually took several generations for the land to be considered ready to be reoccupied: “Lifetimes might pass, it was true, before the group returned to the place, but what was that in the rhythm of tribal life?” (Bower 1952: 137).

In the early nineteenth century the British and the immigrant Kukis arrived almost together into the Barail region of North Cachar Hills (Bower 1952: 137). The Kukis settled on the Zemes’ fallow land, and the Zemes protested to the administration. The Zemes had not been able to explain their practice of cycle-migration to the British officers and the authorities decided that the Zeme had abandoned their ancient sites and “were taking a dog-in-the-manger line” (Bower 1952: 138). The protests of the Zemes were overruled and their claims disallowed. Politically, this alienation from their treasured land, unwitting though it was, set the Zemes against the British administration despite their appreciation of the new roads and protection from the “Angami terror”. The economic results were even more disastrous. The land which had just sufficed for the Zemes was now carrying a bigger population than it could support. Progressive over-cultivation followed, with endless encroachments, land disputes, tribal friction and steady deforestation and degeneration of what *jhum* land there was (Bower 1946: 52). Throughout the area the level of prosperity fell and no more great feasts (dependent on a surplus of rice paddy) were conducted (Bower 1952: 138). Year by year more and more households could not grow enough to feed themselves and more and more men were compelled to hire themselves out to work in Kuki and Kachari (Dimasa) fields (*ibid.*: 141). By the late 1930s, the Zeme villages were constantly on the edge of famine (Bower 1946: 52). Understandably, this bred widespread dissent amongst the Zemes of the area (see also Longkumer 2010: 47) and perhaps was their first, and profound, experience of marginalisation.

The unification of the Naga tribes

I now turn to describe how the formerly disparate Naga tribes, including the Zemes, began to unify. However, as I explain below, even though Zemes engaged in these processes, their relationship with the British was not as friendly as those of other Naga tribes and they often felt peripheral to the interests of the more dominant Naga linguistic groups, such as the Angamis, Aos, Semas and Tangkhuls³. Issues of power and identity that Nagas began to clearly articulate for the first time in the late colonial era reverberate today. Alliances amongst Zemes, and between Zemes and other Naga groups, continue to shift as they engage with, and create, socio-political change.

³ The ‘dominance’ of a groups such as the Tangkhul Nagas, for example, may be partly explained by them being the second most populous tribe amongst Nagas in Manipur state, and with education beginning early with the establishment of the Pettigrew College in their district in 1896 (Zehol 2004: 304).

Sanjib Baruah (2003: 327) comments that, “The story of the emergence of Nagas as a people – the Naga nation in the words of independentists- is one of the most remarkable 20th-century stories of a radical transformation of political structures and world-views within a relatively short period of time”. It is widely recognised that the integration of the Naga tribes is a legacy of the British occupation (for example, Chasie 1999: 26) and the ongoing question of what constitutes Naga identity is testimony to this constructionism (see Baruah 2003). The First World War planted the seeds of unification for Nagas. In 1916/17 four to five thousand Naga men were recruited for battle in France. Here they developed a camaraderie that transcended the age-old prejudices (Johnson 1986: 17). Christianity also had a massive unifying effect (see Sanyu 1996: 115). The first missionaries, American Baptists, arrived in the Northeast on the heels of the British, and many Nagas responded positively to them. Christianity and literacy began to link some of the tribes (Maxwell 1980: 4). In 1928 the Naga Club was formed in a search for a new and independent Naga identity (*ibid.*). Johnson explains that the Club “was not in conflict with the British rulers, rather it sought British protection to save the Nagas from being assimilated into an India whose independence was becoming more and more certain” (1986: 18). In 1929 the Simon Commission⁴ on constitutional reforms visited Kohima, a large town in Angami territory (and now the capital of Nagaland state), and met with a delegation from the Naga Club. The Club’s memorandum requested that Naga independence be restored when Britain pulled out of India (Johnson 1986: 18). Their main reasons included the pre-colonial independence of their tribes, ethnic distinctiveness of the Nagas, and vulnerability to exploitation by plainspeople. The Naga and other tribal (mostly hill) areas were duly excluded from Assam under the reforms, allowing a large degree of self-rule (Maxwell 1980: 4). The Naga Hills Excluded Area, created in 1937 (but which had a precedent in the Inner Line⁵ regulation of 1873), also meant that they and other tribal peoples continued to be treated separately from other parts of India, that Indian plainspeople were restricted in their rights to enter the Hills, and that they would remain under direct colonial rule from Delhi (Jacobs 1990: 152).

⁴ The Simon Commission (Indian Statutory Commission) was a group of seven British Members of Parliament sent to India in 1927 to study constitutional reform that would determine the future of India.

⁵ The Inner Line was a virtual boundary at the foothills separating most of the hill regions of the northeast, including North Cachar Hills, from the rest of colonial India. Originally it was to bring under more stringent control the commercial relations of the British tea planters and others with the hill tribes (Elwin 1961: 43). It was an attempt to protect both tribal people and plains people and enforced strict travel regulations in the areas it was applied (see also Rizvi 2003: 59). The areas beyond the Inner Line were supposed to be outside the active control of the colonial administration, leaving the peoples to manage their own affairs (Baruah 1989: 54). Ultimately, these peoples behind the Inner Line now carry the legacy of having been constructed as ‘ungovernable’ and as incapable of participating in modern institutions of self-government without adequate tutelage (see Bora 2010: 346). On the other hand, many Nagas and other tribal peoples are demanding the retention of the Inner Line Regulation to prevent their assimilation into the mainstream and by being overwhelmed by migrants (for example, *Eastern Panorama* n.d.). The Indian Government re-enacted the Inner Line Regulation in 1959 (Johnson 1986: 14) and permits are still required to enter many of these hill states.

In the more southern region of the Zemes and their kindred tribes the course of history was running somewhat differently. These peoples experienced the British occupation of their territories as particularly oppressive. As mentioned earlier, the taxes, forced labour and particularly the policies of the British that favoured the Kukis alienated these Nagas. Furthermore, those who were employed in the Government were aware of Mohandas Gandhi and the political movements for the independence of India, and of the request to the Simon Commission that when the British left India, Nagas should be left to themselves. As Kamei (2004: 147) points out, the situation was ripe for any movement if it was properly directed. Two very charismatic young people, Jadonang and his cousin Gaidinliu, a girl of 13 when they met and formed a ‘master-disciple’ relationship, emerged as leaders and the instigators of the unification of the Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Puimei tribes in their trifurcated regions.

Jadonang and his Makam Guangdi

Jadonang, a Rongmei Naga, was born in Puilon (more commonly known as Kambiron in the Meitei language) village in what is now Tamenglong District in Manipur state in 1905. He began his early adolescent life as “a mystic healer-physician” (Kamei 2004: 147) and became well-known in the region for treating the sick and interpreting dreams. In response to the widespread social change of the times, and claiming divine sanction through his visions (Longkumer 2010: 49), he reformed the restrictive practices of the taboo-ridden religion of his people. He built temples, devised new rituals, advocated the adoption of one supreme god and encouraged the abandonment of the minor, local gods. Kamei explains that Jadonang’s aim was to “protect, preserve and develop his society and religion from being swallowed by an alien religion and culture” (Kamei *ibid.*: 150). The ‘Jadonang movement’ as the British termed it later evolved into the ‘Heraka movement’ which is practiced today. By 1928 Jadonang had predicted that the British Raj would come to an end (Kamei 2004: 151). His ultimate aim, says Kamei (*ibid.*: 150), was the establishment of a *Makam Guangdi*, a kingdom of the *Makam* (meaning Nagas). He pronounced certain measures against the British as well as the Manipuri Maharaja, such as non-payment of house tax and the rejection of forced labour (see Longkumer 2010: 49). As Kamei (2004: 150) describes, Jadonang was trying to achieve the political integration of his people under a ‘kingdom’ after the attainment of social unity through religion. Jadonang and Gaidinliu also gave military training to a youth force known as *Riphen* (Kamei 2004: 151). This political ideology met with condemnation by the colonial authorities who accused him of trying to establish a ‘Naga Raj’. He was arrested in 1931, framed for murder, and executed on August 29th in the same year.

The momentum of the ‘Jadonang movement’ was picked up by Gaidinliu, by then 17 years old. In 1931-32 she organised the people of Western Tamenglong, southern Naga Hills and North Cachar

into armed rebellion against the British Indian soldiers, the Assam Rifles (Kamei 2004: 159-60). Her strength and determination was legendary in the region and the people who believed in her divine powers worshipped her as a goddess. In the ancient Zeme village of Hangrum, Gaidinliu decided to attack the Assam Rifles resulting in the deaths of eight Zeme warriors and six Assam Rifles. This is locally known as the ‘battle of Hangrum’ in which it was considered something of a miracle that not more Zemes had perished. Meanwhile, Gaidinliu managed to elude the colonial authorities until she was captured and arrested in October 1932. She was sent to trial and imprisoned for life. Gaidinliu was later to be released and continue her political and religious campaign for a unified homeland. However, in the meantime, this movement created a “fraternity, social unity and integration” of the three tribes of the area “that had never occurred in the history of the people” (Kamei 2004: 145).

Aspirations for Zeliangrong unity

After the suppression of the Jadonang and Gaidinliu rebellion the Maharaja of Manipur and the British authorities encouraged the State employees and non-involved elders to form a tribal organisation named the Kabui Samiti⁶, formed in 1934. A ritual ceremony of customary oath was taken by the elders representing the Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Puimei tribes. Kamei writes,

They took oath in the name of God that the ...people collectively and individually pardoned each other for the past wrong doings... They declared that they descended from the same parentage and origin, and made a solemn oath that they would henceforth abstain from head hunting and inter-village feuds and extend help towards each other in all possible ways (2004: 142).

The Kabui Samiti only lasted six years. However, it was the beginning of an inter-tribal organisation and it was revived after the Second World War. Johnson (1986: 19) writes that the relative isolation of the Nagas was shattered by the Second World War when their territories “became a theatre of war between the Japanese and the British”. Many Nagas fought for the Allied cause and the Battle of Kohima on Angami Naga soil was the turning point for the retreat of the Japanese from India. According to Kamei (2004: 173), “The war brought tremendous changes in the mind of the people. The physical and psychological seclusion created by distance and inaccessibility of their geography had been broken”. The Nagas had witnessed devastation and thousands of refugees. Despite their victory, the British Army was no longer viewed as invincible and “in whose empire the sun would never set...From a village level society to Sub-divisional... their (the Nagas’) view of the outside world had turned global” (Kamei *ibid.*: 174).

⁶ ‘Kabui’ is the name Rongmei Nagas were earlier known as, and ‘samiti’ is a Hindi word meaning a ‘society’ or ‘association’.

The two years following the end of the Second World War and preceding Indian Independence were significant for the Nagas and other peoples of northeast India (Kamei 2004: 174). Many tribal organisations were formed and people came together to discuss the future of the Naga people. In 1946 the Naga National Council (NNC) arose under Aliba Imti (an Ao Naga), T. Sakhrie (an Angami) and later Angami Zapu Phizo (eventually known as the father of Naga nationalism) claiming to represent all the Nagas of the Naga Hills and aiming at political sovereignty. In the southern regions, the Kabui Samiti was revived into the Kabui Naga Association. A historic conference was initiated by this Association to create a larger organisation to protect them from any danger in the eventual withdrawal of the British from India (Kamei 2004: 176). The Zeliangrong Council was formed on the 15th February 1947, the term combining the prefixes of the tribes, Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei (Ze+Liang+Rong), with the objective of “furthering the economic, social, educational and political advancement” of the people (Kamei *ibid.*).

Naga rights for self-determination

Britain had offered India the prospect of independence in return for loyalty during the Second World War, and suggested a Crown Colony for the Nagas and other hill peoples in the India-Burma region (Jacobs 1990: 158). The Naga National Council rejected this claiming that anything other than independence would leave them vulnerable to the assimilating tendency of the Indian nationalists of the plains (*ibid.*). On February 20, 1947 the NNC submitted a memorandum to the British Indian Government presenting the case of the Naga people for self-determination and requesting an Interim Government (a ‘Guardian power’, preferably British, for their protection), consistent with the Letter to the Simon Commission, for a period of 10 years at the end of which the Naga people would be left to choose any form of Government under which to live (Kamei 2004: 178). Again, they emphasised their cultural and religious distinctiveness and referred to their Excluded Area status. At first the Government appeared sympathetic to the Nagas and an Agreement (the Nine Point, or Hydari, Agreement) was drawn up recognising “the right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their freely expressed wishes”. However, a lack of clarity of a particular point meant that the Government of India viewed the clause as a peaceful step to bring the Nagas into the Union of India forever (Johnson 1986: 22).

This clause also caused a rift in the Naga National Council. One group of nationalists declared that the clause meant that after the interim period was over the Nagas could opt for complete independence (under Phizo), whilst the other saw it as a step towards self-rule within India (under Sakhrie). Jacobs (1990: 151) calls the ideology of the first group ‘separatist’ and that of the second ‘integrationist’. The ‘separatists’ became illegal and continue to operate clandestinely. They eventually came to be known locally as the ‘underground’ and have since split into several factions,

while the other group are often referred to as ‘overground’. The latter tend to advocate a non-violent struggle. Nevertheless, both groups continued to press for their right to self-determination but were met with silence and indifference (Chasie 1999: 38). In response to the dismissal of the Agreement and the threatened use of force by the Governor of Assam (Sir Akbar Hydari) unless the Naga leaders agreed to join the Indian Union, the Naga Hills people declared their independence on the 14th of August 1947, the day before the British departure from India.

The Nagas and the Indian State

But by the Indian Independence Act, 1947, the Naga Hills District became part of free India. The Government of India (GOI) declared that there could be no question of self-determination now or ever, but only adjustments within the Union (Johnson 1986: 23). The NNC, under Phizo, continued negotiations with the new Indian Government, but relations between Nagas and Delhi grew increasingly bitter. Civil disobedience ensued. However, when the Nagas refused to participate in the first general elections the Indian government responded by banning the NNC and issuing arrest warrants against its leaders, who went underground (Chasie 1999: 39). In the 1950s it turned into armed conflict. By the end of the 50s the idea of statehood within the Union began to gain some credibility among Nagas (though not the NNC), as the best practical tactic in the short term (Jacobs 1990: 159). In 1963 the new state of Nagaland was carved out of Assam, but it did not include all, or even most of, Naga-inhabited areas, more recently known as ‘Nagalim’⁷. This meant that now the Zeme people were divided between three separate states. The NNC did not recognise statehood and violent conflict continued with the Indian Army. In 1975 the ‘Shillong Accord’ was signed by some members of the underground to join the Indian Union (at least until a more satisfactory arrangement could be reached). This created a furore and resulted in a new armed outfit, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), who condemned the accord and those participating in the state governments of Nagaland and Manipur as ‘puppets’ of the GOI. Later, in 1988, due to internal disagreements and tribal loyalties the NSCN split into two groups: NSCN under the leadership of Isak Chisi Swu and Thiungaleng Muivah, known as ‘I-M’ and another, under S.S. Khaplang, based in Burma, and known as NSCN (K)⁸. Negotiations between the NSCN-IM leadership and the GOI are ongoing⁹. The Indian Army forces have been accused of committing atrocities not only against the Naga guerrilla armies but against civilians including women and children. Massacres, tortures, rapes, aerial bombing and strafing, burning of villages and the destruction of local economic

⁷ Some Nagas are fighting for the unification of all Naga-inhabited areas in India and Burma which they call ‘Nagalim’. This region ignores the arbitrary borders created first by the British and multiplied by the GOI.

⁸ As of June 7th 2011 a new ‘K’ group was formed by expelling Khaplang. This offshoot is known as ‘Khole-Kitovi’ after its two leaders (see Khangchian 2011; Sandham 2011).

⁹ Since the 1997 ceasefire, over 70 rounds of talks have been conducted without any positive results for Nagas (G.A. Shimray 2011:354).

systems under the guise of ‘fighting the insurgents’ are well known (see for example, K. Iralu 2000; IWGIA 1986; Chasie 1999). An estimated 200,000 Nagas, mostly civilians, have been killed in the conflict. Of course, it led to casualties on both sides. The underground forces also demanded food and shelter from villagers, and there were forcible recruitments, tortures and killings due to conflicts of loyalties and ideological differences. Chasie (1999: 41) says, “It was, from all accounts, hell on earth.” This war between the Nagas and the Indian State is now one of the world’s oldest continuing armed conflicts (Baruah 2003: 321).

Map 4 Showing Naga-inhabited region of Nagalim, <http://www.angelfire.com/nm/nagalim/map.htm> [retrieved February 2005]

The Zeliangrong people were drawn into the Naga Independence movement initiated by the Naga National Council (Kamei 2004: 184). The Zeliangrongs felt that neither the Government of India nor the Government of Manipur had done much for their political or economic development, and thus the Zeliangrong Union leaders were convinced to extend support to the wider Naga movement (*ibid.*: 206).

The people resorted to an intense movement in the Zeliangrong area, popularly known as the Homeland Movement. This was the reflection of the three trends of the Zeliangrong political perceptions: participation in the mainland Indian political process was necessary for social and economic development; the homeland was necessary for the strengthening of the

Zeliangrong identity and Zeliangrong regionalism; and participation in Naga insurgency was the identification and fraternity of the Zeliangrongs with the Nagas. And it was the Zeliangrong people who had started the first 'Naga Raj' movement during the colonial period (Kamei 2004: 184-185).

The Zeliangrong region became a focus of the Indian Army in the late 1950s when Phizo, perhaps seeking foreign assistance (Kamei 2004: 209), left the Naga Hills and escaped through the region into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and then onto London where he remained in self-exile until his death in 1990. East Pakistan was also the source of arms and ammunition. The Indian Army perceived every Zeliangrong Naga as a 'hostile' and they oppressed the common people (Kamei 2004: 215).

The Zeliangrong Nagas continue to seek equality with the Indian State through either separatist or integrationist means. However, as Jacobs (1990: 164) succinctly puts it, the Zeliangrongs generally "stand in a somewhat different relation to the Indian State to both the integrationist and separatist Naga nationalists. Their history makes them both somewhat more anti-British than the integrationist Nagas, and less anti-Indian than the separatists". There are religious, as well as political reasons for this. To more fully understand we need to return to the story of Gaidinliu and her impact on Zeme and other Zeliangrong societies.

Rani Gaidinliu

At India's Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru, the country's first Prime Minister, released Gaidinliu from her fourteen year imprisonment. He had admired the young girl's rebellion against the British which he had come to know of in 1937, publicised her efforts for freedom, and gave her the title of 'Rani' (Hindi: 'Queen'). I mentioned earlier the very significant effect of Christianity on the unification of most Nagas. The Naga nationalist movement was supported by the Christian Church and Christianity is generally viewed as the 'Naga religion' in contradistinction from, and in resistance to, the Hindu and Muslim majority of India. Indeed, Jesus is believed to play a divine role in the Naga movement for liberation (Vashum 2000: 126). Rani Gaidinliu perceived the Naga Independent movement which her people had been fighting for as more of a Christian movement than a fight for freedom. It was the religion of the British colonials and she therefore considered it imperialistic (see N. Pamei 2001: 84). The condemnation by some Christian Nagas of her reformed indigenous religious movement as 'heathen' resulted in a parting of ways between Gaidinliu and the nationalists. The Christians questioned her loyalty to the 'Nagas' and made her appear as an agent of 'Hindu' India (Longkumer 2010: 147). Kamei (2004: 214) writes that her objective was the defence of her indigenous religion, which they called Heraka, and a revival of the political fight for the integration of the Zeliangrongs into a common homeland within the Indian Union. She formed a

Zeliangrong army (known as the Rani party) and went underground. Her party engaged in several armed conflicts against Christians including against some Zeliangrongs. Kamei (*ibid.*: 21) argues that Rani Gaidinliu and her followers were not opposed to the Naga independence movement as such, but their clash with the Naga separatists “was more on the religious issue”. According to Longkumer, “Rani Gaidinliu saw the Naga Christian vision of either/or as limiting and countered such accusations by stating her position that she was both Naga and Indian. In other words, she asserted that identity can be conceived in terms of both/and” (2010: 147).

Until her death in 1993 Rani Gaidinliu fought for an integrated Zeliangrong Homeland within the Indian Union, meeting with Prime Ministers Indira Gandhi, and later Rajiv Gandhi, to assure freedom and equality for her people. She received recognition and awards for her services to the Indian nation. Her goal of a Zeliangrong Homeland has not yet been fulfilled, and the Heraka religion which she spent her life reforming continues to have the greatest influence over the Zemes of North Cachar Hills to this day. Nowadays approximately 60-65 per cent of Zemes in this region, the stronghold of the religion, practice Heraka; while the rest practice Christianity and a very small minority practice what is now known as *Paupaise*, or ‘way of the grandparents,’ the original Zeme religion. However, Zeme *Paupaise* also view Heraka as a ‘foreign import’ like Christianity (Longkumer 2004: 126). ‘Religion’ for Zemes then, which I must emphasise is central to every aspect of their lives, has become something of a conflicted arena in which they pursue various strategies for identity and equality with others.

Zeme marginality

The practice of the Heraka religion, which increasingly has affiliations with Hindu groups, as well as their pursuing of a unified homeland, means Zemes are in a somewhat ambiguous position in relation to both the Indian State and the Christian Naga nationalist movement. Longkumer (2010: 132) elaborates on this position that Jacobs hinted at:

It must be mentioned that the position of the Heraka is amorphous at best. First, they want to be part of the ‘Naga fold’ and have publicly stated so, but historically the Heraka have had a tense relationship with the Naga Christians over proselytizing. Second, although the Heraka receive considerable support from ‘Hindu organizations’, they are wary to be seen as too close to them because then the Naga Christians will label them as ‘Hindu’ therefore jeopardizing their relationship with the larger Naga population. Moreover, it is tempting to suggest that the Heraka represent, for both ‘Hindu’ groups and the Christians, an ideological battlefield: one source of contention is the question of nation building of a modern, universal ‘Hindu’ India. On the other hand, the Christian Nagas question this project and are resisting larger hegemonic forces by espousing a decentralized federal India with individual rights over land, resources, culture and religion. It appears that ‘religion’ is the tool whereby the shift can occur both ways.

Zemes, then, occupy a marginal status as Nagas within India, as Heraka/'Hindu' amongst the Christian Naga (mostly Baptist) majority, and as a people divided into three states. Christian Zemes are a minority amongst their own people, as are *Paupaise* to a much larger degree. The Zemes of Assam, moreover, constitute a minority in their ancestral home of the District of North Cachar Hills leaving them very poorly represented in local electorates. On 30 March 2010 North Cachar Hills was renamed Dima Hasao District¹⁰, reflecting the demands of the majority Dimasa people. The Zemes and other indigenous peoples of the area now feel like 'foreigners' on their own soil and are coming together and creating organisations in protest. It has meant, among other things, that the Dimasas claim most development funds, jobs and other benefits as the majority Scheduled Tribe and their political dominance is greatly increased. It has also been argued that the establishing of this district would thwart the NSCN movement for a greater Nagalim (thupui.blogspot.com 2010). Issues of identity remain very important for Zemes and are discursively connected to defence of land and resources, and vital issues such as education, employment and healthcare (as with many other peoples of the Northeast). They are well aware that conflicts between Zeme groups contribute to their marginality in the ways they are perceived by others as 'backward', and 'weak' in their lack of unity, as well as materially.

While the Zemes of North Cachar Hills may have appreciated the infrastructure brought by the British and the ban on Angami raiding and headhunting, they have nevertheless suffered unprecedented impoverishment due to their marginalisation from the foreign economy that the Indian State continues; and from the occupation of their land by Kuki peoples and other outsiders. One consequence of this poverty has been the decline in the redistribution of wealth by senior men, as I mentioned, resulting in increased inequality within the community. The Zeme division into three states means their small population makes them politically weak and easily dominated by other ethnic groups and the State. Fractures and fissures amongst Zemes along religious and political lines, despite new alliances and some success at unification (often more conceptual than practical) also undermine their power regionally. Of course, this results in a diminution of Zeme control over, and access to, resources. At the time early colonial administrators were producing ethnographies about Nagas, in patriarchal Zeme society young men protected territory, people and resources, and senior men explicitly controlled and administered these resources more or less equitably throughout the clan and community. Women's domain was the private economy of the individual household (which indirectly and less explicitly contributed in crucial ways to the wider community), and which I shall elaborate upon in later chapters. The increasing marginalisation of

¹⁰ All non-Dimasa 'tribes' who constitute some 57 per cent of the district are opposed to this renaming (which represents only the Dimasa people) and Dimasa greater claim to rights and privileges. I continue to refer to the district as North Cachar Hills.

the Zemes, then, may well be affecting this domain of men, and their sense of masculinity, in different ways to women and 'femininity'. While Zemes have, in many ways, successfully engaged with the rapid socio-cultural change of the last two centuries, they now suffer disadvantage, relative to other peoples in the region, not previously experienced by them. I will later show the gendered effects of this disadvantage.

Chapter Three

Tracks to the Zemes

Beginnings

Although I had not set out to investigate Naga gender divisions of labour, I had wanted to do fieldwork with women in a marginalised community. The Zeme Nagas provided the opportunity to understand something of gendered effects of rapid socio-cultural change and were perfect hosts. Anthropologist Michael Jackson (1995: 119) reminds us that the knowledge of others is primarily a matter of sociality. Anthropology, he insists, “should never forget that its project unfolds within the universal constraints of hospitality.” It is Zeme generosity that has permitted this fieldwork at all. Here I provide the context of my encounter with the Zemes, the approaches to my fieldwork and analysis, and a sketch of the key characters that informed them. I also reflect on some of the shortcomings of these approaches and the ways they have shaped my research.

My approach was originally influenced by Fourth World Theory which emerged to explain “persistent global patterns of ethnocide and ecocide” (Nietschmann 1994: 225). Social and ecological systems are intimately linked (see for example, Berkes and Folkes 1998). The ‘Fourth World’ refers to indigenous peoples whose lands have been overrun by the States of the ‘First’ (mostly Western, capitalist countries), Second (the old Cold War Communist countries), and ‘Third’ (States often created out of former colonies) Worlds (Graburn 1981: 67; Bodley 2000: 396-7). Geographer Bernard Nietschmann also referred to these “self-identifying people who have a common culture and a historically common territory”, and their homelands, as ‘nations’ (*ibid.*: 226) encapsulated within a larger State. They are ‘hidden nations’ (Spicer 1992:29) meaning that their equality as people is hidden from the awareness of makers of State policy and they are therefore not ‘given’ the right of self-determination (Nietschmann 1992: 241). Indigenous peoples use self-determination to express most broadly their aim of controlling their political, cultural and economic lives (Gray 1995: 37). Self-determination is viewed as crucial to survival and to ecological integrity (see Hyndman 1994). Fourth World analyses, maps and writing aim to “replace the missing identities, geographies, and histories of the world’s peoples and nations that make up the usually hidden ‘other side’ in the invasions and occupations that produce most of the world’s wars, refugees, genocide, human rights violations, and environmental destruction” (Nietschmann *ibid.*: 230). My aim was to understand and, in writing about them, evoke something of ‘hidden’ women’s lived experiences of ethnocide, ecocide or other forms of marginalisation.

The Fourth World approach married my interest in indigenous rights with my concerns about more general ecological degradation. The literature is compelling, with maps clearly showing that Earth's 'biodiversity hotspots' are regions inhabited by 'indigenous' peoples (e.g., Christie 1999; Nietschmann 1994). Cultural and biological diversity are strongly correlated. India's northeast appeared as such a bioculturally diverse region. If 'indigenous peoples' could be represented as living sustainably in their territories then this would not only allow their voices to be heard, but privilege them in global environmental discourses. I felt that this was a potentially empowering platform for indigenous peoples. Specifically, I wanted to write about the lives of women who produced their livelihoods by working the land, and participated in the conservation of their environments. In doing so I hoped to make visible the threats by the State to their ways of life, and to render their experiences significant, not only to themselves, but also in terms of global cultural and biological survival and diversity.

A shortcoming of Fourth World Theory is that it oversimplifies 'indigenous peoples' as unanimously opposed to 'the State'. Indigenous peoples tend to be portrayed as victims of rapacious governments and profiteering transnational organisations. While there may be a great deal of truth to these representations, they often overlook the contradictory policies and practices of the State, particularly the more beneficent programs designed to safeguard indigenous peoples' interests and livelihoods. Importantly, they tend to disregard other and more complex relationships that indigenous individuals and groups may have with the State, such as that some members of indigenous societies are themselves pro-State actors; that indigenous people frequently seek out and actively engage with State programs; and that people within the same 'community' may differentially benefit or suffer disadvantage by the State. The notion of the collective tribe against the State may elide divergent views and conflicts of interests within the 'community' as well as between 'tribes' or ethnic groups.

Representations of indigenous peoples as 'natural environmentalists' may also have the effect of conceptually tying people to a particular place and result in what anthropologist Alpa Shah (2010) calls 'eco-incarceration'. Shah (2010: 110) contends that arguments about indigenous peoples' attachment to land, and nature-based spirituality, are based on a "generic stereotype that is currently in vogue in the international public sphere", and says little about the diversity and complexity of indigenous peoples' relationship with their environment. What this may mean is that the destruction of forests, wildlife and other resources by indigenous peoples, or the commoditisation and privatisation of their land, as people struggle over material resources for their livelihoods, may remain unanalysed to conform to essentialised indigenous rights agendas. Such 'anti-conservation' practices of tribal peoples challenge notions of indigenous 'authenticity'. Furthermore, the 'rooting

of indigenous peoples in land' (Shah 2010: 134) makes their voluntary migration seem anomalous, and a result of oppression rather than choice.

It was after reading a report compiled by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) titled *The Naga Nation and its Struggle against Genocide* (1986) that I resolved to work with the Nagas in northeast India. The Fourth World Theory approach dovetailed neatly with the nationalist literature produced by Nagas that I became familiar with before undertaking fieldwork. These accounts (such as those below) construct Naga identity as radically different and separate from Hindu and Muslim 'Indians' and position themselves as victims of the Government of India. Self-determination in the form of a sovereign Naga nation was (and remains for many) the goal. The IWGIA report, as well as other literature by and about the Nagas, pointed to a deeply traumatised people, colonised and disrupted first by the British, and now oppressed by India and its army (for example, Yonuo 1974; Luithui and Haskar 1984; Ashikho-Daili-Mao 1992; Sanyu 1996; Chasie 1999; K. Iralu 2000). Murder, rape and torture by Indian armed forces were alleged to be widespread. However, as Lotha Naga researcher, Dolly Kikon writes (2001:140), "From most of these books on the Naga Resistance movement, one is forced to conclude that Naga women have not been represented as members in the struggle". I wanted to understand how women coped with living in these conditions as an addition to the above accounts which were produced mainly by educated men.

One of the most oppressive measures of the Indian State is the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (known as the AFSPA) which was enacted in Naga- inhabited regions in 1958. These regions were declared 'Disturbed Areas' under the Act. The AFSPA is still current and gives unbridled powers to personnel in the Indian armed forces (for example, to 'shoot to kill' on mere suspicion) and also guarantees them near total immunity¹¹. The imposition of the AFSPA in the name of maintaining law and order generates terror and has "destroyed the basic rights and the liberty of Nagas" (Khala 2000: 9). The AFSPA also applies to other tribal peoples of the Northeast, except in Mizoram and Sikkim, but was originally enacted to combat Naga separatism. Laws such as the AFSPA are bolstered and legitimised by representations of Nagas as 'backward beef-eaters' and 'savages'. The Indian media builds on well-known British colonial depictions of Naga men as head-hunters and represents those who seek to safeguard their territory as 'terrorists' (see, for example, The South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2000) and a threat to national security. Assamese political scientist, Sanjib Baruah (2007: 54) writes, "Despite being a democracy, the postcolonial Indian State has routinely

¹¹ Even the National Human Rights Commission of India does not have the authority to address matters of human rights abuses committed by the Indian armed forces due to the protective measures provided under this Act (Longchari 2001b).

asserted sovereignty in the Northeast with significant display and use of military power... AFSPA in India is about to enter its sixth decade; it is almost as old as Indian democracy... illiberal democracy is the only type of law the region has known". The Nagas have constructed a moral narrative of domination and suffering out of their experience and this, and their fight for self-determination, were themes that corresponded to my research interests. My pre-field research questions and observations were accordingly heavily informed by identity politics and concerns about militarisation.

Encouraged by exiled historian Visier Sanyu, an Angami Naga and author of one of the books listed above, as well as by the 1997 ceasefire agreement (and the initiating of peace negotiations) between the Government of India and the most powerful Naga militant group, NSCN (I-M), I headed to Shillong (the hill capital of the Khasi people in Meghalaya) to do further preliminary research and await a Restricted Areas Permit (RAP) to enter Nagaland. The RAP is a continuation of the Inner Line Regulation and foreigners as well as Indian nationals need one to enter the states of Nagaland, Arunachal and Manipur. The fact that a permit did not materialise because it was suspected that I would report on the human rights abuses perpetrated by the Indian Army underscored the limitations placed on Naga lives and their 'hidden-ness'.

However, in April, only a fortnight after my arrival, a major Naga conference was held in Assam for the first time. The district it was to be held in, North Cachar Hills, although a 'Disturbed Area' where the AFSPA applied at that time, did not require the Restricted Areas Permit¹². I was invited by prominent 'peace activist' Niketu Iralu to attend the 2001 Naga Student's Federation (NSF) conference in Lodiram, near Haflong, hosted by the All Zeliangrong Students Union in Zeme territory. The NSF has been described as 'the organisation with the widest outreach and acceptability among the Nagas' (N. Iralu in All Zeliangrong Students' Union 2001: 2) and is the oldest Naga civil society organisation. It brings together representatives from all parts of Nagalim. While it specifically is concerned with Naga youth, a major aim is to 'safeguard common interest, integrity, fraternity and co-operation amongst ourselves all over the Naga inhabited Areas' (N.S.N. Lotha 2001: 3). It is conducted in English which is the official language of Nagaland. While the knowledge of elders is traditionally much respected, the prominence of the NSF may demonstrate the celebration of Naga youth and higher education as key to a better future. This conference, held every two or three years each time in a different location in Naga territory, is a significant event. Dignitaries from all over the Northeast are invited, as well as representatives from other tribal, and non-tribal, communities. The Chief Minister of Assam and the former minister of Arunachal

¹² The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958) continues to be applied to Naga-inhabited regions despite the 1997 ceasefire agreement.

Pradesh were invited to this, the 19th NSF Conference. The theme of this conference was 'Reasoning Together'. Largely, it addressed the distrust, corruption and fragmentation occurring within their society as well as advocating peaceful means for self-determination. The conference is also a forum for displaying the diversity of 'cultural' dances and songs, as well as general mingling and opportunity for group prayer. While the atmosphere was generally one of joviality and the site beautiful (a football ground decked out with a stage, tarpaulins and banners on a hilltop surrounded by the Barail Ranges), the presence of the Indian Army was heavy and on high alert. Some of us were interrogated several times regarding my purpose there. No doubt there were many other interrogations I did not know about for other reasons. I was told that many groups, travelling from all over Nagalim, had been stopped and threatened on their way to Haflong. Indeed, some were harassed so badly they had been forced to return home. Not only this, but a few delegations did not show up due to ideological divisions. Again, this reinforced the sense of oppression and danger that is the daily reality for the Nagas.

The heterogeneity of 'Naga experience' was immediately evident at the conference. Naga nationalist literature that appeals to the non-Naga reader emphasises the plight of 'the Nagas' *vis-à-vis* the Government of India and tends to downplay differences and conflicts between Nagas. On the other hand, dialogues between Nagas that urge intra-community reconciliation as well as between various 'tribes' continue to emerge (for example, Chasie n.d.) in response to ongoing killings and abuses of Nagas by Nagas. Nagas in different Indian states, and of course in Burma, face vastly different problems and opportunities, as do urban and rural Nagas, and according to such factors as wealth, gender, age and occupation. As in any contemporary society we can hardly homogenise the life experiences of, for example, the multilingual young Ao Naga woman in rehabilitation for injecting drug use in urban Mokokchung with the farmer who has not had the opportunity to venture beyond the villages surrounding her home. However, specific histories and other local 'emplaced' conditions tend to be understood in India, as in most parts of the world since the globalisation of generalised European worldviews, as a uniform, abstracted time-based evolutionary process.

The outcomes of different histories of colonialism, neo-colonialism and accidents of geography mean varying interactions with what we may term 'modernity'; Nagas are deeply engaged with this concept, which is situated in the broader Indian discourse of the struggle to 'modernise'. Like other critical anthropologists, I question the attempt to view 'modernity' as a singular or coherent development (see Knauff 2002: 2), and I discuss this and regional and multiple inflections of it (as 'modernities') further in Chapters Eight and Nine. I will also draw out some of the ways in which modernities are gendered. My main problem with the notion of 'modernity' is that it denies what anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1983: 30) calls 'coevalness'. In short, this means that indigenous

peoples and their ways of life are viewed as belonging to the past while the present is seen to belong to Western ('modern') people. The belief from this perspective is that 'primitive' customs and beliefs will inevitably 'die out' and give way to Westernised ways of life. Of course, all humans share the same evolutionary history. Yet, these cultural evolutionist notions have informed Western economic 'development' models which were enthusiastically adopted as Indian policy at Independence as the means to 'progress' to 'modernity'. I view this implementation of globally dominant ideology and practice as a form of neo-colonialism. Despite the evidence that 'development' programs have consistently failed and impoverished the people intended to be their beneficiaries, the discourse of 'modernity', which juxtaposes 'progress' (for example, industrialisation) against 'backwardness' (for example, rural village life) continues to be understood as scientific, and even natural, truth. To be 'modern' is believed to be superior to the 'traditional'. 'Cultural traditions' have been historicised and relegated to the past, and even regarded as infantile, rather than being recognised as lifeways in their own right. As such, the ideology and institutions (such as the globalising economy and religions which were originally local Western ones) of 'modernity' are often welcomed and recreated by indigenous peoples. This occurs even as they undermine some of their cultural lifeways (labelled 'traditions') and their engagement produces novel ways of thinking and practices (modernities). At the NSF conference, upon seeing Nagas from villages far from towns and most agents of modernity, their skins darker from working outdoors, the urban, educated Nagas in Western clothing whispered with a mixture of pity and awe, "Oh, they are not even Christian yet!" This use of 'yet' illustrates the belief that Christianity is the religion of the 'advanced' people (such as wealthy Westerners and urbanising Nagas) and the sense of inevitability that this stage of 'progress' will be achieved. In other words, the hegemonic discursive hierarchy of 'modernity' is often reproduced by Nagas themselves. Some Nagas, more than others, are further marginalised by this worldview.

I discuss this at some length because Nagas very much look towards 'the West' for political, religious, moral and economic support and emulate certain behaviours perceived as 'Western', including some gender models as will be explained later. In many ways Nagas have sought to adopt 'Western' worldviews, especially of Christianity which is the state religion of Nagaland. The 'West' for Nagas generally means a place where 'White people' come from. Now it not only means the United Kingdom where their former British colonisers hailed from, but also the United States who sent missionaries in early colonial times and with whom the majority Baptist Christians interact, if only in imagination, and more recently, the Netherlands (especially the Hague) as a site of negotiation for human and political rights, as well as the sites of United Nation bodies (such as Geneva) with whom some activist Nagas engage. From a general Naga perspective it has been

stated that no distinction was made between British and American people or interests, but they were seen as one race, 'the White Man' (Sanyu 1996: 113). Certainly the majority of Zeme Nagas at the time of my research also conflated the diverse nationalities of the 'White Man' or 'Westerner' as demonstrated when I was labelled by research participants as 'Kehapui' (White woman) or 'Saipui', a respectful term for a female British woman. 'White people' are considered to be the very personifications of 'modernity'.

The Zeme Nagas, on whose ancestral domain the conference was held, were considered by themselves and other Nagas to be fairly low in the hierarchy of 'modernity'. The Zemes of North Cachar Hills, even more than those of Nagaland and Manipur, are considered more 'backward' than many of the other tribes in terms of levels of education and urbanisation. Mostly, as mentioned earlier, their relatively low rates of Christianity and practice of reformed indigenous religion (Heraka) mean that they are regarded as less 'advanced' (that is, Westernised) than the majority of Christian Nagas. Even the Heraka Zemes have internalised this developmentalist chain of command, although they continue to battle for the recognition of the global relevance of their religion. This imaginary hierarchy of peoples, with its roots in social Darwinism, was the socio-political condition of my fieldwork. Anthropological research is, of course, inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism (see Smith 1999). The histories of British colonialism in India and Australia meant that as a pale-skinned person from a wealthy English-speaking country, I was viewed as having achieved the desirable state of 'modernity'. Endowed with prestige I was entirely unworthy of, and personal power that I did not experience, the Zeme Baptists at the NSF conference, presuming me Christian, kindly invited me to undertake fieldwork in their villages. Despite their ambivalence about the British during the colonial era, the Zeme positioning of 'Westerners' as 'developed' and powerful may have meant they believed my work with them could not only provide them with an opportunity for a voice but also that they might, while providing exceptional hospitality, informally make me, too, the subject of their research on 'Western life'¹³. Moreover, the acceptance of me by Zeme leaders may have been part of a strategy to present their plight to the international community (see Karlsson 2006: 59). In many ways then, my focus on gender relations emerged in the context of Zeme marginality.

In the 'field'

My introduction to Zeme village life was delayed by the district elections in North Cachar Hills. I was advised by my Zeme contacts that it was too dangerous to be in the area until conflicts and

¹³ Here I am illustrating Zeme agency and aims at empowerment rather than suggesting equality in power relations. Furthermore, this observation, like so many in this thesis, was made in hindsight.

‘ethnic tensions’ had died down. It was May when I arrived in Laisong, a large ‘interior’¹⁴ village close to the borders of Nagaland and Manipur. I was warned by contacts in Shillong that the Zeliangrong area was not only very ‘underdeveloped’ but also unsafe due to guerrilla activity and the visible presence of the Indian Army. Kidnappings were rife all over the Northeast. I expected a warlike situation and the inhabitants to be riven by deep psychosocial wounds. I must admit I was a little afraid.

Imagine my surprise, then, to find myself in beautiful surroundings amongst people who seemed extraordinarily relaxed and happy. Friendly, well-organised villagers bustled about humming, and the *jhum* fields rang with love songs. It was just before the monsoon and thousands upon thousands of white butterflies snowed down from the steep hill-tops to the valleys, promising a plentiful harvest. The green and brown patchwork of mountainous fields, the creaking bamboo, and the trickling springs presented a scene so beautiful I could have cried. The people are generally healthy and strong and enjoy an abundance of wholesome food concocted into a delicious chilli-laden cuisine. It is not unusual for people to live to their hundreds. Even though the ‘community’ is not harmonious and is divided by religious and ideological differences laughter and general merrymaking abounded. As my fieldwork progressed in two stints over 3 years Zemes seemed to enjoy a level of well-being and happiness I had not witnessed elsewhere. My expectations had been confounded.

¹⁴ ‘Interior’ villages in India refer to those remote from administrative centres. Most Zemes in North Cachar Hills live in rural villages.

Zemes and 'backwardness'

Yet Zemes insisted on the inferiority of their way of life which they regarded as 'backward' (*melangbe*). Most discussions Zemes initiated were (perhaps unsurprisingly) self-conscious reflections in relation to a 'white' researcher and guest from an 'advanced' country. Non-Zeme indigenous individuals who worked for a local branch of a European non-governmental organisation (NGO) also reinforced the belief that Zemes needed to change and 'improve' their lives, and in doing so underscored the position of Zemes in the regional pecking order. However, the Zeme construction of 'the West' as a wondrous and abundant world, and of them as lacking and lowly, paradoxically made me acutely aware of how rich their lives seemed, in a social, if not material, sense. I had witnessed the ravages of colonialism in some Indigenous communities in Australia, as well as the acute poverty that is highly visible in Indian cities. Zeme life was not comparable. Certainly very few Zemes have any money at all and women's work is nowadays punishingly hard. There is no electricity in most villages, roads are cratered and often impassable, and people occasionally die of illnesses that would have been preventable in wealthier countries. The threat of an occasional visit by the Indian armed forces was also ever-present¹⁵. Nonetheless, there is no homelessness, begging or prostitution in their society as Zemes like to point out. No one goes hungry unless the whole village suffers a famine, which is rare. The woven bamboo houses with earthen floors provide ample accommodation and everyone is guaranteed of owning or using a share of land to cultivate. The drug addictions, HIV/AIDS crisis, and violence that now characterise life in Nagaland are presently absent in the Zeme villages of North Cachar Hills, and the serious pollution and types of ecological damage that is occurring in other regions of the Northeast¹⁶ is unknown.

On the other hand, Zemes are convinced of their moral superiority in relation to the plains Indians, Bangladeshis and other migrants, as well as neighbouring tribal peoples such as Kukis. The Herakas and *Paupaise*, in particular, are concerned to promote Zeme identity. Even in a material sense they appreciated their lifeways. I often observed Zemes revelling in the beauty of the land whose fertility they had increased and from which they usually reaped a bountiful harvest. I noticed on excursions across hills bursting with paddy and fed by fast-flowing rivers where children fished and

¹⁵ By placing this sentence in this context I do not mean to trivialise the domination and suffering of Zemes under these armed forces. Rather, I am attempting to foreground the neo-colonial discourse of modernity which has contributed to the creation of inequality and Zeme marginalisation.

¹⁶ For example, illegal coal mining in the state of Meghalaya is causing deforestation, the poisoning of rivers and social problems. The Inner Line Regulation, which was not enacted in the Khasi Hills region (which later became a 'partially Excluded Area') of what is now Meghalaya, has largely protected Naga regions from intensive resource extraction and industrialisation.

laughed, that my companion would exclaim with gratitude “God has forgotten nothing!” I remember one relentlessly rainy evening an elderly man visited our house after weeding in the wet, bedraggled and soaked to the bone. He bent himself onto a tiny wooden stool, about an inch high, and slurped weak tea from a chipped enamel cup. He stretched out his muddy legs on the cold dirt floor and sighed “Ah, this is the life!” Zeme discourses of lack and inferiority coexisted awkwardly with the daily pleasures of life.

The anthropologist as ‘gendered knower’

Earlier drafts of this thesis constituted a counter-narrative to those that represent the Zemes as ‘backward’ and continue to contribute to their marginalisation. They privileged some aspects of Zeme gender constructions over Western ones. I mention these because they brought into focus the notions of ‘masculinities’ and socio-cultural change with which this present thesis is concerned. Earlier drafts, in some ways, charted my surprise at particular Zeme social relationships. They reflected the distinctive ‘astonishment’ of anthropologists at the difference of others (Shweder 1991: 1). This ‘surprise’, of course, revealed the norms of my own society. The anthropologist is, of course, the gendered product of her own culture. My personal constructions of reality constitute this thesis, and I choose to view them here not as the understandings of a unique individual, but as those of an Australian/Western woman at a particular point in historical time (see Lutz 1988: 15). Callaway asks (1992:30), “What are the implications of the anthropologist as a gendered knower? ... In what ways does rational inquiry have gendered dimensions? Since there are no ungendered lives, can there be ungendered texts?” She goes on to explain that the narrative that we, as anthropologists, construct of our lives and work necessarily unfolds in terms of gendered experience and its inequalities of power and privilege (*ibid.*: 35). Female subjectivity in the West is, at present, partly constructed around the possibility of sexual and other male violence, resulting in experience of relative powerlessness (see Levett 2003: 68). These cultural constructions of gender inevitably inform my research.

Two themes emerging from casual conversations, as well as semi-structured interviews and collected life histories seemed, in many ways, to privilege the quality of Zeme life over some aspects of ‘Western’ life. One of the most ‘surprising’ of these was the pleasure and nostalgia with which adults spoke about their childhoods. Their stories of their sense of inadequacy and insecurity at what could be described as their collective position in global politics were sharply contrasted by what seemed to be a deep personal contentment and security *within* their local family and kinship context, at least in their childhoods. Descriptions of their own childhood and youth, even accounting for events experienced as tragic, painted a picture of a time of life that is a safe haven from the troubles of adult life, where one is both enveloped by the tender ministrations of adult kin

and enjoined to be carefree. Participant-observation, as well as general discourse, produced the other subject: the close engagement of men with children. I would argue that this second theme is intimately connected to the fond memories of childhood. Zeme men's caring practices involving children was something of a revelation to me and a counterpoint to the social problems of disengagement from, and physical and sexual abuse of, children by men in Western countries (for example, Finkelhor 1984, 1987; Herman 1992, 2000; Mandell 2002; Barclay and Lupton 1997). The 'safe haven' of childhood and 'family' that is the Zeme norm is largely alien to a disturbing number of Western children as documents from organisations such as the National Child Protection Clearinghouse (2011) testify.

Issues of masculinities

The contrast of Western men's problematic interactions with children against Zeme men's caring practices brought into frame the concept of 'masculinities', originally. There is now a growing body of sociological literature that implicates Western cultural constructions of masculinities in relation to the current hegemonic form in 'uninvolved' fathering practices and child abuse (for example, Hearn 1992; Cossins 2000; Marsiglio and Pleck 2005). Zeme skills in navigating social life could help explain why, in some societies, women and children are more likely to be protected and nurtured rather than abused (as per Scheper-Hughes 1987: 8). It seemed to me that in the Zemes I had found a people who had devised cultural and social solutions through gender practices that were not only different but also somehow *better* than our own (after Lutz 1988: 17). Explicitly caring behaviour towards children and other creatures constructed as 'vulnerable' did not seem to diminish Zeme men's sense of masculinity. Rather, they were admired and praised for such behaviour. Unlike dominant patterns of masculinity in English-speaking countries (but certainly not absent from 'Western cultures') relations that might be described as 'caring' or 'nurturing' were not feminised, but crucial components of Zeme masculinity. They made a man 'fit to be a man'.

Involvement with children as central to Zeme normative masculinity seemed a worthy topic. As a comparative study it privileged Zeme constructions of 'caring' masculinities over Western ones as contributing to a society that supported the safety and well-being of children and women. I hoped to show that far from being 'backward', Zeme gendered lifeways are highly relevant and illustrated a positive alternative to Western narratives that 'biologise' men as unsuited to intensive child care. Marcus and Fischer (1986:1) state, "In using portraits of other cultural patterns to reflect self-critically on our own ways, anthropology disrupts common sense and makes us re-examine our taken-for-granted assumptions." As a kind of cultural critique, I set about writing a celebration of Zeme masculine practices, especially those that involved the care of children and adolescents. It

was to oppose developmentalist accounts that depict indigenous men as possessing a ‘savage physiology’ (Hokowhitu 2007: 331) that is dangerous to women and children, including their own families (see for example, DeMause 1991). Such representations contribute to ongoing marginalisation of indigenous peoples by suggesting they are unworthy of protection and benefits, and in the Naga case, contribute to ongoing abuses by the State. My account was to portray Zeme lifeways as equal to others. Some of these masculine ‘caring’ practices involving children are documented in Chapter Seven and elsewhere here.

However, my political attempt at a comparative study that privileged Zeme masculine practices was at odds with another issue that repeatedly emerged during my stay with the Zemes. This was, of course, women’s increasing sense of inequality with men that I illustrated earlier through Mrs Takheule’s comments. While certain areas of their lives were viewed as improving due to such factors as education and the importing of certain goods for example, married women insisted that men were becoming more dominating than in the past. Men, specifically ‘husbands’, were no longer fulfilling their duties and, as I explained earlier, this means an almost unbearably heavy workload for wives. This thesis explores some of the reasons for Zeme women’s decreasing sense of quality of life. From the outset I had sought to be guided by women to write about the topics they felt were most important.

Nevertheless, it was not my initial intention to scrutinise, let alone appear to critique, the behaviour of Zeme people. While it is a mistake to generalise, my experiences and observations of Zeme men during a year’s fieldwork were of kind, generous, hardworking, self-sacrificing, witty and fun-loving people. I grew very fond of many individuals. Due to the focus of this thesis it may appear as though my opinions of Zeme men are negative. Nothing could be further from the truth. I continue to wrestle with the tension between showing processes which have led to further marginalisation of the Zemes as a people, and the urging of Zeme women to explore their perceived increasing marginality vis-à-vis their husbands within their own society. In my mind there has been a kind of tug-of-war of loyalties about whose perspectives to (re)present. I remain deeply uncomfortable with this representation. Indeed, the normative masculine constructions of my own society meant that I viewed Zeme men’s behaviour as exemplary. Zeme women, on the other hand, viewed men’s current behaviour and decline in *heleuraube* as a departure from masculine ideals.

My aim in this thesis is to explore changes in Zeme gender relations. How have the structural and ideological forces of what we might call ‘modernity’ been engaged by the Zemes, and how might these socio-cultural changes have differing gendered impacts? What are the reasons Zeme

masculine ‘caring practices’ might be changing to the detriment of women? Have the benchmarks of being ‘fit to be a man’ altered? These are some of the questions that have guided my research.

My approach to ‘gender’ is that it is socially constructed, but involves a specific relationship with bodies. Being a man or a woman is not a predetermined state (Connell 2009: 5). An informed critical gaze towards men and their practices developed through modern feminist thought is enhanced by discussions within the sociology of masculinity (see Whitehead 2007: 402). To explore Zeme notions of what makes a man ‘fit to be a man’ I employ the concept of ‘masculinities’ as developed by Australian sociologist, Raewyn Connell. Because this thesis is about women’s responses to changes in men’s behaviour, I have made extensive use of Connell’s work. Her work on gender (for example, Connell 2009) is detailed, critically examines global processes, and incorporates ethnographic findings on gender around the world. Furthermore, her theory of masculinities (for example, Connell 2005a) has informed important understandings of dominant constructions of Anglophone masculinity and child sexual abuse (for example, Cossins 2000) that were particularly pertinent to earlier drafts of this thesis. Through her work I have been able to better understand relationships between particular constructions of masculinities and the ways femininities and children are culturally configured. This has been important for my focus on the ‘caring practices’ of Zeme men.

Connell (2005a: 71) writes,

Masculinity’, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture.

The concept of masculinity is inherently relational; it does not exist except in contrast with femininity (*ibid.*: 68). The pluralised terms, ‘masculinities’ and ‘femininities’ allow a degree of transcendence of binary, usually fixed and naturalised understandings, of gender. They recognise the constant interplay between gender, ‘race’ and class as well as other differences among men and among women. My understanding, informed by Connell, is that gender is social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, but is not social practice reduced to the body. She explains, “Gender exists precisely to the extent that biology does *not* determine the social” (Connell 2005: 71, emphasis in original). It is a historical *process* involving the body, not a fixed set of biological determinants (*ibid.*. Emphasis added). Gender as a structure of social relations is multi-dimensional and arrangements of gender which may appear ‘stark and rigid’ are ever changing “as human practice creates new situations and as structures develop crisis tendencies” (Connell 2009: 11). Gender, of course, produces boundaries and inequalities. It is the shifting nature of these boundaries and emerging inequalities that I explore in these chapters.

While I use the term ‘gender relations’ throughout to underscore the culturally constructed and relational aspects of the sexes, I also make use of the concept of ‘patriarchy’. It has been argued that in using the expression ‘gender relations’ we lose sight of the agents: men and women. Deo and McDuie-Ra (2011: 116) argue, “Replacing ‘women’ with ‘gender’ has real consequences not only for the constitution of the subject under consideration but also for the analysis of that subject”. Feminist activists in India have indicated a wish return to the words ‘women’ to help prevent the loss of women’s own voices and ability for political action; and to ‘patriarchy’ to highlight power relations. One activist said, “Patriarchy makes you see all the ways in which politics, violence, economics and religion together keep women back. Gender can’t do that” (in Deo and McDuie-Ra 2011: 118). I understand patriarchy as both a system by which men dominate women and by which some men (older men; fathers, in the classic definition of the term) dominate other men (Kimmel 2005: 417). I also view patriarchies as culturally diverse, constantly contested and shifting.

Politics and terminology

Focusing on the ‘problem’ of men and changing masculinities will be to magnify it. I am very concerned not to participate in yet another misrepresentation of indigenous men as wanting in ‘civilised enlightenment’ (Hokowhitu 2007: 332). As such, I privilege indigenous, especially Zeme, interests over those of the State and other entities. This is in line with strategies of Fourth World Theory that posit indigenous experience and concerns¹⁷ as the focal point rather than peripheral as they appear in State narratives.

India and ‘indigenous’ and ‘tribal’ peoples

The Zemes and other indigenous peoples in North Cachar Hills, and elsewhere in northeast India, generally refer to themselves as ‘tribes’. Despite the term being a British colonial construct later adopted by Indian anthropologists and administrations, it could be argued that people who designate themselves as ‘tribal’ have appropriated the term and invested it with new meanings (Karlsson and Subba 2006: 4). In northeast India, ‘tribe’ and ‘tribal’ do not generally have pejorative connotations. Indeed, not only Zemes and other Nagas, but also other tribes of the Northeast, tend to view their casteless societies as more democratic, and their gender relations are widely regarded as more egalitarian, than in non-tribal India. There are also some advantages to belonging to a ‘tribe’. Shortly after Indian Independence ‘tribe’ was superseded by the term ‘Scheduled Tribe’, an administrative category constituted primarily for political expediency rather than on the basis of cultural characteristics (Nongbri 2006: 83). Karlsson and Subba (2006: 4)

¹⁷ However, I often retain place names that foreign scholars of the Zemes and of the general region have used (and that the Zemes are familiar with) to avoid disorientation and confusion for the reader.

suggest that one explanation regarding the acceptance of the term is due to the ‘Scheduled Tribes’ (STs) linkage to entitlements to “a comprehensive programme of affirmative action”. Scheduled Tribes are those that have been listed as such by the government and may enjoy certain constitutional provisions such as quotas for educational institutions, state employment and political representation (Karlsson 2008: 28). There are also specially designed programmes for the economic ‘upliftment’ of the STs (Karlsson and Subba 2006: 4.). Zemes participate in such programmes and aspirations for their ‘upliftment’ as a tribe are increasingly audible. However, as Karlsson (2008: 29) clarifies, the Scheduled Tribes framework is really a State welfare project and agency resides with the State and its institutions.

The term ‘indigenous people’ was, until recently only very occasionally used by Zemes in N.C. Hills because it was largely unknown. Where it was used it was usually by those who are more politically active (and therefore familiar with broader Naga discourse) in the quest for the unification of all Naga-inhabited areas (the recognition of Nagalim) and Naga self-determination through a special federal arrangement¹⁸. For some Nagas, the term ‘indigenous’ seems to retain the evolutionary overtones of ‘primitiveness’ and ‘wildness’ that the term ‘tribe’ has outside India. However, in 2010 the Zemes, with neighbouring indigenous peoples (mostly Kukis such as Hmars), formed the ‘Indigenous Peoples Forum’ in a movement to bifurcate North Cachar Hills district into Dimasa and non-Dimasa areas to avoid continuing Dimasa domination. A non-Dimasa armed outfit, the Hills Tiger Force, has also been established for this purpose. It seems, then, that very recently the term ‘indigenous people’ has gained currency for Zemes in local political arenas as well as for forming alliances across tribes. The Dimasa success in gaining further government recognition with the official renaming of the district as ‘Dima Hasao’ also shows that empowerment of one indigenous people does not automatically imply social justice and may exclude others who are even more vulnerable (see Baviskar 2006).

Nagas, including Zemes, then, increasingly refer to themselves as ‘indigenous peoples’ as a political strategy. Because ‘many Nagas do not realize they are indigenous’ stated an important Naga newspaper (*The Morung Express*, September 17, 2007) there have been programs conducted by the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR) and the NSF to raise awareness in more remote areas of Nagaland (<nscn.livejournal.com> 2007) to clarify the Naga position as indigenous peoples. Since 1993, Nagas have been actively participating in the deliberations of the United Nations both in the Working Group (replaced in 2008 by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples) and Permanent Forums on Indigenous peoples and issues. Being indigenous is

¹⁸ G.A. Shimray, a Tangkhul Naga, (2011:356) argues that the general public have largely been ‘kept in the dark’ about the details of the Naga (mostly NSCN I-M) negotiations with the Government of India.

a new way of placing oneself in the world, and as such to pursue a new type of politics (Karlsson 2006: 52). The emergence of 'indigenous peoples' in global discourse means recognition as rights-bearing global subjects. It could be argued that the international indigenous peoples' movement has emerged as a reaction to the failure of States to protect the interests of people who now assert themselves as indigenous (Karlsson 2008: 29). Rather than asking for welfare measures which are linked to the 'tribal' construct, indigenous peoples seek recognition as peoples with the right to fully govern themselves and their territories and natural resources. The indigenous peoples framework has its base and rationale outside the State sphere (Karlsson *ibid.*) and agency remains with them, through self-identification with the term and through self-governance and land rights.

Yet India does not recognise her own indigenous peoples despite voting in favour of the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. In other words, India is claiming to be a champion of indigenous rights yet denies that such rights apply to India (Karlsson 2008: 28). India's position is that either all Indian citizens are indigenous, or none are. However, this argument tends to be based on questions of original occupancy rather than of politics. As Karlsson points out (2008: 24) a Declaration is a non-binding international instrument and States risk little by approving them. Some indigenous people in India say the term is dismissed by the Indian Government because they want to keep the tribals as dependent receivers of welfare assistance rather than as peoples in their own right to pursue the development they find most suitable (in Karlsson 2006:58). However, India's main fear, it seems, is that indigenous peoples' right to self-determination will fuel secessionism and undermine State sovereignty and territorial integrity. India insists that the right to self-determination only applies to people under 'foreign domination' (in Karlsson *ibid.*) such as Aboriginal peoples in Australia. While most indigenous peoples in India (including some Zemes) aspire for self-determination within the framework of the Indian constitution (Karlsson 2006: 58) some Naga organisations, including the NSCN (I-M), claim full independence¹⁹.

The notion of 'indigenous peoples', then, is highly contested in India (see for example, Beteille 1998, Baviskar 2006) and some may condemn the concept as 'intellectually reckless' due to it not submitting itself to the procedures of academic knowledge (see Chakrabarty 2006). I showed earlier the constructionism of 'the Nagas' (although it is no more constructed than the concept of 'the Indian State'). However, Karlsson (2006) argues that the concept of indigenous peoples is 'already out there' and anthropologists need to understand its relevance to marginalised peoples and engage

¹⁹ According to NSCN (I-M) Nagas cannot secede because they were never part of another country. Rather, they are occupied by the States of India and Burma. Nepuni Piku, a member of NPMHR, is quoted as saying "Nagas are very much part of the world indigenous community but their unique historical struggle puts them within the context of national liberation against both colonial and neocolonial forces enduring both oppression and suppression without enjoying their basic rights and dignity as any human community" (nscn.livejournal.com 2007).

with it. I align with indigenous Khasi sociologist, Tiplut Nongbri (2006: 87), who clarifies that the United Nations Declaration is an instrument for social justice and therefore this issue is not academic but political. She explains that the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues created in the UN (UNPFII) was an important achievement because indigenous peoples were accorded parity with State actors for the first time (*ibid.*: 92, note 11). Nongbri also notes the transformatory potential of the concept and its ‘explicit concern to correct the asymmetrical and exploitative relations between the indigenous and the dominant population’ (*ibid.*: 88). I view the concept of ‘indigenous peoples’ similarly and continue to employ the term, even as I recognise the nationalist aim of the Naga movement. I also continue to use the word ‘tribe’ interchangeably due to this self-referencing of Zemes.

A note on the use of essentialisations

As with ‘indigenous peoples’ and ‘tribes’ I fully make use of essentialising terms such as ‘the West’, ‘the Zeme/s’, ‘Third World’, ‘middle-class’, and ‘traditional’ as analytical tools. They are ultimately unsatisfactory because these classifications neglect their inherent heterogeneity, and perpetuate the ideological divisions between “those who make history and those who are mere objects of it” (Ahmad 1995:78). However, while these sorts of binarisms are unsophisticated, they are useful “to create a space, to open up theoretical questions” and to acknowledge that there are no pure categories on either end of the spectrum (Moore 1997:141). We can only endeavour to remain aware that these notions are essentialisations (see Carrier 1992). As futile as it may be, I try here to account for the heterogeneity of ‘Zeme’ points of view. As with all people, disagreements, contradictions and different interests and allegiances characterise Zeme life. I try to not sacrifice complexity for coherence²⁰.

More on gendered research

My gender as a woman, I believe, was an advantage in being granted permission to do research in North Cachar Hills. To my knowledge, there had been no other foreign researcher in the district since Independence. There was, therefore, no precedent or protocol for a foreign researcher. Given the general paranoia by the State about Nagas forging Western alliances and about the internationalisation of reports of atrocities, being a ‘lowly woman’ was a benefit. It meant that I was viewed by officialdom according to common masculine Indian constructions as possessing somewhat inferior capacities and that my work with ‘women and children’ would be largely unimportant and unthreatening. This gender stereotype, along with an important letter of support

²⁰ Part of this complexity is demonstrated in my irregular use of past and present tenses throughout the thesis with reference to particular practices. These irregularities reflect the unevenness of ‘cultural change’ in Zeme society.

from the Meghalaya Inspector General of Police and an obligatory discussion of cricket, meant that the 2001 Deputy Commissioner of N.C. Hills allowed my research to go ahead without interference from security personnel.

On the other hand, inevitably there were limitations to this research due to my gender. A study of masculine practices ought to entail some scrutiny of sexual practices. Being a woman as well as an outsider meant that I was not privy to deeper understandings about Zeme sexualities, especially masculine constructions and practices. It is not considered proper to discuss such matters in Zeme society. My primary research consultant, Adeule, was unmarried and was considered not yet to have knowledge of such matters. Furthermore, militarisation is important to masculinities and it is a very significant aspect of Naga masculinity. However, as a foreigner and guest many issues regarding 'underground' activities and militarisation were kept from me for obvious security reasons. As such, issues of sexualities are sidelined in this thesis, and the topic of militarisation, though present, is somewhat circumscribed in my discussion of Zeme masculinities.

Introducing Adeule and other key figures in the research

Catherine Lutz (1988: 31) reminds us that there is nothing more central to the process of cultural understanding than the interpersonal relationships that are established between the anthropologist and those she visits. Adeule was the person with whom I formed the closest relationship and this research has been dependent on her to a very large degree. She was in her early twenties, unmarried, and an English Major student at the Haflong university when I was first introduced to her. She was literate in the Zeme language, and partly literate in English and Hindi. She practiced Baptist Christianity but was a fairly recent convert from Heraka, making her ideally positioned to clarify Zeme religion/s and its utter inseparability from every other aspect of their lives. Her English was at first rather rudimentary²¹ but crucial to my fieldwork as I struggled to grasp the tonal Zeme language whose diphthongs seemed to slide around like my feet in the slippery monsoon mud. Most of all, it was because of Adeule's sociability and popularity, and that she was trusted by all, that I was able to mix with many people from several villages and was welcomed into their discussions and homes. Adeule once told me that 'character' was the most important thing to her. The practice of *heleuraube*, or acts of selflessness, is integral to the cultivation of good character. Adeule epitomised this behaviour. She was a most cheerful companion, always ready to laugh and a wonderful cook. It was in her that I first observed the deep well of generosity that commits itself to

²¹ Adeule, who grew up in the very remote village of Hereilo on the Nagaland border, was one of the only women in Laisong to manage conversational English. This is due to an earlier preference of education for boys, which I discuss later. Unlike in Nagaland where English is the official language, in N.C. Hills a kind of pidgin known as 'Haflong Hindi' is spoken between linguistic groups. There were, however, quite a number of men with whom I could converse and most of my interviews with men were conducted in English.

the comfort of others that so many Zemes exemplified. I am embarrassed to recall the constant demands I made of her, to which she submitted uncomplainingly, and to realise what an imposition being the interpreter, ‘chief informant’, housekeeper and confidante must have been during my two periods of ‘fieldwork’. This thesis emerges largely a result of Adeule’s translations and explanations, although I take responsibility for all the errors and misunderstandings that are inevitably evident (especially to Zeme readers) here.

With permission from the Head Man of Laisong village on the proviso I make my research available to them, it was the Baptist community that took me in, as I mentioned earlier, and accommodated me in every sense of the word. Far too polite to voice their dismay that I was not a practicing Christian they nevertheless ensured my safety and well-being for the duration of my stay. In fact, this sense of personal ‘safety’, not just in Baptist colonies, but in all Zeme areas, was something I had not previously experienced in other societies. Not only in the West, but also in northern ‘mainstream’ India, any non-senior female travelling without a male chaperone endures nearly constant sexual harassment. My perception of Zeme men as ‘safe’ in this regard also contributed to my earlier drafts that privileged Zeme constructions of masculinity over normative Western ones.

I was ‘adopted’ into a Baptist family, my ‘father’ being the Pastor at the time. Being adopted in this way meant I would be placed into a particular kinship context of certain social duties and relationships (although these were somewhat loose due to my stay being temporary). I was told that should I get into any ‘trouble’ or make some awful mistake, my father would take responsibility for me and bear any punishment if necessary. In hindsight I realise my reciprocal duties were woefully inadequate. However, I taught English in the Baptist Mount Zion English School on both field trips (and in the Heraka school on the first trip), socialising with most of the teachers which, as Chapter Six shows, produced some significant data as well as good company. Adeule also taught there sometimes, as it is considered that anyone so lucky to have received a higher education should impart their knowledge to the young. The Headmaster, Mr Hiaduing Neume, a Zeme from neighbouring Manipur state was highly articulate, relatively worldly and a good source of information and jokes. One of my adopted ‘younger brothers’ (*akina peu*), Akum, was also an important figure providing a young man’s knowledge and perspective as well as regaling me with Zeme creation legends and other stories that emerged at the cry of a particular bird or around the meaning of the yellow bean flower. Even though I spent much time with Zemes of other religions, my research and interpretations may have a ‘Baptist bias’.

However, I obtained diverse views by interviewing people from all walks of Zeme life. Adeule, Akum and I spent several days in the cloudy hill-top *Paupaise* village of Hezailoa on several occasions, in the Jongkau range opposite Laisong. People who practice the *Paupaise* religion are usually viewed as particularly ‘backward’ and uneducated by Christians and Herakas, and I was especially interested in hearing their perspectives which were often framed in terms of cultural survival. I was primarily based in Laisong, the largest Zeme village in N.C. Hills, and with the most diverse population in terms of religion. Laisong is now divided into religious colonies: the Herakas inhabit the old village site on the spur of the hill, with the Presbyterians and Baptist colonies below it, and the Catholic colony closer to the Henamki River (known more generally by non-Zemes as the Jenam River) in the valley. I interacted with and interviewed a broad cross-section of Laisong residents, as well as travelling east on foot to Ngaulong village in Nagaland and to Tousem in Manipur, stopping in many villages in between, in the interests of documenting as broad a range of experiences as I was physically able. Adeule and I also spent several weeks in the Western Zeme region (*Nzebak*) and walked westward, across a gentler landscape, towards Meghalaya to conduct interviews. I interviewed people of all ages (though I did not conduct formal interviews with children) and was especially interested in recording perceptions of change by the elderly. Inevitably, I engaged in more in-depth conversations with people who had studied English, occasionally in major Indian cities such as Chennai or New Delhi, and who had the time to interact with me. These were most often unmarried people, and usually young Christian men, who had the confidence and leisure to practice their English with a visitor. However, I intentionally conducted more formal interviews with married women, often in groups, than men. I also interviewed Zeme government employees (women and men) living in Haflong town and who might be called (and both criticised and admired by other Zemes) ‘elites’. Nevertheless, most of my research was undertaken with rural villagers who cultivate the land, with translations offered by Adeule, herself originating from Hereilo, right on the Assam, Nagaland and Manipur borders and considered one of the most interior and ‘backward’ of all Zeme villages.

All the people I interviewed requested (when asked) that their name accompany their words cited in this thesis. The subject matter of this thesis is not particularly controversial; nor do I believe it constitutes a threat to personal security. Similarly, people welcomed being photographed. In this case to not name may be yet another silencing typical of the colonisation process (John Bradley pers. comm. See also Gutmann 2006: 31).

Hastrup argues that fieldwork is a personal adventure that belongs somewhere between autobiography and anthropology. It implies that the ethnographer is a person with a distinct biography (1992: 119). I asked questions earlier about the implications of being the ‘gendered

knower'. After my first stint of fieldwork, and back home in Australia, I became a mother for the first time. This happy experience sharpened my interest in issues concerning children and parenting, and also opened up related topics for discussion with Zemes as well as creating new relationships that were constructed for me in my new role. Like anthropologist Matthew Gutmann who brought his new daughter, Liliana, from the United States to Mexico City, my own "cultural and personal hybridity" of parenting in the field' shaped my ethnographic questions and how I asked them (Gutmann 2006: 29). Returning to the field as a mother with my two year old son therefore served to further humanise me in Zeme eyes. It also meant I had plenty of opportunities to observe Zeme interactions with children. I employed a close friend of Adeule's, a young woman named Ameile, to stay with us and help mind my son while I conducted interviews or undertook journeys on foot over a few days. My son's delight at the quality of care and attention he constantly received has, in some ways, inspired some of the topics discussed in this thesis.

Photograph 2 Adeule (left), and Ameile holding my son Jadonang, Laisong

Another key figure in my research, though I never met her (she died at an old age in 1988), is British anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower (married name Betts). An upper class woman in her early twenties, she lived in Laisong for about five years from 1939. She describes her time with the Zemes as the happiest of her life and by all accounts she was much loved. Although I felt very much in the shadow of this brave woman who was famous for leading a band of Zemes through the jungles in search of Japanese forces in World War Two, her presence and her research very much paved the way for me. Many very elderly people had known her and perhaps this was a reason they so readily granted me interviews (and sometimes mistook me for her). Her unpublished thesis

(which Bower's daughter, Catriona Child, who has an ongoing relationship with the Zemes, made available to me) titled *Village Organization among the Central Nzemi Nagas* (1950) offers an unparalleled, detailed picture of pre-Christian Zeme life. An article about the agricultural cycle-migration of the Barail Zemes, published in *Man in India* (1946), describes the unintended consequences of British colonialism that caused the famine I described earlier. However, she was best known for her popular book, *Naga Path* (1952) which is largely a rollicking adventure story. Indeed, Bower became known as 'the Naga Queen' in Britain. Apart from vividly introducing the reader to Zeme life in the early 1940s Bower succeeds in humanising the Zemes with her sympathetic portrayals of particular individuals (all men). While her work suffered from the scientific cultural evolutionist beliefs of her time she clearly felt that many Zeme ways of life were equal, or even superior in some cases, to British ways. However, gender was an area Bower virtually ignored. She describes women as a 'very strong folk' (1952: 78) and offers a brief description of their 'position', but presumably the men were more available than women for socialising and their lives far more exciting to write about. Nevertheless Bower's research underlies, and has been invaluable to, this thesis.

Ursula Graham Bower was the last 'Western' anthropologist to work with the Zemes in North Cachar Hills, to my knowledge. An Assamese anthropologist, Babul Roy, had completed field research in the Eastern Zeme area not long before I headed there. His unpublished thesis (1998) was a comparison of the Zemes with the Dimasas examining the sociocultural and environmental dimensions of health. He later (2003) published a paper on evolving gender relationships of the Zemes in the *Journal of the Indian Anthropological Society*, mostly with reference to the Heraka religion. While an interesting paper, he employs social Darwinist notions that contribute to the perceived 'backwardness' of the Zemes and it is not a sustained analysis that takes into account global forces.

During my second field trip I met Arkotong Longkumer, an Ao Naga religious studies PhD candidate from Edinburgh University. He was making a preliminary visit to Laisong in order to research the Heraka religion. We shared information, vehicles, a few meals and laughs over a couple of days. On his return he was to move into the little bamboo house that had been constructed for me on land owned by the Baptist church after I left for Australia. Adeule also became one of his friends and primary research consultants. His book about the Heraka Movement, *Reform, Identity and Narratives of Belonging: The Heraka Movement in Northeast India*, published in 2010, in which he shows the interrelation of religious and economic reform and the construction of identity, is masterfully written and wonderfully detailed. He has been able to show, in ways that I have not been able to, the centrality of 'religion' to Zeme personhood. While taking into account the

sweeping changes wrought by British colonialism and the relationship with India he succeeds in fully documenting Zeme agency in these processes. Longkumer (2010: 77) notes that the Heraka (and presumably other Zemes) have “seen what change can do to the ‘traditional’ forms of knowledge, values and gender relations”. My research articulates with, and elaborates on, this observation.

Chapter Four

‘Men no longer seem to Care’

Chapters Two and Three provided an overview of the history that has contributed to Zeme marginalisation, the precondition of my fieldwork, and of the key figures of the research, and the approaches I take here. This chapter returns to the problem of growing gender inequality articulated by Mrs. Takheule in the Introduction. In the tribal Northeast of India gender inequality is generally understood as being less of a problem for women than elsewhere in India due to women’s greater involvement in the economy, absence of dowry, and other factors. However, not only Mrs Takheule but women from all over the Zeme area of North Cachar Hills voiced their dissatisfaction with men’s neglect of their responsibilities, and exploitation of their labour.

Other observations of Zeme and Zeliangrong society concur with what Zeme women say about changes in gender relations and their deleterious effects on women. I briefly outline the nature of women’s typical labour in the village, before documenting some historical observations from the early and late colonial periods. These highlight that women have traditionally accepted that their duties were more numerous than men’s, and that men had more leisure in the past. This leaves us with the question as to why women now perceive their greater portion of work as unjust, whereas in the past it was accepted.

An outline of men’s views on the topic leads to a discussion of the Zeme dichotomy of gendered domains of labour. These dualisms underpin Zeme men’s and women’s understandings of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ and the tasks proper to men and women. This is illustrated by showing how the conception of the village converges with notions of personhood and gendered domains.

I then furnish a description of Zeme women’s ‘traditional’ life-course to illustrate that women expect certain benefits and entitlements for the successful performance of their labour. They expect to ascend the female hierarchy as they age. The life-course description includes childhood and adolescence; raising girls; marriage and motherhood; Naga mothers and peace-keeping; and becoming an elder. It orients the reader to the expectations of most Zeme women. It also offers a fuller understanding of Zeme gender constructions, particularly of womanhood.

Growing gender inequality

As I mentioned earlier, from the beginning I sought to be guided by issues that Zeme women regarded as most important to them. Zeme women face many problems such as loss of children to

malaria and other illnesses (which are understandably experienced as tragedies), illiteracy which contributes to their sense of powerlessness *vis- a- vis* literate members of their society, as well as a sense of inferiority about their position in relation to neighbouring peoples and the wider world. These concerns are subsumed by the idea of ‘backwardness’, or *melangbe*, which I briefly referred to in Chapter Three. Despite occasional conflicts with the Indian Army, and between Naga armed factions and other local militant groups, women’s sense of safety and social and physical integrity seems to remain well safe-guarded *within* their own communities²². Indeed, many women in more remote villages knew very little about the protracted Naga battle with the Indian State and issues of politics and identity (about which so much has been written by other Naga groups). These matters did not generally appear to impinge on their day-to-day lives.

Less dramatic, but perhaps more insidious, was women’s stated dissatisfaction with their husbands. As I mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter Three the topic of ‘problem husbands’ was a dominant concern. Explicit in many interviews, and implicit in conversations, was the dismay expressed at what women felt was the increasing exploitation of their labour by the men. Men are increasing their control over women but are no longer adequately fulfilling their duties, women said. Many men, women lamented, were no longer ‘fit to be a man’. Problems in gender relations for women of the Northeast may come as something of a surprise, as they are perceived as generally better off than women in other parts of India. I discuss this briefly below.

Tribal gender relations in India

It is largely accepted by commentators on tribal women in northeast India, that they generally occupy a higher position than their non-tribal Hindu and Muslim counterparts (e.g., Zehol 2004; Arya & Roy 2006: 45; Hutton 1921: 183; von Furer-Haimendorf 1933:101). However, it may also be argued that the notion of the relatively ‘high status’ of women has prevented critical examination of gender issues in tribal societies (McDuie-Ra 2009: 125; see also Xaxa 2004). It is also increasingly acknowledged that within their own societies they are viewed as inferior to men (e.g., Zehol 2004: 301). I understand ‘women’s status’ as highly variable within and between societies (see also M. Rosaldo 1980: 401) and that ‘the positive or negative evaluation of women’s lives elsewhere will always be partial and selective’ (di Leonardo 1991: 17). Naga social scientists writing on the ‘status of women’ in their society demonstrate there is some tension between the belief, on the one hand, that ‘modernisation’ is improving quality of life and is increasing parity between the genders (e.g., K. And L. Zehol 1998; Kelhou 1998), and on the other, the observation of increasing social ills (particularly in Nagaland state) and deterioration of the quality of life,

²² At least since the violent clashes between Christians and Herakas that began and ended in the 1960s.

especially for women (e.g., Newmai 1998). However, the narrative of a natural, ameliorating, and even ‘God ordained’, trajectory of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ is by far the most dominant and it has for some time formed an integral part of programs for social change and even cosmology. The benefits of modernisation are pitted against the ‘evil’ of local traditions (e.g., Zehol 1998: 80) and Western/Christian values are considered to be indisputably liberating to women in these discourses.

Naga social structures, economies and cosmologies are utterly intertwined and changes in one lead to transformation of the other as Longkumer (2010) describes in his volume about the Heraka movement of the Zemes in North Cachar Hills. My findings, like that of Nongbri (2006) and a small handful of critical social scientists in the Northeast (e.g., Kelkar and Nathan 2003), go against the prevailing discourse that claims ‘modernisation’ (often in the form of Christianisation, Westernisation and integration into the mainstream economy) has unequivocally improved women’s position in society and provides the best security for them.

My attempt to understand the reasons for Zeme women’s growing sense of inequality in relation to men begins by giving voice to Zeme women’s dissatisfaction with what may be termed the ‘caring practices’ of their husbands and that result in women having to shoulder what they consider an unfair burden of labour. Gender relations are inherently complex. For analytic purposes, Connell (2005: 78-81; 2009: 75-87) suggests that there are four dimensions or ‘substructures’ of gender: the division of labour, power relations, emotional relations and symbolisation. These dimensions are interwoven and interdependent and now involve not only local but global elements. The following section focuses on some of the ways Zeme women have problematised the gender division of labour (which refers to the ‘work’ that is culturally appropriate to socially defined men or women) but the other categories are necessarily implicated.

The problem of husbands

“If the husband is good, then life is good” proclaimed Mrs Paukuisuangle from a Western Zeme (*Nzebak*) village. Her statement echoes the sentiments of the women from the Heraka Women’s Society meeting in Laisong (in the Eastern Zeme area, *Nreibak*) and indeed from both Christian and non-Christian self-help groups and Women’s Societies²³ all through Zeme territory in North Cachar Hills.

At the end of August, Adeule and I panted up the steep path through the shady village grove above the Baptist colony to the original Laisong settlement at the spur of the hill whose inhabitants

²³ These sorts of Women’s Organisations are often an initiative of the Government of India and, through them, women may apply for funds. However, one of my research participants, Mrs Wangsamneule, said that Rani Gaidinliu visited Laisong seven times and suggested the women create a Society for themselves.

practice the Heraka religion. All the married (and some young adult unmarried) women of this section of the village sat on wooden benches, some with children on their knees, in the small woven bamboo hall that had been built especially for Women's Society meetings in 1989. The stated aims of the Heraka Women's Society are to support each other and serve the community, and to actively preserve 'traditions' and cultural identity in the light of rapid cultural change. It is a forum to discuss problems and debate solutions. And the biggest problem according to the women is some of their husbands (*napeume*). Mrs Takheule, who held a government job as a nurse, and was said to have learnt about many women's problems, explained in front of the group,

Husbands are the biggest problem for women because men lack respect. Before we get married we don't know how difficult life will be for women. Only after marriage do we understand that a woman's life is very troublesome...If the men were to understand that to help the women carry firewood and also with the heavy work in the fields, then it would be a bit better for women. But we women do everything, in the home as well as in the fields. The men are very uncaring towards women, and they eat bigger and better dishes than the women. The women should have double the food of the men because the children are sitting with the mother and taking from her plate... The men don't help us and spend money unnecessarily and drink rice beer and rice wine, and the women work for wages but the men spend more than their earnings.

Our Women's Society has had some success in changing men's behaviour and we have the full support of the elders and the *Gaon bura* (village head man: Hindi). The card-playing that was introduced by the Indians and Nepalis has decreased due to our actions. This was a problem because they weren't paying enough attention to the children. And we continue to make and wear traditional clothes. Men tend not to wear Zeme clothes any more, but we still wear our heirloom necklaces (*tela tau*) and proper cultural dress. We save money for the education of our children. We respect and serve others and preserve our culture. We women *care* more.

Mrs Takheule's comments draw attention to some of the most important issues in this thesis, and I return to her comments several times. She points to the power relations between a husband and wife, suggesting that men 'lack respect' and are 'uncaring'. This sense of lack comes from an expectation that men *should* respect and care for their wives. First Mrs Takheule indicates that 'caring for' and 'respecting women' are expected from men as *normal* and normative behaviour. Does this expectation stem only from the experience of certain women of her age group (married, but non-senior) who have received some education and much-coveted government employment? In Chapter Nine I will suggest that women who have received schooling do indeed aspire to equality with their husbands (as it is culturally conceived) and to livelihoods beyond 'traditional' Zeme ones confined to the villages. Such women have experienced that they may possess abilities equal or superior to men's, and therefore contest their husbands' 'disrespect' more vocally and powerfully than other women. However, Mrs Takheule and the other members of the Laisong Heraka Women's

Society were not the only ones to express dissatisfaction with the behaviour of husbands, in terms of the gender division of labour.

Photograph 3 Heraka Women's Society, Laisong

Senior women (grandmothers, but not elderly) such as Mrs Iheule and Mrs Pedechungle from the Laisong Baptist community indicated that men's behaviour towards wives had worsened over time. They were not educated yet they were keen to comment on what they thought was one of the most pressing issues of their society. Mrs Iheule said that when they were young women they "didn't have the problem of eating less than their husbands because their husbands had more respect for them." This comment echoes the one by Mrs Takheule about "eating bigger and better dishes", and is significant because people show their love through food, in its preparation and distribution. To be denied what is considered an adequate portion is a personal affront and perhaps indicative of particular social group's fall from grace (an issue I take up in Chapter Nine). Again, these women whose backgrounds were significantly different from Mrs Takheule's, suggested that husbands were erring from acceptable and expected behaviour. During the interview with these two women, Adeule added her view about the recent changes in men's labour practices:

Nowadays women have to work even harder than in the past. The old women scold the young men and their own sons for making their wives clear the *jhum*. They say it's shameful

for a man to ask a woman to clear the *jhum*... Men are lazier now than in the past, and the women have to work even harder now... Nowadays more women will carry a heavier load than men. In the past men used to work hard and didn't want their wives to go and do hard work in the *jhum*. But nowadays it's the opposite.

It would be difficult to suggest that the young Adeule was expressing nostalgia about an idealised Zeme past when women were happier in their relations with husbands. Adeule, like other relatively educated young Baptists, sought to carve out a 'modern' identity for herself which sometimes entailed the derision and devaluing of 'the ways of the past' as 'backward' and lowly. Furthermore, almost all women held similar opinions.

I was careful to interview as many women as possible and cover a range broad both in geographical territory as well as in documenting individual women's backgrounds and circumstances, such as age, religion and education. But the topic of men's increasing 'laziness' was at the top of the list of what most women wanted to say. Paujelungle, an illiterate 37 year old widow from the *Paupaise* (the original Zeme religion) village of Hezailoa said, "The present men's manner is very bad. In my understanding men's behaviour is getting worse and worse. There is less respect and less love and people do as they please. We can't continue to live like this".

In another part of Zeme territory, the very 'interior' Eastern Zeme area, near the border of Manipur state, the women of the Hangrum Women's Society said that they are so busy nowadays and very much wish to have the leisure they enjoyed 10-20 years before. Many women converted to Christianity so they could be permitted to do less work on Sundays. Also, Christian women no longer have to make rice beer and wine, a time-consuming task, as the Baptist religion prohibits it. (Indeed, Nagaland, which is a Christian state, as well as Manipur, prohibits the sale and consumption of alcohol.) While they primarily blamed poverty for their overwork, they were unanimous in declaring that men have far more leisure time than women. However, they accept that it is women's duty to cook and collect firewood, as well as work hard in the *jhum*. Women help each other, but said that men don't help often. From their understanding of the biblical 'Adam and Eve' myth, men and women are not created equal. "Most women accept that our husband is like a god", they said.

In the Western area in the Heraka village of P. Kubing, the women of the Self Help Group complained about men's 'laziness', as well as their 'uncaring' attitudes towards wives, even in the presence of one of husbands who sat in on the meeting. They estimated that about 80 per cent of husbands would not help women adequately with their work and were idle instead. However, they also said that husbands and fathers were generally supportive of the Self Help Group which utilises a micro-credit scheme initiated by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and

the Christian NGO World Vision. Some men even worked for wages to contribute to the group whose projects (such as creating new plantations for the market, pig-keeping, and the purchase of a sewing machine) benefitted the community as a whole. One woman said,

Women work so much harder than men! In fact, some husbands not only won't help, but they'll get angry if the wife hasn't finished all her work by when it's time to go to the *jhum* in the morning. Even if she gets up at 3 am! Even though a wife will do all the work at home, in the *jhum*, where a man is supposed to do the very heavy work, even then he'll only do a minimum. God created men and women as equal, but men make them unequal. Older women notice that men have become lazier. In their day, boys would wake early and collect firewood, though very occasionally some boys help nowadays.

The middle-aged man who observed the meeting made no comment but sat silently and casually. While I was confused about his presence at a women's meeting and shocked that women would complain so raucously about men in front of him, even pointing out his occasional drinking problem, the women of the Self Help Society seemed quite nonchalant. I shall convey more about what some men say shortly. First I include what other social commentators have said about Zeme and Zeliangrong gender relations, recently and in the colonial past.

Changes in the gender division of labour: some recent observations

Zeme Naga women have not been the only people to criticise deleterious changes in the behaviour of husbands. Liangmai Naga scholar, Hunibou Newmai (1998), also observes that conditions for Zeliangrong women in general are declining. While Newmai's observations are perhaps more pertinent to his own more rapidly urbanising society in neighbouring Manipur state, they offer a departure from Naga narratives that depict 'modernisation' as improving women's lot (for example, K. and L. Zehol 1998; Kelhou 1998). Newmai's disappointment in men's moral behaviour appears to reflect the dissatisfaction expressed in Zeme women's narratives:

In the traditional Naga society of bygone days, women were happy with their position in the society because they were given adequate protection. Since women were considered to be weaker than men, they were not required to do any hard work. It is expected of a man to do all the hard work...

With the advent of Christianity and western education, the status of women is said to have improved in the Zeliangrong Naga society. This however, is only an illusion, for their status is much worse than what it was before...

The emergence of working wives have [*sic*] resulted in making their husbands lazy and irresponsible. Most of such husbands have become drunkards. They are not ashamed of using their wives' money in buying drinks. These husbands are no longer discharging their duties. As a result, the modern educated woman has to perform the role of the father as well as that of the mother. They are forced to perform the dual role of maintaining the household, and also to give the financial support. Their responsibilities have multiplied as they have to take care of their children as well as their husband. All these indicate that the position of

women in the Zeliangrong society has been progressively deteriorating (Newmai 1998: 45-46).

Newmai's observation of Liangmai husbands seems to accord with those of Zeme women, and his insights inform my discussion. However he does not offer further analysis.

Assamese anthropologist, Babul Roy (2003), has documented some relatively recent changes in Zeme gender relations that "have made men relatively more favourable over women" (*ibid.*: 18). He cites changes due to "contact with several modern and outside influences on the one hand, and undergone for changes [*sic*] apparently under the religious and social reforms called Heraka" (*ibid.*). He examines in some detail the gender division of various tasks and the symbolism of left (weakness/ female) and right (strength/male) oppositions used by Zemes in Heraka ritual contexts, which have underpinned gendered activities as well as some changes in economic patterns. However, Roy employs social Darwinist notions of 'primitive' versus 'modern', positioning Zemes as the former, and does not shed much light on the broader social, political and discursive contexts of these cultural changes.

U.A. Shimray, a Tangkhul Naga sociologist, has also written about the gender division of labour in Naga societies employing extensive time use measurements as well as focus group discussions in several Tangkhul villages in Ukhrul District, Manipur. He finds that men's responsibilities are shrinking while women's are growing and they are increasingly doing what were previously considered men's duties, such as construction and repair work (Shimray 2004: 1709). Like Newmai, he notes that even when women are employed outside the household (and no significant gender disparity is observed in professional work) women still perform the majority of household labour (*ibid.*). Shimray cites women's objections and also states that most women complain that their husbands are too involved in social activities, clan problems and leisure, so a wife has to bear her husband's portion of work because he is not around (*ibid.*: 1705). However, like Newmai and Roy, Shimray does not explain these increased gender disparities. Shimray naturalises gender differences by stating that Naga women have an 'affinity' with 'economic activities' (*ibid.*: 1710). As West and Zimmerman (1987: 128) point out, reducing gender to a fixed set of psychological traits precludes serious consideration of the ways it is used to structure distinct domains of social experience. Furthermore, Shimray claims that the "activities of women in Naga society are neither authorised nor imposed by the patriarchal community" (*ibid.*). He implies that women are 'free' and choose to be quiet and dutiful to their husbands, and he does not seem to find any contradiction against his statement that if there is "any mismanagement of domestic affairs, accusing fingers point to the mother" (*ibid.*: 1704). Instead, he insists there is no prejudice against women in Naga society. (Perhaps he means there is no 'misogyny' in Naga societies which I understand as hatred or

hostility towards women.) While Shimray's detailed time use surveys have been very fruitful in quantifying the disparities between men's and women's labour, and contain information that is helpful for this thesis, I believe his analysis is inadequate to an understanding of the broader socio-cultural and historical factors that have contributed to this particular aspect of gender inequality. Below I sketch an outline of women's typical workday before exploring some historical observations.

Zeme women's labour

Women have always laboured hard in Zeme society. Almost all tasks within the homestead fall to women. Domestic chores are constructed as work that is 'natural' to women (women's work is known as *mpuime-ta*). Zeme women are accustomed to performing tasks that most middle-class Western women would find physically gruelling. Typically, women arise between 3.30 and 4.30 in the morning to sweep the house. Until about 6.30 am she will fetch water, cook breakfast and pound rice. The first meal will be served at about 7am. After breakfast they head to the fields (*jhum*) with the men and perform labour appropriate to the season in groups, until they break for lunch at about midday. Then they resume *jhuming* until about 6 in the evening, after which they bathe, cook, and clean up before retiring to bed. Other activities include spinning cotton and weaving, cooking food for the pigs and dogs, and of course attending to small children. Indeed, Zeme women pride themselves on their adeptness at tireless labour (to show tiredness is regarded as a fault for men as well as women), and it is a hallmark of their femininity and social status. Kamei (2004: 256-57) describes a Zeliangrong marriage hymn that casts a 'lethargic' young woman as an improper (even profane) wife, who, after being sanctified by a special ritual, receives the blessings of God and thereafter becomes "diligent, active and hardworking". According to Zeme constructions the ability to perform tasks at a high level of competence makes a woman 'fit to be a woman' and will increase her status and opportunities for 'success' as it is culturally defined. As the hymn suggests, the capacity for wifely hard work has connotations not only of mundane success but of sacredness. We might question, then, whether it is merely the *quantity* of work women now have to undertake that is the only problem? A brief historical account might help illuminate that women accept that their duties are more numerous and time consuming than those of men's, and that men in the past also had a great deal more leisure time.

Photograph 4 Lunch break during teenage girls' working bee in a Laisong *jhum*

Some historical observations

The early colonial period

Major Robert Stewart, the first Deputy Commissioner of the region then known as 'Northern Cachar' in British colonial India, recorded his observations of Zemes (whom he called 'Aroong Nagas') in 1855:

The Naga woman is quite a model of labour and industry. At all hours of the day she may be seen busily employed in domestic duties, weaving cloth, pounding rice, washing clothes, carrying water, making grog, or tending children, while her husband and the men generally lie idly basking in the sun, deeming it effeminate to put their hands to any work save the cultivation for their fields, or the repairing of their houses (in Elwin 1969: 416).

In the early colonial past it is sometimes said women worked even harder than they do nowadays because men were expected to be in a state of constant readiness to form an army against attacks on the village. Zeme men remained vigilant against raids by the stronger Angami Nagas to the northeast (these happened very infrequently but they were devastating), and to the occasional revenge killing, where the head was taken, by individual men from enemy Zeme villages. This meant that, prior to 1879, able-bodied men (by a roster system) were required to remain awake and on guard at night, and were expected to rest and refrain from agricultural work during the days (Betts 1950: 55). This practice persisted to a degree when anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower lived with the Zemes in the 1940s and she remarks that, "So strongly does public opinion support this pattern of *rahamngmi* (unmarried men) life that parents will make considerable sacrifices rather than call in their *rahamngmi* sons to take part in the daily reciprocal field-work, and they suffer a

marked loss of prestige if they are in fact forced to do so” (*ibid.*). The *hangseuki*, or men’s dormitory and club-house, was the locus of male-only activities. Only during times of war, however, were married men (*hangtingme*) required to join the unmarried men (*rahangme*) to help guard the village. *Hangtingme*, that is, husbands/householders, generally, worked in the fields with their wives.

Photograph 5 Pounding rice, ‘women’s work’

The late colonial period

In the late colonial period, the Laisong villagers depicted in Bower’s research practiced the religion of their ancestors, *Paupaise*, based on the agricultural cycle, and were not yet affected by Christianity. The emerging indigenous religious movement (later known as Heraka), started by cousins Jadonang and Gaidinliu, was gaining momentum in neighbouring Manipur, and had begun to erupt into the lives of the Zemes of North Cachar Hills. Despite the relatively minimal British interference in Zeme and other Naga polities, the introduction of currency and all that came with it (for example, taxes, enforced labour) and colonial land policies had, however, profoundly affected economic life by this time (see Bower 1946, 1950; Betts 1952; Longkumer 2010) as I explained in

Chapter Two. Inter-village feuding had long been abolished under the Pax Britannica. By the time of Bower's writing there would have been some significant shifts in social structure and the types of work men were expected to undertake with a decreasing emphasis on warriorhood and the increasing imperative of carving a place for themselves in the money economy. I provide more detail about these events in Chapters Eight and Nine. However, the *rahangme* were still largely exempt from normal agricultural work (except during harvest) and were more involved in ceremonial work such as the first clearing of jungle (Betts 1950: 57). They were nevertheless required to make themselves useful in the village; for example, by maintaining and repairing village pipelines. Rather than be left fully idle, they also sometimes worked for hire (Betts 1950: 55) and this was somewhat prestigious for the landowner whose fields they cultivated.

In Bower's writing, Zeme society of the late colonial era appears relatively cohesive despite deep disgruntlement with the British administrators and their poverty-creating land policies. Conversely, Longkumer's (2010) analysis would suggest that Zeme society of this period was far from cohesive, but rather in crisis. Most importantly here, gender relations seemed comparatively unproblematic.

Bower did not tend to include Zeme women's opinions in her ethnographic writing as I mentioned in the previous chapter. However, she asserted that while women were not free to voice their views publicly (male kin would do so on their behalf) women nevertheless wielded a quiet power in the community, especially in peace-making contexts. Bower noted that women and girls performed the bulk of the work. She wrote that unmarried adolescent²⁴ girls (*heleume*) worked at home or in the fields during the day, and in the evenings they held spinning bees in their *leuseuki* (the girls' dormitory) or entertained visitors to the village with music and dancing (1952: 75), while the unmarried man was excused from field-work unless he felt like participating and was "let all day with nothing to do but drink beer, gossip, make baskets, play music, and finally so to bathe and array himself as to be an object of admiration to all the girls as they came in from the fields" (*ibid.*: 76). She noted that the men performed the heavier and more arduous work, such as house-building, hunting and jungle-felling, but that women's work was of far more economic importance (*ibid.*: 78). A man alone was condemned to poverty and women's economic contribution to village life meant that "[t]hey were, behind the scenes, the real rulers of the community" (*ibid.*).

In her unpublished thesis, Bower observed that a wife was responsible within the household for the economical use of available supplies and would be consulted about the sale of rice-stocks, and "indeed about almost all her husband's transactions" (Betts 1950: 81). It is the wife, rather than her

²⁴ Zemes categorise life-stages in roughly similar ways to Westerners (for example, childhood, adolescence, adulthood) although these are further divided according to age and gender. Of course, these categories are not historically static.

husband, who will go to a bazaar to sell produce and buy thread or salt with the money obtained. Bower does state: “It should be noted that the male Nzemi speaks of his wife outside the home as something of a lesser being, and ridicules the idea of consulting her on matters of importance” (*ibid.*: 83). However, Bower insists women wielded considerable influence (Betts 1950: 83; Bower 1950: 93; Bower 1952: 77) in Zeme society at the time of her fieldwork.

Photograph 6 Senior woman in a Laisong *jhum*

Complementary hierarchies

As the historical observations show, women are accustomed to men having more ‘leisure’ time while they bear the brunt of the labour. However, we must be cautious in passing judgements on the ‘subordination’ of women in any particular society. Helliwell (1993: 282) contends that while ethnographic evidence does seem to indicate that in most societies of the world women have lower status than men, there is great diversity in the degree of women’s inferiority.

In Zeme society there is a complementary female hierarchy and a male hierarchy based on age which I shall shortly describe. The male hierarchy is considered somewhat superior to the female hierarchy. As a Baptist leader from Tousem village explained, “Naga society is classless. Only that men are high class and women are low class.” The ‘traditional’ gender order which may be characterised as a ‘gerontocratic patriarchy’ means that very senior men have the right to dominate women and non-senior males. In the Zeme gerontocracy, senior women may also exert considerable

pressure and influence on other women, non-senior males and husbands, but this ability is not officially recognised (see also S. Luithui 2005). Zeme wives, it seems, previously perceived their division of labour to be a ‘fair’ arrangement (see West and Zimmerman 1987: 143) as my inclusion of a ‘women’s life-course perspective’ below and later chapters will show. For example, In Ngaulong village, Nagaland, I interviewed Mrs Heuningle Nriame who was said to be over 100 years old. She agreed that women worked more than men, but qualified it by saying, “Men do less work, but heavier work. The women have lots more work, but it’s not very heavy. When men complete their few heavy tasks, women feel satisfied.” Mrs Ramsile, a grandmother from Chaikam village in the Western region towards Meghalaya, indicated the gender complementarity of labour by describing women’s importance in making ideas concrete reality. “The husband or father creates the ideas of what to do, but the details of the tasks, and their completion, are seen to by women”. Indeed, by performing the bulk of housework she is ‘doing’ gender and enacting the ideals of Zeme femininity (see West and Zimmerman 1987). What do men say about women’s greater portion of work that was once accepted in the past but now perceived as unjust?

Men’s views

When I discussed with men women’s perceptions of men’s insufficient labour, compared with women’s difficult work, they all agreed it was true that their wife (or mother if they were unmarried) does a lot more work than the husband or father. Some expressed pity for women’s burden and agreed that women’s lot was more difficult than men’s in this way.

Most men agreed it was a lamentable fact that women suffered from so much work, but they usually blamed Zemes from different groups or regions than their own as neglecting their duties. One educated senior man responded, “Only in some quarters men are lazy. Only in particular groups”. Baptists tended to point to the drinking of alcohol of Presbyterians, Catholics and Herakas as contributing to men’s ‘laziness’. Herakas pointed to Christians’ “loss of culture”. And *Paupaises* said it was due to the bad influences of new religions and others’ ways of life.

Furthermore, *none* of dozens interviewed, expressed that they would, or should, take up any of these duties (though in practice some, though few, men performed household labour constructed as ‘women’s work’). They invoked the tradition of their ‘forefathers’, by which they meant men’s entitlement to leisure and special treatment because of the important, self-sacrificing and dangerous work of governing the village and keeping the people safe. Their work is constructed as ‘heavy’ work, by which they meant very arduous labour of cutting trees *et cetera*, and also onerous work (defence, organising funerals, conflict resolution *et cetera*). They said they had to be ‘free’ to address such matters.

Besides, they said, and women agreed, men would be subject to ridicule if they were seen pounding rice or fetching water for the household which are tasks constructed as women's work only. Men accepted the gendered labour status quo and seemed to regard it as incomprehensible, laughable even, to consider undertaking any household chores even while he is idle and the woman is rushing to complete her work. This brings into frame the Zeme dichotomous construction of gender and gender-appropriate labour domains.

The Zeme dichotomy of gendered domains of labour

According to Zeme gender ideology, girls and boys possess different temperaments and are suited to different roles and tasks. Girls are stereotyped as weak and in need of protection by strong boys. Zeme boys and girls often perform the same kinds of activities (such as looking after younger children) and men and women often undertake the same work or other activities together (such as weeding and harvesting the jhum). However, boys are thought to be 'naturally' suited to the jural-political or 'public' sphere, and are trained in these activities, while Zemes insist that girls are best concerned with the 'domestic' functions of the household. Zemes usually express this as an 'inside' and 'outside' binary. Mrs Namchiliale, a grandmother from the Western region said, "Outside the home men are important, inside the home women are important". Other appropriate dualisms describing Zeme gendered domains are female: private/narrow/encompassed/light, and male: public/broad/encompassing/heavy. However, there are some caveats to be heeded in discussing such dichotomies.

The association of women universally with domestic life and men with public life - the 'domestic/public' dichotomy - as an explanation of male dominance across cultures has long been criticised as reflecting anthropologists' Victorian ideals of masculinity and femininity and ignoring vast cultural variations in behaviours and meaning (Rosaldo 1980 who was an early proponent of this model; Rapp 1979: 511; Yanagisako 1979; see also Jacka 1997: 16; Lamphere 2005: 86-95) as well as disregarding the histories of societies under colonialism (Comaroff 1987). I make no claim here of universality or of explaining the 'origins' of male dominance.

Nevertheless, ethnographic studies strongly suggest that many societies do indeed divide themselves into two separate and contrasting categories of 'male' and 'female' that seem to correspond to a 'domestic/public' model, and Zeme Naga society is one of these; although this division is also most commonly enmeshed with, and reproduced through, other conceptual dichotomies or contrasts (such as kinship and age) which play central roles in organising social life (see also Jacka 1997: 19). While anthropologists have 'gone beyond the use of dichotomies to produce analyses of the complex and layered structure of women's lives' (Lamphere 2005: 94),

Sherry Ortner argues that the ‘domestic/public distinction... also embodies some very useful distinctions that, I think, should not be thrown out’ (1989-90: 55; see also Gutmann 2006: 147). The domestic/public dichotomy, with its multiple forms and meanings taken into account, and if employed as a research tool rather than an explanatory factor, may be of some use to anthropologists (see di Leonardo 1991: 16). The domestic/public dichotomy does, very much, characterise Zeme notions of femininity and masculinity. However, Zeme conceptualisations of, and practices within and between, these ‘spheres’ of social action are understood not only as complementary (rather than oppositional), but mutually constitutive (see Yanagisako 1979: 191; Holtzman 2002) even though they are not always constructed as such discursively.

Zemes understand their social lives largely through their gender dichotomy, which they regard as ‘natural’ and ‘true’. It allows them to explain differences in behaviours, rights and duties. It will be elaborated throughout the thesis as it is crucial to understanding some of the reasons men are no longer viewed by women as fulfilling their duties. Below I outline the relationship of the village to gendered labour domains.

The village and the gender division of labour

Zeme personhood and conception of the village (*keloa*) and its community (*ram*) were (and still are to a large degree) thoroughly intertwined. It underpins the dichotomy of gendered labour domains. Kamei describes the village as “an inseparable part of the Zeliangrong psyche” (Kamei 2004: 98). Every village, built on sites whose auspiciousness was divined through dreams and safeguarded against evil spirits by many rituals, had its own jurisdiction. Village land was clearly demarcated and no one was expected to trespass on the territory of other villages. Trespassing usually invited conflict or war (Vashum 2000: 111). Village defence was paramount and the division of labour, according to gender and age, revolved around it:

Every citizen/villager young and old was in one way or the other involved in maintaining the security of the village, be it for offence or defence or otherwise according to their age, skill/talent, or gender. For instance, the imparting of training to young boys and girls in the ‘Morung’ [youth dormitory] was, in fact, a crucial process of ‘enculturation’ and/or ‘socialisation’ for being good citizens, successful leaders, warriors, and/or defenders of the village-state (Vashum 2000: 147).

The village is a sacred site surrounded by the swidden fields which sustain its inhabitants. It has been argued that Naga women’s role in rotational agriculture and in the processing of forest products for sale has kept gender relations relatively balanced (Kelkar and Nathan (2003: 16) Despite particular divisions of labour by age and gender, it must be emphasised that *married householders, husbands and wives, do largely the same kinds of agricultural work together*, from

young adulthood to seniority. This type of work takes up the vast majority of men's and women's lives. Men and women leave in groups for the *jhum* in the early morning, with lunches cooked and packed by women in banana leaves, and return together in the evening. These fields are usually some distance from the village and from the small children left behind who are minded by older children and the elderly, if they are not in school. Although females do a larger portion of childcare, men and women of all ages, when not working in the fields, are actively involved in child-rearing (and I will take this point up in Chapter Seven). In this way, the reproductive domain is largely shared.

In terms of economic production, there was no sharply separate gendered domain. In fact, it is acknowledged that women contribute substantially more, economically, than men in this type of agrarian society (for example, Nathan 2004: 203). As such, there was no concept of the husband as 'breadwinner' or of the 'housewife' that has any resemblance to Western constructions produced from the nineteenth century and that persist today (see Mies 1986: 106). However, at the crudest and most general level of analysis, socially defined men were employed in the defence and administration of the village (public sphere), while women laboured within the household (domestic/private sphere) to maintain its production and provide further sustenance and goods. Gendered conduct was (and is) utterly symbiotic and this dichotomy of 'public' and 'domestic' gendered domains continues to shape Zeme masculine and feminine ideals of personhood and practices. Below I furnish some details of the 'traditional' life-cycle of the Zeme female that underpins some of the expectations women continue to hold about their futures, rewards and entitlements.

Zeme Women: a life-course perspective

I will now sketch an overview of the usual 'traditional' life-course of Zeme girls and women to orient the reader to some of their socio-cultural conditions from birth to old age. Because many details will be added throughout the thesis, this section will be brief. This sketch is highly oversimplified but is useful to understand as a benchmark of some Zeme women's life expectations (this is not to suggest that their expectations have ever been static). These practices or 'customs' are enacted to greatly varying degrees depending on the age, religion, location and other circumstances and characteristics of the people. Some Zemes may no longer perform or believe in these practices at all. However, they are important to record not only as a guide for the reader, but also because women expressed interest in having their ways of life documented. I focus here on the ways they may prove themselves as 'fit to be a woman'; in other words, by conformity to the Zeme ideals of femininity. Being a man or woman is not a pre-determined state, but rather a condition actively

under construction; a *becoming* (Connell 2009: 5). Children learn about, and create in their own lives, patterns of gender practice in personal life that we call ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ (Connell *ibid.*: 101). These gender patterns develop in personal life as a series of encounters with the constraints and possibilities of the existing gender order (*ibid.*).

For Zemes segregations begin early in life by gender and by age, not only by labour but through sleeping arrangements, types of sports and games, topics of conversations, permitted foods, physical placement in public spaces (left for women, right for men. Also see Roy 2003), and places of burial and styles of grave markings. Zeme creation stories also support the separation of women’s control over food and production from men’s duties to explore the wider world and to fight to demarcate their territory (see also Aier 2009 for mostly Angami Naga examples). They also underscore that women ‘belong’ to men. The condition of women as men’s ‘property’ both expresses and creates women’s relative subordination. This will be explored in some detail in Chapter Five.

The gender dichotomy is largely based on two understandings which Zemes view as ‘natural’ about women. One is bodily difference, in particular, the bodily emission of menstrual blood, and the other is women’s social condition of ‘difference’. Of course, these are viewed as underpinning each other. As Mary Douglas said, we must “see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body” (Douglas 1966: 3). All Zemes are preoccupied with the condition of their ‘blood’. Lapses of morality, ‘eating with enemies’ and pro-creating with people who are considered inappropriate are all thought to ‘dilute’ one’s blood. Even drinking the blood of certain animals is said to have power to strengthen human health. Blood is the symbol of life and death. As such, it appears that menstrual blood has both positive and negative valences for Zemes. Longkumer’s male research participants told him that the primary weakness women possess is the ‘hole that bleeds’, referring to the vagina (2010: 178). My adoptive brother, Akum, spoke of menstruation as both polluting and dangerous. For Zemes, blood might be conceived of as a liminal fluid (see Turner 1967), betwixt and between the earthly and supernatural worlds. It is as though being marked with blood activates supernatural interest in a person. It is therefore very dangerous as it may be a signal to the spirit world that death is imminent. Menstrual blood is considered dangerous in a ritual sense because it has supernatural power: it may cause harm. However, as I understand it, it is only polluting when it is out of place, that is, when it threatens the domains of men.

As Buckley and Gottlieb remind us, menstrual ‘taboos’ may not be a vehicle of the ‘oppression of women’ (1988: 9). Zeme women do complain of feeling ‘weaker’ during their menses and wish that they could perform only lighter tasks at this time, with men shouldering the greater burden.

However, restrictions around the menstrual cycle may affect the behaviour of others rather than women themselves (Buckley and Gottlieb *ibid.*) and this seems to be the case with Zemes. Men's vulnerability to menstrual pollution means that they are subject to most of the restrictions (*neube*) and a man will avoid sleeping with his wife while she is menstruating or any other contact with her menstrual blood. Indeed, most restrictions around blood involve men, rather than women. Only men hunt and engage in warfare and thus spill blood that causes death. Before and after these masculine events strict purifying prohibitions are observed to not only protect themselves but the entire village. A man is 'polluted' by blood and is dangerous when associated with death. He may inadvertently cause an entity of the spirit-world to kill him or another human.

Only women bleed when they are not wounded and this is the expression of fertility. Thus menarche, as the symbol of the ability to bring into being new life, is celebrated by the women in her family and a girl's first blood is dotted on her face to 'improve her complexion' (an indication of its positive power) and make her attractive to a marriage partner later.

More important, in my view, it is Zeme women's constructed social condition of 'difference' (understood as 'natural' differences in personality and temperament) and perceived relative 'weakness' that makes her bodily emission of menstrual blood an issue to men and a threat to public safety. Women's 'disenfranchisement' in relation to men's culturally defined ownership of families, land and other property, rights to ritual and public administration, and the means of violence define women as weak, vulnerable and 'incomplete' without men. (However, I must emphasise while they lack authority they are, as a category, "respected in their own right" as Akum informed me – at least until recently). Should menstrual blood, or even the possibility of it, enter these male-only domains, her inferior, magical and 'not-man' blood, may weaken and pollute the realm of men, and thus threaten the safety of the whole society (which men are responsible for protecting). Thus women do not sit on honoured men's seats in the *hangseuki* (though postmenopausal women and small girls may do so). Women are also not permitted to enter the sacred space of the Heraka temple, the *kelumki*, (a 'conduit' of the other-worldly and presided over by men) during menstruation²⁵.

However, because Zeme women spend much of their fertile lives pregnant or breast-feeding, the threat of menstrual blood may not generally pose a significant threat. Furthermore, men are also subject to many more sexual and food restrictions to protect them from the potential supernatural consequences of spilling blood. A man is not permitted to sleep with his wife or girlfriend before hunting or war, whether or not she is menstruating, or he will be sure to be killed or injured. During

²⁵ This may also indicate a Hindu influence.

certain important ritual periods, such as the making of a new village (a male-only duty) a man may not touch any property of a woman and will use separate utensils to eat food cooked only by men (Kuame 2005: 33). This is for his 'purification' and to protect the health of the whole community and to prevent against misfortune inflicted by the gods. Boys, as well as women and girls, may not touch weapons. All people present at childbirth (always a bloody scene), including the husband and the house itself, must undergo ritual seclusion for up to a week. Every member of Zeme society has rules and taboos associated with their age and gender. I would suggest, then, that the regulations and fear around menstrual blood do not degrade or demean women. They are not viewed as punishments and menstruation is not understood as a 'curse'. Instead they reinforce women's place in society as inherently separate from (and beneath) men's and that to overstep the boundaries into men's domain is an 'unnatural' transgression. It would upset the social balance. In this way, a woman's body reproduces the social structure, as Douglas suggested. As such, Zeme 'menstrual taboos' contribute to the segregation of women's activities from those of men.

Childhood and adolescence

Zemes categorise life-stages in roughly similar ways to Westerners (e.g., childhood, adolescence, adulthood) although these are further divided according to age and gender. These categories are not historically static. As in 'Western' culture, the ages at which Zemes enter 'adulthood' and 'adolescence' have also changed as marriage, which defines a person as adult, is now taking place later in life.

Zeme girls (*heleume*) are born into families that are 'owned' by the father's family and that generally have a slight preference for male children (*rahangme*). Having male children is considered especially auspicious for Nagas because it means the continuation of family lineages and the 'manpower' to defend villages (see Zhimomi 1998: 47). It also means security for the parents because the youngest son will look after the parents in their old age. It is because of this that men may divorce their wives if they do not eventually bear a son, *not* because girl children are devalued²⁶. (It is reasoned that a woman will be looked after by the men who 'own' them: a new husband, her father, or her brothers.) Girls are welcomed and equally loved (see also X. Mao 1998; Zhimomi 1998) and are valued also for their future economic productivity. From early childhood children (*napoineramme*) participate in the economic life of the household (though children do not work in the swidden fields) and this work is gendered, with girls responsible for the majority of the domestic duties (which I will discuss later).

²⁶ I was told that a woman may also divorce her husband for his 'sexual malfunction' and inability to impregnate her.

As Paujelungle Neume, one of my research consultants said, “Boys and girls are loved equally, but their activities are different”. Before five, a child is considered “like a baby” (*nngene*), Adeule explained. At that age everyone does what they can to indulge the child. Between ages eight and thirteen girls learn to pound rice in the early morning to remove the husks. They will fetch water, clean utensils and collect firewood accompanying their mother. Meanwhile, the men sleep and have leisure time. “It was justified that when men work, their work (*mpeume ta* or men’s duties) is harder, and that this was practised by our forefathers”, Adeule explained. After age 15 (around the age of sexual maturity or *bui*) girls can collect firewood and water with their friends. Girls can also start to work in the *jhum* at this age, with their family or *leuseuki* (girls dormitory) group.

Girls and boys are expected to be obedient to parents and anyone senior to them. However, boys are permitted more latitude in breaking minor rules *et cetera* as they are expected to be strong, adventurous and relatively autonomous. Women even say boys make for more difficult pregnancies. Girls, on the other hand, are believed to be born prone to fears and tears, and to be concerned with the minutiae of the household and personal relationships. This may be partly explained by the situation wherein girls, while having adequate time for play, spend far more time within the confines of the house being taught chores by her mother (*pui*), grandmother (*pai*) or older sisters (*sipui*), as well as the wish to conform to the feminine ideal of compliance and the cultivation of virtue by serving others.

Raising girls

Segregation²⁷ begins early with young daughters sharing the mother’s bed while sons sleep with the father. Shortly before puberty (or earlier if a girl has an older sister or relative there) a girl (*heleu*) begins to sleep in the dormitory (*leuseuki*) with other girls of the village. There were at least two *leuseukia* (pl.) in a village, each corresponding with the boy’s dormitories, the *hangseukia*. The *leuseuki* served to create cooperation between peers and to develop bonds between male and female youths. These dormitories or clubhouses also served as a voluntary labour force at times. Elderly Mrs Chukamle Ngame of Boro Haflong told me that the purpose of gathering in the *leuseuki* was to “enjoy companionship and enhance work. If we’re happy we work well.” Together they would spin cotton in the dry season and weave, and learn skills and etiquette (*heleuraube*) from older members. They also learned dances and songs with the boys from the *hangseuki*, and entertained visitors to the village. Especially talented dance troupes would tour the villages. Most of the elderly

²⁷ Segregation occurs only partly, because there is a great deal of interaction of men and women in Zeme society. In fact, most of their adult lives are spent in working together in the *jhum*.

women I spoke to described their adolescence in the *leuseuki* as amongst the happiest times of their lives.

Romantic liaisons were carried out between members of the *leuseuki* and the *hangseuki*. By all accounts, this was a very exciting time of life. Adeule said that nowadays ‘youth’ may span the ages 13-30 as marriage often takes place later these days. Being a youth or adolescent (*hangleuding* or *hengbime*) is considered very important, she said: “After marriage, you can’t enjoy singing like the youth. You must enjoy your childhood. Youth-life is considered most important for enjoyment before the responsibilities of marriage begin”. Indeed, the status of Zeme children and adolescents is high. In a ritual sense, for example, virgin young women (*kantuapui*) were selected for the first planting of a crop in spring; virgin young men (*kantuapeu*), apparently more difficult to find, were also chosen for this symbolic task. (‘Virginity’, at least in the past, was associated with newness, vitality, untapped potential and freshness. A ‘pious man’, ‘new fire’, ‘perfect tree’, ‘spotless hen’ or a ‘blameless pig’ (in Kuame 2004: 33) are similarly valued for ritual functions.) However, while youth was celebrated, the social position of young women and men upon marriage and setting up a new household is accepted as low (and young men especially try to flee the formal initiation into adulthood in the *hangseuki*, not for any physical pain, but for the heavy duties they must assume, I was told) until that household has generated children and wealth in the form of rice and other goods.

Marriage and motherhood

Marriage allows a woman access to cultivable land through her husband and his patrilineage (*tsami*). It also gives her the opportunity to carve out a livelihood for her family, and, by doing so, cultivate a reputation according to the norms of ‘feminine success’. Of course, this is the imputed value of marriage for a woman. All Zeme women wish to marry because, simply, it is the socially desirable means to adulthood and the expected thing to do. Upon marriage a husband and wife set up a household of their own (the primary unit of production) or the new wife moves in with her in-laws if her husband was the youngest or only son. A mother-in-law will want her daughter-in-law to be from her natal clan “for closeness”, Adeule told me. Marriage and motherhood define a woman as adult and a contributor to her husband’s patrilineage. A wife’s contributions and the manner in which they are performed add to (or detract from) her moral standing. A wife’s work is very demanding, especially if she has her parents-in-law to serve. Adeule said, “Parents in law expect food, clothes and bedding from women. These are the main thing. Suppose there’s a beautiful girl, but if she’s not great at housework they don’t want her. Even a literate girl has to do all this. If she can’t do all these she’s not fit to be a Zeme woman”. However hard a woman’s work is, it is usually done willingly as it means a gradual rise in moral authority for her. Anthropologist Richard

Shweder describes such service as a “culturally significant way of achieving power” (2003: 273). A young woman will expect that her turn to be served will come as she ages.

Mothers are generally held to be the most loved person in the family. People tended to explain that while fathers were the most powerful household members, mothers are the most *important* person in family life. In a way, the traditional husband/wife categories capture the complementarity of Zeme relations between men and women. A wife is explicitly in charge of the food for the household. All are completely dependent on her for their food, clothing and other necessities. Bower (Betts 1950: 82) says that the mother remains a powerful influence and is regarded with respect and affection by her children until her death. She observed, as I did, that relations between Zeme children and their parents (*puipeu*) are nearly always good. She also noted that “there is a deeper emotional content in the attitude towards the mother than there is in that towards the father” (*ibid.*). She explains that this is because later the son becomes the provider and the aged father a dependent, while the aged mother continues helping her daughter-in-law in the household (i.e., remains economically viable, although she rests and is deferred to a great deal more). Her husband has had to give up strenuous ‘manly’ tasks. As Mr. Ijirangbe Zeme explained, “the son will become the father of the father”. The mother, however, retains her position.

A wife has a large measure of control over the household economy and influence over the children. Children contribute to a woman’s livelihood and security, as well as emotional well-being and her social position rises as her children become adult and their forms of labour increase household productivity, cement alliances, and elevate her and her husband’s status. She wishes for many sons to look after her interests (publicly) and to care for her and her husband in old age (this is the duty of the youngest son who inherits his father’s property). She also wishes for many daughters to help her with all her duties, for companionship, and later to foster connection with other families through marriage. Giving birth to many children, and being seen to take care of the children of others (by feeding them), is ideal behaviour for women of this age group. However, as I shall later elaborate, eight days after giving birth a mother returns to the *jhum*, some distance from the village, with her husband, to resume agricultural work. While she may continue to breastfeed for 2 years, her children will be fed (very young children are fed rice pap that she chews in the morning while pounding rice) and looked after by grandparents, older siblings or cousins, unmarried aunties and uncles or anyone else who is willing and able to help out.

Naga Mothers and Peace-keeping

Zeme women serve an important function as ‘peace-keepers’ between clans, villages and now between wider political entities. From the head-hunting days to now, Naga women have used their

exclusion from politics as a resource to negotiate with the state and non-state armed actors to protect their communities; to mediate between warring factions of the Naga underground; to sustain ceasefires and to build inter-community, people-to-people dialogues (Manchanda 2004). In late pre- or very early colonial times Zeme women were permitted to enter enemy villages unharmed. Within the village women have the right to break up the occasional brawl that breaks out between men. Zeme and other tribal women in the Northeast are well known for staging public protests and demonstrations that men are unable to perform due to military retaliation (e.g., Bora 2010). As one of my research participants, Azuale, said, "If a man is picked up or beaten by the army, only women can approach his captors." There have been instances where Zeme women, as protest groups, have beaten Indian officials black and blue for not protecting Zeme children or other vulnerable members of their society and these women are permitted to remain unpunished. Women will, in some public arenas, step in front of rifles aimed at their men, because the perpetrator will be morally humiliated and put down his weapon. Women across many Naga tribes have formed women's organisations and 'Mother's Associations' as a result of the atrocities committed by the Indian Army (see e.g., Luithui 1998). The most well-known of these is the Naga Mother's Association which was formed in Kohima (Nagaland's capital) in 1948. Militarisation and violence has led to alcoholism and drug addiction there and the general feeling amongst these organisations is that only mothers understand the extent of damage that these situations of conflict cause to the social fabric (Neidonuo Angami in World People's Blog 2008). These groups have campaigned about the discriminatory practices in their own societies, health and education and also on wider issues of peace, justice and reconciliation (Kikon 2007: 379-80). Adeule (now married and a mother) is presently the general secretary of the newly formed Zeme Mother's Association, Assam.

Becoming an Elder

Women, like men, ascend the female hierarchy as they age, and in this way, older women are partly segregated from, and have power over, younger women. Time and again I was told that it is women who teach the proper practices, exert pressure, and criticise the behaviour of women and a woman's 'fitness to be a woman' (see E. Iralu 2007 for an extreme example of this in a novel about Angami Naga society). Women *compete* to be viewed as the best worker and to serve her family in a superior way. As a senior (but not elderly) research participant, Mrs Pedeichungle, said, those who excel in all their duties are known as 'The Perfect Woman'. She will serve as a model to other women and the whole village will admire her. Feminine labour, and the manner in which it performed, defines the parameters of a woman's ambition and ability to achieve the highest level of success.

Women cultivate feminine personhood around the provisioning of the family, while the ideal man, as Mrs Iheule explained, is expected to “care for society as a whole, the village and the trees and so on.” For men to meddle in the business of women’s private domain, and for women to cross over into the public domain of men, is considered laughably odd and a contravention of gender expectations. To be concerned about broader social and political matters is to be ‘unwomanly’. (Longkumer 2010: 174-90 offers an explanation of how Rani Gaidinliu, as a woman, utilised Zeliangrong and Hindu narratives to sustain leadership, while still maintaining ‘feminine’ boundaries, during an era of acute crisis). In this way Zeme women have an interest in reproducing the constraints (and opportunities) of patriarchy.

There is a festival to celebrate the very senior women folk, during which the *kiangna* (members of the men’s dormitory) earn and save money and fowls to give to the elderly women for their feast (Kuame 2005: 34). Akum informed me that for this day, without exception, all the power is handed over to the ‘old ladies’ of the village. The elderly women would enter the *hangseuki* (men’s house) and all the young men present would stand to show respect for them. Kuame explains that the old women would touch the spears and bless them, then bless the *kiangna* to be healthy, vigorous and brave: “May you overcome the enemy, be victorious at all times; may you hunt and kill the stag with the best horns, and kill wild mithun, elephant and tigers” (2005: 34). After this blessing the *kiangna* followed the old women out of the *hangseuki* singing songs of praise to them. They would then escort the elderly women to the place the feasting was taking place, presenting each with a live chicken tied with a rope (*ibid.*).

Young men also have an ulterior motive to please the elderly women. If a youth is conspicuously helpful older women will praise him: “[So and so’s] son is very good. He will achieve many things. Girls should be available for his wife. Yes, he should marry easily.” It was explained to me that when older women praise a boy, automatically the girls like him. The young man *depends* on the older women to praise him so that the girls will notice him and vastly improve his chances for romance. He will work very hard for an elderly woman. He must prove he can make her happy. It is imperative to show that he cares in order to harness her powerful influence.

In the Zeme age-hierarchy a woman’s privileges increase as she grows elderly and she works less and rests more. The following conversation (depicting the self-deprecation of *heleuraube*) between two elderly friends (being interviewed by Adeule and me) indicates the respect shown by others who pick up the workload of the elderly:

Mrs Paukuisuangle: We get more respect now that we're older. And our grandchildren don't allow us to do much work. Even if I want to work in the kitchen- garden my daughter-in-law will say, "Don't work. Take rest!"

Mrs Itingrangle: Yes, now I don't do anything, not even sweeping the room. Just sitting. When I want to lie down on the bed, I lie down, and if I don't want to, then I just sit. If my daughter-in-law prepares food, I eat. My daughter-in-law and my grandchildren all respect me. I don't know why, I'm not a very good woman; maybe I misbehave sometimes. But they're still good to me.

Mrs Paukuisuangle: We're enjoying our old age. When my son-in-law brings us wine, we enjoy it together. Even though we're now Christian [laughing, because Christians are not supposed to drink alcohol]. When my daughter-in-law makes a fish curry, we eat it with the wine. I enjoy it so much. It makes me remember Christ's mercy (*kangia*).

The labour of these women has elevated their husbands' status and his status, in return, raises hers and that of the whole family. Her work, traditionally, is respected and acknowledged by all. A husband's and wife's very different forms of gendered 'success' affects the other's sense of personhood. In seniority a woman's wide knowledge (social, ritual, botanical *et cetera*.) is revered and her advice may be sought after. Elderly women, traditionally, were assigned ritual functions during births, deaths and religious ceremonies (Kamei 2004: 255). She may practice midwifery (see also Roy 2003: 15) and other healing practices utilising a wide array of medicines, dream interpretation, pulse reading and other techniques. In old age she is deferred to and lovingly ministered to by younger men and women alike, as described in the narratives. She was considered close to the gods and, if so inclined, may do the shamanic work of mediation between the human and the spirit world by divination (unless she is Christian). At very old age she reaches the zenith of her moral authority and therefore of her social status. On her death, though no great monument is raised in honour of her (as they are for important men), grandchildren may be named in her memory and the social debts from her contributions to society are continued for decades as I shall outline in Chapter Six.

While Zeme women did not enjoy the same privileges as men and had very little recourse to direct power beyond the household, they nevertheless were able to exert significant influence, took pleasure in their lives, and benefitted from a number of advantages in what may be described as a gerontocracy. On the whole, their experience of the Zeme form of patriarchy was one of being 'cared for' as a woman and their crucial contributions to economic and social life were recognised and respected.

Summary

Zeme women's disappointment that their husbands are no longer adequately discharging their duties to family and community, leaving women with an extra burden of labour, has constituted the

problem of this chapter, and indeed, this thesis. When I questioned whether women were unaccustomed to the types of labour they must perform today I found that historically women also had less leisure time than men. However, my elucidation of the Zeme dichotomy of gendered labour domains shows a complementarity of labour performed according to gender (and age). Women were unanimous in claiming that in the past men worked harder than in the present. The ‘traditional’ life-course perspective depicts an age-based hierarchy which women have been certain of ascending if they properly perform their duties. Old age came with many privileges for women as well as for men.

Why do women now perceive men’s relative ‘laziness’ as unjust? The next chapter shows in some detail the ‘caring practices’ of men through village defence which enacted masculine ideals such as protection and courage, and of generosity such as through the equitable distribution of wealth via senior men’s Feasts of Merit. While these practices are largely redundant, the values that underpin them persist. I suggest that women expect the enactment of these ‘masculine’ values through different forms of reciprocal labour exchange today.

Chapter Five

‘Providing what the People need’

The last chapter showed that women are dissatisfied with men’s performance of labour. Women’s expectations, I suggested, are based on the values that developed in early colonial times. ‘Caring’ is conceptualised not only a value but also as a practice. The custom of *heleuraube* is the ideal embodiment of these and is appropriately expressed through labour in the service of others. This chapter focuses on traditional age-based masculine practices that demonstrated men’s capacity to ‘care’ by ‘providing what the people need’ through protection and wealth redistribution. They also allowed relatively egalitarian opportunities among men to achieve their ideals of masculinity, and shows that these were tied to serving women and the community. These practices made them ‘fit to be a man’, and women continue to expect reciprocal forms of labour that reflect the attributes (such as courage and generosity) developed in these largely redundant practices.

Persistence of ‘traditional’ values

In my observation, the practices and values that Zeme women expect men to uphold are those that women understand to have developed in the pre-colonial or early-colonial period. These values and expectations seem to persist today to a large, but diminishing (or rapidly transforming), degree. Morrell and Swart (2005: 97) suggest that some values concerning deep existential questions, such as those regarding identity, may survive centuries of colonialism. The notion of ‘tradition’ or ‘traditional’ is problematic because it suggests an anachronism. Sahlins (2005: 51) insists that “tradition is not the opposite of change”. Rather, cultural traditions survive in the different ways they change and ‘culture’ might be better understood as not only heritage but a project (Hountondji in Sahlins 2005: 58). I understand Zeme ‘cultural traditions’ as every bit as contemporary as Western culture (and all other ‘cultures’ that exist today). Zemes use the word ‘tradition’ a great deal and many Zemes actively try to live the values women cherish today through various practices, including gendered labour. However, I will later suggest that certain socio-political changes have made particular ‘traditions’ less viable and some have become obsolete while others are actively transformed or even intentionally ‘forgotten’ as a strategy of survival.

Mrs Takheule’s narratives and those of the other women imply that ‘labour’ and ‘care’ are conflated and that men are ‘caring’ less than what is deemed acceptable by Zeme standards. ‘Caring’ behaviour is ‘proper’ for Zeme men and it is what they rightly expect, according to their perspective. It is what they are socialised to receive. Below I explore Zeme understandings of ‘care’ in light of women’s concerns.

The first section discusses the persistence of ‘traditional’ values, highlighting the contemporary nature of some of these. ‘Caring’ through labour continues to be expected by Zeme women, and I describe it as a practice as well as a value, especially in relation to *heleuraube* which roughly means the etiquette of helping others.

I then sketch the traditional practices that were performed in the pursuit of age-appropriate hegemonic masculinity in early or precolonial times. These were the young warriors’ practice of headhunting, and senior men’s Feasts of Merit. I suggest there was plenty of scope, not only through headhunting and throwing feasts, to demonstrate caring values through tests of courage and other ‘masculine’ activities.

Caring as practice and value

I think it would be a mistake to imagine that ‘care’ is constructed by Zemes in identical ways to Western constructions. Zeme women complained that because of the men they no longer had time to ‘care’ for children adequately. The use of the word ‘care’, in this context, initially confused me because I had understood ‘caring’ as an emotion (although ‘caring for’ in English also implies practice). It was abundantly clear that Zeme women loved and cared for their children enormously. Sociologist Maria Mies (1986: 53) has explained that in pre-capitalist societies the activity of women in bearing and rearing children should be understood as *work*²⁸. “If women had more leisure time”, Mrs Pedeichungle said, “then they’d be able to care better for their children. They’d be able to teach their children better manners, how to do housework, to read and write and to follow advice.” ‘Care’ then, for Zemes, is explicitly linked to activity, ‘work’ or practices, rather than sentiment.

We might characterise as ‘caring practices’ the reciprocal arrangements of labour exchange, which Shimray (2004:1703) describes as a “pan-human phenomenon of giving and receiving”. For Nagas exchange of labour is explicitly important to the fulfilment of social obligations. Shimray explains that the Naga household relies on the generosity and co-operation amongst relatives, clans and neighbours. Working collectives of people of the same age cohort also work together on a rotational basis. One of Shimray’s research participants states that “helping each other is a manifestation of one’s concern of others” (*ibid.*).

Zeme understandings of the relationship between the individual, the moral-social order, and the natural order mean that the conception of the ‘person’ is duty-based, rather than rights-based as in the West. Anthropologist Richard Shweder (1991: 157) explains that in duty-based cultures social

²⁸ Strictly speaking, Mies is referring to pre-capitalist and ‘matristic’ societies, but I think that this observation largely holds true for Zemes.

roles are the fundamental building blocks of the social order (as opposed to the Western conception of a rights-based social order that is built up out of self-interested individuals in pursuit of their wants and preferences). Duty-based codes direct attention to the moral quality of individual action (*ibid.*: 171). This moral dimension is likely one reason Zeme women protest so bitterly about men's lack of labour and care nowadays. It also means that shame has a special power in the self-regulation of behaviour and as a social control in Zeme society. I think it is prudent to remember when discussing non-Western conceptions of personhood that:

Shame does not have the same meaning for Americans [and other Westerners], who tend to think they have a right to be let alone to do their own business and who have nearly reduced shame to embarrassment and blushing before the public eye, as it has for more tradition-bound peoples, who believe that most of what they do is governed by natural law and who view with shame any action that discredits their standing in the natural order of things (Shweder 1991: 245. Parentheses added).

Not helping others is considered an immoral act and it ought, according to the Zeme view, to evoke shame. Conformity to ideal norms of age- appropriate masculinity and femininity (expressed by types of labour) was regulated through a prestige/stigma system which relied heavily on praise and ridicule (see also Hodgson 1999: 127). I was told by several senior men and women that 'shamelessness' (*ngamakbe*) is now the worst problem in Zeme society.

To do one's 'duty' well and uncomplainingly is to be a model of Zeme personhood. Highly significant in day to day life are the smaller acts of labour and self-sacrifice that underscore the co-operative ethos of daily village life and that demonstrate care for other village members. These 'acts of selflessness' (Longkumer 2010: 226) often lead to much prestige and, as a result, the extension of influence to men and women alike. These are enshrined in *heleuraube*.

Heleuraube

As I indicated in Chapter One Zemes say that *heleuraube* is the most important aspect of their 'traditional' culture and it is what distinguishes their life-way from the neighbouring non-Zeme societies they regard as morally inferior. In an interview in Haflong with a representative of the Zeme people, known as Mr. I. Zeme, I was told, "*Heleuraube* developed for the good of the community and is vital to the survival of Zeme people. It is the opposite of shamelessness".

Heleuraube is not peculiar to one religion but is viewed as compatible with them all. It pre-dates Heraka and Christianity. The literal meaning of '*heleuraube*' is not easy to distil. However, its essence is to offer oneself willingly to take on the burden of others. Mr. I. Zeme emphasised the value of quickly volunteering to perform a task and to perform it freely: "I'll do it!" It is considered the epitome of co-operation and care and the institutions of the *hangseuki* and *leuseuki* instructed the young into strictly *heleuraube* practices. Men, women and older children can, and ought to, act

with *heleuraube* at all times, which emphasises self-restraint, helping the vulnerable or unfortunate, gentleness, calmness and control of anger, honesty, respecting elders and friends, and obeying parents. From a young age, a person can cultivate moral worthiness and this will affect their position in their society. *Heleurau* behaviour considers the other person, or the good of the community, ahead of one's own comfort. It is expressed in acts of labour to help others and is looked upon so favourably that it elevates the status of the person who practices it. It is the enshrinement of *service* and *self-sacrifice*. Presumably (and unsurprisingly) caring labour deserves loyalty. Adeule told me the proverb: "*Heleurau me du, heleurau dau lei*". This means, "Those who do *heleuraube* will meet *heleuraube*." *Heleuraube* defines meritorious character, so important in Zeme society, and thus, in a sharing economy, it helps create wealth and the status to redistribute it. A leader, or chief, Mr. I. Zeme informed me, "must have a great deal of *heleuraube*".

Zeme women lament the decline in *heleurau* behaviour of their husbands. The decline in *heleuraube* is connected with what they call 'shamelessness' in English. Women are expecting men to continue to uphold 'caring' values and practices, embodied in *heleuraube*, that they understand to have emerged from the 'tradition' of the pre or early colonial past and ought to continue today. We are able to gain some insight into certain practices of pre-colonial²⁹ times due to the present practices of those who continue to follow *Paupaise*, the religion (law or *hingde*) of the ancestors (literally 'grandfather's/grandmother's way'). Of course, this is not to suggest that *Paupaise* has remained unaffected by colonialism and other forms of globalisation. Indeed, Longkumer (2010: 79) reminds us that, "It is impossible to construct a 'pure' *Paupaise* past, as the *Paupaise* itself is a twentieth-century construction. With the introduction of Christianity and Heraka into Zeme culture, distinctions were made to differentiate one from the other." However, followers of this religion are highly concerned to live according to 'traditional' Zeme precepts as they now understand (or produce) them. Nowadays there is only one village, Hezailoa, in North Cachar Hills where all the citizens practice *Paupaise*. Yet, it is important to remember that a great many living people who practice Heraka and Christianity transitioned from their own earlier practice of *Paupaise*, and that many *Paupaise* beliefs and values are very much alive despite religious conversions. Men also expressed their dismay at what they viewed as the loss of *heleuraube*. For them, this was more likely to be framed in terms of cultural survival and of loss of 'identity' or 'Zeme-ness'. The Chief of Hezailoa said that the biggest changes he had seen in his life was the emergence of the new religions and the associated decline of the 'true' Zeme way of life, and with it, their unique form of

²⁹ Sahlins (2005: 49) argues that almost all cultures described as 'traditional' by anthropologists were in fact already changed by Western expansion. However, I am not suggesting that Zeme practices were 'pure' or unchanging before colonial observations of them.

etiquette, *heleuraube*. The following example of the tradition of *heleuraube* as practiced in recent times illustrates an ideal of masculine labour.

Paujelungle, a young widow from Hezailoa, told Adeule and me that Heraka people “often praise the people from Hezailoa for their diligent *heleuraube*. They see us offering to carry other’s heavy loads”. *Paupaise* suffer some scorn from Heraka and Christian Zemes about their ‘backwardness’. In spite of this, *Paupaise* claim their moral superiority of sticking with Zeme law, of which *heleuraube* is an important aspect. Paujelungle had a very clear idea about the *heleuraube* ways a husband should behave towards his wife, and claimed that her deceased husband most often behaved in such a way.

While eating, the husband will allow the wife to take lots of food, especially if it is the wife’s favourite dish. In work, the husband will allow her to do just light work, not heavy work. The husband would sometimes think, “Let my wife take rest while I do some work. It is shameful for my wife to do very hard work.” The husband will also carry many heavy things back from the *jhum*. He will allow the wife just to look after the children, domestic animals and do housework. And when she is pounding rice the husband will look after the children and cook the curry. There are now very few husbands who will cook for the family, but it is *heleuraube* to do so. It is because fewer Zemes are following their own culture that there is more shamelessness.

Paujelungle’s story of ‘traditional’ and ‘proper’ husband’s behaviour strongly contrasts with that of Mrs Takheule’s comments about loss of support. They suggest recent cultural changes and transformations in Zeme constructions of masculinity that have emphasised caring labour. What practices made a man ‘fit to be a man’ in the past and continue to inform masculine ideals today? Zeme values and gendered ideals have been produced and reproduced in accordance to the realities of quotidian village life.

Traditional hegemonic masculine practices

I have suggested that the caring *values* and acts of *heleuraube* women expect today from their husbands have been produced through reciprocal labour exchange that sustained ‘traditional’ village life. Many of these values persist as socio-cultural change for the Zemes has been neither even nor monolithic. Here I explore some of the *practices* that made a man ‘fit to be a man’ and that enacted the values that women continue to cherish. However, as will become clearer, these masculine practices underwent significant transformations during the era of British colonialism. Yet, the values inherent in these practices remain celebrated today, at least by women. Understanding these practices and changes in them may be important to our appreciation of the acuter gender inequality Zeme women now experience.

The notion of hegemonic masculinity provides a way to theorise gendered power relations among men (Connell 2005a). It is also understood as a pattern of practice that allows men's dominance over women to continue (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832). Political anthropologist Andrea Cornwall (1997: 11) elaborates that the concept of hegemonic masculinity is most valuable in showing that it is not men, *per se*, but certain ways of being and behaving that are associated with being 'men'. It is distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 832) but is always contested and influenced by these. Connell and Messerschmidt explain that while only a minority of men may enact it, it is normative (or 'ideal') and in any culture or era is the currently most honoured way of being a man (*ibid.*).

There were two well-known practices in the pursuit of Zeme hegemonic masculinity in the colonial era that showed not only women, but the whole community, that a man was fit to be a man. These were warriorhood and feast-giving. Any portrayal of Naga 'masculinity' must take into account these most famous practices. Nagas, including educated Zemes, continue to engage with colonial ethnographic literature in which they are described. The physical protection of the village and its inhabitants, especially the most vulnerable such as children, women (who are viewed as 'naturally weaker' than men) and the elderly, was mainly the work of the young men, or *rahangme*. Able-bodied married men were also expected to protect their family and village. However, only very experienced and skilled senior members of the dormitory were permitted to fight (Kamei 2004:330). The Village Council (senior men elected democratically³⁰ on the basis of *helaurau* and competent character) controlled and oversaw the *rahangme* and the *hangseuki* (Kamei *ibid.*). The village priest (*tingkhupau*), always an elderly male, also helped oversee village affairs. The hierarchy according to age was very strict and non-senior men did not join in conversation with elders, or sit with them, unless invited (Betts 1950:75). The *rahangme* were always accountable to seniors.

Married men, *hangtingme*, through hard work, beneficent influence over others, and good fortune, could amass wealth (rice) and when they became seniors could begin the series of feasts whereby they redistributed their surplus throughout the village (although they could begin the first, small feasts when they were quite young. These were of a ceremonial nature to initiate the series of feasts (see Betts 1950: 67)). Their generosity ensured respect. If they had performed sufficient meritorious deeds throughout their life and were held in high esteem, when a man became an elder (*katsingme*) he could be invited into the Village Council, the ultimate village authority, and to assume other leadership roles.

³⁰ The elected head of the Village Council (*Matai*) was a *kadeipeu*, 'man of the soil', and a hereditary landowner who had to be from the original village founder's patrilineage (*tsami*). However, his age, character and ability were of essence as another man from his lineage could have been chosen instead (Betts 1950: 48).

In short, the *ram*, or village community, held young men accountable for their *protection*, while older men were responsible for the *distribution of benefits* to the village. These may be conceptualised as masculine ‘caring practices’. Despite radical social change, these gendered values persist, and many women continue to hold men accountable to them.

The protection of, and distribution of benefits to, the *ram*³¹ by men are conceived by Zemes as duties and services. Only socially defined men may own land, and property is passed through the patriline (*tsami*). Therefore men have control over the accumulation and redistribution of wealth. However, when Zeme and other Naga men proudly proclaim that their societies are ‘patriarchal’, the word is loaded with a sense of responsibility and personal sacrifice and risk to life and limb. While it entails ‘fame’ and privileges not available to women, these privileges were, in the past, offset by dangers and sacrifices women did not have to make. Newmai (1998: 45), cited earlier, said that previously women were happy with their position in the society because they were given adequate protection, suggesting legitimate reciprocation of labour. And Vashum calls village security and administration the ‘lot’ of men in a patrilineal and patriarchal society (2000: 155) indicating the danger or burdensomeness of these duties. We might call these ‘caring’ or ‘supportive’ masculine practices (see also Chopra 2007). The onerous nature of manly responsibilities was summed up by one of my research consultants, and friend, Jonah Neume in Laisong village:

Men will take a bullet for women and children. More men die because they protect the women and children. One hundred percent of Zeme men would sacrifice their lives to save their women and children. If I can’t save my wife and children from an opponent then I’m not fit to be a man.

Perilous and burdensome tasks and responsibilities brought a great deal of honour and prestige to the man who performed them. Indeed, it was considered better to die fighting than to shame one’s children by not protecting the village or clan (in Bower 1952: 194). Below I am going to explore two of the best known Naga masculine practices and hope to show that they are embedded as much in the service of women and the community as they are in the pursuit of personal glory.

‘Headhunting’ and youthful masculinity

The Nagas are renowned as ‘warriors’, as representations of their armed opposition to the Government of India army have demonstrated in the past six decades; and, in early colonial times, for their practice of headhunting and resistance to British hegemony. Any discussion of Naga constructions of masculinity means the former practice of ‘headhunting’ cannot be overlooked. The

³¹ Nowadays, the *ram* might refer to a particular religious community (colony) of a village, rather than the whole village itself.

taking of enemy heads was a solely male pursuit and a vivid demonstration of the Naga configuration of ideals of youthful masculinity.

A great deal has been written (and sensationalised) about Nagas and head-hunting (for example, Hutton 1928, 1965; Mills 1937; von Furer Haimendorf 1938; Elwin 1961; Jacobs 1990; Stirn and van Ham 2003; Saul 2005). See Gray (1986: 47, 55) for a critical perspective on representations of Naga men and headhunting. Here I wish to show that headhunting was the practice, *par excellence*, of the Zeme masculine ideals of courage, ingenuity and service to others. These were the qualities that proved a man worthy of protecting his village and the community that was his constant judge of character and to whom he was always accountable. Furthermore, I also engage with narratives of head-taking because it occurred within living memory of some people. Saul (2005: 188) notes that the last recorded head-taking was in 1983 and I was once told that an enemy head was taken by a Zeme in a conflict with the Kuki people in the 1990s. Vashum (200: 17) states that the ethos of headhunting of the past continues to influence the Naga national movement. And as explained earlier, the past conditions of inter-village feuding and the village as a military republic is foundational to the gender division of labour that is at issue here. Most importantly, as I said before, women still expect men to uphold relations of ‘care’ in the form of protection.

It is said that Zemes were not a ‘war-like’ people (Bower 1952: 76) and that they were relieved when the British administration imposed a ban on inter-village feuding. Little has been written about Zeme Naga head-taking; nevertheless, Zeme men did practice the taking of enemy heads and were glorified for doing so. When questioned about headhunting, Zemes I spoke to responded with a mixture of pride and embarrassment. Pride because of the courage it was said to involve, as well as the excitement it caused; and embarrassment because they now view this practice as ‘backward’ and improper. General literature by Nagas suggests that some would rather forget this aspect of the past. I would argue that, despite the massive changes Zeme society has been involved in, ideals of masculine and feminine behaviour that enact particular Zeme values continue to connect the past to the present.

Ursula Graham Bower states that all Naga men “before the Pax Britannica stopped them...were head-hunters to a man” (1952: 1). However, Jonah Neume, questions this:

Not every man is a head-hunter. How could they be? For example, if a man from another village cut off my relative’s head and we have no strong family members, then we’ll hire a warrior to take revenge on our behalf. Obviously we have to give the brave person something in payment (*nchaikuak*). Only every *strong* man could have taken a head.

Jonah’s narrative suggests a hierarchy of masculinities with only those considered the physically and mentally strongest at the top. “It’s only because of his strength that a man can bring his

enemy's head", Jonah said. "Because it's a sign of strength there's huge pride and joy, we *rehoi* (chant in victory): 'I am a man from Tousem village and I took revenge on this man!'" Elsewhere, Bower states that there was "a small proportion of the slightly abnormal, men who have never married, men who have failed to keep a wife, and men who have been expelled from other villages..." (Betts 1950: 107). These men were still able to contribute to the village, but would have struggled to live up to the ideal standards of masculinity. However, unless they were considered to have had a severe disability they would have formed part of the village guard and have been able to participate in lesser tests of courage and character that I shall describe shortly.

Adeule often used to say that 'character' was the most important thing in Zeme society. She uses the word *matateuchibe* to describe the qualities of the ideal man. She translates it as 'to be expert'. Adeule explained that it means a man who is creatively intelligent, athletic, orderly, and who energetically "can supply whatever the people need". The ability to answer people's needs, the essence of *heleuraube*, seems to be at the core of Zeme understandings of headhunting in the past, at least according to the accounts that I was given. In the literature about headhunting it is generally accepted that bringing enemy heads to the village was about "the acquisition of soul-matter for the fertility of the crop" (Hutton 1928: 405). 'Soul-matter' was thought to reside in the head and contain supernatural powers. Vashum writes that in Tangkhul Naga society heads were sacrificed "to appease and please gods...for a good yield and harvest" (2000:17). While this may have been so for other Naga peoples and even for Zemes in the unrecorded past (such offerings to deities do seem to strongly accord with traditional Zeme cosmology, and the ritual spearing of the *mpe* -a kind of effigy-would indicate a representation of human sacrifice. Indeed, the head man of Hezailoa village explained to me that, "We can't sacrifice people to the gods, so we sacrifice animals instead"), my research participants insisted that headhunting had nothing to do with 'fertility'. (I should add that it is said the courage it required for a man to take a head made him particularly attractive to women and increased his chances of having plenty of lovers and of marrying the girl of his choice. In this way, 'fertility' might have been enhanced.) It is also possible that my research participants who now practice the monotheistic religion of Christianity preferred to downplay the polytheism of the past, or this aspect of head-taking may not have been communicated to them. Instead, Jonah and Adeule emphasised the ties of loyalty that incite revenge.

Contrary to accounts by colonial writers of constant and blood-thirsty attacks between Naga groups (death tolls being greatly increased by the advent of firearms into the area (Jacobs 1990: 148)), Zeme enemy villages had agreed upon 'seasons' or 'appointment times', as Jonah called them, for revenge killings. At these times people remained especially vigilant and women did not go unescorted because even a woman's head could be taken to injure her male relatives or to prove that

a man had the cunning to infiltrate the inner sanctum of a village. The rest of the time the villages enjoyed ‘ceasefires’, as Jonah referred to them, though villages were always on guard for Angami Naga raids (for Zemes, these raids did not constitute part of their head-taking cycles). Indeed, generally it is said that women could travel between villages unharmed. Young men received special training in the *hangseuki* that constituted warfare ‘re-enactments’, and they were constantly monitored for failure of courage (Betts 1950: 27).

Even though some non-Naga writers underscore that head-hunting was to benefit the whole village (for example, Jacobs 1990), especially regarding the ability of the head to increase the fertility of the village fields, I have included Adeule’s narrative, not only because she offers a woman’s perspective generally missing from masculinist colonial accounts, but also because of her emphasis on social ties within and between villages. Adeule said:

Imagine I am a man. My girlfriend’s brother’s head was taken by a man in Hejaichak (a neighbouring village). So I will take revenge for her. I’ll try to target the man who took her brother’s head. I’ll go to Hejaichak at dusk with some special wine in a gourd. There, I adopt a family as my protector. They’re my forefather’s relatives so I know them already. I’ll tell them the truth about my plan to avenge the death of my girlfriend’s brother. I offer them the wine and tell them, “I came here to adopt you as my parents, so that if there’s a conflict you’ll support me”. They will not refuse me, even if they’re a good friend of the target, because they understand that it’s right that revenge is taken.

I have to do very careful research about who he is and at what times he is in which place, and my adopted parents help me with that information. I stay at their house that night, and if I’m seen I just say I’ve come to visit relatives. The targeted man must be awake because taking the head of a sleeping person is cowardly. I hide, and lie in wait, maybe for hours, until he’s alone. Then I kill him by chopping off his head. That’s *how* I kill him. Then I break the gourd to make a bowl and put his head inside it, to hide it and carry it. By the time his body is found I’ll be back in my village. I bring the head straight to the *hangseuki* where it’s announced by the old men, “The target’s head has been taken!” We don’t mention his name in case someone in the village is related to him and a conflict arises. We beat his face til it’s unrecognisable.

He has to take a head within one or two days. Sometimes a man is not able to kill his target, so he’ll take another head. But that person must be a close relative of his target. If by accident they kill someone from their adopted family that’s such a grave mistake that he might even kill himself.

Adeule’s narrative demonstrates the kinship ties between, and interdependence of, Zeme villages usually missing from ‘village as republic’ narratives. There is a tension of loyalties between clans, affinal families, *kiangna* (members of a particular *hangseuki*) and villages. However, family and clan loyalties take priority. As Kamei (2004: 251) explains, “Clan transcends the villages. Even during the past head-hunting days, the clan was the vehicle of inter-clan fraternity across villages”. Adeule insists that a head is only taken “because we’ve made a promise to avenge someone else’s death out of loyalty to that person and their relatives”. As Adeule has shown, the person to whom a

man is loyal may equally be a woman with whom he has a strong bond. Taking a head in retribution of his girlfriend's loss means strengthening the bond between them as lovers, gaining favour from her relatives for his loyalty (and no doubt he will be favoured for marriage to their daughter), as well as to be decorated and honoured as a brave warrior. He has risked his life for her. Hunting a man is the ultimate dangerous pursuit. He must also undergo deprivations and isolating prohibitions (*neube*) to ritually safeguard him before and after his conquest (see Pame 1996: 121). However, his personal sacrifice brings him glory and fame that only men are entitled to.

Headhunting has been described as a 'male cult' "which could, theoretically, continue without much involvement of women" (Jacobs 1990: 131). Indeed, for head-taking, as well as for other forms of hunting, women and men are ritually segregated and strict prohibitions between them are observed. As Jacobs (*ibid.*) notes, head-taking does not confer the rights of ornaments for the woman, as it does automatically for the man. Headhunting was also viewed as a heroic masculine 'game' with the head as a trophy and proof of bravery. 'Bravery' is constructed as a masculine trait, while women are characterised as 'chicken-hearted' and, at best, can be considered only 'stoic'. Yet headhunting indirectly very much involves women. In Adeule's narration clearly the girlfriend and her family benefited by being somewhat appeased by this instance of head-taking as proof of revenge. Her boyfriend, in a way that showed him to be *matateuchibe*, supplied his girlfriend with what she 'needed', and so restored the balance of life where there was formerly a debt.

By the late colonial era, apart from rare and sporadic incidents, head-taking had ceased in Zeme country. There are several colonial accounts of the despondency and boredom that set in for Naga men after the abolition of head-hunting, and how 'drab' their lives became (for example, Mills 1973 [1926]:209) and how the villagers' health and sense of well-being deteriorated (von Furer - Haimendorf 1969: 99)³². While Zeme men may have resented the ban on head-taking and inter-village feuding, written reports (for example, Bower 1952: 76) as well as accounts by my research participants, say people were happy that relative peace was brought, even though they were displeased with the foreign administration of their country. However, even though head-taking was no longer practiced in the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity, there was still plenty of scope for a man to demonstrate his courage, strength and ingenuity to prove himself worthy of protecting his kin and village and to be able to supply what people needed. When Bower arrived in Laisong in 1939 she noted that the people there felt that the Pax Britannica "was but an interlude" (Bower 1952: 76) in the wars between tribes and villages, and the *rahangme* were kept on guard in case of threat. There were many ways, other than taking a head in revenge, for a man to prove his mettle.

³² Marshall Sahlins (2005: 45) calls this 'despondency theory'. The 'natives' may have indeed felt despondent, but colonial anthropologists tended to think 'they' eventually would become 'just like us – if they survived' (*ibid.*).

Young men could gain admiration for their skills at handicrafts and oratory, and (as well as unmarried women) for their gifts at dancing and singing. Unmarried men and women strengthened their social bonds and popularity through liaisons Zeme celebrate as ‘romance’ and men would display a tally (through special ornaments or monuments) of the number of lovers they had enjoyed, though the identity of the women was kept strictly secret. But here I shall focus on some of the ways character and strength were tested to deem a fellow ‘fit to be a man’.

Young men and tests of courage

At the time Bower wrote, the *hangseuki* was still fully functioning in Zeme country. As I will elaborate in Chapter Six the very size of the *hangseukia* (pl.) and their paraphernalia (for example, beds and drums) are testaments to their members’ strength. The felling, transportation and erection of the massive posts alone require strength, skill and co-operation of a high degree. The grander the *hangseuki* the more formidable the defence of the village. The *hangseuki* itself boasts its members’ masculinity. Presumably, the more magnificent the *hangseuki*, the safer the women, children and elderly felt and the more intimidated invaders might feel. Men who invented ingenious weapons, and who had the strength to build huge fortifications brought security to the village. As such, these men, usually *rahangme*, were indulged, permitted special foods and other privileges and publicly praised. In the 1940s, “the buck’s was a life of gilded leisure, to which the harried householder looked back regretfully ever after” (Bower 1952: 76).

There were at this time plenty of competitions for young men to display their bravery and worth. The sacrificial mithun (*bos frontalis* or semi-domesticated Asian bison) chase is one that Bower (1952: 66-71) describes in typically colourful fashion. At the beginning of *Puak Pet Ngi* (first fruits festival in autumn) members of rival *kiangna* (members of each *hangseuki*) chased a huge mithun or buffalo, its horns padded with creepers and bark to prevent fatalities. The idea of this “stern test of nerve and stamina” (*ibid.*: 67) is to catch the bull, and as a group, throw it to the ground and tie it up. After protective incantations and offerings, the priest whacks the bull on the rump and as it thunders off it is pursued through the village and into the jungle.

As soon as some stalwart has a tight hold on the tail, he yells his patronymics at the top of his voice; and at the moment he is identified, all the bucks of his morung race to the spot, the first up catching the horns while the rest beat off the rival morung and help bring the bull to a standstill. Then they band together, to throw it, with much ho-ho-ing; for no throw, no win (Bower 1952: 68).

Apart from agility, courage and co-operation, a remarkable point about this competition and other traditional competitions between individual men, such as running races and high jumping (*hetoa*), long jumping (*hezoa*), and shot-putting (*nching*) is that the winner was expected to *give* a prize.

Bower explains that Zemes have “an engaging custom by which the winner of a contest is...de-kilted, by any elder present, on the ground that anyone so gifted by nature can spare mere ornaments to those less favoured” (1952: 95). In 2004 I witnessed a re-enactment of traditional ‘cultural events’ in Tousem village in adjoining Manipur state, in which an extremely athletic and entertaining youth, the winner of every game (who, incidentally, was profoundly deaf), gave money to an elderly priest in exchange for blessings in front of the entire village. (Women and girls participate in their own games as well for an audience, but these are not accorded quite the same prestige.) Adeule told me that during the five day winter end -of- year festival of *Hega Ngi* (post-harvest Departure of Souls Festival) the family of the winner of the long jump over the village sacred altar stone (*hezooa dekung*) had to provide wine, sticky rice, meat and money to each *hangseuki* member. The family was considered especially fortunate to have such a talented son and they were honoured by the praise of the *hangseuki* members in return: “This family gave pork feet as big as elephant’s feet and one thousand and ten rupees. May God bless this family and wherever they go may this family be as bright as the sun and moon.” I should also add that while every youth does his best to win, there is a great deal of clowning and comic behaviour to amuse onlookers. This tends to defuse the more hostile aspects of ‘competition’.

As we can see, girlfriends, mothers, siblings and children, elders, indeed all members of the community, had an investment in the practices and displays of youthful ideals of masculinity that provided security, retribution, reflected glory and demonstrations of loyalty. These masculine feats were not merely the gratuitous posturing of the kind body-builders display. Nor was the violence of head-taking merely to gain status as a ‘dangerous’ man serving solely his own interests as celebrated in some Hollywood depictions of aggressive machismo. They are viewed as evidence of the ability to protect and serve the members of their society. In return men were decorated and lauded and their paths paved for further positions of responsibility when older age was attained.

Feasts of Merit and senior masculinity

Also well-known among scholars of the Nagas was the practice conducted by senior men referred to as Feasts of Merit. These feasts, similar to the potlatch ceremonies of the indigenous peoples of the northwest coasts of the United States and Canada, were the expression of senior hegemonic masculine behaviour. My aim here is again to briefly show the perceived benefits of this masculine practice to women, children and other members of the Zeme community.

A major factor that inhibited the rise of economic class-differentiation in northeast India was the existence of forms of reciprocity that used up surpluses. Obligations to fellow clan families were not balanced. On the contrary, those who had more were obliged to provide more. Social prestige

was linked not to accumulation, as it now largely is, but to the extent to which a family provided for others (Nathan 2004: 198). It is readily acknowledged in literature about the Nagas that the series of feasts given by a wealthy man benefited the whole village and that not just he, but his whole family, including female members, rose in status and enjoyed special privileges (for example, Mills 1973 [1926]:257; Betts 1952; Elwin 1961; Jacobs 1990; Longkumer 2010.). For this reason I will be especially brief. Bower explains that Feasts of Merit (*Ka 'nkuibe*) serve two functions for Zemes.

They ensure the distribution of surplus rice, and of wealth in other forms based upon that surplus, among the village community through the medium of a feast; and to encourage the owner of riches to distribute them to his poorer neighbours instead of hoarding them, they reward him with prestige and political power (Betts 1950: 71).

According to Zeme writer, Reverend Kuame (2005:41), there were seven types of feasts that formed a sequence, each bigger than, and predicated upon, the previous feast. The feasts were entirely dependent on the economic conditions of the time so that the final feast, *Kepeupakbeki*, was seldom performed (*ibid.*). The agrarian economy was inextricably associated with rituals and offerings of animals to the gods (*hera*) and spirits of the land for protection of crops, so there was the added expense of paying for sacrificial beasts to perform the ceremonies connected with the feasts. Thus, fertility of the soil and health of crops and social status were closely connected. As Longkumer explains (2007: 507) the propitiatory sacrifices themselves, the 'dangerous' period of observance or non-working days (*nrei*), and prohibitions (*neube*)³³, such as abstinence from sexual activity, restrictions on travel *et cetera*. "transformed the feast into a work of merit". Giving a feast was a huge expense and, in fact, an enormous burden. However, Kuame (2005:41) writes that the rich wished to "give out their food and drink, sharing charity and joy in this world" and some guests made gifts of "beautiful clothes... as a token of honour and homage" for the feast giver. Feast givers were also rewarded with ornaments such as elaborate head-dresses and huge monoliths were erected in their honour. This practice also required the construction of a series of large houses called *kumarumki*, *kapeoki* and *hekuiki* (Longkumer 2010: 55) each more magnificent than the last, and these required strict prohibitions and ceremonies. Longkumer explains that while the wealthy man and his family was 'reintegrated' back into society economically through the wealth-levelling device of the *Ka 'nkuibe*, he retained the status he acquired from redistributing his wealth (*ibid.*).

Women, particularly wives, were crucial to the performance of *Ka 'nkuibe*. A man could not give a feast if he was unmarried. He was entirely dependent on his wife, grown daughters and other female kin to brew the beer, which is women's work and, in this context, had a 'sacramental' quality

³³ These prohibitions are known as *genna* (an Angami word) in most ethnographic literature about the Nagas.

(Jacobs 1990: 131). She was also vital in producing the surplus rice, livestock and other goods that constitute wealth, and provides cloth which women and girls alone spin and weave. Clothing, of course, is not only functional, but particular colours, patterns and cuts of cloth designate rank and status. It was fully acknowledged that women do the bulk of the agricultural and other productive labour, and a wife received ornaments at a Feast of Merit (Jacobs 1990: 132). Bower writes that the wife and daughters of a feast giver received “reflected glory from the increased prestige of the husband and father” (Betts 1950:72). Moreover, as Julian Jacobs (1990: 132) discerns from literature about Nagas in the colonial period, women were in a potentially powerful position as a result of being between two groups of men as a married woman has ties to her clan of birth, and also to her husband’s clan, in the kinship system.

Her husband is dependent on her labour, to undertake the Feasting series, and this allows a certain degree of freedom of option, on her part, as to how much she identifies with her husband and his clan and how much with her clan of birth. A woman who chooses not to involve herself fully in her new clan may work less hard in the field, and produce less rice, thereby reducing her husband’s ability to compete in the Feasting arena. Without her cooperation in production, the man is unable to gain status (Jacobs 1990: 132).

A husband, then, would have to make himself popular, through caring practices, in order to win the loyalty and labour of his wife that would increase his own political status. A wife’s ability to withdraw her labour gave her increased power in her marital household and a husband needed to please his wife in order to receive the benefits of her labour.

Bower writes that between 1940 and 1946 only one Feast of Merit was performed in the Central Zeme area, and she doubted that the ritual formulae for the largest feasts had survived by this time (Betts 1950: 70). British policies had caused land shortages and poverty had resulted by the 1930s. The Gaidinliu movement (later known as Heraka) with its message of religious reform responded to the economic crisis by abolishing the expensive sacrifices that underpinned the Feasts of Merit (see Longkumer 2010) as I will explain in Chapter Seven. *Ka ‘nkuibe*, then, are a thing of the past though some of the values that underpinned them persist for the time being for some people in some villages.

While Feasts of Merit with all their pomp and scope for status elevation may have been relegated to memory, ceremonial feasting is still a very important part of Zeme lives, and forms part of the many agricultural festivals during the year. *Hega Ngi*, the end of year festival that now melds with Christmas for Christian Zemes, and the most important festival of the year, is the time when a large feast by an important man is offered. Adeule explains from her memories of her adolescence (in the 1980s-90s) when she practiced the Heraka religion:

On the third day of the *Hega Ngi* after special ceremonies, prohibitions, offerings to Tingwang (God) and sports, the old men decide which family had lots of rice this year. They'll discuss it carefully. "This year so- and- so's family have got lots of rice so we'll ask them to provide a big feast for the whole village". They choose two households in the village, one to provide a large feast, and the other a smaller one. It is an honour and a burden at the same time. The family must accept. This feast is called *metungduara*. After that the priest will announce to the village the families that are offering the *metungduara* and he commands the *rahangme* and *katsingme* (elders) to get ready to toast the families with a '*rehoi*' (victory chant that sounds like 'ho-ho'), which they do continuously from the north of the village and to the south.

As Adeule points, out, these feasts are a burden as well as an honour for the givers, so to a large degree communal equality continues to be supported by a man's generosity and support. It is understood as his 'duty' as a wealthy man to outlay considerable hospitality. Again, *metungduara* cannot take place without efficient and loyal labour from wives, and their contribution is celebrated. Certainly a man will be offered positions of influence and be remembered in some sections of society, as will his wife and family, for giving a *metungduara*.

However, as I shall elaborate in Chapter Eight, it may not be surplus rice and other products from the household over which women have control that is nowadays the source of a man's wealth. Indeed, he is unlikely to have much surplus from soil that is now depleted and affected by erosion and unprecedented changes in climate (see Keisha 2008), and from land that is increasingly inhabited by outsiders. Giving a feast itself, while still a valued practice, no longer has the same meaning due to economic change, and, as a core component of senior Zeme hegemonic masculinity, its future may be uncertain.

Fit to be a man

Zeme hegemonic masculinity, then, has been constructed around values and practices that are understood as 'caring'. These are usually constituted by forms of labour that are viewed as protective of the society, such as warriorhood (embodying the values of courage and loyalty), which was largely the responsibility of younger men skilled in warfare; and village administration that was the duty of senior men who made up the Village Council. The distribution of wealth and other benefits throughout the community by wealthy senior men in Feasts of Merit is much valued in a materially egalitarian society. While Feasts of Merit have now disappeared, the values of generosity and sharing persists, although in altered form, such as in the *metungduara*. At each stage of his life-cycle, even in the late colonial period, there was the opportunity for nearly every man to achieve his society's ideals of masculinity for his age-grade. Masculinity was demonstrated by qualities such as courage and ability to provide what the village needed. Masculine leadership was based on self-

sacrifice and service to women and the rest of the community that is enshrined in *heleuraube*. These attributes are what Zeme women view as making a man fit to be a man.

Summary

I have suggested that women's expectations of men's labour (*mpeume ta*) and other 'caring' behaviour continue to emerge from traditional hegemonic masculine practices that benefited them and the whole community. As junior adults, men depended on, and sought to please not only village leaders, and family, but also girlfriends and vulnerable community members, by displaying courage, loyalty and protection. Respect was gained by acts of *heleuraube* and conspicuous service to others through work defined as 'masculine care'. Senior men gained prestige from the *heleurau* attributes of generosity and sharing. Married men were explicitly dependent on wives' labour for the elevation of their social status. Therefore, wives had considerable leverage over husbands. The loyalty (and therefore labour) of female kin was won through service to women and the community as a whole through reciprocal 'caring' practices.

British colonialism initiated radical social change, including the obsolescence of certain masculine practices. I mentioned these events in Chapter Two and will discuss them further in Chapter Eight. Bower noted the impoverishment caused by colonial land policies during her field work in the late colonial era. However, it seems that at that time men were able to continue to express traditional values associated with masculinity through newer practices as well as through various sorts of labour in and around the village that contributed to their community's livelihood.

The next chapter shows that, even though women as 'men's property' is a condition of their inequality, they nevertheless were viewed as fulfilling their masculine obligations through and within the institution of marriage. Being considered to 'belong' to the men meant the enactment of duties of care towards women. These duties were part of the important provisioning of what women were perceived to need.

Chapter Six

‘We Belong to the Men’

Zeme men own property, including land, and people. Women do not. Overseeing women and their products (children and domestic labour) are the constructed conditions of being Zeme men and properly part of their ‘public’, ‘outside’, and ‘encompassing’ duties. Thus owning and exchanging women is part of providing what the community needs. The more women under a man’s influence meant more wealth and power and ‘fitness’ to be a man. Indeed, Zeme customary law permitted polygyny (and still does in Hezailoa where the chief’s son has two wives) although it was rare. Here I suggest that the condition of women ‘belonging’ to men, while underscoring their subordinate status, was largely experienced as receiving the care of the gerontocracy. Being exchanged for goods acknowledged the value of women to their community and was a matter of pride and prestige for some.

This chapter shows that the control men had over women came with responsibility and reciprocal acts of service, according to the ethos of *heleuraube*. Masculinities were constructed accordingly as we saw in Chapter Five. Adeule’s father, Mr Heuchangying Mbau Nriame, explains that men are the “owners of families”, while women, in marriage, “come from other families”. Patrilocality and patrilineality make women vulnerable. Daughters customarily do not inherit property when their parents die and it is only through marriage that a woman may inherit, from her in-laws through her husband. It is therefore considered men’s responsibility to “look after women”, Mr Mbau Nriame said. Other Nagas also consider caring for women as men’s responsibility as social commentator Mr Mhathung Tungoe (1998: 34) describes for Lotha Nagas: “Women in Lotha society are given special care and protection because they are considered as weaker sex.”

It is from women’s understanding of their legitimate claim to support from men that their critique of their behaviour has emerged. This chapter gives an account of women ‘belonging’ to men as a condition of their lower status. This condition of belonging to men also constitutes women’s entitlement to protection and other supportive masculine practices.

Being constructed as the ‘property’ of men is the foundation of Zeme women’s relatively subordinate status and of special privileges for men. Children, as well as women’s productive labour, are the primary resources men have the right to lay claim to. How then, can Mrs Takheule hope for gender equality (see Chapter One) while men consider wives and children their property? And why do women, on the whole, appear to happily acquiesce to this law?

‘Proper’ Zeme marriages are arranged by parents. What ability do women have to refuse a husband and marriage? What are some of the specifics of women’s relative disadvantage, and what freedoms may they legitimately enact with regard to marriage and divorce? Which marriage practices elicit something of women’s value in Zeme society?

In this chapter I present some of the particularities of women’s relative inequality in Zeme society. I detail a few of the ways women are valued as the ‘property’ of men, as well as some of the disadvantages they suffer. I propose that the condition of adult daughters as their father’s property, as well as the exchange of goods and transferral of ‘ownership’ of her to the senior kin of the prospective husband, offered women security in marriage. The cases I present suggest that it is *not* the customary law decreeing that women belong to men that is the centre of women’s current complaints about increasing gender inequality (though I also show that women suffer certain hardships because of this law). I take up this point again in Chapter Nine.

In Chapter Four I referred to Zeme women’s increase of status through the accomplishment of age-appropriate feminine ideals expressed through labour practices. A woman’s accumulation of moral authority meant the enjoyment of private influence over others and the benefits they entailed in the gender hierarchy. I also showed how men’s hegemonic masculine practices (according to age) in the ‘traditional’ patriarchy ensured the protection and support of women and other vulnerable citizens. Senior men also maintained relative material equality through the redistribution of wealth through Feasts of Merit. I have underscored that men and women generally performed complementary and reciprocal labour practices that are experienced as ‘caring’. Traditional patriarchy was experienced as supportive for women despite their comparatively inferior social status.

This chapter focuses on the patriarchal institution of marriage, through women’s eyes, that has largely been supportive of women in the past, and partly continues to be so today. Actually, I do not investigate women’s experience of being married (and we have already seen how dissatisfied women are with their sense of inequality in their marital situations nowadays). Rather, it is the experience of being ‘given’ in exchange between men that I explore by recounting two weddings, a divorce, and becoming a widow from several women’s points of view. I attempt an impression of their sense of themselves as well as their children ‘belonging to’ fathers and husband’s families. In the Zeme patriarchal system (as in ‘traditional’ Western patriarchy) marriage means a woman ceases to be the ‘property’ of her father to become the property of her husband’s patrilineage. Any children born in the marriage union are also viewed as the property of the father and his clan. Traditionally, Zeme patriarchy also meant that junior men, including new husbands, were of

relatively low status as well. In effect, grooms, as junior men, also belong to senior men. However, the focus here is on women (and their children and labour) belonging to fathers and fathers-in-law. It is these senior men who are directly involved in the bridal exchange. By drawing on life-histories or examples given by women, I draw attention here to what may be called fatherly ‘caring practices’ towards adult daughters in the first two cases. The customary law of fathers’ ownership of adult daughters benefits the young women. The final case shows the limits of the customary law and the ways it may increase women’s suffering and sense of inequality.

Zeme women and children as property of men

Connell (2009: 68) reminds us that though it is often forgotten in “the excitement of gender politics among adults” that the reproductive arena (bodily capacities - such as birthing, sexual interaction and child care - and the social practices which realise them) very much concerns children. In many societies, marriage legitimises the offspring born to the woman as children belonging to both (female and male) partners. The elaboration of gender in Zeme society in relation to the ‘reproductive arena’ constructs women and children as men’s property.

Giving Women in Marriage in Zeme Society

The notion of women and children as the property of men brings into frame the suggestion of commoditisation, even objectification. Objectification, according to political philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1995: 257) is treating a human being as an object. She argues that there are several ways to ‘treat a person as a thing’ (*ibid.*: 256) but that not all types of objectification are equally objectionable. However, to use a person in a solely instrumental way, as a tool of our own purposes while denying their status of being ‘ends in themselves’ (*ibid.*: 265) is morally problematic. It is this aspect of objectification that feminists have argued is a central problem in the lives of Western women.

It is impossible to understand the ways in which Zeme women and children are held to be under men’s ownership without further investigation into Zeme social structure. As I implied earlier, Zemes are traditionally a classless society. While such societies are often egalitarian relative to class or caste-based societies, social inequality may be determined by age and gender. In such non-stratified, kin-based societies marriage organises the distribution of privileges and obligations between the genders and generations (Collier 1988: 2). Zeme society may be classified as an ‘equal bridewealth’ society according to the definition given by anthropologist Jane Fishburne Collier (1988: 3). Zeme society is horticultural with a kinship mode of production and may also be classified as a ‘domestic-scale culture’ (see Bodley 1999, 200). In ‘equal bridewealth’ societies, the senior kin of the bride and groom exchange gifts (which may include labour) of roughly equal

worth, establishing their mutual equality (Collier 1988: 103). Anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower (Betts) describes Zeme marital gift exchange in the 1940s:

On the youth's side the main part of the wealth is provided by his father and the balance is made up by gifts and loans from kinsmen, the father's brothers and classificatory brothers being the chief contributors. On the girl's side, the wealth is retained by her parents and not distributed among her kin, but they send with her to her husband and his parents a substantial provision in clothes, household utensils, and food for the wedding-feast, this provision being proportional to the bridewealth (Betts 1950: 61).

Collier (1988: 132) claims that in equal bridewealth societies women's capacity to bear children is the central contested resource, and both men and women claim to control it. Children are the source of all power. Men need sons and daughters to become household heads and women need children to work for them as so that they will have bargaining power relative to their husbands and natal kin (*ibid.*). Paternity is established by the transaction of bridewealth. As Collier explains (1988: 93), in equal bridewealth societies men acquire children by accumulating women (wives and sisters). Marriage in such societies might be considered, from a Marxist perspective, an instrument of political power that allows men to gain rights to utilise women's reproductive powers (Bodley 2000: 105).

In Zeme society, as in other equal bridewealth societies, a main gender difference is that which establishes women as more 'giveable' than men. A woman's kin can apparently give her away. Senior kin can portray themselves as giving daughters because they can keep a married woman away from her husband if they do not approve of his behaviour (Collier 1988: 79-80). Collier argues that "the power of women's kin to keep married sisters and daughters from their husbands structures the arguments people make when negotiating marriages, and therefore structures the commonsense understandings that organize social inequality" (1988: 81-82). To perhaps overstate the case, it is the construction of Zeme women as giveable in marriage that is equated with being the 'property of men'.

Marriage negotiations in equal bridewealth cultures, then, establish men and women as unequal. Culturally defined men initiate marriages; culturally defined women are given as wives (Collier 1988: 85).

Photograph 7 Jonah and Adeule at marriageable age

I would now like to illustrate some of the ways Zeme women experience the context of their ‘givability’ in the following narratives and descriptions. The narratives are constructed from interviews and conversations with three Zeme women with Adeule’s translations and explanations. Ijeile is a great grandmother, and Pauramhuile and Paujelungle are both mothers of young children. They highlight a small number of different aspects of patriarchy from women’s points of view. Each attempts a brief evocation of a life centred on ‘belonging’ to husbands, fathers or parents-in-laws. They depict something of the distinctly Zeme, yet rapidly shifting, nature of patrilocality, marriage and patrilineality. I’ve chosen to use examples here of two *Paupaise* women, who actively attempt to retain customary Zeme practices, as a kind of benchmark from which to show some changes in marriage and bridewealth practices later in the thesis. The narratives presented here are drawn from women who consider themselves (and are considered so by others) to have suffered a fairly unusual degree of misfortune. The setbacks these women have experienced provide a context that starkly shows the disadvantages of being a woman in the Zeme patriarchal system, as well as highlighting some of the benefits of being considered the ‘property of men’.

Ijeile

Adeule and I interviewed Mrs Ijeile Nriame from the *Paupaise* village of Hezailoa in the Presbyterian colony of Laisong village where she was visiting her daughter’s family until the new

moon, when the rain would clear. She had come to pray for an improvement in her daughter's son's eyesight. Suffering poor health, she had increased her stay until she felt well enough to trudge up the long, steep track home to Hezailoa. She attributed her weakness to the deaths of so many of her children (five out of six), and was not afraid to die as she considered herself an 'unlucky person'. Many Zeme mothers lose children to illness, but it is unusual to have this many die.

My life has no taste any more. My husband is older than I. Who will look after us when I'm older? My daughter-in-law helps us a lot, but what if she remarries? I just want to die. I wouldn't wish to die if my son was still alive. But now life is meaningless. So many people are saying I look unhealthy, just like a ghost (*mamerie*).

Still, Ijeile could hardly have been described as morose. She responded to my questions in a light-hearted way, and to Adeule and passersby with a lively sense of humour. Her happiest moments of her 60 years of life, she said, were when she had her son, when he got married, and when he produced a grandson. Since her son died, her hopes lay with her grandson and his potential to become 'well qualified' at school in the district township of Haflong.

Ijeile's first marriage

Not yet fit to be a woman

Ijeile described herself at her first marriage as 'very young'. She eloped (*suipak pa*) with her boyfriend, married, and left her *leuseuki* the very next day. (To elope for Zemes means that in cases of parental disapproval the couple abscond to another village where the boy's kin are under obligation to give them shelter. The elopement must also take place in the 'marriage season'. After the fuss has died down the marriage will be recognised and the bridewealth paid (Betts 1950: 59)). Ijeile bore a daughter who is herself now a grandmother. The marriage, however, only lasted a year.

After one year, I went back home. I was very young and naive. The marriage finished because I was so young and I couldn't do all the duties required by my parents-in-law. I worked in the *jhum*, but I wasn't able to compare with my husband's parents. I couldn't carry as much as they could, nor do what was expected by them. So I returned home. There is a Zeme proverb: "*Kelakta pualak rei*" ["You cannot bear the family responsibilities"]. This proverb was true for me.

A proper wife should be able to do everything: weaving, spinning, collecting firewood, fetching water. Women who finish one job and go promptly on to the next - who are not lazy- they are properly behaved.

Adeule explained that women must be ready, or 'fit', to be a wife to pass to the adult status of being married. Girls are trained for marriage and the running of a household from an early age. A young woman must stay in her father's house to be trained by her mother at home and by older girls in the *leuseuki*, until she is ready to be given away in marriage. Everyone has a reputation associated with how well they perform their labour. Adeule said, "Men will compare the work of one woman with

another: ‘if *she* can do such and such, why can’t you?’ Mostly however, female peers, mothers and other senior female kin are the ones who not only train, but judge and criticise other women’s work and therefore her worthiness of womanhood.

In the *leuseuki*, we’d have special spinning competitions. We had songs of praise {Ijeile sings}:

Kelang teu je ninglang yi ninglang rei mikeu mak.

Ninglang ria yi lei hangket nai langria hegua nnum ria kum lei.

[When we’re spinning, your thread is very good – we cannot do better than you.

Your thread stretches beautifully – Your thread stretches like the *num* vine from the deep forest.]

The next song is one that criticises. I’m not sure I can remember...

{Ijeile sings} *Akileume hekuagateu pepui jui ke dai chelei.*

Mina se melei. Chaulang lau? Hangket nai lang pepui jui dai lei.

[Our group celebrates our spinning festival, but her mother is re-spinning.

That’s not the right way. Who stretched it like this? Someone’s auntie {namely ‘you’} did. Her mother is re-spinning it.]

The song shows how women are complicit in constructing their subordinate position in a patriarchal system. Older women (rather than men) have the right to define and evaluate the duties of younger women and to circumscribe their ascendance of the female hierarchy. If a young woman’s mother has to re-spin her thread, then that woman is clearly not ready to undertake the responsibilities that come with being a wife and not meeting the ideals of age-appropriate ideal femininity. A wife is responsible for clothing the family. Ijeile was such a woman at the time of her first marriage. She bore a daughter in her first marriage and it was her school-age grandson by this daughter whom she was visiting when we met her. Her daughter and this grandson ‘belong’ to the family of her first husband an hour or so walk away from Ijeile’s home, but she may see them as she pleases.

Photograph 8 Mrs Iheule spinning cotton

Ijeile's second wedding

If I was willing to get married, I'd accept

Weddings (*kahegiabe*) take place in the dry season, between November and March. During this season, after the harvest, the skies become blue and the fields brown and there is ample time for celebrations. Everybody says it is their favourite time of year.

In the following description, I follow Ijeile's narrative, but digress to include Adeule's extrapolations and clarifications of wedding procedures from a woman's perspective. Adeule provided these during the process of translating Ijeile's audio tape, some time after the initial interview. Ijeile, like many others, (understandably) assumed I was familiar with the intricacies of Zeme marriage. For Ijeile, weddings Zeme -style were natural and universal. She had already asked about my *leuseuki* at home and whether I practiced *Paupaise* or Christianity. It would take Adeule's feeling for my position as 'outsider' to furnish a description beyond Zeme ethnocentricity. Furthermore, Adeule's explanations demonstrate that many features of Ijeile's wedding are performed today.

I asked Ijeile to describe her second wedding procedure.

When the boy's family visited my family again and again, if I was willing to get married, I'd accept. If my parents were willing for me to marry into that family, we'd make the decision to get married.

Adeule helped me build a more detailed picture by asking me to imagine that it was to be her own boyfriend Kisatuing's family, from the Western Zeme village of New Kubing, proposing for him to marry her. Kisatuing's aunties' husbands (his father's sisters' husbands) and his elder sisters' husbands, that is, two married men (that is, householders) and two senior men (elder kin), will come to Adeule's parent's village of Hereilo. However, they would not come directly to Adeule's home, but stay with relatives in Hereilo. Around 7.30 in the evening they will come to Adeule's home, whether she is present or not, and propose that Kisatuing marries Adeule. However, her parents will not directly accept. They will say, 'My daughter's not like other girls, she may not be able to do all the things other girls can do. She'll not be good enough for your family.' Adeule explained that they will say this even if she has a good education and her behaviour is impeccable.

Kisatuing's family will reply, 'She's very good; we very much want her to be our daughter-in-law. Kisatuing is not well-qualified enough for her. He's badly behaved. We want her to be a good influence upon him. But we do not have enough to give your daughter whatever she wants. We are poor and not fit to have her as our daughter-in-law. Yet, we plead with you to accept our proposal'. Adeule's parents would say, 'Let's meet again next month to discuss it further', and that is the end of the first stage of the proposal, which must be met with *heleuraube*.

The next interaction directly involves the prospective bride. Adeule's parents will call her and question her about the proposal. Adeule would say, 'Yes, I like him. If you want me to be happy then I'll accept.' The next meeting, then, would take account of this decision. If, however, Adeule did not like Kisatuing, then she would say, 'No, I have to do further studies', or make other excuses. In this case, she would go elsewhere when Kisatuing's family returned to her home, and her parents would relate what Adeule had said, and no one would force the matter any further.

An important part of the marriage negotiations is the settlement of bridewealth. Ijeile said,

Our two families discussed the brideprice. And if the boy's parents agree to pay the amount asked for, then the negotiations are finished.

Bridewealth (*henaumipeibe*), in Zeme custom, Adeule explained, is to help compensate and appease the girl's parents. Their daughter is their gift to the boy's parents. They are sad because their daughter is going away. The boy's parents have to give payment in precious necklaces (*tela tau*), mithuns and buffaloes. Often cash is also given. The animals are divided amongst the girl's relatives and are to help make up for the loss of a beloved family member and helpful pair of hands.

The necklaces help to remind them of their daughter and become valuable heirlooms. The boy's parents must be able to meet the girl's parent's requests, or the marriage will not go ahead.

Ijeile continued:

After the proposal was accepted, we got ready to welcome the boy's parents back. Before the wedding day I arranged clothes and did a lot of weaving. My family killed a big pig to take to Hezailoa where the boy's family lived. I prepared cloth (*paisua*), the black one that is called *paitik*, especially for the husband, and *hengipai* [a larger white ceremonial cloth for males only, that can also be used as a blanket]. For my mother-in-law I prepared a *mini* {for a long skirt} and one cloth for my father-in-law. All of my friends escorted me to Hezailoa.

Again, Adeule clarified that when a girl wants to marry she will need a year to prepare and to weave all the cloth. If the boy has many married sisters and married paternal aunties (*hemeime*) then she will have to make a great deal of cloth as gifts for them (up to 45 pieces, Adeule thought). Her very close friends may also help her make cloth and wine to bring to Kisatuing's family. Adeule's father will also have prepared for her a wooden trunk, plates, an axe, a small spade and spinning and weaving implements. The wedding will take place at the boy's family's home. The girl's family brings *all* the food, beer and wine needed for the wedding itself. A specially made wine would be brought in a gourd for the *hemeime*. Every household from Hereilo would contribute a chicken apart from poorer families who would provide dried meat. They would bring these proudly all the way to New Kubing. The girl feels loved and respected by her family and the whole village as they proceed with the food and other contributions. All these food items are for the daughter, to express love for her, Adeule informed me. It is not prepared for the boy's family, although it is shared with them. The boy's family have also prepared food, but they understand that all the food brought from Hereilo is to show how much their daughter is loved, and will be missed.

On their wedding night, at least in the past, Adeule told me, the couple would not sleep in the same room. The boy would sleep with his friends, and she with hers. The whole night the girls will talk about their times together and often cry. The boys will dance and sing together. The next day, before the boys and girls who accompanied the bride to her new husband's village depart, they sing songs to her. Ijeile said:

Before they returned to Laisong, my friends sang a song for me. I can't remember...

{Singing in ancient Zeme kua}

Hangket penai je kepauming, Nimlo ge kainge karimna.

Hangket penai, wangchu chinglei!

Keluang pungle lau nairam lua wang dai tei.

Akileume rehei yi.

Hangket penai je milung gemak.

Hereu wang je nianguang jai kanra chaine miki leuje

Huije hap lau hangket penai.

An auntie ('you', namely Ijeile) was escorted to Nimlo village then we departed.
Auntie, we are ready to go back!
Pick up your basket (to Ijeile); let's go back to our village {as if to bring her with them}.
Our *leuseuki* group is good.
We are feeling sad about our auntie.
When the 'trouble' comes {the hard agricultural work of the monsoonal months}, when the cicada chirrup
You will miss your *leuseuki* group and cry.

The departing wedding party sang out in archaic language to Ijeile as they departed:

Heleugau! Nang jeu jen ning jeulung chai Ramdikumbau je ntak je ku lau.
Mina chang gelak le gau!

This loosely translates as:

Hey girl! When your child is born, give him the name Ramdikumbau {village ruler}, call him that. No one can compare with you!

Pauramhuile

He loves his grand-daughter very much

Pauramhuile is one of Kisatuing's elder sisters. On a sunny October day as Adeule and I returned from a morning in the *jhum* where members of Kisatuing's family had been cutting paddy, we passed through the shade of some young trees that stretched up the hillside on our left. These were a timber plantation set up by Kisatuing's father (Mr Iralung Nkuame) for his grand-daughter, Ningchile, to inherit later. Ningchile was born in 1995 after her mother, Pauramhuile (daughter of Iralung), had eloped and married a local man. In 2003, Pauramhuile's husband fell in love with a cousin (a member of the same clan) and, against the condemnation of the New Kubing community, had married her. 'This was *very* serious', Adeule emphasised. 'There was a huge conflict between the relatives of the families involved. It was a great mistake on the husband's part. It was as if he and his new wife didn't *care* about their relatives'.

After much discussion between the parents of the husband and wife it was decided that the husband was at fault and that Pauramhuile should be allowed to keep her child. Pauramhuile had no wish to remarry because this would mean returning her daughter to her former husband. 'She loves her daughter *hugely*', Adeule told me. While she remains unmarried she and Ningchile live, seemingly happily, in her parent's relatively large and comfortable house. Adeule thought that it was a little uncommon for a Zeme man to leave such resources for his grand-daughter's use. However, apart from having the means to do so, he was considered an especially thoughtful and far-seeing man.

The timber plantation was to safeguard the future of his daughter and grand-daughter after his death.

Paujelungle

When the goddess Heratingrangpui creates a female child she cries

One morning during a break in the September rains, Adeule and I met Paujelungle Neume sitting by the basket of vegetables she was selling in the little Laisong weekly market at the bottom of the hill.

We learned that at about the age of 20 a marriage was arranged for Paujelungle. She laughed in embarrassment as she explained she was happy with the choice of husband, in response to my question. Utmost modesty is required when Zeme talk about their spouses or boyfriends or girlfriends. In the market I had been shocked to learn that Paujelungle was a young widow (*kemipui*). She was exactly my age and healthy, and rather beautiful I thought. Her first pregnancy had ended in miscarriage, and the second child was stillborn. Her husband had died six years before. She had one surviving son who was then eleven years old. They both lived with Paujelungle's parents-in-law (Ijeile – who we met earlier - and her husband). Adeule explained that if Paujelungle were to marry another man she would have to leave her son with her in-laws while she would go to another family, possibly in another village. The child is the property of the father's family, not of the mother. Furthermore, a child from another marriage will not be accepted into a different clan. This custom clearly caused Paujelungle much distress and she was keenly aware of the disparity between the options for men and women.

If we left the son to the old husband's relatives, then the mother would feel as if he is not her son any more. Suppose my old in-laws weren't able to take enough care of my son because of their age and illness... When I think of these things I feel too sad to leave my son to get another husband. If my son's relatives don't treat him as their own child then he'll miss me very much and cry. When I think about these things I feel very upset to think about a next marriage. I love my son, that's why I don't want to remarry.

If I were a man I wouldn't need to worry about my son and I could also earn more money for my son's schooling. I could get a new wife and my son could get a younger brother and sister. It would have been better for my son had I died instead of his father, because then he could get a new mother. If I were a man I could help my son and wouldn't worry so much. But we are women so we can't go very far away from our parents-in-law to earn money. It's very difficult to be a woman.

The previous year, Paujelungle and her parents-in-law sent her son to study at a Hindu school, Saraswati Vidya Mandir, in Haflong.

I want to look after my son, and if God wills, then he can continue to study. I miss him very much and I feel very sad. Because I'm alone. I cry a lot. But if I didn't send him for study then it's bad. Nowadays many people study. For the future only I send him to study, but I

miss him and cry a lot. If I were like other mothers who have more than one son I wouldn't miss him so badly... I want him to look after me after he completes his studies. That is my plan.

Zeme women, 'exchangeable goods'

While women are exchanged for goods, do they view themselves as commodities for barter? Ijeile's narrative shows something of a young woman's experience of being given in marriage (some 40 years ago) by senior kin to the groom's family. Bower explains that a woman retains close ties with her kin after marriage (who are able to act on her behalf should she find serious fault with her husband) and her parents demand greater bridewealth if she is to marry into another village and be separated from them (Betts 1950: 45). If the ties between the woman and her kin are particularly close, they may affect the residence pattern of her husband's lineage (*ibid.*).

Despite a young woman's sadness at leaving her natal home and some trepidation at joining a new family, all Zemes aspire to marry. Marriage is a central signifier of adult personhood. There are (or were in the recent past) at least three types of Zeme marriages occurring today, each with a different moral and economic value depending on the social capital of the prospective bride and groom and their families (see Kamei 2004: 258 for a brief description; and Kuame 2005: 45). The responsibilities of running a household, having children, producing food and making a living is both looked forward to and dreaded. Heavy responsibilities successfully carried out mean power and prestige. Successful marriage and producing children is the goal of every bride and groom, and indeed, of their whole families. Zeme Reverend Kuame explains:

The Zeme society considers the married person occupies a position of honour, and is considered as a responsible person. Giving marriage to a person is a prime duty of the parent toward his son and daughter in the society. So a married person is entitled to all social privileges and is allowed to participate in all social functions. Marriage is considered as one of the most important duties in the life of a man and or a woman (2005: 45).

In *effect*, Zeme women are deployed as exchangeable goods. However, Adeule's commentary on Ijeile's marriage in no way suggests that a girl experiences herself as a bargainable object (see also X. Mao 1998: 40). It appears she feels deeply valued by her kin and by the transaction of compensatory riches. It seems that Naga commentators on the 'status of women' in their societies do not generally consider bridewealth as commodifying women (for example, Zehol 1998: 22-23). Senior men particularly, but senior women as well, are the main beneficiaries of the bridewealth goods as the valuables pass between elders. As Bower (Betts 1950: 60) states "the youth and the girl have no part in them". However, these goods are understood to derive from the nature of the affinal bond, not from the amount and quality of goods exchanged (Collier 1988: 82). It appears,

from an emic point of view, that bridewealth confers prestige upon the young woman, and the better her capacity for work, and her reputation and ‘character’ (which she may take great pride in cultivating) the more her family can command from the young man’s family.

Liangmai Naga scholar, Dr. Hunibou Newmai (1998: 43-44) reminds us that for Zeliangrong Nagas, ‘Those who share the bride’s price are responsible to sort out the girls’ matrimonial problems if and when they arise.’ The meaning of the goods exchanged, then, carries a duty of care. In Zeme society, the affinal bond expressed through bridewealth continues in the wife’s later life and even after the wife’s death. When she has passed menopause, her husband, or her son if she is a widow, pays a further instalment of bridewealth. It is paid to her father, if still living, and if not, to her brother. A final payment is made after her death, and is known as *katsai-mi*, or ‘death-price’ (Betts 1950: 82-83).

In Laisong I attended a feast, mostly of senior men and women, held in a green *jhum*, to observe the handing over of a repayment of bridewealth some 20 years after the death of a very elderly woman. My adoptive brother Akum called this ‘*Kechingjie*’ or ‘*Ndeujie*’ where the elderly clans-people came to work in the *jhum* in the deceased woman’s memory as a form of payment (*ndeujie*) and to “renegotiate their clan relationship to make them closer with each other”. The discourse surrounding this occasion was not expressed in terms of goods or wages, but was laden with emotion and described to me as a ‘celebration in memory of the old woman’. Kinship bonds outlast the people whose marriages establish them (Collier 1988: 78).

Photograph 9 Memorial feast and working bee

Referring to equal bridewealth societies in general, Collier states:

Although women's kin are assumed to give brides to sons-in-law and/or brothers-in-law, the rights and obligations of each side are not negotiated by the parties. They are determined by the affinal bond. The arguments that people advance when trying to make or break marriages define the content of the bond. Marriage is not a market transaction. Women are not commodities to be bought and sold. In providing valuables for his in-laws, a groom does not buy a wife. He merely assumes the already defined obligations of a husband and son-in-law (1988: 82).

As we see in Ijeile's story women generally have the final say over whom they marry. Even in elopement, as in Ijeile's first marriage and in Pauramhuile's, the parents generally eventually capitulate to their daughter's decision. Naga academics who write about the position of women in their societies tend to emphasise women's freedom to choose, or at least agree or not, to a husband based on love, attraction, as well as other practicalities (for example, Zehol 1998; Tungoe 1998). This is not merely a case of the perceived effects of Christianity or 'Modernity' contributing towards gender equality which Naga social observers tend to advocate (for example, Zehol 1998; Kelhou 1998). Kamei indicates the traditional importance of woman's consent to marriage (2004: 256, 257). Bower's observation from pre-Christian Laisong more than half a century ago shows the weight accorded to the girl's opinion and her relative autonomy in this decision.

Once the choice of a bride has been made, the boy's parents or a relative go to the girl's father and mother and ask if they are agreeable to the match... If she refuses, there is an end of the matter, and though her parents may try argument and persuasion, no case is known of a girl being married against her will. Such a thing is counter to all Zemi feeling, and - more practical reason - if she finds life unbearable and runs away, her parents will have to refund at least part of the marriage price. Conversely, if the boy cannot stand the bride of his parents' choice and divorces her for no fault of hers, he will have to pay her damages for the shame to which he has put her, all of which makes for a wise choice at the beginning. If the girl is willing, then the matter is settled, a date is fixed for the discussion of the price (Bower 2006).

Ijeile spoke of her inability to be a 'proper' wife when she was very young. As mentioned earlier, being seen to have a 'good character' is very important for Zemes and this includes not only full training in gendered labour, but also morality and temperament. At the time of her first marriage, Ijeile was not yet regarded as meeting the Zeme ideal of adult womanhood. Even after the termination of her first marriage, there is no sense Ijeile felt she was unfairly treated (though we are not to know what she felt at the time) but that she views it instead as the inevitable consequence of her immaturity and inexperience. It was perceived that at her young age she was not able to fulfil her duties of contributing to the production of the household. This is very serious in an agrarian society where labour guarantees that each household can meet its nutritional needs. It meant she

was not yet viewed as ‘fit to be a woman’. She was sent home to be further trained by her natal family.

It would be inaccurate, then, to view Zeme wives and daughters as mere chattels to be exchanged and exploited for the benefit of men. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to view a young woman’s ‘givability’ as constituting the type of gender inequality that would leave her vulnerable to exploitation, at least until recently. Collier reminds us that, “The most unequal inequality in equal bridewealth societies is not that between men and women, but between seniors and juniors” (1988: 135). It is the elders who control the valuables that young men need to validate their marriages. In equal bridewealth societies men are not credited with earning their wives; they are given wives by elders (Collier 1988: 78). All young men start out with an equal need for valuables that will enable them to marry and set up households of their own. A man whose kinsmen refuse to help him marry is at the mercy of his prospective wife’s kin (*ibid.*: 117). All recently married men are in debt to those who helped them marry (*ibid.*: 73). Young men are as dependent on seniors as young women are.

Young men as ‘property’

Young Zeme men also must be seen as ‘fit’ or worthy of being an adequate husband by senior kin. An unmarried man is regarded as a minor and has no authority.

In equal bridewealth societies, a groom’s senior kin presumably know him, so their willingness to provide the gifts he needs to validate his marriage is taken as a sign of his worthiness and their commitment. If a suitor’s elders do not provide gifts, the suitor may have to prove his own worthiness and value as a son-in-law through long years of hard labor (Collier 1988: 79).

However, as Collier points out (1988: 77), it seems logical to conclude that young men should work for elders because they think that is what they and everyone else think they should be doing (rather than just to acquire valuables to marry).

In Zeme society, at least in the past, a groom may be required to live with and undertake labour for his in-laws for two years or more (Kuame 2005: 46). It is often known as ‘marriage as servitude’ (Kuame 2004: 95). This brideservice practice is called *Henau Ka’mbangbe* and takes place after the marriage. He may stay until a union is validated by his senior kin’s exchange of appropriate gifts or, more probably, in lieu of an exchange of valuables. In this case, the young man and his possessions belong to his wife’s kin (Collier 1988: 140). Kuame insists that the young man is not given any heavy work to do, but does general “social works in the village” (Kuame 2005: 46.). This means maintaining the bamboo water pipes and clearing pathways and aiding others in their work (not horticultural work). His parents-in-law will treat him affectionately and “try to give him all

comforts as far as possible” (*ibid.*) until the time bride and groom go to live with the young man’s parents (if he is the youngest or only son) or to set up a household of their own near them.

Men are implicitly dependent on wives, as well as their mothers and their children for economic security and social status. Young men’s explicit dependence on elders means they may be temporarily treated as the property of others. Yet, the discourse of ‘property’ around Zeme equal bridewealth social structure only constructs women as exchangeable goods. The practice of *Henau Ka’mbange*, shows that a young man may be required to provide labour *in lieu* of valuables (Collier 1988: 118). In these ways equal bridewealth peoples often speak of one person owning another in the same way that a person owns a thing (*ibid.*).

Exit options

The story of Pauramhuile’s divorce brings into focus the options for Zeme women to leave their marriages (even though in this case it was the husband that left). A woman’s ‘givability’ means they have the option to return to their natal family if they are unhappy in the marital home. Collier remarks, “Women who want their kin to shelter them from their husbands are unlikely to blame their kin for having given them away in marriage. In fact, in begging their kin to take them back, women tacitly acknowledge the right of their kin to give them away” (1988: 85). A Zeme woman’s major contribution to household economic production makes her a vital member of any family. Furthermore, unlike in some other societies (such as in the West where ‘women’s work’ of child-rearing and domestic duties are devalued), her contribution is traditionally *perceived* as valuable by the family (see Nussbaum 2000: 286) which strengthens her bargaining power *vis-à-vis* other family members. Her labour is a coveted resource although conversations around her are more likely to emphasise affection than utilitarian notions. This was shown, in the negative, by the consideration of Ijeile’s incapacity to undertake women’s work and the termination of her marriage until she was able to demonstrate her readiness for adult tasks.

When an unhappy wife “runs home to mother” the woman’s kin negotiate with the abandoned husband and decide whether ‘disunion’ should be allowed (Collier 1988: 82). A woman must defend herself and accuse her husband of wrongdoing if she is to enlist her kin’s support against her husband (*ibid.*). In Pauramhuile’s case, as in most equal bridewealth societies (Collier 1988: 84) it seems the negotiations were mainly with the husband’s senior kin. Discussions, as defined by the rights and obligations of the affinal bond, centre on whether the husband has behaved badly, a subject that necessarily assumes “the prior existence of standards defining the proper conduct of a husband, son-in-law, and brother-in-law” (*ibid.*). The elders must approve that the breaches of the commitment of marriage constitute reasonable grounds for divorce (Newmai 1998: 44). Here, the

Zeme 'community court' was made up by New Kubing's Presbyterian Church Council consisting of senior men³⁴. In Pauramhuile's case, Zeme social norms defined her husband at fault. His breach of convention was deemed sufficiently severe that he was put in the unusual position of having to relinquish possession of his daughter, Ningchile. Adeule assures me that had Ningchile been a boy³⁵, Pauramhuile would have still been allowed to keep her child.

While Pauramhuile's ex-husband's disregard for his obligations was hurtful to Pauramhuile and an affront to the Nkaume family, Pauramhuile and Ningchile were welcomed back into the natal family home. Pauramhuile, as a much loved daughter and valuable part of the household economy, finds shelter and solace for as long as she chooses to stay there. She again belongs to her father who has done his best to protect her from ill-repute, economic insecurity and the loss of her daughter (and his grand-daughter) to her ex-husband.

Upon the dissolution of Zeme marriage, a woman is usually entitled only to her movable property. By custom, land passes through the male line but a man may delegate the right of usufruct in a portion of land to a daughter or other female member of the lineage on her marriage. She retains the right of usufruct in that portion for her life, and on her death it returns to the male lineage (Betts 1950: 39). It might not be seen as particularly unusual, then, that the use of the timber plantation (the timber, not the land itself) should be provided for Pauramhuile and her daughter on her divorce. Zeme patriarchal laws are not immutable, and the well-being of a daughter and grand-daughter is as an important consideration as customary property laws. As such, Pauramhuile is still being treated as if her status were that of a married woman. She would otherwise have been left economically insecure after her parents die. Being without sons, if she did not have this right to usufruct, she would have to be able to rely on the kindness of her brothers, who would also represent her in public. The timber plantation will enhance her and Ningchile's capabilities (as described by Nussbaum 2000: 80) in terms of a degree of control over their environment, not normally granted to Zeme unmarried women.

Divorce carries no stigma for either Zeme men or women, unless the breach is considered grave (such as adultery). A woman without children, then, may exit a marriage and remarry with relative

³⁴ As Kamei (2004: 259) explains, many laws and disputes arising from Zeliangrong customary social institutions are still dealt with by Village Councils without reference to the State courts. In this case (and now typically) due to the demise of the gerontocracy these men were not 'senior' in terms of being 'elders', but rather in terms of importance in village administration; nor were they very young men.

³⁵ I mention this because of the view that Nagas prefer boy children to girls. Having male children is considered especially auspicious because it means the continuation of family lineages and the 'manpower' to defend villages (see Zhimomi 1998: 47). It also means security for the parents because the youngest son will look after the parents in their old age. It is because of this that men may divorce their wives if they do not eventually bear a son, not because the girl is devalued. Similarly, a woman may divorce her husband for his failure to impregnate her. Girls, in fact, are welcomed and equally loved. As Paujelungle emphasised, "Boys and girls are loved equally, but their activities are different".

ease (see also Soppit (1885) in Elwin 1969: 426). Women with children, however, face a painful decision. Pauramhuile's permission to keep her daughter with her in her natal family demonstrates a triumph for her. However, it also shows the limitations of her exit options in terms of her possibility of remarriage. As the story shows, she has to choose between keeping her daughter and marrying again. While Pauramhuile is now once again considered the property of her father Ningchile has also become property under the care of her grandfather's patriline.

Custody of children

For other mothers, however, exiting a marriage may be a far more painful decision. As we have seen in Paujelungle's case the law of children belonging to the father's clan may become a problem once a widowed (or divorced) woman has given birth to children. More accurately, it is the custody of children that is the painful issue for mothers. As we have seen, apart from in unusual cases such as Pauramhuile's, custody of children in divorce is not shared with the mother, though she may have visitation rights. Custody may be shared with other adults of the father's family. The condition of children belonging to men is the painful issue for widowed or divorced women, rather than a woman's givability between men. Men's ownership of children is viewed as a 'natural fact'. It is reasoned that women do not share custody of their children because children will be better cared for by the father's family, and that the mother will be cared for by her new 'owners', their fathers or brothers, or the new family if they remarry and she may produce more children.

Women in equal bridewealth societies appear to be 'the means of reproduction' whose control constitutes the basis of all social power (Collier 1988: 131). Women are the 'property' of men because *children* are the most valuable resource. As 'mother' to her in-laws' grandchild Paujelungle is welcome to stay with them. However, she would have no status as 'mother' if she left her deceased husband's family. While women's 'givability' may make them only the temporary property of particular men, children are not givable. Rather they are the permanent property of a father or his patrilineage, until a daughter is of marriageable age. If Paujelungle leaves, she will no longer be viewed as 'mother' but as 'unmarried woman'. Her son will continue to know her as mother, but legally she would have no rights of motherhood.

A woman's 'givability' means, by Zeme law, she is free to leave her in-laws, and to again become the property of her father, or if he has died, her brothers or uncles. Ijeile, her husband, or any other member of the patrilineage has no power to ask Paujelungle to leave, or insist that she stay. It is her choice (though she may not feel 'free' in making it). She is also able to remarry, with new bridewealth transactions, without stigma and join another family and bear more children. However,

a widowed mother's emotional attachment to her young children may make her highly reluctant to leave even though she is free (legally) to see her children when she likes.

The cases of Paujelungle and her mother-in-law Ijeile draw attention to the importance of, and dependence on, having (adult) children and of belonging to a family where younger kin can take care of older kin. So important are children that couples, and even the rare single person, without children often care for relatives' children (especially if their parents are deceased) and then they are looked after by those adult children in their old age. As Ijeile implied, life is scarcely worth living without children to care for and be cared by. Her grandson by Paujelungle is too young to depend on yet, and her grandson by her daughter from her first marriage does not belong to her present family so she may not expect future assistance from him (though she may expect his affection). However, men are as dependent on children as women are, and Ijeile's husband (Paujelungle's father-in-law) is in a similarly precarious position. He is as impoverished and aggrieved by the deaths of his progeny as Ijeile. Rising in social status, material security and general well-being all depend on kin. With only one son/grandson the stakes are raised and their interdependence is highlighted. The child offers future security as he is expected to look after Paujelungle and his grandparents (if they are still living) when he is old enough to do so. All their hopes are invested in the child, and considerable expense has also been invested to send him to Haflong to a relatively prestigious school. Presumably this boy feels the heavy weight of responsibility already on his young shoulders. Ijeile and her husband are dependent on Paujelungle. Because of Paujelungle's givability and freedom to leave, Ijeile expressed that she is afraid she might depart, leaving them with no one to look after them. While Paujelungle is not legally bound to Ijeile and her father-in-law she may feel a moral duty to assist them. She may also benefit from belonging to the household of an esteemed Hezailoa family and of being under her father-in-law's protection, an important man in that village, who represents her interests in public and who can afford a good education for her son. Mostly, though, her narrative would suggest that she is dependent on belonging to her son's patri-clan, and serving her in-laws, to retain the status of mother of her son.

Photograph 10 Father with children, Laisong

Summary

A woman's perceived 'givability' as the property of men is a product of, and reproduces, her unequal status in relation to men. However, I have shown, especially with Adeule's detailing of Ijeile's narrative, that Zeme women do not experience themselves as commodities or as objectified as exchangeable goods. Nussbaum³⁶ (1995: 257) suggests that 'ownership', where a person is treated as something owned by another and that can be bought or sold *et cetera* is one of the notions that may be involved in the idea of objectification. However, being treated as owned does not necessarily entail being treated as instrumental to the purposes of another (*ibid.*: 264). The non-instrumental treatment of adult human beings entails recognition of autonomy. A young Zeme woman may exercise autonomy in choosing whom to marry (with parental approval) and may freely refuse a proposal. Being the 'property' of men does not mean her husband or in-laws may mistreat her because they 'own' her. The structure of Zeme patriarchy, has meant, at least until recently, that it is recognised that many men have what I call 'investments of care' in a woman, entailing the right for fathers, brothers, and her senior kin to intervene against the family she has married into should she be mistreated, as in Pauramhuile's case. Rather, the meaning of the exchange of bridewealth and other wedding goods shows how much young women are loved and valued as Adeule explained. We should be cautious then of employing Western understandings of women as men's property and notions of the husband as sovereign and where only legal authorities (not relatives, and

³⁶ I do not mean to suggest that Nussbaum would believe that Zeme women are given 'human capabilities', that is, what people are 'actually able to do and to be' (Nussbaum 2000: 5), equal to Zeme men.

not always sympathetic to the woman) have the right to interfere in the very private domain of the household. In the West it is well documented that these circumstances frequently lead to the abuse of women and children. However, in 'traditional' Zeme patriarchy, a husband did not possess the sole power over his wife and children. The husband's senior kin and the wife's kin had the ability to diminish his power over his wife and children as in Pauramhuile's situation. Women and children in Zeme society do not merely 'belong' to one man, but many. There are many other authoritative kin to turn to in the traditional Zeme gender hierarchy to aid and assist women. Men had responsibilities to women, not just rights over them. While a woman and her children are regarded as being under the 'ownership' of men, a woman, even in situations where she loses custody of her children, is (or perhaps was) nevertheless generally treated as "as a dignified human being whose worth is equal to that of others" (Nussbaum 2000: 78).

We have seen that the customary law of women and children as men's property establishes inequality between women and men. It is from this law that many seeming gender inequalities arise. However, when women as wives received the reciprocal labour, care and protection from men that they understood as their due for fulfilling their own obligations they saw no reason for complaint. As I pointed out in Chapter Four women accepted fewer privileges because men sacrificed the most (including their lives) for women and children. Women were worth their male 'owners' dying for them. Women were worth lavish bridal parties and tears at their loss. When Mrs Takheule asserts women's equality with men, she is likely to be referring to the equal value (rather than social status which may have a performative quality) that has traditionally been accorded men and women, though they are understood as being very different.

While Zeme patriarchal law favours fathers over mothers for custody of children causing widows like Paujelungle, or divorcees, much grief I would argue that it is not the tradition of a woman's givability that is the core of women's complaint about increasing domination by men in their society. Through being exchanged in marriage, young women experienced 'care' by men. This chapter showed that while relations of inequality, according to age and gender, are embedded in the Zeme patriarchal social structure, the construction of women and children as the 'property' of men has (at least until recently) ensured their protection and sustenance, and is inimical to commoditisation and objectification. The traditional law of women 'belonging' to men, while a condition of their relative inequality, does not seem to be the ground of their increasing sense of inequality with men. Rather, through being exchanged in marriage women experience that they are being provided with what they need by men. However, women's notions of their 'position' in society are changing and they are aspiring to different forms of 'equality'. Some of these will be discussed in Chapter Eight and Nine. The next chapter shows some ways in which Zeme men have

‘cared’ for children, and have participated in relatively equitable (though gendered) ways in the reproductive arena.

Chapter Seven

‘All Men want to be Fathers’

This chapter explores the practice of ‘fathering’ as a core component of Zeme normative masculinity. It shows some of the ways in the past and present that Zeme men ‘care’ for children and adolescents. Parenting is a reasonably equitably shared domain for labour for men and women as mentioned earlier. Here, ‘fathering’ refers to how men perceive, live out and enact practices of fathering within the larger political, social, cultural, symbolic, ideological and discursive institutions of fatherhood (Doucet 2007: 192). I do not necessarily refer to the biological reproduction of children, but to particular practices around the socialisation of children that are constructed by Zemes as both ‘masculine’ and ‘caring’ and that may be performed by people who are not actually fathers themselves. Obviously, fathering practices are culturally diverse. As Marsiglio and Pleck (2005: 250) point out, “the cross-cultural literature teaches us that there is considerable variation in how men act as fathers, that children can flourish in societies where different types of paternal models and expectations of children exist, and that gender as a social organizing principle is implicated in various ways throughout the world in structuring the opportunities for fathers to interact with and invest in their children”. Other factors such as class, sexualities, age, ability/disability and household form also influence the ways fathering is understood, experienced and enacted (Doucet 2007: 192.). There are, of course, complex and intimate interplays between constructions of mothering and fathering, experientially and as social institutions. I touched on mothers’ relationships with their children in terms of custody in Chapter Five. I do not highlight Zeme fathering practices here in terms of ‘achieving equality’ between men and women. There is a great deal more shared child rearing labour amongst Zemes than is customary in many cultures in recent decades. However, this sort of labour forms part of the problem with which Zeme women take issue, as Mrs. Takheule suggested in Chapter Four.

Zeme fathering practices illustrate the centrality of caring values to masculine ideals. In this chapter I show some of the ways the ways caring for children continues in traditional institutions as well as some of the more recent forms they have taken. Chapters Eight and Nine will discuss changes that may affect fathering practices and that Zeme women find problematic. Here, however, I focus on traditional (and I reiterate this often means contemporary) practices of men in relation to children. I show how fatherhood is socially constructed as highly desirable and that Zeme boys, as well as girls, are encouraged to care for children from a young age. The masculine social institution of the *hangseuki* (young men’s dormitory) largely performed the role of the socially defined father (and

continues to do so in some non-Christian villages) and is described as a place where the values of co-operation, self-discipline, and mentoring of the young are inscribed, as well as the protection of the village. In areas where the *hangseuki* has met its demise due to the influence of Christianity I argue that Youth Clubs, private schools and student hostels continue the prestigious tradition of educating children into culturally appropriate, *helaureau* personhood. I show that the care of children and young people remains a central constituent of the Zeme configuration of hegemonic or normative masculinity. Children *matter* to the Zeme sense of masculinity in ways that are often quite dissimilar from the relationship of children to normative Western masculinities, where studies have often focused on how *not* caring has affected men (see Doucet 2007: 192) and children. In Australia and the United States, for example, ‘care work’, such as child rearing, are most often equated with feminine practices, and devalued (Barclay and Lupton 1997; Adams and Coltrane 2005). On the other hand, anthropologists Matthew Gutmann (2006) and Barry Hewlett (1991) found high levels of father involvement with children in Mexico City and Central Africa respectively. Zeme males are only considered ‘fit to be a man’ if they are conspicuously involved in caring relationships with children.

Photograph 11 Feeding his grandchild

Zeme Fatherhood

The ‘orphan myth’

Nriamepeu and Mpamepeu (two men of the clans Nriame and Mpame) discovered an orphan child in a tree hollow in the forest. Together, they caught the child whose hair had grown long. They both kept and looked after him/her. Both men wished to become the child’s father, and wondered how to decide this. They made a plan to each take gifts to the child and whoever he or she called ‘father’ would become the father. So they brought the child flowers and fruit. But the child didn’t call either of them ‘father’. Nriamepeu had an idea. He took a butterfly and attached a thread to it and tied it to a small stick. He brought this for the child to play with. The child was delighted and exclaimed “Ape’!” (This would be a small child’s way of saying ‘Apeu’ meaning ‘father’.) Nriamepeu said to Mpamepeu, “The child will be mine because it said ‘Ape’”. So the child lived with the Nriame family.

In this part of the story of the origination of the various Zeliangrong clans, the listener has heard that the child, who turned out to be a boy, was originally of the Nriame clan anyway, although the men do not know this. The boy, who was illegitimate, was turned away and left in the forest by the stepmother as she did not wish to look after another child.

This excerpt from the story shows several facets of Zeme society that are relevant here: the eagerness of men to assume the father role; that men also fulfil the role of nurturer and carer of children; that social, rather than biological, paternity is more important; and that in Zeme discourse, it is more likely to be a stepmother figure, rather than father figure, who abandons or neglects children. What follows is an attempt to unpack some of the assumptions in the clan myth and describe Zeme cultural constructions of fatherhood, and fathering practices, as an integral part of normative masculinity. To my knowledge, Zeme fatherhood has not been previously written about in relation to the concept of masculinity.

Paternity

As we saw in the ‘orphan myth’, the legal paternity of a child counts for more than who the natural father might be. This is said to be true of most Nagas, at least historically (see also Jacobs 1990:55). I explained in the previous chapter that children belong to the father and his family. The child belongs to the clan of the man who is married to the mother, even if it is understood that he was not the natural father. On divorce, the child once weaned would be raised by the father’s family, the mother having no more customary legal rights over the child once she has been paid a compensatory ‘milk price’; though she may still maintain a lifelong relationship with them, as we have already seen.

However, biological paternity is nevertheless considered important. A man may refuse to marry a girl who is carrying a child he suspects is not his. But he must have very good reasons to support his suspicions. Or a man may acknowledge paternity but not marry the girl (presumably if he is already married to someone else), and take the child as soon as it is weaned. It appears that today, due to the relatively recent restrictions of Christianity and the Heraka religion (which have also influenced the ancestral religion, *Paupaise*) that less premarital sexual freedom is permitted than in earlier days, for both men and women, so that uncertainty over biological paternity might be less of an issue.

A Zeme baby (*nngene*) is not fully recognised as a ‘person’ until specific rituals have been performed. As Conklin and Morgan (1996:681) point out individuals do not automatically become persons simply by being born. They must be incorporated into a social network. Mr. Ijirangbe Zeme informed me that:

Five to eight days after being born, a type of non-genital ‘circumcision’ for boys and girls is performed. This is the piercing of the ears. We need to cut the hair and cleanse him or her in order to be recognised as a human being. Before that, if the baby dies it is not considered human and has an unceremonial burial. When a child is in the womb it is not considered exactly human – more like an egg.

Hegemonic scientific (or pseudo-scientific) discourse explains babies’ bodies are perceived to grow ‘naturally’ after fertilisation and personhood is conferred upon what is understood to be the autonomous infant body, regardless of the existence of a family or community network (Conklin and Morgan 1996: 687-688). If Zeme infants lacked the guarantee of a father’s nurturance they were sometimes killed, but children who live are wanted, valued and cared for. It is important to note that it was usually elder women who would quietly do away with unwanted babies (see Soppit (1885) in Elwin 1969: 425). It is women, not men, who are viewed as potentially dangerous to young life. However, this practice would have been constructed as a necessary service to the unwed mother and her family.

It is because Zeme stepmothers have no claim over their husband’s children, very occasionally, some are considered to not adequately care for and feed them. As in the last chapter, a father and his family have custody of children, so that if a man remarries, his children remain in his household. In the past some women were reluctant to rear the children of a woman with whom her husband had had an affair or was previously married to. In extreme, but rare, cases a stepmother would surreptitiously neglect or abandon a child, as in the part of the orphan story of the origination of the clans. While mothers are generally held to be the most loved and loving of all Zeme people, stepmothers, and not fathers (there are no Zeme stepfathers) are seen as potentially capable of bringing harm to a child, because mothers bear the main responsibility of feeding and clothing children.

Fatherhood and the cultural construction of children

In a very utilitarian sense we may view the capacity to produce heirs as a central marker of masculinity (see also Silberschmidt 1992: 241). In an experiential sense, however, fatherhood for Zemes is much more than this. Fathering is so central to Zeme normative masculinity because of the elevated position of children in their society. In the previous chapter I explained that children are viewed as the source of all power in equal bridewealth societies (Collier 1988: 132). Parents (*puipeu*) are dependent on their (adult) children to care for them in old age. The cultural construction of children (*napoineramme*) and childhood are intrinsic to what it means to be a Zeme man and parent. In equal bridewealth societies parental care is emphasised (Collier 1988: 88), and Zemes almost invariably do what they perceive as best for their children. Parents are indulgent of their children's wants and expect obedience in return. Put in a very functionalist way, in societies where people get ahead by collecting dependents in their households, parents must grant children's requests if they possibly can, to forestall children's turning to other, more generous relatives. The labour of children who go to live with a more generous relative is lost to their parents (Collier 1988: 89). Fathers, who are constructed as 'owning' children, and are dependent on them in old age, are particularly concerned with pleasing and influencing them. This view, while accurate, overlooks the affective ties between kin. The Zeme view of children is that they are precious and defenceless. Thus, they incite the urge to protect. Until they are about five years old, children are indulged and their every whim is fulfilled. My son and I had a great deal of personal experience of the cultural differences in constructions of childhood. While I would resist my son's demands fearing that giving in to him would encourage 'spoilt' tyrannical behaviour, Adeule and Ameile would laughingly capitulate to him explaining, "He's just a small child. We want to make him happy." The happiness of their children is paramount and men and women will do nearly anything to keep a child smiling. As mentioned in Chapters Three and Four, childhood and youth are meant to be carefree stages of life to be thoroughly enjoyed before the heavy responsibility and drudgery that is a householder's lot.

Children are celebrated as gifts from God, or the goddess Heratingrangpui, and never seem to be regarded as an inconvenience. I am reminded of Gutmann's observation (2006: 70), "[m]any poor people in Mexico City become parents for the fun of it. Finding pleasure in the company of children is considered by people of all generations in Mexico, even childless adults, to be one of the most natural and wonderful things in the world." It is said that even if a baby boy urinates onto her plate of food, the mother loves her son so much that she will continue to eat from that plate. Men, too, rarely complain or even show annoyance should a child defecate down their back (although they are not happy about it). The Zeme practice of teknonymy, whereby a person is known as 'So and so's

(usually the first born child's) father/mother/aunt', *et cetera*, may contribute to the relatively child-centred focus of Zeme society. Despite the upheavals of the last century for Zemes their social construction of children seems to have remained remarkably consistent, at least according to the records we have of Nagas in general. Anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf's observations of Konyak Naga children in the late 1930s accord with mine of the Zemes in the first decade of the 2000s:

Young children were treated as reasonable and responsible persons, and there were few opportunities for coercion or punishment of naughty children. During my entire stay among the Konyaks I saw only one child beaten, and this beating was nothing more than a few slaps which an angry grandmother gave to a screaming little boy who refused to leave the fascinating spectacle of house-building and go and eat his dinner. Parents spoke to their children in the same quiet and friendly tone they would use to adults. A grumbling father, shouting at his children in public, would have been subject to the disapproval of kinsmen and neighbors, and parents reacted to minor acts of indiscipline with tolerance and apparent indifference.

Yet, despite this permissive attitude of parents, Konyak children soon grew into responsible members of the community. Two factors promoted this development: the children's early integration into the economic life and the education which the boys received in the morung (von Furer-Haimendorf 1969: 68).

Fathering for Zemes very much revolves around the construction of children as innocent and vulnerable and the understanding that childhood is a stage of life to which both men and women are to contribute in a nurturing way. The way Zemes expect children to be treated was demonstrated to me in another and unusual way. During church services I was always startled as the beseeching prayers were shouted out. There was a great clamour and men and women would weep, or at least, try to weep while pleading with God. Unsure of the sincerity of the congregation I questioned Adeule about the tears. She explained that they were making themselves cry like children before God so that He might give them what they prayed for, as parents inevitably did for their children.

The eagerness to father

When asking unmarried young men about the prospect of creating their own family, all responded with enthusiasm. Men without children (through infertility or death of their children) experienced a sense of lack and were pitied by the community. Inability to produce children was also viewed as a divine punishment for misdemeanours of ancestors. Fathering children and taking care of them, is experienced as a happy (and sometimes heavy) responsibility to Zeme men and boys. To this day, Zeme men look forward to the role of fatherhood and to fathering as many children as possible. Zeme men express a great deal of eagerness at beginning a family of their own, and wish to have many children. Fathering children is a marker of adult status and both boys and girls spend much of their young lives in preparation for parenting. Indeed, people without children, or even those with

only one or two, are seen as disadvantaged and are viewed with pity. Even so, they are given the opportunity to ‘parent’ other people’s children and to take an active role in their lives. Children are considered the wealth and strength of the family, as I demonstrated in the last chapter, as well as being cherished as individuals. The many hands and minds of a large family and clan make work easier and support is more easily found. As explained earlier, in many places, adult children are expected to take care of elderly parents; they are social security, but are not objectified³⁷ as such. Adeule illustrates the importance of coming from, going to, and producing, a large family:

All Zeme men want to become fathers because Zeme with a big family are happy. There is a lot of pride with a big family because they can support each other. An only child isn’t respected because he doesn’t have any support. In a conflict there is no one to support him. He won’t be feared and respected. In marriage a girl is advised to choose a man with a big family. If she marries a man with no brothers and the husband dies there’s no one to look after her. The brother-in-law is supposed to look after her if her husband dies. If she marries again, the uncle will look after the children. She can’t take them to her new husband.

A large family makes a man a more attractive prospect as a husband and potential father. He is likely to draw a ‘better’ wife (in terms of her domestic skills, moral reputation and, lastly, beauty) from a superior family. A girl’s parents usually care deeply for her well-being in marriage and thus seek out a prospective husband from a family with numerous members to provide her with adequate protection against the loss of her husband, for her old age, as well as a kind of safety net for the future children, in the ways Adeule describes. Because Zemes are aware from a young age of the parenting role they will undertake in the future, Zeme boys and men are concerned to provide their own children with the kinds of opportunities and support afforded by generating many new family members themselves.

Furthermore, like many other indigenous peoples, Zemes are concerned to boost their population to gain a stronger political foothold. As I explained earlier it is a cause of much grief that Zemes have become a minority in their own territory. ‘Populate or perish’ might be their catchcry and there is a sense of safety in numbers against other local peoples and the encroachment of a largely unfamiliar outside world. It is not uncommon for a married couple to have had 15 children (it is unusual, though, for all of them to survive). As the more cosmopolitan Jonah Neume, a teacher who attended Agra University in Uttar Pradesh, puts it only half-jokingly: “Most men want to have children – to multiply their heredity around the world! If we want to work we call all our clans together and work

³⁷ As in most places, the treatment of young Zeme children by their parents almost always involves a denial of autonomy (that is, it is reasonably expected that parents will make certain choices on behalf of children) and some aspects of ownership which may be regarded as features of ‘objectification’ (see Nussbaum 1995) as I mentioned earlier. However, Zeme children are not treated as lacking in bodily integrity, which in many other places contributes to them being battered or sexually abused, which is their instrumental use for adults. Zeme children are treated as ends in their own right, ‘persons with a dignity that deserve respect from laws and institutions’ (after Nussbaum.2000: 2) and not mere tools to help create their family’s wealth and security.

easily. More heredity!” In a marriage ceremony, the traditional blessing shows the importance of human fertility:

May your physical body be strong and stiff as iron, and your life be clean and pious. Live in peace. And may you prosper and be wealthy, increase in numbers and fill the country as the wildflowers cover the fields. May the good God bless you (Kuame 2005: 47).

Early child-care and Zeme personhood

A Zeme male’s nurturing of children starts early in life. From early childhood to late old age Zeme males have a close relationship with children. From around the age of 4 or 5 both girls and boys (more commonly girls) are seen carrying around their younger siblings on their backs. Caring for the young is everybody’s business. While discussing the intricacies and problems of rearing children is considered ‘women’s talk’, men are simply expected to be active in children’s lives, and are usually more than willing to do so. ‘Scolding’ (by which Zeme mean offering firm advice to cultivate correct behaviour, rather than ‘berating’) juniors is seen as nurturing behaviour. If a person does not scold, then that person is seen not to care about those she or he is responsible for in that moment. It is viewed as natural that women should gently scold and educate their children about the minutiae of life, but men are expected not to ‘unnecessarily’ scold children about things that are deemed trivial, or risk being ridiculed as behaving like a woman. Men are ideally supposed to advise their sons and daughters about general matters and support their wife’s counsel to the children about the details (of course, this does not always happen). If a man is seen frequently chastising his children or quarrelling with his wife he is seen as ‘unfit to be a man’ and the ‘grandfathers’ or clan elders, *katsingme*, (traditionally the ultimate masculine authority) will say, “Don’t you feel ashamed to quarrel with your wife?”

Photograph 12 Karchile, Jonabe and other children minding younger children, Laisong

Beating young children, other than a rare slap on the thigh, is regarded with a kind of horror by Zemes. I only once saw a child receive such a slap, a light one, from her mother. The goddess who brings children, Heratingrangpui, is said to weep if children are mistreated. Before she sends the children to be born, she tells them, “If your parents beat you with a spoon, then you come back to me”. No doubt this story is well-digested by all Zemes regardless of religion, and I only ever saw small children being treated with gentle, firm respect.

Mothers are responsible for the early training of the children, but men spend a lot of time carrying them and caring for them. Ursula Graham Bower observed in the 1940s, that “... men frequently work at basket-making, repairing house -walls, or other tasks not requiring violent movement, with a sleeping baby slung in a cloth on their backs” (Betts 1950: 82). According to my observations this is as true today as when she wrote 60 years ago. To a very large extent, Zeme economic production allows for more gender equality in the rearing of children than in the West, generally. Both men and women usually work in the *jhum* by day, often some kilometres from their home and their children who are looked after by older children or grandparents. When at home men usually have more leisure to mind or carry children. Men nowadays also work in small shops and other businesses with a child in a sling on their backs or sit around gossiping with other men while keeping a watchful eye over small children.

Men's Emotional Relations with Children

To openly demonstrate care for children is considered a natural aspect of Zeme personhood and an ideal of masculinity. To show lack of concern for children is considered highly unusual, to be not fully human, and certainly not manly. Even Zeme militants, expected at times to be paragons of aggressive and unemotional masculinity, openly display affection to children and other vulnerable creatures. Young uniformed 'underground' soldiers (armed 'freedom fighters' or 'insurgents', depending on one's perspective), skilled in combat and hardened to survive in very inhospitable terrain, play gently with small children and dandle them on their knees when visiting a village, and cuddle and coo at puppies in front of their peers and leaders. At a clandestine meeting convened by two heavily armed and protected Tangkhul Naga NSCN-IM leaders, the predominantly male group of about 80 were admonished to "love all Zemes like you love your wives and children". Conspicuous care of 'vulnerable' others, such as children, women, the elderly and infirm is encouraged as part of responsible leadership.

Other ethnographers have noted the emotional relations of Naga fathers to children. The attachment of a father to his daughter was movingly described by Bower about a man called Haichangnang and the death of his small daughter from diarrhoea in the 1940s.

...Haichangnang appeared suddenly in the doorway. His face was all disfigured by weeping; the grunts had been his sobs as he ran up the path. He fell at my feet, clutched my knees, and began to cry out in Zemi. I got him up again and called Namkia [Bower's chief 'informant']. When he arrived, Haichangnang asked quite rationally whether I had any medicine to poison him. He couldn't bear his daughter to go the long, dark road of the dead alone (Bower 1952:64).

Of course, I do not quote Bower's experience to suggest that all Zeme men wish to commit suicide upon the death of one of their daughters, but to illustrate the depth of feeling for their children that is acceptably expressed despite typical Zeme self-restraint. While Bower calls Haichangnang 'a child-like little man' (*ibid.*) and he perhaps challenged her notions of masculinity, it is my understanding that crying publicly is acceptable for men if circumstances are considered to warrant it. Haichangnang's actions might have been perceived as somewhat extreme by the Zeme at the time. But, I doubt Haichangnang would have been considered 'unmanly' for his outburst. However, if he had continued in this manner over a long period of time he would have been reminded of the necessity of accepting your lot and chastised for not 'getting on' with life in a healthy way. Crying a great deal for a long time, or over a minor issue, would be seen as womanly or childish. A grieving mother would be advised similarly and admonished not to weep too much after an acceptable amount of time had passed. Haichangnang's manhood would not have been called into question by Zemes over this incident, I believe.

Heleuraube and manhood

Many Zemes, especially the elderly and married women, are very concerned to sustain the commandments of *heleuraube* as I explained earlier. According to the women I interviewed, men's *heleuraube* was in decline (though still continuing). The following are typical masculine forms of *heleuraube* behaviour associated with being a father or grandfather. Becoming a father, while highly desirable, is an enormous responsibility. A father is responsible, for example, for any expenses or debts his unmarried children (adult or not) might have incurred, and both parents are considered not to have parented properly if their son or daughter commits a crime or whose behaviour is wayward by Zeme standards. In the past, if a serious crime was committed then the whole family was expelled from the village. Formerly in the case of serious quarrels resulting from grave crimes the paternal kin of the perpetrator were, with the culprit, liable to summary vengeance by relatives of the victim (Betts 1950: 91). When I was being advised to choose an adoptive family I was told that the young are admonished thus: "When you have done the wrong thing, run to your parents for support. Your father will die in your place".

Fathers then, face an onerous task. However, disciplining and cultivating proper Zeme personhood is also the duty of many others. The paternal grandfather has a particularly close relationship with his grandsons. I asked Mr Nkuame of New Kubing, a grandfather himself, to describe expected behaviour towards grandchildren. He said, "He should carry them, not scold much, love them very much". Reverend Kuame (2005) mentions the pleasure of eating "together in one brass plate the sacrificial meat very often" at the age of four or five with his grandfather. To eat together from one plate implies a closeness that is at once both sacred and mundane. It is an expression of utmost sociability and of a kind of spiritual intimacy through and beyond the everyday, human/animal act of eating food. Many foods are taboo for the young, but a grandson is considered protected by the spiritual powers of his grandfather, and may thus eat whatever is on his grandfather's plate. In the traditional patriarchy grandparents and other elders are revered as they were the only people who could perform the rites and sacrifices to the deities before the advent of Christianity³⁸ into the area. Usually the grandparents live in the same house as one of their sons and his wife and children. Adeule explains one aspect of a grandfather's duty of *heleuraube* to his daughter-in-law and his grandchildren:

Suppose I am married and it's early morning and I need to pound the rice. I'll indirectly ask my father-in-law to carry the children while I do so. "Father, I've already warmed your rice wine", I'll say. Automatically he'll understand, respect my wishes, and look after the children. This kind of mutual understanding and manners is *heleuraube*. The father-in-law

³⁸ The spread of Christianity in the North Cachar Hills Zeme region was uneven. However, it first took hold in the Western Zeme area (Nzebak).

will take the children and go roaming and visit relatives and his other sons and daughters in the village.

Protecting and behaving in a *heleurau* manner towards children (adult or immature) or grandchildren increases men's sense of manhood. Zeme men feel enriched by their children. Children are a social and economic asset (mostly when they become adult in the economic sense) and are a *constituent* of manhood. Importantly, as we saw in the previous chapter, except for in very rare circumstances Zeme children remain the property, and in the custody, of the father in divorce. The word 'property' has utilitarian connotations, of being subject to the type of exploitive authority of fathers that we might witness in Western patriarchy (see for example, Herman 2000), or whereby children might be viewed as a burden (see for example, Barclay and Lupton 1997; Mandell 2002). However, Zeme children are experienced as the father's willing responsibility, his duty of care, and his adornments. It is understood that it is for the well-being of the children that they stay with the father's family in the case of divorce. Mr Ijirangbe Zeme, the nominated leader of the Zeme who lives in the town of Haflong explained:

Fathers love their children very much; as much as their mothers do. Men do, very much, regard children as their property. Children are our future. Today's child will become the father of the father later. The son will eventually have to protect both parents.

Children's activities, whether being educated at school, or doing chores in and around the home, are viewed as strengthening to the family, clan and thus the father's prestige. Happy, healthy children are recognised as the embodiment of a father's care (as well as the mother's) and indicative of his wealth and a reflection of his success.

Raising young men

The Hangseuki

In traditional Zeme patriarchy the *katsingme* (elders) had authority over non-senior householders (*hangtingme*) and the youthful warriors (*rahangme*). The central institution the *katsingme* controlled, through which all men passed and to which they maintained a lifelong connection, was the *hangseuki*. Much has been written about these Naga 'bachelor's halls', or 'youth dormitories', usually called the *morung*, which is an Assamese term that has attained wide currency in anthropological writings on the hill tribes of northeast India (von Furer-Haimendorf 1969: 23). The *morung*, or its equivalent, is a feature of all Naga, and many other, societies (see Elwin 1947). More accurately, the *hangseuki* (literally 'men's house') is an imposing building and its members who form its community, are called the *kiangna*. The patriarchal hierarchy of the *hangseuki* takes on and continues the role of disciplining sons. The *hangseuki* is central to the raising of boys and young men in some villages. In Nagaland, where close to 100% of Nagas are Christian the *morungs*

have largely disappeared as they were seen by missionaries as expressions of heathen and backward customs. However, because approximately only 35% of Zemes in Assam are Christian, the *hangseuki* survives today in North Cachar Hills, although in altered form.

The *hangseuki* is a bastion of masculinity. There are always at least two *hangseukia* in a village, though very rarely more nowadays unless it is an especially large village. These two compete with each other to be the best and strongest and to perform the most socially valuable work for the village. Their very magnificence and sanctity express and celebrate the Zeme masculine ideals of strength, protection, ingenuity, self-discipline and courage. The height of a *hangseuki* is about 28-30 feet, the breadth 25-28 feet and the length is about 70 feet (Kuame 2005: 13). My first glimpse took my breath away. They are extremely spacious with one or two (usually one nowadays) hearths surrounded by long, wide benches (*nzun-ze*) for sleeping and sitting. The eldest and most honourable men occupy the *nzun-ze* around the hearth. Other occupants sleep on the wooden benches that run the length of walls.

The construction of a new *hangseuki* is wholly dependent on its members. They must collect or buy all the building material themselves (Kuame 2005: 10). Special trees are chosen to make the posts, and a 'pious person' must make the first cut and examine the poles for any defect (*ibid.*: 14). Such a person is exemplary in their practice of *heleuraube*. Akum, my adoptive brother and research participant, then in his early twenties, explained to me that out of respect young people may not cut big, old trees in the forest. "The tree has a life also, and only an old and holy man may cut it for a special purpose, such as to construct a *hangseuki*. A tree is glorified to God", he said. It seems that the very poles must contain the strength, purity and kind of transcendent power that the men must embody for success in their masculine protective and aggressive feats. Building the *hangseuki* becomes a kind of competition where the young men vie to succeed in the dangerous task of climbing to the high rafters and binding them to the ridging pole. The one who accomplishes this receives a prize (Kuame 2005: 10). The idea is that the *kiangna* will compete to outdo each other in good works for the welfare of their own *kiangna* and the whole village (Kuame 2005: 9).

Photograph 13 *Hangseuki* inauguration, Laisong. Photo by Akum Nriame.

The *hangseuki* is attached to the house of the *kazeipeu*, the man chosen to be in charge of, and responsible for, all the young men and boys. He must be a highly respected patriarch and his family must be ‘strong’ and have the means and strength of character to run the *hangseuki*. They are called on to provide for, oversee and protect the *kiangna*. During festivals, the *kazeipeu* supplies the rice and rice beer (which his wife makes) for the men of the *kiangna*, and must also provide hospitality for visitors, such as travellers and dance-teams from other villages (Betts 1950: 54). The *kiangna* call the *kazeipeu* ‘father’ and his wife ‘mother’ and his role is similar to his fatherly duties to his own children. Bower explains that an unmarried youth suspected of a crime or other difficulty or danger seeks the help of the *kazeipeu* who is in duty bound to protect him until the village authorities take charge of the case. He will give all the assistance he can (Betts 1950: 54). The *kazeipeu*’s reward for the expense and responsibility for the *kiangna* is prestige:

The extent of his hospitality, the size of the *hangseoki*, the presence and size of the *nzun-ze*, the standard of dancing shown by the young people, and the prowess and discipline of the young men under his charge are the criteria by which he is judged and by which his prestige is measured (Betts 1950: 55).

Recruitment into a *kiangna* constitutes a kind of competition. Upon hearing of the birth of a child from any clan or family, a party of members of each *hangseuki* (or *leuseuki* if the baby is a girl) will rush to the family and present a gift of an egg or similar, to claim that child for their *hangseuki*.

The first to arrive secures that child as a member. Fathers, brothers and sons may belong to different, rival *hangseuki*. *Kiangna* membership thus cuts across family, lineage and clan. Bower explains that this practice does not exist in any other Naga tribe, who are recruited along family lines (Betts 1950: 50). It has the effect of enhancing village solidarity by offering a “counter-pull crossing the natural lines of cleavage in the Central Nzemi village... [and] mitigates bitterness in ...inter-moiety... and inter-family disputes...” (*ibid.*). Traditionally, loyalty to the *kiangna* was lifelong and men defended their *hangseuki* and its members fiercely.

In terms of recounting some of the masculine values that the *hangseuki* cultivates, and I believe are continuing to some degree through newer Zeme institutions, we can do no better than to repeat Bower’s glowing description from sixty years ago. The colonial British, of whom Bower was one, once they had ‘subjugated’ the Nagas, generally found Naga masculinity pleasing and liked to think that Naga constructions had some similarities with their own. There are many admiring ethnographic accounts of Naga male practices (for example, Hutton 1921; Mills 1926; Elwin 1961; von Furer- Haimendorf 1969) and my descriptions in this chapter will join in their chorus. My account, like theirs, is not uncritical, yet as outsiders our criticisms as well as praise are ethnocentric and partial. It is important to remain mindful that the anthropologist views others through her own cultural construction of personhood and her account tends to reflect her own concerns. Here, I share Bower’s observations:

On boys the hold of the morung was far deeper... the give and take of communal life, the opinions of contemporaries, replaced the disciplinary influence of the father. The people who checked the boy and ordered him round, who told him to wash and twisted his ears if he didn’t, were lads of his own age or a little older. He was responsible to a body to which he belonged, of which he was an active member. The system taught early the meaning of co-operation and responsibility. I have known and employed men trained by both methods, the morung and the home; and, where choice existed, I would choose the morung graduates every time. They are of tougher fibre and the rough corners have been rubbed off. They are more self-reliant, with commonsense and better discipline, and above all their loyalty and sense of service to a corporate body is well developed. They have not lost their individualism; but they have a view of the world in relation to themselves, a grasp of mutual duties as well as rights, a way of giving a fair deal for a fair deal, which is most refreshing (Bower 1952: 75).

Before the British administration of Zeme country the *hangseuki* served as guard-houses (Betts 1950: 54) to an ‘army brigade’ (Concerned Senior Citizens’ Forum 2005: 25). The youths learned the art of warfare and the use of weapons there. In the event of an attack on the village, the *kazeipeu* commanded and led the fighting-men of his *kiangna*, most of whom, married or unmarried, were concentrated at night in the *hangseuki* (Betts 1950: 54). However, another primary function of the *hangseuki* was as a place of education, to instruct boys into “right living, and mould their characters into good persons, and to be the wisemen [*sic*]” (Kuame 2005: 13). At night older men would come

to the *hangseuki* with a cup of *dekui zau* (rice beer) and sit on the special benches (*bamdi*) reserved for respected elders. The *kiangna* would be taught the meaning of the traditions and customs and to learn various religious practices. The old men would tell legends of brave men, ancestors and mythical heroes. These were to encourage wisdom and cleverness, good habits, good character, respect of elders and leaders, and to be modest and prudent (*ibid.*). Married men would teach the *kiangna* how to treat women properly. The younger boys also learned handcrafts (such as making baskets) and other masculine activities from older boys, to whom they would be a kind of apprentice. The gerontocratic patriarchy was reinforced and reproduced in the *hangseuki*.

Many of these activities occur today in a somewhat altered fashion, except that nowadays the boys spend their days at school and less time generally is devoted to *hangseuki* activities. It is mostly during festivals, when a holiday is declared, that the *hangseuki* comes to life nowadays, in *Paupaise* and Heraka villages.

For Zemes, ‘right living’ means serving others, and a ‘good character’ is one who happily sacrifices his or her own needs for the benefit of others (or at least, for the community and allies) as explained in Chapter Five. The importance of doing ‘social work’, as they call it in English, is paramount in cultivating ideal personhood. ‘Social work’ is the active expression of *heleuraube*, the sentiment of offering help gladly. As I explained in Chapter Five, I was told that *heleuraube* developed for the good of the community. Character and community are considered inextricable. *Heleuraube* is a central ethic and the youths of the *hangseuki* are in demand as a volunteer work team. There is much prestige in the discipline of *heleuraube* and the youths must be seen making themselves useful in order to secure a reputation as a worthy person. Again, a leader or chief is traditionally chosen on the basis of his *heleuraube*; that is, his self-restraint and willingness to offer what he has (his protection, talents or means) to others.

Reverend Kuame (2005: 4) describes some of the traditional duties of the *kiangna*, for whom “the joy of selfless service and sacrifice to his fellowmen or villagers makes them cheerful”:

The duty of the Zeme youngmen [*sic*] is to look after the pipe lines of village water supply early in the morning almost every day, to collect fire wood, fire sticks, or fire brands for torches for the use of the *hangseuki* in emergency; when a man died, the youngmen must go to convey the news to his relatives, even to their villages at night. For this purpose the messengers require fire sticks or a bamboo torch for their way... They have to clear the village paths, the path of the jhums and wells, and so on.

Young men are also required to chase and capture domestic animals for the owner, carry the injured, form harvesting teams for the paddy and thresh it; help married men to construct their houses, and to fully construct houses for widows without expecting payment in return (Kuame

2005: 10). These are just a few of the services a *kiangna* must render to the community and male youths, whether they are a member of a *hangseuki* or not (Christians are not), perform these duties today. In other words, the ‘manpower’ (a term Zemes use) of these youths is harnessed to look after the village and its inhabitants.

Mentorship

Every age-set has duties to people both older and younger. It is taken for granted that members of a *hangseuki* are responsible for the protection of the vulnerable, such as children and elderly women. It is the duty of the older *hangseuki* members to nurture, protect and train a boy to achieve manhood. The *kiangna* are like older brothers and fathers to him, regardless of whether his biological family members are part of his *kiangna* or not. Until he is about eight or so, a boy remains sleeping at home in his father’s bed and does not have much to do with his *kiangna*. Then he begins to watch the member’s activities and listen to them. At this stage, he will sometimes sleep at home, and sometimes in the *hangseuki*, to which he gradually transfers his interests (Betts 1950: 51-53). An older boy will supervise him and act as a mentor. By the age of about nine or ten he will spend every night in the *hangseuki* unless he is ill, though he still goes home for meals. Akum informed me that in the past the smallest boys slept at the back of the *hangseuki* then advanced according to age closer to the door. When a boy was old enough to protect himself he would sleep at the top of the bed, near the door. In the inter-village feuding days the door would be kept shut at night (during that time villages were fortified and gated). Nowadays, there are platforms high at the front inside of the *hangseuki*. These are for young boys to sleep, two to a bed.

While protection of the boys is utmost they are not coddled. Age-grading and the associated respect due are part and parcel of all Zeme interactions. Bower’s observations of life for a neophyte are appropriate here as the *hangseuki* was fully functional in Laisong in the 1940s:

He and the other boys under the age of puberty sweep the *hangseoki*, run errands, and act as fags to the young men. When the men of the *kienga* go out to fetch firewood for the *hangseoki* woodstack, the boys go with them and bring in kindling. Before a feast, the boys go to the jungle under the supervision of an older youth and cut and carry back leaves on which the meat may be cut up. At the actual feast in the *hangseoki*, one dish is reserved for the boys, one for the young men, and one for the married men. In the *hangseoki*, each boy attaches himself if he can to an older patron, a youth above the age of puberty. This patron passes on to him discarded necklaces and cloths. He allows him to share his bedding and sleeping-bench in the winter, a coveted privilege when a boy’s only covering, day and night, is a worn cotton wrap; he takes him on hunting and fishing expeditions of a minor kind, the boy learning to lime and snare birds, set traps and dig for bamboo-rats. His patron also occasionally takes him with him when he goes courting. The youths do not punish the boys formally, that being reserved for the old men of the *kienga*, but they do not spare their reprimands. A dirty or lazy boy finds no one to act as his patron, and the troublesome or ill-

mannered have their heads knocked together or their ears twisted by angry seniors (Betts 1950: 52).

Hangseuki as hallowed space and centre of community

In most villages today, the *hangseuki* may not be the hive of activity it was previously. But it is still key to the raising of children and youth in some villages. It should be noted that even though the *hangseuki* offers a space for large gatherings of people, it is only used for special purposes. The space epitomises patriarchal authority. Other halls have been erected, and Women's Societies have had their own small halls built for their meetings. In the Heraka colony in Laisong village, the *hangseuki* is the proper meeting place, every full moon day, to discuss children and issues of discipline. This is called *Telung Ndui*, *telung* meaning 'manners, character and lifestyle', and *ndui* meaning 'meeting' and these sorts of gatherings only became official in 2001. The whole community, men, women, boys and girls, cram into the *hangseuki* in typical orderly fashion (that is, in groups according to age and gender) to raise and debate concerns about their young people. These meetings are taken very seriously (despite normal Zeme jocularity) and are presided over by the most respected, or 'chiefly' men. It should be noted that these men are not elders but are non-junior married householders who are powerful within the Heraka community. There is a sense of ceremony and all stand and sing to begin the meeting. Family issues are made public and all try to assist. At these meetings it becomes clear that the well-being of children and young people are considered topics of importance and worthy of the attention of community leaders. The adage "it takes a village to raise a child" is most pertinent for Zeme children.

Institutional changes and the continuation of men raising children

The pressures of schooling and other sociocultural changes no longer allow for such intense *hangseuki* activity and mentoring within the *kiangna* that Bower described. During school days a *hangseuki* will seem nearly deserted. Akum explained that even though today there is no headhunting, there are two or three youths of 18-20 years in age, who are always prepared for an emergency and must stay in the *hangseuki* at all times. These youths exchange work in the *jhum* and then can rest the next day while other *kiangna* youths take over. Nevertheless, the sentiment of responsibility to train, nurture and discipline juniors endure for the young men of today to a significant extent. However, while child care as reinforcing to the sense of Zeme masculinity remains relatively stable, shifts in local patriarchy and regional hegemonic masculinity may mean a shift in who is viewed as suitable for the task. Below I show some of these shifts in fathering practices, as well as their continuation in novel forms.

Youth Clubs

Despite the massive social changes Zemes have experienced in the last century, the well-being and disciplining of children and young people remain a central concern to all Zeme men. The transformation of the *hangseuki* in *Paupaise* and Heraka colonies or villages, and its complete demise in Christian ones, has seen in their place the advent of ‘Youth Clubs’ and student hostels. In Laisong in 2004 I attended the inauguration of the Heraka Youth Culture Club. Although the *hangseuki* still functions there, the Youth Culture Club was for boys and girls together to work to “keep the traditions alive” in the words of a Heraka leader. Dances in full traditional costume were performed and the whole ceremony, with all recent cultural modifications embraced, was a public statement of cultural survival. Instead of being a place to sleep, the Youth Culture Club is a place to practice dances and sacred songs and to nurture a sense of unity as well as to galvanise Heraka religious teachings. The members of Heraka Youth Clubs also come together with the same clubs of other villages, and they may serve a proselytising function similar to the Christian missions.

Each religious colony of a village has its own Youth Club. Like the *kiangna* the youth groups of boys and girls are expected to perform various ‘social works’ and to serve the village in general. Many of their duties remain identical to their traditional ones. The girls must serve beverages to visitors, for example, and boys collect firewood, capture animals and help construct houses. Indeed, it was entirely the boys of the Baptist Youth Club who built the bamboo and thatch dwelling for our 2004 visit to Laisong. Importantly, now that inter-village enmity has ceased, at designated times such as school holidays, youth groups walk from village to village to congregate with other young members of their church. They call these ‘preaching tours’ and they are social events looked forward to with joyful anticipation. I accompanied the Laisong Baptist Youth Group preaching tour in 2001. Apart from sharing Christian teachings and songs, youths reconnect with old friends and kin, and may meet new people, including of course, prospective romantic partners. These visits help cement inter-village, intra-faith camaraderie. These groups of boys and girls are always accompanied by a few older and protective adults. It would be unthinkable to allow groups of teenage boys and girls to wander unescorted, in the same way that it would be highly improper for the *kiangna* to not be overseen by responsible adults. It is a position of some honour for those adults chosen to lead the youths.

Again, these Clubs do not function as dormitories in their own villages. Previously, it was considered improper for children as old as eight or nine to continue to sleep in their parent’s room (presumably because both parents and children would feel ashamed if the adults were seen having sexual relations) and they went to the *hangseuki* or *leuseuki* as soon as they were comfortable enough to do so. Parents are never seen naked, I was told. Nowadays, a girl or boy of nine or

younger will still sleep with their mother or father respectively, if they wish to, and teenagers will share another bed or room with same sex kin. Teenage boys now often have their own room or granary to sleep in but prefer to share it with a brother or a male friend. Even in the absence of the *hangseuki* and *leuseuki*, Zemes nearly always choose to sleep in the company of others. On the Baptist Youth Group preaching tour all the girls, accompanied by our designated ‘mother’, were accommodated in a room with a series of wooden planks lined side by side for sleeping on, identical to the communal bed in a *leuseuki*. The joy of being raised communally found its expression in the girls’ vociferous glee at the sight of that large, shared bed.

Photograph 14 *Leuseuki*-style Christian ‘preaching’ tour

Private Schools and Student Hostels

Like the Youth Groups, student hostels are an increasingly common feature of Zeme society. Most Zemes consider that their survival as a people depends on the education of their children so that they can make informed decisions for their future. “Our children are our future” was a phrase I heard time and again during my stay in the Zeme community. Consequently, an increasing number of people are taking their children’s education very seriously. Many villages have a school provided by the Government of India. However, the non-Zeme teachers, though drawing an ongoing monthly salary, simply do not turn up to these schools that are considered to be in ‘backward’ and marginal areas. In response, a few Zeme villages have set up private schools of their own, funded by fee-paying students (these fees are necessarily minimal). They also do their best to attract financial aid from foreign Christian organisations or NGOs such as World Vision. It

has been observed that in poorer countries, most primary/elementary school teachers are male (Connell 2009: 69), as a contrast with Western countries where working with young children is viewed as lower status and thus identified with women. What is notable about these Zeme private schools is that they draw in the services of the most educated and talented Zemes (and some non-Zeme) as teachers, often from neighbouring states, several days gruelling walk away. These are usually men (though educated women such as Adeule may teach as well), who with their tertiary and post-graduate degrees from large Indian cities, could presumably make more money in other ways and elsewhere. In this way, they sacrifice personal financial success for the future of their children and the survival of their people. The Mount Zion English School in Laisong is such a school where the devotion of the teachers is remarkable. The headmaster who set up this school, Mr Hiaduing Neume, is a dynamic and accomplished man with a Master's Degree who, despite his large social contribution, earns a very meagre salary. However, his work with the children draws a great deal of respect from the villagers and he enjoys considerable social status.

Photograph 15 Mount Zion English School, Laisong

The teachers' dedication to the children extends beyond school hours. Some children come to these schools from other, distant villages. As a consequence, student hostels have been set up to accommodate them. Adeule set up a student hostel in Haflong in 2007 for Christian children and some *Paupaise* and *Heraka* children attend schools in Haflong with hostels funded by the Hindu organisation *Saraswati Vidya Mandir*. In Laisong, which is the largest Zeme village in N.C. Hills, the Mount Zion English School has a hostel associated with it. Several teachers from the school also

oversee the children at the hostel and are accommodated there themselves. In a way, these hostels are similar to the *hangseuki* and *leuseuki* although both boys and girls are housed in the same building. Their sleeping quarters, are, of course, segregated, with many children of the same sex packed into a room. This crowding of children emphatically entails no sense of deprivation, but rather a delight at sharing their space. Here, older children help supervise the younger ones, under the tutelage of the teachers. Unlike the *hangseuki* and *leuseuki*, though, these children do not go home for meals, as they are provided at the hostel by a male cook around a large communal table. These young teachers (mostly unmarried men) consider it their natural duty to take over the caretaking, disciplining and protection of all these children, and those who value education regard these teachers highly.

Where hostels are not available, relatives who live in close proximity to a school may accommodate children. Often such children are entrusted to an unmarried uncle or aunt for the duration of school terms. At times when it was suitable for her, Adeule in her early twenties was responsible for her two younger brothers and two nieces attending the local school. When she had too many other responsibilities, the children would go on to another close relative. This was not entirely unproblematic for Adeule. It proved difficult for her to discipline her brother who was only a few years younger than she. Adeule felt that he needed to live with a male relative, and ‘traditionally’, he would have gone to the *hangseuki* or have been placed under male supervision. Adeule’s problem, I believe, reflects the shifting and novel forms of these arrangements.

Photograph 16 Meal time, Student Hostel of Mount Zion English School

Unmarried uncles are also quite frequently seen with a gaggle of nephews in tow. Those in these care-taking roles are usually relatively well educated and respected and are considered to have much to offer the children in terms of providing an ideal learning environment. Of course, the children must also be cooked for and their washing done, *et cetera*, and uncles as well as aunties must fulfil all these chores. Usually, however, a person is not left with all these duties to manage alone and there are many others to help. The children themselves are already competent at most household chores. They seem relaxed and happy about these arrangements and I never heard a child cry for their parents in a remote village who they may not have seen for months (although, they may have, of course). Hostels and these sorts of child-care arrangements demonstrate that all Zemes are expected to take part in the upbringing of children, and that Zeme children expect to be raised not only by parents, but by the wider community. These hostels, schools and similar arrangements also reflect the continuity of Zeme masculine cultural traditions that exemplify self-discipline, nurturing and protection, but in new and ever changing forms. Males continue their custom of supervising and looking after children. Indeed, a Zeme man who fails in his responsibilities to children, if such a man existed, would be deemed as unworthy of being a man. The care of children and masculinity are inseparable.

Summary

This chapter has shown that Zeme men are deeply involved in the caring and upbringing of children. Thus, generally speaking, women are not citing men's absence from the reproductive domain as the issue at the heart of their troubles.

The data here also highlighted that the high value of Zeme children has remained relatively stable over time, and their importance to Zeme masculinity persists. I have shown that the values of protection and nurturance of children are essential components of Zeme normative masculinity. These values continue to find expression not only in the fathering of children, but also through the caring for, and disciplining of, other children and young people in the community through institutions such as the *hangseuki*, Youth Groups and student hostels. Men also help raise children of relatives in order to facilitate the children's education which is seen to be integral to the development of the community and for their survival into the future. Fatherhood and other father-like roles are attributes of adult personhood and to the attainment of social status. Having many children who are healthy and flourishing is to be successful and to enjoy the favour of God. Indeed, fathering is inherent in the Zeme normative construction of masculinity and it remains desirable. Demonstrating the ability to care, as well as the strength and skill to offer protection, is deemed a desirable quality in a man and if he exhibits these he will be more likely to enjoy plenty of romantic

adventures and draw a wife from a respectable family. It demonstrates he has sufficient *heleuraube* to achieve the ideals of manhood. While stoicism and the ability to bear hardship and pain are essential to proper adult conduct, the public expression of caring emotion is appropriate masculine behaviour. Public tears of grief are expected when a loved one dies, as we saw in Bower's description of Haichangnang over the death of his daughter. Men are comfortable in their public expression of emotion and practices of care. It is this emotionality of care (as well as practice) that Zeme men cultivate and show towards children, elderly people and certain other vulnerable creatures that Zemes expect from men and is seen as 'natural' masculine behaviour.

We have seen in Chapter Six that children are regarded as the property of fathers and that mothers have very little recourse against male privileges and rights to children. However, men's rights to their children come with the commitment to their well-being, physically and emotionally. Fatherhood is privileged over motherhood, and the Zeme configuration of gerontocratic patriarchy entailed the care and sustenance of the community. Changes in this form of patriarchy will be the subject of the following chapters. Children, we observe, are experienced by Zemes as precious gifts and are celebrated as strengthening to the family and community. Their health and well-being is a reflection of the care they receive and therefore of their father's success and masculinity. Children are seen to have their own integrity and should any kind of intentional violence befall a child of their own community it is regarded with horror and outrage. Children are *important* people, equal in worth to adults. Looking after and shaping them into culturally appropriate people are prestigious tasks of elevated social status. Good fathering is an expression of *heleuraube* and social power. Fathers and other Zeme males must nurture and protect their community's children or not only their masculinity, but their very humanity, would be questioned.

However, as Guttmann (2006: 64) points out, "active participation in parenting does not necessarily mean an improvement (or worsening) on the position of women vis-a-vis their husbands and men in general". Zeme women, like the women in Guttmann's Santo Domingo, usually spend more time with children, at least small children, than men do. Nevertheless, this chapter and Chapters Five and Six have shown men's customary 'caring practices' have provided women and the community with what they are perceived to need. What underlies the changes in men's labour patterns that women decry? The following chapter explores some of these processes.

Chapter Eight

Zeme Masculinities and Modernities

The customary practices of Zeme men are largely supportive of women (and children) as described in the previous three chapters. If demonstrations of ‘care’ through *heleuraube* and other forms of gendered labour are such important constituents of Zeme hegemonic masculinity, why, into the second decade of the 2000s, do so many women complain that their husbands “no longer seem to care”? In order to understand something of this state of affairs I shall first explore some of the processes of ‘modernity’ that have led to the changes in masculinities and patriarchy that Zeme women mourn. The next chapter will focus on the engagement of women with these processes.

Mrs Takheule suggested a connection between growing Zeme marginality and men’s domination of women (see Chapter One). This chapter focuses on some of the ways cultural, economic and religious changes have contributed to the recent emergence of inequalities amongst men destabilising the ‘traditional’ patriarchy in which authority resided with elders. The discourse of ‘modernity and backwardness’, the new economy (resulting in poverty for most), and the emergence of religious and educational reforms serve to marginalise Zemes and their way of life. The militarisation of Naga territory over six decades, I will also argue, has underscored the decrease in Zeme ‘masculine’ capacities for protection of their communities. These processes of marginalisation and loss of material and cultural resources have led to the demise of the former gerontocracy, and to changing power relations between women and men, amongst Zeme men, and between Zeme men and others in the region.

This chapter discusses historical and present Zeme interactions with agents of ‘modernisation’: economies, religions, agricultural projects, schooling, and the creation of Statehood. Material (economic), discursive and social relations are inextricable; however, here I attempt to delineate between them for the purpose of analysis. The first section briefly describes some of the ways in which the ‘discourse of modernity and backwardness’ came to be engaged by Zemes through British colonialism, its perpetuation in official and everyday Indian discourses, and through practices such as agricultural ‘development’ projects. The discourse of modernity devalues indigenous economies, livelihoods, and cosmologies as ‘backward’ and inferior. This has had significant repercussions for Zeme gender relations, which include relations amongst men, and is changing the direction of the pursuit of masculine ideals.

The next section examines economic changes and describes the arrival of the ‘modern’ capitalist economy with the British colonials that not only introduced a currency which devalued traditional

forms of wealth and redefined 'poverty', but also destroyed the Zeme welfare system of reciprocity epitomised by Feasts of Merit (described in Chapter Five). In doing so the customary hegemonic form of senior masculinity based on generosity and provisioning to the community was undermined. Inequalities amongst Zemes, and between neighbouring peoples, are created by unemployment and accentuated by the recent influx of goods into the region due to India's economic liberalisation policies.

The subject of the next part is the religious and educational reforms engaged in by Zemes that accompanied the transformations of the agrarian economy contributing to the demise of the gerontocracy. Colonial law initiated the gradual erosion of the traditional village authority by elders. As Zemes enacted their own projects of modernity through the new religions of Heraka and Christianity the cosmology, in which the elders had been viewed as crucial to the safeguarding and support of the village through their ability to communicate with the gods, was altered. When individual relationships with God were fostered, elders, as mediators of the supernatural world, lost their relevance to the younger generations. The introduction of schooling also served to sideline the elders as 'backward' and illiterate, undermining their hegemony over the community. Power shifted from the gerontocracy to those, usually younger people, who had opportunities for education and employment. The convergence of the two most important traditional elder positions, the hereditary village founder and the priest, into the newly created office of Paipeu for Herakas, and positions in the Church councils for Christians, demonstrate the new value of individual wealth over the communal wealth once controlled and shared by the gerontocracy. In contrast to the former authority based on age and generosity, new masculinities are ascending based on individual wealth and relative youth.

Finally, in the section entitled 'Militarisation' I suggest that not only have the gerontocracy lost their influence over the young but that the interaction of Zeme men with militant groups underscores their vulnerability to being forced to acquiesce to the power of others in the region. I give several examples of Zeme men's recent interactions with insurgent and counter-insurgent groups that have materialised as part of India's enforcement of Statehood and national integrity. I suggest that traditional practices of 'warriorhood' have found little expression for most Zeme men during the more recent period of the region's militarisation. As such, more youthful forms of normative masculinity constructed around ideals of armed protection of the community are rarely realised. Rather, militarisation, the discourse of modernity/backwardness, economic, religious and educational changes have all contributed to sidelining a core component of Zeme hegemonic masculinity, the ability to 'provide what the people need' (see Chapters Five, Six and Seven).

Furthermore, they have created inequalities of opportunities for men to demonstrate ‘care’ in this way.

The discourse of modernity and backwardness

The discourse of ‘modernity’ and its inverse ‘backwardness’ has had profound implications on the ways Zemes view themselves and their ways of life, especially in relation to non-Zeme others. It devalues agrarian economies and livelihoods, and traditional forms of authority and other social relations.

‘Modernity’ here refers to the long term global processes of social change and to the “multidimensional yet often systematic interconnections between a variety of cultural, political and economic structures” (in Hodgson 2001: 3). Modernity and the discourse of progress/backwardness served as a rationale for imperial and colonial expansion since the eighteenth century.

Anthropologist Dorothy Hodgson considers modernity a ‘project’ that uses scientific knowledge and reason to liberate people from ‘irrational’ superstitions that impeded their perceived progress and emancipation as human beings. Ideas of social as well as economic progress are intertwined and integral to this project (*ibid.*).

‘Deficient subjects’

The concept of ‘backwardness’ positions peoples such as Zemes as deficient subjects in need of correction and ‘improvement’ (see Li 2007). Zemes are presently considered to occupy a particularly low status in the regional hierarchy. I mentioned in Chapter Three that Nagas, including Zemes, are deeply engaged with the concept of ‘backwardness’, which is situated in the broader Indian discourse of the effort to ‘modernise’. When talking to a ‘Westerner’ many Indian citizens comment on the ‘backwardness’ of India in relation to the ‘advanced’ Western countries. India’s attempts to modernise (at least at the time of my research) is produced discursively in everyday conversations, the media and in Bollywood films transported to Anglophone countries (for example *Bride and Prejudice*, 2004) and is reflected in everyday objects such as calendar photographs that celebrate ‘modern’, industrial edifices such as concrete dams for hydro-power, electricity pylons and other icons of ‘big development’. ‘Modernity’, embodied in infrastructure, is viewed as the visible antidote for backwardness (see McDuie-Ra 2009: 323). As noted in Chapter Two the northeast region is continually referred to as particularly ‘backward’ in India generally, and by the peoples of the region itself. Assumptions and objects of ‘modernity’ (or depicting it, such as the calendars) are common in North Cachar Hills.

Zeme marginality or perceived ‘backwardness’ was the socio-political condition of my fieldwork, as I described in Chapter Three. Like the vast majority of other Indian citizens, Zemes are familiar with the assumptions of modernity and ‘progress’. The position of Zemes in the district hierarchy became clear the morning after my arrival ‘in the field’ in Laisong village when I conducted my first informal interview. My interviewees were two non-Zeme householders, in their early thirties, from neighbouring tribes, working for an international Christian-based NGO that had a secular approach of working with ‘the poor and marginalised’. They spoke English relatively well and had completed upper secondary schooling, so they were considered reasonably well-educated. Both were married to Zeme women, and committed to implementing the various projects of the organisation. While their own tribes also qualified as the ‘poorest of the poor’ and were assisted by the same or other NGOs, these men viewed Zemes as being more uneducated, uninterested, hopeless and unamenable to ‘development’ than their own societies. In other words, they viewed Zemes as more ‘backward’. Even as they acknowledged regional climate change, over-population and soil erosion as contributing to Zeme poverty, these men blamed the Zeme people themselves for failed income-generating and sustainable agriculture projects (among others), and their inability to achieve a higher standard of living. Mostly they blamed Zeme ‘cultural’ factors³⁹. The view of these men (typical of the region) was informed by colonial notions of social backwardness which they employed to make sense of Zeme conditions of material poverty. It is also important to note that the most educated (or ‘schooled’) Zemes tended to share this view, especially about those who had not received a formal education.

Colonialism and the discourse of backwardness

Zemes have participated in discourses of backwardness for decades. Among the multiple and often contradictory tasks of officials in Asia in the late-colonial era was to exercise a ‘governmental’ rationality. Not only were they to make colonies profitable, and find revenue to support the costs of administration, but they were also entrusted to ensure order and stability, and ‘improve the condition’ of the colonised population (Li 2010: 386). The British brought with them to India a world-view based on a culturally peculiar construction of linear time and historical progression which continues to inform world-views and policies today and which has had an unintended devastating effect on indigenous peoples such as Zemes. This peculiar valorisation of time (see Fabian 1983) engendered the belief that civilisation progressively developed through stages from the primitive to the advanced. Cultural differences were viewed as historical differences. The

³⁹ For example, these NGO workers cited the institutions of the *hangseukia* and *leuseukia* as a hindrance to Zemes being accustomed to teaching their children ‘systematic’ crop cultivation.

difference between ‘the West and the rest’ was explained by the evolutionary anthropology at the turn of the century as the result of ‘progress’. The ‘rest’ were considered to inhabit an earlier stage of evolution. Tribal peoples were viewed as particularly backward savages and in need of ‘improvement’ (and in some cases, annihilation) to bring them into a higher state of functioning that was considered, of course, to be epitomised by the British ruling class themselves. While contemporary anthropologists are *au fait* with this information, which is understood as a cultural construction unsupported by evidence, it is largely accepted as truth in India (as in the West).

India and Western knowledge

Political theorist Sanjay Seth argues that India today would be a vastly different entity had it not been for a crucial dispute in the 1830s to decide whether the British Indian government should patronise ‘Oriental’ knowledges or promote Western knowledge through the medium of English (2007: 1). Western education was chosen and endowed with great significance in India, not only by the colonisers, but also by the colonised, to the extent that today almost all ‘serious’ knowledge about India (even within India) is based on Western epistemologies (Seth 2007: back cover). At India’s independence from British colonial rule the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, set India on the path to ‘modernisation’ established on Western models of large-scale industrialisation and economic growth based on science and rational planning. The institutions of modernisation are the same for both capitalist and socialist States (Obadina 2008). While initially sympathetic to the plight of tribals (see Munshi 2005) Nehru believed (in opposition to Mohandas K. Gandhi’s vision for India’s future) that the ‘village’ was intellectually and culturally ‘backward’, and from it, no ‘progress’ could be made (Linkenbach 1994: 63, 64). According to this ideology rural areas have to be the object of developmental programs and villages in their ‘pre-modern stage’ have to vanish (*ibid.*: 64).

Backward tribes

The discourse of backwardness/modernity and the notion of social progress define villagers and especially tribals such as Zemes as inherently ‘backward’. As I mentioned in Chapter Two the term ‘tribe’ was a British colonial construct that the later Indian government adopted. The late colonial protectionist policies such as those of anthropologist Verrier Elwin that advocated that tribes live on their own terms with little interference from the outside world gave way to assimilationist ones after Independence according to the imperatives of nation-building. Tribal peoples were viewed as ‘Backward Hindus’ to be reclaimed into civilisation (Nongbri 2006: 79). As mentioned, indigenous peoples in India are known as Scheduled Tribes, and they are officially termed ‘backward’ communities. The social Darwinist discourse of the British colonials continues and ‘tribals’ are

considered to occupy the lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder as well as the bottom of the Hindu caste system. In the Northeast, they are viewed as the greatest impediment to the modernisation and integrity of the Indian State. The continuation of the AFSPA is testimony to the view that tribals are lawless, violent and in need of correction and civilisation.

India's official Ministry of Tribal Affairs website (2010) characterises the Scheduled Tribes as possessing "indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and backwardness". According to this essentialist discourse these characteristics need to change and tribal means of livelihood need to be superseded. Now 'development', which has inherited the idea of a hierarchy of peoples according to similar notions of 'progress', is regarded as the way to modernise. The basic assumption is that the 'developed' world (including 'developed' Indian elites), has the automatic right and unavoidable obligation to set the pace for the 'underdeveloped' (Nandy 1994: 7). A number of policies and programmes for the Northeast have been developed accordingly (see Nongbri 2006: 92, note 6). The most recent of these, the GOI's 'North Eastern Region Vision 2020', aims to 'bring peace, progress and prosperity' by combating 'seclusion, backwardness, remoteness and problems of governance' through intensive resource exploitation and infrastructure development (MoDoner 2008: 2). The discourses and policies in dealing with the Northeast expose the "inherent inequalities in models of citizenship" (Kikon 2000: 278).

Modernity and agrarian reforms

Reforms are considered necessary to bring tribal peoples into modernity, and among these are agricultural reforms. Zeme economic production is based on rotational farming (also known as shifting or swidden cultivation), as I have already mentioned, which in northeast India, is known as *jhuming*. The economies of the tribals are viewed as outdated as the following text from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2010) demonstrates: "There are some tribal groups, which are still at the food gathering stage, some others practice shifting cultivation, yet others may be pursuing primitive forms of agriculture". In contrast to the commercialised world, such traditional economies and resource management are considered impoverishing to those who practice them and do not contribute to India's Gross Domestic Product, the accepted measure of a country's economic development or modernisation. These narratives are repeated by community resource management 'experts' (who may be trained Zemes or other indigenous people themselves such as the two NGO workers already described) who declare to Zemes and others that the shifting cultivation that has sustained them for thousands of years and has largely protected the region's high biodiversity (see for example, Gadgil, Berkes, and Folke 1993; Colchester 1994; Dove and Kammen 1997; Jodha

1998) is not only ‘primitive’ but ecologically unsustainable. The ecological degradation and increasing poverty caused by immigration, over-population and subsequently shorter jhum cycles underscore what the experts say.

Transitions from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, and from village control of land to private ownership, are proclaimed as inevitable, desirable and modern in North Cachar Hills (see for example, M. Hmar 2012: 4), as elsewhere, and reflect the continuation of social evolutionary thinking. These are transmitted through various ‘development projects’ that many villages are involved in. Any attempt to gauge the success of such development projects is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, many Zemes embrace these sorts of reforms and seek them out. Particular agricultural or animal husbandry development projects are often regarded as helpful. The Zeme village of Laisong, for example, is part of the ‘Backward Areas Development Scheme’ funded by the Government of India and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) which focuses on ‘interventions’ to develop new ‘investment opportunities’ (NCHCRMS unpublished draft paper, 2004) away from *jhuming*. The perceived backwardness of traditional *jhuming* and the ‘modernity’ of introduced methods is thoroughly internalised by Zemes. Traditional means of livelihood are increasingly viewed as undesirable and belonging to the past. The discourse of modernity/backwardness values the money economy and livelihoods created within it.

Economic changes

This section describes the undermining of the fairly even customary ground of opportunities for men to achieve their age-appropriate ideals of masculine success. I briefly reiterate the more equitable conditions of the agrarian economy before going on to describe how the colonial capitalist economy contributed to the creation of poverty, and the conditions for the destruction of the Zeme welfare system of reciprocity overseen by senior men. When ‘traditional’ livelihoods and symbols of success based on the agrarian economy are undercut, materially and discursively, men seek to participate in the labour market. However, regional and intra-community inequalities are expressed in high levels of unemployment and highlighted by the recent appearance of luxury commodities into the area.

Loss of equitable opportunities

The transformation of the Zeme agrarian economy has had profound impacts on the expression of customary ‘caring’ youthful and senior normative masculinities. The modern money economy does not offer the kinds of equal opportunities or security that the agrarian economy and ‘traditional’

institutions once offered men. The reasons are as political as they are economic, but here I focus on the economy. In the agrarian economy, if a man worked hard in the fields, as a protector in the *rahangme* ‘army’, in administration and in general service to others he would likely attain his society’s standards of wealth and success. While not all men were able to give feasts or take a head, there was plenty of scope for a man to prove his worth and receive respect and other benefits. Other activities, such as hunting, training juniors, house-building, weaving baskets, and agricultural labour afforded men opportunities to demonstrate their courage, strength and care-giving in visible and culturally valued ways. These activities continue, but as I shall explain here and in the following chapter, they are not accorded the value of earlier times. Every man knew his duties to the village, was fully occupied in their deployment, and faced condemnation from his whole society should he fall short in carrying out his tasks. At the very minimum, he was guaranteed inclusion, a livelihood and the right to receive the entitlements of being a man, the ‘patriarchal dividend’⁴⁰, as Connell (2005a: 79) calls it, that women are denied (for example, the right to bear arms; political access; control of property and wealth). If men met the cultural benchmarks of masculine labour they were deemed ‘successful’.

The capitalist world economy and the creation of poverty

The intrusion of the colonial economy into these tribal regions was deeply disruptive to Zeme power relations and notions of ‘success’, both within the village community and between others. The British colonials brought their economy based on capital accumulation to India, which was considered their most important colony. This sort of economy is in stark contrast to the traditional Zeme agrarian economy that was based on sharing and reciprocity. According to historian Kamei (2004: 342) the most significant change brought about by the colonial economy was the monetisation of the Zeme and other Naga economies. It symbolised the economic integration of the Nagas with the rest of the Indian subcontinent (2000: 19). Although there was a barter system, Zemes did not use currency⁴¹. As we have seen, before the British incursion into their territory, Zemes, like other tribal peoples, had their own non-monetary, self-sufficient agrarian production system often known as a ‘subsistence economy’. However, the use of the word ‘subsistence’ is misleading as it evokes an image of a people struggling to eke out a living from their natural environment. Instead, Zemes enjoyed lives of relative wealth and comfort, according to their cultural definitions of ‘comfort’ (see also Bodley 2003: 7). One interview participant explained:

⁴⁰ The patriarchal dividend is the ‘advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women’ (Connell 2005: 79).

⁴¹ Similar to other peoples, Zemes traded and had interaction with other linguistic groups, as mentioned in Chapter Two.

In our forefathers' time, we were self-sufficient; we grew cotton, spun it and they survived. But now we see others and compare we feel lack. There were festivals to celebrate sisters and all. There were feasts of plenty. Enough paddy meant rich people, enough buffaloes, pigs *et cetera*, meant rich people... Compared with now they enjoyed life more.

Not only were Zemes and other Nagas marginal to the imposed market economy and defined as 'poor' because they lacked money, but they were further impoverished by the introduction of house tax "which was the dramatic change or symbol of the coming new masters" (Kamei 2004: 125) and which forced men to seek work for money. Importantly for Zemes specifically, colonial land policies, whereby the British administration allowed Kuki immigrants to settle on Zeme fallow sites in the eastern area of North Cachar Hills, led to over-cultivation and the people living on the edge of famine, resulting in high infant mortality in some villages by 1936 (Bower 1952: 137-141) as described in Chapter Two. Today, surplus paddy is rarely produced and very real poverty now exists for many Zemes.

The destruction of the Zeme welfare system of reciprocity

'Traditional' Zeme gender relations and divisions of labour underpinned the health and survival of the whole community. As noted, the community expected Feasts of Merit as a wealth-levelling device to redistribute goods in the village. Savings, or hoarding goods to oneself, was actively discouraged. The performance by senior men of Feasts of Merit, as described in Chapter Five, provided what the community, or *ram*, was perceived to need in terms of material goods. This practice enacted the 'caring' qualities of generosity and selflessness which were central to senior hegemonic masculinity at the time. Those with surplus were obliged to share and redistribute their wealth throughout the community by throwing elaborate feasts. This dispersion of wealth reintegrated the feast-giver into the community but he retained his high status (merit) for a lifetime. Egalitarianism was rewarded with elevated social status.

The colonial capitalist economy sidelined Zeme forms of wealth which were controlled by senior men. The colonial administration created a bureaucracy in which the local indigenous peoples were employed at the lowest levels (Kamei 2004: 339) and the payment of salaries to Zeliangrong employees increased the use of currency as a medium of exchange for the sale and purchase of goods and commodities (*ibid.*: 342). The wealth which was measured in the traditional economy in terms of paddy, mithun (*bos frontalis*), and metal heirlooms, was viewed in terms of money, spending and saving (*ibid.*). The people now had to produce surplus to sell their goods in the markets on the plains (*ibid.*: 344) rather than for redistribution within the community. These processes undermined the resources the gerontocracy controlled and contributed towards their

downfall in status. They also changed the direction of men's pursuit of hegemonic forms of masculinity to beyond the norms of their own society.

Devaluing 'traditional' livelihoods

With the devaluing of their customary lifeways as backward, many Zemes seek to align themselves with projects of modernity. Despite the socialist policies of India until the 1990s, the modern money economy continued to marginalise Zemes and create internal inequalities. In the last section I showed that the discourse of backwardness/modernity propagated by the government of India has devalued the agrarian economy and livelihoods obtained from traditional forms of agriculture such as shifting cultivation. Accordingly, many Zemes aspire to 'develop' not just beyond poverty, but to lives and labour characterised by the achievement of 'modernity'. While 'traditional' livelihoods and objects are associated with poverty and backwardness, modernity is associated with wealth. To be categorised as 'better off' or relatively wealthy, according to an 'Identification of Target People' survey of a typical community resource management project in North Cachar Hills, is to not only have sufficient rice for the whole year but also to maintain permanent orchards, have one member of the household in government service or as a 'businessman', to live in a concrete house with electrification, and possess permanent assets such as a television or radio, cassette recorder, furniture and a vehicle such as a motorised scooter (NECORPS Training Manual 2012: 17-18). All Zemes are familiar with the symbolic value of these objects. These accoutrements of relative wealth and modernity offer a great deal of convenience and comfort and are not of themselves problematic. However, poverty makes them difficult to attain. The 'Natural Resource Management Group Annual Action Plan for the village of N. Kubing' for the year 2002-2003, for example, also shows that the livelihoods of most villagers would preclude the ability to buy such goods, as well as highlighting the widening gap in income. It documented that in the village there were only 8 people employed in government service (all of whom were men), 12 were 'unskilled labourers', while 168 were *jhum* labourers. Employment in the money economy is increasingly desirable, particularly for men who consider themselves appropriate to work in this 'outside' domain according to the customary Zeme gender dichotomy outlined in Chapter Four. However employment in the labour market is difficult to achieve.

Unemployment

Increasing regional inequality means there are many constraints on Zemes finding employment in the local labour market. A corollary of the money economy and labour market is, of course, unemployment and underemployment. Unlike many other north-easterners (see McDuié-Ra 2012a),

very few Zemes from North Cachar Hills, at least at the time of my fieldwork, migrate to larger cities seeking employment. I have already mentioned the Dimasa monopoly on important positions in Haflong. Zemes not only have to compete with Dimasas, but also with better connected or educated Zemes, and other peoples in the region. One interview participant spoke of the entrenched ‘injustices’ that Zemes face when seeking employment. Zemes are ridiculed as amongst the most ‘backward’ peoples of the northeast, she said. Her brother was discriminated against for being Zeme, despite his suitability for a position and after paying a great deal of money to be considered for the job. She told of how he was made to feel so ashamed in applying for a particular “office job” that he broke down and cried.”Somebody is always pulling us down”, she said. “We are looked down upon by others. Even when Zeme people are happy, though poor, we hear others commenting, ‘Oh, look how poor and backward those Zemes are’. We don’t want to hear these things any more! We aren’t getting any privileges or opportunities”.

For some Zeme men their inability to succeed in the labour market, to obtain a sense of ‘modern’ identity, and their subordinate position in the region creates a sense of futility. In the village of Asalu, where the remnants of the first British outpost in Zeme territory lie in ruins, a householder in his thirties, Mr Chikambe Ndaime, explained:

The market creates new needs, new wants, especially what men want to be and have. They get jealous, so they feel angry and will steal because they think, “Why can’t I have that?” It makes them lazy. They think, “What’s the point of working if I can never afford to have those things”? So they sit and drink. The market takes away men’s masculinity.

Mr Ndaime is giving expression to what we might call ‘protest masculinity’. Connell (2005a: 114) explains that, “Protest masculinity is a marginalized masculinity, which picks up themes of hegemonic masculinity in the society at large but reworks them in a context of poverty.” It seems that while the majority of Zeme men presently find more socially acceptable ways of dealing with the ‘market’ (stealing is viewed with immense disapproval and happens very infrequently), a small but rapidly growing number of Zeme men experience the conditions and feelings Mr. Ndaime describes that affect the gender and age divisions of labour and masculine caring practices.

The inability to receive an adequate education is also a significant reason many men expressed as the cause of their inability to obtain employment in the labour market. In many villages schools do not exist, and often, where they do, teachers simply do not turn up to government schools as I pointed out in Chapter Seven. They collect their wages while deeming it beneath them to work in such remote and backward areas. For many young men, their parents could not afford the fees for school and the necessary equipment. And for others, parents did not encourage schooling as it is often seen as making one ‘lazy’. Sitting and studying is not viewed as labour by many Zemes.

However, even for those men who did attend school and attained good results, even a tertiary education, most find it difficult to find employment in the mainstream economy, despite reservations for tribal peoples. This is due to their political marginalisation as I have already described, as well as the corruption that is characteristic of many organisations in India.

It is increasingly common to see young Zeme men engage in public drinking outside culturally endorsed times, often due to unemployment. This is also, as Mr. Ndaime implied, a form of protest. This sort of activity, especially coupled with indolence, is condemned in Zeme society, as Mrs. Takheule and the Heraka Women's Society showed. Idleness and underemployment, known in India as 'timepass', has been conspicuously practiced by unemployed young men in the wider society since the neo-liberal economic reforms of the 1990s (see Jeffrey 2010). I shall say more about men, gender relations, and the increase in alcohol consumption in the next chapter.

India and economic liberalisation

Another factor that has highlighted Zeme material poverty and their marginalisation from the global economy, as well as their perceptions of inequality is the influx of goods into the region in recent times as a result of India's economic liberalisation. In 1991 neo-liberal economic policies replaced the socialist ones India had introduced after Independence. India may now be characterised as a market economy. This has opened India up to foreign capital and has 'liberated' the consumer goods sector from the 'License Raj' of the previous decades (India Resource Tripod, 1998). The effects of these reforms were slow in coming to Zeme territory, but when they did, it was sudden. In 2001 the Haflong bazaar (market place) sold mostly goods produced locally or elsewhere in India. These were basic necessities, including a wide variety of fresh and dried foods, and a limited supply of clothing, batteries, *et cetera*. A plastic bucket was considered an extravagance. By 2004 new shops were filled with 'modern luxuries': electric blenders, *faux* designer wear, mobile telephones, disposable nappies, plush stuffed toys and other previously unseen goods manufactured in China, Thailand and other countries. Intermittently (due to Haflong's erratic electricity supply), mass media became available via the Internet and cable television, although images from Bollywood and national newspapers were already commonly seen in the town. Even a couple of shiny new cars, the possessions of the township's most powerful men, cruised the dusty streets. The global flow of 'cargo' (Diamond 1997: 14) had finally swept into Haflong.

These luxuries, as elsewhere, are the new markers of success. Clearly Mr Ndaime and most other Zemes do not have access to these sorts of commodities. Yet, according to Mr Ndaime's comments, and those of other Zemes, these sorts of goods are much desired, as is the status associated with them. Whereas once men had equitable access to resources for redistribution and the accumulation

of merit and status, now these items are beyond reach. No amount of talent, diligence, heroism, or strength and self-sacrifice can guarantee the acquisition of money or other goods either for sharing with others or for self-aggrandisement. Their lack of ability to acquire these means that men are denied the opportunity to demonstrate the ‘masculine’ attribute of generosity to the community by ‘providing what the people need’ that results in elevation in masculine status. The customary expectation that men *ought* to succeed in the ‘outside domain’ of the money economy in order to benefit others is a constraint on them feeling successful or worthy as Mr. Ndaime indicated. In this way, the Zeme construction of gendered domains is a factor not only in women’s perceptions of men’s lack of contribution, but also to men’s view of themselves as failing to provide for the community and receiving their entitlements.

The last two sections showed how the discourse of modernity/backwardness and economic changes have contributed to poverty and have undermined the ability of men to demonstrate ‘care’ by redistributing resources to the community. The agrarian economy has become devalued as ‘backward’ compelling people, especially men, to seek employment in the money economy. Zemes’ low status as backward in the regional pecking order, underpinned by inadequacies of educational opportunities, results in difficulties in attaining employment. The difficulty of succeeding is highlighted by the recent influx of unattainable goods. These factors underscore men’s regional and intra-community inequalities and the decreasing ability to provide for their families and community in ways that bring them prestige. I now move on to explore some of the ways in which changes in religious and educational institutions have also contributed to new forms of inequalities between men and have destabilised the gerontocracy.

Religion, education and the demise of the gerontocracy

A great many of my research participants, and not only women, discussed the “loss of respect for elders” and suggested this was deleterious for the community as a whole. Earlier chapters showed that the existence of a gerontocracy ensured that as people ascended the age-based hierarchy they enjoyed security and special privileges. Old age was something to be looked forward to. Senior men were expected to be of service to, and in control of, the village and lands in their entirety. They were to supply governance and justice, manage resources (that included women and children), and ensure the safe-keeping of the community. However, while enormous affection is generally shown to grandparents and elderly people in general, they have largely been divested of their former power. Indeed, at a meeting of village leaders in 2004, for example, it was suggested that the commonly used Hindi word for the village headman, *Gaon Bura*, be changed to the Zeme word, *Matai*. ‘*Bura*’ means ‘old’ or elder. This appeared less to do with the survival of the Zeme

language, and more to do with the fact that many village headmen are now relatively young. What are some of the processes by which these shifts in generational power relations have come about?

Colonialisms

Colonial laws set in motion huge social changes and paved the way for new forms of religion and education. The advent of the British into Zeme territory, despite putting in place some mechanisms of local control, resulted in gradual erosion of traditional village authority held by elders (*katsingme*) and the values on which that authority rested. The British administration removed village defences, curbed the carrying of spears, and occasionally demonstrated military might of a kind that Nagas had never before seen (Khala 2000: 19). Furthermore, they installed an authority that could overrule the decisions of local chiefs and elders. This loss of authority and legal autonomy continues to rankle. Haideudangbe, the son of the chief of Hezailoa village said, “When we all followed *Paupaise* there was one law. Now when there’s a problem we must report it to the police. Before we could solve the problem within our own communities”. The rigid community discipline began to ebb and the village chiefs started losing their hold over young warriors (Khala *ibid.*).

Yet Zemes engaged with (as well as resisted) agents of British colonialism and Indian neo-colonialism, such as religion and schooling, to form their own projects of modernity. They are active in the reform and ‘modernisation’ of their cosmologies and education. However, and no doubt inadvertently, these have weakened the traditional patriarchy that was once expected to oversee the well-being of the villagers.

Changes in cosmology

One of the factors in the erosion of the authority of the elders, or *katsingme*, is changes in the laws of their culture and religion (*hingde*). Below, I focus on the ways changes in cosmology, or religion and worldview, might be affecting the traditional Zeme patriarchy. As a reminder, for Zemes, as with so many other non-secular peoples, ‘religion’ is inextricable from ‘economy’, ‘law’ and, indeed the whole ‘culture’ and cosmos. Divine powers are considered to govern every aspect of life and people are mindful of them at all times. I cannot over-emphasise how deeply religious Zemes are, and this is one of the reasons I examine this matter in some detail. I now explore some of the specific conditions of the cultural and socio-religious changes that have led to ‘disrespect of elders’ for Zemes.

Ritually potent elders

Traditionally, boys and girls did not learn much, at a formal level, from their parents but from their elders in the *hangseuki* and the *leuseuki*, as outlined in Chapter Seven. Furthermore, in the past, and indeed, in the present in the *Paupaise* village of Hezailoa, only the very elderly were able to communicate with the gods (*hera*). The Zeme cosmos was (and remains so for many, even ‘converted’, people) thought to be populated by gods of places; for example, the rice fields, the mountains, and ponds all have their resident gods or spirits. While some are viewed as beneficent, many are held responsible for illnesses, ‘unnatural’ deaths, failure of crops, natural disasters and other misfortunes. Animal sacrifices (normally chickens or pigs) were offered to appease or buy favours from particular gods. To communicate with gods was considered very dangerous and ritual formulae learned over a very long time, and performed perfectly, was needed. It was thought offensive to the god(s) to have a young and inexperienced person offer sacrifices or incantations. This would invite further divine retributions. It was the priest (*tingkhupau*), usually the oldest man in the village, who performed all the major and large sacrifices (Longkumer 2010: 80). However, elderly shamans (women: *herakapui*, and men: *herakapeu*) were able to “divine everything concerning the well-being of the village, its inhabitants and their relationship with the natural elements” (Longkumer *ibid.*).

Photograph 17 Divination, Hezailoa village

Younger people are not considered to have sufficient self-discipline to follow through with the restrictions and prohibitions (*neube*) or to possess the wisdom to perform a divination to find the reason for a misfortune and to prescribe the number and type of rituals required, Adeule told me. Non-seniors needed these potent elders to act on their behalf. As Paujelungle from Hezailoa pointed out, “Young people never pray. The old men are so crucial to our lives that without them we cannot even function”. *Paupaise* believe in a Creator or Sky God (*Tingwang*) but It is so remote that

elders, including the *tingkhupau*, do not communicate directly with It. By mediating between the people and the lesser gods and spirits the powerful elderly protected and sustained the villagers. The arrival of Christianity and the emergence of the Heraka movement into Zeme country was to change this.

Heraka and the new relationship with Tingwang

The Heraka movement of the Zemes of North Cachar Hills has been richly documented by Longkumer (2010) and I can only give a rudimentary outline here (and to supplement the information provided in Chapter Two) to show the ways I understand it has contributed to the diminishment of the gerontocracy. In short, Heraka is a unique adaptation to the crisis of modernity. It is an ‘alternative modernity’ (see Miller 1995; Knauff 2002). Longkumer (2010: 92) writes, “The reform itself suggests a progression, an improvement on the traditional order” rather than a ‘new religion’. It was a direct response to British colonialism and the intention of the Zeliangrongs involved was to reclaim sovereignty over their own land. While not anti-Christian it was also a challenge to the Christianisation that had begun to take place in the region (see Kamei 2004: 300). Its specific aim, though, was largely to respond to the economic changes of the early 1930s onwards, by abolishing the costly animal sacrifices to the gods and the restrictive prohibitions connected with the sacrifices. These *Paupaise* prohibitions (*neube*), and their non-working days of observance (*nrei*), severely limited the mobility of villagers to specific geographic demarcations (for example, house or village) and presented a problem when schools, often outside village boundaries, were introduced into Zeme areas (Longkumer 2010: 54). The abandonment of the minor local gods was encouraged (Longkumer 2010: 49) in favour of worshipping the Sky God, Tingwang, who did not require animal sacrifices. Instead, Tingwang is to be worshiped through the singing of devotional hymns (Kuame 2005: ii). The word ‘Heraka’ means to build a fence (*ka*) to keep the smaller gods (*hera*) out (Longkumer 2007: 501) and allow a focus on the high God. Tingwang is now viewed as ‘active’ while the smaller gods, though still in existence, are considered ‘ineffectual’ (Longkumer 2010: 86). After people transitioned from *Paupaise* to Heraka, they considered their ‘burden was eased’ and it is said more freedom was enjoyed; “they could venture out of the village, get education and find jobs. They also related the ensuing economic success to the blessing of...Tingwang” (Longkumer 2010: 55).

The worship of Tingwang, and turning one’s back on the lesser gods, is legitimised by the resurrection and reinterpretation of a story well-known to Zemes about a famous healer called Herakandingpeu (the ‘Superman’). This story is understood as historical fact and is likely as important to Zemes as the story of Jesus is for Christians. Adeule’s father, Mr Heuchangying Mbau

Nriame, who practised Heraka before converting to Baptist Christianity, and is an authority on Zeme oral history, explained to me that Tingwang sent Herakandingpeu to rule the world. As such, he was able to receive communication from Tingwang without spilling blood. This story invokes a time when ‘no sacrifices’ were needed and therefore that particular ancient generation and their religious practices were ‘pure’ (Longkumer 2010: 203). No sacrificial blood was spilled as Herakandingpeu used only ginger and some other plants for divination. On the other hand, Chuprai, the malevolent god of rice, deprived of blood, is cast as incurring the wrath of Tingwang for conducting animal sacrifices. At the end of the story, the jealous Chuprai takes the form of a bird and kills the young hero Herakandingpeu. The Heraka are convinced that theirs is the age that mirrors the ‘pure’ generation of Herakandingpeu (Longkumer 2010: 203) and that *Paupaise* is ‘impure’ because its practitioners sacrifice to Chuprai and the other minor deities. Indeed, many people told me that the word ‘Heraka’ means ‘pure’.

Despite my oversimplification of what continues to be a complex and uneven movement, we can begin to see how the mediation of sacred elders to communicate with the gods was no longer required. Instead, an individual relationship with Tingwang was nurtured, regardless of a person’s age. Whereas once the *tingkhupau* mediated between the visible and invisible worlds, Heraka has created sacred spaces (*Kelumki* and *Paiki*: buildings akin to temples, churches or mosques) where individuals may enter into a *personal* relationship with Tingwang (see Longkumer *ibid.*). Zemes now consider that the better their relationship with Tingwang, the more one will prosper. Longkumer declares that this “symbiotic relationship between the material and the spiritual is the main legacy of the Heraka Movement” (Longkumer 2007: 515).

Photograph 18 Heraka Youths, Laisong Kelumki, full moon day

Elders, then, lost their relevance and value to younger citizens, as mediators of the supernatural world, and as protectors of the earthly realm. The Heraka reform instituted programs to symbolically usher in the ‘new’ and clean the village of the ‘old ways’. This meant ritually (and literally) washing one’s belongings and replacing important artefacts of *Paupaise* practice, which was now viewed as ‘dirty’ and ‘evil’. For example, the *hezoa dekung*, the sacred altar stone, and formerly the heart of the village at which the *tingkhupau* made offerings to the gods, was replaced with a new stone (Longkumer 2010: 68). Some entire villages have been renamed (see Longkumer *ibid.*). ‘Superstitious’ and archaic ways of the elders were denigrated in favour of adaptation to the rapidly changing world.

The Heraka are concerned with the survival, or perhaps reinterpretation, of many Zeme traditions and are critical of Christians eschewing Zeme ways of life. Mr Ramkhui Newme (now deceased) then President of the Zeliangrong Heraka Association of North East India, told me:

To improve society we needed to reform *Paupaise*. We insist upon our own religion; it’s a question of identity. They [Christians] forsake everything, customs, songs, dress, forsake their own beliefs. Their language also, their way of life, their mind also – there’s no sign of Naga. But this has begun to change. We should retain our culture.

However, the reorganisation of the village administration, the personal worship of Tingwang, and the undermining of some ‘old ways’ including the accumulated knowledge of the elders, have contributed to unseating the gerontocracy.

Christianity and the diminution of elders’ authority

While Christianity arrived fairly late for the Zemes under the British colonial regime (the villagers of Laisong continued to practice *Paupaise* in the 1940s according to Bower) it has nevertheless also played a fundamental role in changing the arrangements of customary Zeme power relations. As mentioned in Chapter Two approximately 35 per cent of Zemes have converted to Christianity. Christians, of course, are also considered to have an individual and unmediated relationship with God (Zeme Christians also use the term ‘Tingwang’) and the monotheism of encroaching Christianity in the region was likely to have influenced this aspect of the Heraka practice to an extent. Colonial anthropologists also noted the drastic changes in world-view and social hierarchies that accompanied Christianity in northeast India (for example, Hutton 1969 [1921]; Mills 1926, 1937; von Furer Haimendorf 1969; Bower 1952; Elwin 1961).

Naga novelist and scholar, Temsula Ao, has remarked that, “The concept of personal salvation according to Christianity undermined the communal feeling of the tribe, which was the mainstay of

collective survival” (2005: 170). Furthermore, as an agent of modernisation, Christianity has been able to propagate Western patriarchal values even to the non-Christian population through its educational institutions in the Northeast (Nongbri 2006: 253). Elderly women have lost their position as shamans and other ritual experts, although less so amongst the *Paupaise* where elderly women continue to practice divination and other rituals. Like Heraka, the practice of Christianity is said to have relieved the Zeme people of the economic burden of sacrificial offerings and restrictive *neube* and *nrei*, paving the way for education, employment and integration in to the mainstream economy. However, much more than Heraka, many Christians have sought to ‘forget’ about their unchristian past and, in some cases, have actively denounced Zeme traditional practices as evil and backward, in favour of Western cultural practices (which are understood as ‘Christian’) and therefore favoured by God. Indeed, in the 1990s some Baptist Church leaders advocated replacing uniquely Zeme sports such as jumping the *hezoa* stone with English and American sports such as football and tennis⁴². The *hezoa* stone is the altar on which the *tingkhupau* made offerings to the gods. To suggest alternatives to incorporating the *hezoa* stone into village activities such as sports is to demonstrate attempts to banish it from the lives and minds of the villagers. And with it, of course, the memories of the power of the sacred elders. Traditional and local forms of knowledge, which the elders controlled and embodied, are eschewed in favour of Christianity and the ideology of progress.

Elders, then, were no longer viewed as worthy of protecting villagers from malevolent forces, or to encourage good fortune, with their rich ritual knowledge. Zemes tend to view the prosperity of ‘advanced’ countries such as the United States and those of Europe as gifts from the Christian God to the people who have worshiped Him correctly for a long period. Indeed, the individual worship of one god, Tingwang (rather than the pantheon of the ‘backward’ past), is emblematic of modernity. The Christian god is regarded as the greatest by Christian Zemes. Therefore, some emulate what they understand to be Western practices, or other Christian practices that they see wealthier local non-Zemes or other Nagas perform. A quotation cited in Dr Rabi Pame’s unpublished thesis in Theology (‘Dr Rabi’ is a Zeme residing in urban Nagaland, a place considered by Zemes as more ‘advanced’, despite its more numerous problems, than rural Zeme country) sums up the general view of Christian Zemes:

Look at other Naga tribes, they became educated, wealthy and advanced in all aspects of life because they knew God first. But look at Zeme people. We are lacking in many things. Why? Because we don’t know the owner of all knowledge, wealth and prosperity.

⁴² Some of these same people are now trying to ‘salvage’ what they can of certain Zeme ‘traditions’. However, this is not to suggest that Zemes have not modified Western or Christian practices in unique ways that incorporate Zeme world-views.

Therefore put your trust in the real God and believe in Jesus Christ, the giver of all things; and leave the life of bondage and fear (in Pame 1996: 255).

Though Zemes have indeed indigenised this form of religious modernity (see Sahlins 2005: 48), Zeme forms of Christianity, as with other ‘modernities’, subscribe to the ideology of progress and backwardness which originated in the European intellectual tradition. Christianity is viewed as the ideal practice for economic development and equality with others. While Zemes have developed a unique expression of their Christian faith (for example, church services involve original hymns with the use of traditional drums and dancing) they emulate what they believe are ‘Western’ customs, including gender relations, including those amongst men and between generations. Younger, more educated, or at least literate, men (women are excluded from these positions) occupy the important positions in the church. I shall discuss education further with reference to some of its effects on the traditional Zeme patriarchy below.

Schooling and katsingme

Schooling has shifted Zeme relations of power at the community level. Formerly the elders controlled resources and disseminated important knowledge to the community. Every villager could rest assured that they would be able to enjoy some influence as they aged and became *katsingme*. Now education through government or private schools and universities are means to knowledge and influence. It is the relatively young who possess these forms of knowledge and qualifications. Dr John Mao (1998: 13) from Manipur shows the general Naga perspective on schooling: “Education is a major avenue of upward social mobility. Today, education has become a necessity for everyone. Attempts are made to wipe out the ignorance and illiteracy from the society”. Not only Christians, but Herakas and even the culturally conservative *Paupaise* now consider education as the instrument of ‘progress’ and ‘upliftment’⁴³. Haideudangbe of the *Paupaise* village of Hezailoa said, “The biggest problem for Zemes is lack of literacy and education... Education gives us the strength to preserve our own culture... That’s why we follow the Hindu mission and RSS activities for our health and education”. Education and knowledge from elsewhere are considered vital because illiteracy and lack of knowledge about the wider world has led, for example, to Zemes to being tricked out of their land by unscrupulous outsiders⁴⁴. This is a very serious threat to both livelihood and sense of personal dignity. Of course loss of livelihood undermines social standing and opportunities.

⁴³ Zeme Heraka students also attend ‘Hindu’ (right-wing VHP and RSS) schools and colleges around the country (see Longkumer 2010: 222, note 45).

⁴⁴ Nongkynrih has found four types of tribal land alienation: transfer to non-tribals; encroachment by immigrants; acquisition for development projects without recognising community rights; and monopolisation by the tribal elite (Fernandes and Barbora 2008: 2).

The young are also educated in the rhetoric of ‘development’. In this light, the ‘uneducated’ (or rather, ‘unschooled’) are considered ‘backward’ as described earlier. As perhaps everywhere, a ‘modern’ education leads to improved opportunities for income and status. However, in the Zeme case, certain forms of education may also lead to becoming more powerful by attuning oneself to the divine powers of God. In earlier times (and presently in *Paupaise* areas) only the elderly are considered to be attuned to other-worldly entities, as I explained. Now, a number of Zeme youths, boys and an increasing number of girls, study Theology at a tertiary level. They travel a long way from home to train at Christian institutions in other states where they receive an education in English (the global language of power) and in conservative ‘Western’ customs (or interpretations of them). Purportedly they also become favoured by God for their devoted studies. Most return to their villages to evangelise and some teach English in local schools. They tend to become models for their community, particularly their religious community. ‘Backward’, illiterate elders, unschooled in the ways of the wider world, while much loved, decreasingly serve as models for the young.

Moreover, these students’ ‘mini migrations’ also expose them to novel experiences in the broader Indian society as well as mass mediated events that come from further afield. When they return home they come bearing stories and new possibilities (see Appadurai 1996: 4). In this way, they may seek to “annex the global into their own practices of the modern” (Appadurai *ibid.*). Some of these students experience a very stark contrast between ‘modern’ life in the cities and the lives of their grandparents in the villages. The discourse of modernity/backwardness casts their identity as ‘Zeme’ as a source of embarrassment. It is the elders who most epitomise ‘Zeme-ness’ and ‘backwardness’ to the young, and their disconnection from the ‘modern’ world makes the more worldly young question seniors’ ability to govern society.

Leadership based on economic inequality and relative youth

Seniors who have not had the benefit of education are generally not employed in the mainstream economy (although some receive some financial support as members of Village Councils from the government under the Sixth Schedule), while younger people are more likely to get jobs that pay money and confer status. The religious reforms which accompanied the transformations of the agrarian economy meant rearrangement of the village administration. Changes in Zeme cosmology which gave primacy to one universal god (*Tingwang*) over the lesser gods of *Paupaise*, marginalised the hereditary position of *kadeipeu* -the village founder (see Longkumer 2010) along with the traditional elderly priest (*tingkhupau*). In order to promote economic change these positions converged in the newly-created office of *Paipeu* for Heraka followers, and by administrative positions in the various Church denominations in Christian villages or village

colonies. Authority is vested in the *Paipeu* and Christian leaders by extra-village authorities in the former and international authorities in the latter, and, therefore, more power is vested in these positions than in the traditional positions. Longkumer (2007: 513) explains that the office of the *Paipeu* (and I would argue similarly for Christian seats on Church councils) was “opened up, theoretically to all⁴⁵ – though in practice, the honour usually fell to the wealthiest man of the village”. The *Paipeu*, he suggests, symbolised the new value of individual wealth over communal wealth (*ibid.*: 514).

The new importance of the *Paipeu* within the village organisation was significant for several reasons. Firstly, by streamlining the power base and placing it primarily in the hands of the *Paipeu*, a system of competition within the village was created. The moral was: the villagers needed to compete if they wanted to become wealthy. Secondly, the elevation of the *Paipeu* signified a shift from a largely subsistence-based agrarian economy to a market economy. This was connected with several factors: first, the fact that the land did not generate much income, with most of it occupied by outsiders; second, the emphasis on education and literacy which moved people away from the land; third, the shift from collective farming to individual enterprises. With the reorganisation of the village these bourgeois values were nurtured and encouraged (Longkumer 2007: 514).

The wealthy are now rewarded with key positions in the village (Longkumer 2007: 514) whereas in the past, as outlined earlier, a man rose in status *because* his riches were shared and redistributed throughout the village through Feasts of Merit. Expenditure rather than accumulation was previously encouraged. The position (merit) of a feast giver was retained for the rest of his life, long after his wealth had been reduced, as I mentioned earlier. Now, lavish communal feasting is viewed as ‘waste’ and a hindrance to economic progress (although smaller feasts such as *metungduara* are performed as mentioned in Chapter Five, but they will not use up the entire surplus, retaining it for themselves). Development programs encourage ‘thrift’ and ‘savings’ in accordance with the aim of bringing marginal peoples into the economic mainstream (for example, North Eastern Council 2009:2; NCHCRMS 2004: 9). A man’s success is no longer measured by generous distribution made possible by harnessing the labour of his wife and junior adult kin through beneficent influence. Instead, the ultimate ‘success’ is achieving a government job (in the Indian Administrative Service) for which he must compete against many others. In India, government jobs are secure for life which means one cannot be ousted by a more meritorious person (see also IWGIA Document 56, 1986: 102). A man is now far more likely to attain relative wealth through participation in the mainstream economy⁴⁶. Normally, and still in line with ‘tradition’, a *Paipeu* or other community leader will be chosen on the basis of his piety and leadership abilities as well as his wealth (Pame 1996). However, hegemonic masculinity is increasingly (but not

⁴⁵ Longkumer, of course, is referring to ‘all men’. Women are not included.

⁴⁶ Zeme women may also hold government jobs as I will discuss in the next chapter.

uncritically) based on personal accumulation, and leadership is beginning to be based on economic inequality and relative youth. This is in contrast to former authority based on age and generosity.

There are other factors, such as the militarisation of Zeme territory by Indian armed forces and insurgent groups that also contribute to the demise of the gerontocracy. These militant organisations operate according to laws beyond those of the villages and traditional Zeme authority. Moreover, they emphasise the capacity of younger men for combat in skills and with technologies that the *katsingme* may not possess; and of educated (Christian) usually non-Zeme seniors to lead the factions in dispute resolution. *Katsingme* have lost their influence over the youth and village military operations, once central aspects of their hegemony and senior masculinity. In the next section I suggest that militarisation, rather than offering Zeme men an opportunity to demonstrate their ‘masculine’ capacities for protection and ‘warriorhood’, instead increases their sense of inequality in relations with the Indian State, and with Naga and other ethnic militant groups.

Militarisation

This section highlights changes in Zeme masculinities due to the militarisation of their territory. In Chapter Five I described that the defence of the village, through ‘warriorhood’, was vital to the pursuit of hegemonic masculinity of the younger age cohort (*rahangme*). All able-bodied men had an opportunity to embody the values of self-sacrifice, protection, ingenuity and courage, even outside the battlefield, that made him ‘fit to be a man’. Here I suggest that decades of armed struggle with the State, and encounters with various militant groups, have been somewhat disempowering for most Zeme men. Though these conflicts may produce a tiny handful of Zeme heroes, Zeme engagement with these groups tends to underscore their vulnerability in the region rather than the ‘masculine’ ability to provide what their community needs and expects in terms of physical security.

When I began research with the Zeme Nagas in 2001 the Indian government had designated North Cachar Hills (as well as many other parts of the Northeast) a ‘Disturbed Area’. As I explained in Chapters Two and Three, this means (briefly) the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958 (AFSPA) allows any member of the Indian armed forces to utilise, at their discretion, any ‘necessary’ force, even causing death, and protects them from prosecution (see Ministry of Home Affairs n.d.). Insurgency and counter-insurgency have created what McDuié-Ra (2012b: 330) calls ‘the frontier culture of violence’ in the Northeast. In much of the region the AFSPA generates “a constant fear that seeps into social relations on even the most basic level; visiting a relative, being introduced to a stranger, visiting the market, travelling to college, or joining an association” (McDuié-Ra 2009: 256). In short, Zeme individuals like other tribal peoples of the region, have

been vulnerable to harassment, molestation, rape, torture and murder with no recourse to justice. I described the heavy military and paramilitary presence at the Naga Students Federation conference in Chapter Three and the harassment many Nagas received there or on their journey there. Security personnel were highly visible in towns like Haflong and Mahur. It was 'normal' for buses and other vehicles to be stopped and searched many times on any trip.

However, in the villages it was less common at that time to see members of the Indian armed forces. Villagers expressed their relief when they said that the Indian army had left their post in Laisong in the mid-eighties. And yet, by all Zeme reports, they seem to have been spared the worst depredations of the Indian Army. I registered my surprise about this in Chapter Three. When Dolly Kikon, a Lotha Naga, conducted interviews with women from a particularly militarised society in Nagaland she said, "The villagers were afraid to talk about anything concerning the security forces" since the village was near army headquarters. She added, "Every time the villagers saw me with pen and paper they refused to talk" (Kikon 2004: 17-18). My experience differs considerably, with people seeming to welcome the opportunity to be interviewed if time permitted, even about sensitive topics. I did not hear stories by women of rape and torture. They were comfortable enough to tell me they had heard of infrequent cases of civilian non-Zemes sexually assaulting women. And of course, to express their dismay about their own husbands. Interview conversations were only occasionally about the actions of security forces and Naga militant groups. Understandably, this could be because they were keeping information from me as a stranger which could result in security issues. And perhaps because this topic was considered 'masculine'. When people spoke of their personal involvement in armed conflicts they usually referred to those between Zeme Herakas and Christians of previous decades. A couple of men closely aligned with one of the Naga underground groups spoke to me at length about the history of the conflict with India, wanting me to understand their cause. But mostly the younger men I conversed with seemed more concerned with religion, 'development'⁴⁷ and making a living than with ethno-nationalist politics. Most women claimed little knowledge of, or interest in, movements for autonomy or self-determination, and of the militant groups fighting for it. Their primary concerns were maintaining peace in the family, feeding and educating the children, and other everyday issues. Nevertheless, Zeme lives and gender relations have been impacted by the Indian occupation of their territory and by Naga, and other local ethnic, militant insurgent groups that have emerged to counter it. The next chapter will discuss some of the repercussions for women.

⁴⁷ The AFSPA also shapes the way development monies are distributed in the Northeast and ensures that the power to set the development agenda remains in the hands of the Government of India (McDuie-Ra 2009:255).

As McDuie-Ra (2012c: 113) points out, in the militarised Northeast masculinity has been shaped by historical constructions of a warrior past fused with contemporary constructions based on ethno-nationalism and armed struggle. Chapters Five and Seven showed that practices of warriorhood historically were constructed as integral to Zeme masculine identity and that ‘protection’ of women, children and other villagers continues to be considered important to male personhood. Self-sacrifice, self-restraint and demonstrations of courage led to aggrandisement and reinforcement of ‘manliness’. Furthermore, these constructions found at least partial expression in the new kind of Zeliangrong military formation initiated in the 1920s by Jadonang and Gaidinliu, a ‘youth force’ called *Riphen*, that I mentioned in Chapter Two. These constructions of warrior and protector persist, though to varying degrees. The explicit use of historical ornaments on certain occasions may serve as one example. Photograph 13 in Chapter Seven depicts the young *hangseuki* members holding spears, as symbols of Zeme warriorhood⁴⁸, as they stand in front of their exclusively masculine institution that was once the village guardhouse. This was a ritual occasion and Akum took the photo as the presence of women was prohibited. However, in the photo below, a senior is shown carrying a spear as part of his everyday attire. I photographed him during his travel on foot between villages. Presumably if he wanted to protect himself from wild animals or dangerous people he would carry a rifle (used for hunting and which he could have easily obtained). His spear, then, is ornamental and indicates the importance of displaying his former warrior status.

Photograph 19 Travelling through a Laisong jhum

⁴⁸ Historically, the ultimate masculine symbol of bravery and martial success were the collections of enemy heads. Of course, these are no longer displayed by most Nagas (the exception being in very remote parts of Burma).

Contemporary male roles may well have evolved through six decades of armed conflict in the Northeast, as McDuie-Ra (2012c: 114) describes, and certainly the men of every Zeme family quietly express allegiance to one or other of the militant groups and their causes. Some Zeme young men join Nagas of other tribes in factions such as NSCN-IM or NSCN-K which tend to have bases beyond (though are active within) North Cachar Hills. I was told that these armies operate 'outside of Zeme law and custom'. On the other hand, invoking traditional gender constructions, Zeme women, unlike women from other Naga tribes, are not permitted to bear arms and join these groups. This is the sole right of adult men. However, even though some Zeme men are actively involved in violent conflict as 'freedom-fighters', taking up weapons for the cause did not seem to be hugely important in the lives of most men involved in my research. I was not given the impression that by doing so they would benefit their own community or be viewed as heroic as a result. Participating in combat or 'development' activities of these militant groups did not seem particularly significant in a positive way to their senses of self as Zeme men.

For obvious security reasons I was not privy to certain military information and this should be taken into account when reading what is bound to be an incomplete view. There is much secrecy surrounding people's allegiance to Naga armed factions. Fortunately, and perhaps unsurprisingly, I observed no overt violence. However, incidents I witnessed or heard about tended to have demeaning or tragic results for Zeme men. I shall give a few examples.

In 2001 Indian Army personnel drove to Laisong to search the village for any insurgents who might be hiding there. Several uniformed soldiers gathered the people - men, women and children- of this part of the village (who were not in the fields at the time) into the small dining hall in the Baptist colony. Other soldiers searched elsewhere in the village. We watched helplessly as these towering (some nearly seven feet tall) mostly turbaned, uniformed soldiers roughly brushed aside cups and plates from the tables, emptied food onto the floor, and screwed their faces up in exaggerated disgust at the foods and implements of the kitchen. They yelled interrogations at the men in the room and seemed to view the Zemes as objects of ridicule. They were fully aware that they were protected by the AFSPA. It was an exercise of explicit intimidation. What struck me most was what can only be described as the forced defencelessness of the Zeme men; 'impotence' was the word that came to mind. The soldiers were armed and the Zeme men were empty-handed. Most Zemes are not much more than five feet tall. The soldiers were threatening civilians, not 'warriors'. The Zeme men simply could not retaliate or stand up for themselves or their relatives in any way or they would have risked being killed or beaten. Worse, we were well aware that any form of retaliation would have also put the lives of the women and children at risk. They were not able to be protectors

and their shame was palpable. Zemes had had to suffer this sort of harassment and humiliation with some regularity for decades.

Discussions also tended to indicate that while Zemes supported and appreciated one or other of the Naga insurgent groups and joined their cause, they also posed a threat to life and livelihood. Several men, including Akum, explained that there is no incentive to start a business in North Cachar Hills because militant groups “demand money for their cause”. Extortion by armed factions, often by one opposing group after the other, burdens villagers and business owners. These ‘taxes’ tend to prevent business-owners from ‘getting ahead’. In this environment curfews, strikes and blockades (*bandhs*) also frequently occur as forms of public protest. Transportation of supplies is stopped during these times. “Businesses are lost when these go on for 2 to 3 months”, said Akum. While these circumstances affect everybody in the district, Zemes are very vulnerable due to their poverty and marginalisation.

One of my regular research participants, a young man who I will not name here, indicated the ongoing threat to villagers due to conflicts between different Naga armed factions. Here he is referring, as an example, to the most powerful faction in the Northeast, NSCN-IM (National Socialist Council of Nagalim, Isak-Muivah) mostly led by Tangkhul Nagas, and NSCN-K (then Khaplang, now Kitovi) originally formed by Konyak Nagas.

Nagas have a lot of problems because of K and I-M. For example, if the boys of Laisong were to mostly join K, then I-M will not be happy with Laisong. I-M will treat Laisong badly. Then the men will have to try and negotiate the problem. This is only an example, not the actual situation in Laisong.

Militants of these factions also expect villagers to hide them as they travel on foot, endangering the lives of families who are caught concealing them, and to provide them with accommodation and meals. I have been present when these uniformed men arrive unannounced in remote villages, bring their weapons into the kitchen of someone’s household and sit and wait for food to be prepared. Often they cannot even converse with their hosts due to the mutual unintelligibility of their languages. Villagers are powerless to protest at this drain of their resources as these factions expect them to be grateful for their protection and fighting for their autonomy. Indeed, some people may be happy with this arrangement (and some insurgent leaders may pay villagers, but only at their discretion), but on the whole, these sorts of events underscore the vulnerability of Zemes to being forced to acquiesce to the power of others.

Furthermore, the accounts of conflicts involving Zeme men in these militant groups usually revolved around them being killed for ‘disloyalty’ or some other misdemeanour, or of negotiating for the protection of the life of a particular Zeme man being pursued by one or other faction. It was

not clear whether those who generally meted out punishment were themselves Zeme or from one of the other Naga tribes. Only the name of the militant group, with laws of their own, was discussed. Without denying that Zeme men may perpetrate brutal aggression (as historical depictions and their recent retaliation against Dimasa violence bear out) in these accounts they seemed to appear primarily as victims rather than as powerful ‘warriors’.

The ‘Disturbed Area’ designation was lifted in North Cachar Hills in January 2003. I was told by a local man, “The ceasefire brought a lot of peace between the Government of India and all extremist groups”. This held true for at least my second stint of fieldwork in 2004 when people were generally free to move about largely unhindered and unharassed by the Indian military. Still, the armed forces were always alert for insurgents and people remained wary. Civilians continue to be affected by the presence of the Indian Army. In mid 2012 Adeule’s husband was badly beaten and imprisoned in Haflong for several months by security forces in a case of mistaken identity. He is apparently lucky to be alive. Other tribal men in similar situations in N.C. Hills have not been so lucky. The use of violence, or the threat of violence, remains normalised in the Zeme region.

These accounts and observations depict men far removed from the *matateuchibe* ‘expert’ Zeme warrior of Adeule’s story of head-taking from Chapter Five. Within the context of guerrilla warfare nowadays a man may be able to demonstrate his masculine prowess in combat with weaponry equal to his opponent’s. The average Zeme villager, on the other hand, is usually outnumbered and out-armed in situations of conflict. The *hangseuki* is no longer the centre of military operations. Militant groups gather in ‘headquarters’ away from villages. They fight battles to defend other villages, even villages belonging to other tribes. Dislocation from a man’s own community means villagers may not have any knowledge of a fighter’s exploits and be largely irrelevant to them. Women often do not derive any direct benefit. These conditions tend to result in highlighting inequalities of Zeme ‘manpower’ rather the ‘glory’ so many claim to seek, according to both customary and contemporary narratives.

By emphasising the disempowering nature of many military encounters for Zemes I do not mean to deny their agency. Zeme men organise counter-attacks where feasible, even though conditions of feasibility may be generally diminishing. They have also organised alliances with other non-Dimasa indigenous peoples in North Cachar Hills to resist Dimasa domination (such as the armed Hills Tiger Force) to push for the bifurcation of the district as I wrote in Chapter Three. Furthermore, Zeme men once again took up roles and arms as protectors in the 2009 conflict with the Dimasas. However, even then it was reported that (Indian government) security personnel were absent allegedly due to elections in the region, and that the Zeme men guarding their villages “voiced deep

worry due to inadequate weapons with only muzzle-loading arms and some shotguns to defend themselves” (*Naga Realm*, April 20, 2009). The conditions of Zeme inequality mean that there are now few resources⁴⁹ available to them to successfully engage in combat and to succeed in the achievement of this masculine ideal.

Marginalisation and masculinities

This chapter has shown that Zeme men’s engagement with aspects of ‘modernity’ such as the discourse of backwardness, and economic, religious and educational reforms have led to changes in capacities (and willingness) to demonstrate ‘caring’ ideals inherent in earlier forms of youthful and senior hegemonic masculinities. Men were to provide for the community as a whole, performing duties befitting labour of the ‘outside domain’ while women were expected to take care of the ‘inside domain’ of family subsistence needs. Senior men took care of the jural-political and administrative needs of the village, controlled and protected resources that included women and children, trained and disciplined younger men and children, and of course, ensured the relative egalitarianism of the agrarian economy. Junior able-bodied men were involved in the physical protection of the village, while householders, or *hangtingme*, worked in the fields with their wives, doing heavy labour of cutting trees and clearing the jhum, house-building, digging graves, *et cetera*. They also performed ‘fathering’ duties interacting with small children as well as training juniors in martial and other arts. Their responsibilities were numerous but fell short of labour within their home.

Photograph 20 Weaving baskets, men’s work: Hangrum

⁴⁹ My understanding is that the powerful Naga militant group NSCN-IM (that many if not most Zemes are aligned with) was not able to fight with the Zemes against Dimasa militant groups because it would compromise important negotiations with ‘the Centre’ (leaders of the Government of India) in Delhi.

I have described some of the ways socio-political and economic marginalisation have underpinned the loss of a relatively level field of opportunities for men to prove their worth to their community. The conditions of militarisation in the region have highlighted the loss of social and material resources that were the foundation of Zeme men's abilities to 'provide what the people need'. Zeme men have created new masculinities in their engagement with modernity. Women have expressed that they find these forms of masculinity unsatisfactory, saying many men are no longer 'fit to be a man'. In the next chapter I discuss some of women's views on gender relations, as well as their engagements in their own projects of modernities.

Chapter Nine

Contesting Gender Boundaries

The previous chapter explored some of the ways Zeme men have engaged with the global cultural and politico-economic processes we might call ‘modernity’. I suggested these have contributed towards the marginalisation of Zemes, and have produced new forms of inequalities amongst Zeme men, and between Zeme men and others in the region. They have also created changes in relations between men and women and I discuss some of these in this chapter. Diminishing access to material and social resources has undermined the ability of men to ‘provide what the people need’. Caring for the community as a whole by obtaining, controlling, protecting, and equitably distributing resources, continues to be viewed as ‘men’s labour’, or *mpeume-ta*, by women, and expected by them. However, according to women, changes in masculinities are increasingly sidelining the customary ‘caring’ component of manliness demonstrated through reciprocal labour exchange (described in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven) inciting women to accuse their husbands of no longer being ‘fit to be a man’.

In this chapter I focus more closely on the interplay of the Zeme gender dichotomy of labour and some of the processes of modernity already described in order to better understand the reasons women accuse men of not fulfilling their duties. Building on the insight of the last chapter that agricultural and other forms of ‘traditional’ labour are becoming devalued through processes of modernity, I argue that *jhuming* and customary men’s work is now viewed as ‘feminine’. As such men are increasingly leaving such labour to women. Despite the many constraints the customary gender division of labour imposes on women, it also offered them benefits of protection and security as I explained in earlier chapters. The next section explores women’s interests in reproducing the traditional gender dichotomy, as it continues to provide opportunities for women to meet feminine ideals. It is also a domain in which women may enjoy (or at least expect) relative authority, not only vis-à-vis their husbands, but also over daughters-in-law and younger female kin. Younger women, however, are beginning to contest the boundaries of gendered domains. Other, usually older women (though not necessarily), view this as improper behaviour and insist on compliance to the ‘way of the forefathers’. My illustration below of women’s criticisms of others bucking ‘tradition’ through an interview dialogue also shows something of emerging new forms of inequalities between women.

The next section investigates some of the ways that processes of modernity have devalued women’s domestic labour. The loss of authority of the gerontocracy has meant that they are less able to discipline husbands, leaving women more vulnerable to the exploitation of their labour. With the

demise of the agrarian economy, and senior men's practices associated with it, a wife loses her former leverage over her husband to withdraw her labour if he did not please her through 'caring' reciprocal duties. The category of 'wife' is thus devalued. Furthermore, women themselves are beginning to reassess their traditional duties in the light of discourses and practices of modernity. Consequently, many young women no longer wish to perform 'backward' agricultural labour, and aspire to pursue education and livelihoods beyond the confines of domesticity. In addition, assiduous performance of their duties may no longer lead to the enjoyment of privileges in old age that the traditional female hierarchy promised.

The emergence of new religions has altered women's views of themselves, and therefore of gender relations. Christianity is an important factor in women seeking to produce 'modern' identities. Heraka women, despite their culturally conservative focus, also engage in modernity and narratives of progress, buoyed by the teachings of their female leader, Gaidinliu. They see themselves as responsible for the 'improvement' of their community, whereas this concern would normally fall into the domain of men.

Traditional practices that underscored the control of elders over women are on the wane as described in Chapter Eight. While the practice of bridewealth once illustrated the value of a woman to her family (and not just in terms of goods as explained in Chapter Six, but also in affection) the decline in the view of women as 'exchangeable goods' has encouraged parents to send their daughters to school. Women regard literacy as the way to equality with men and to parity with other peoples of the region. However, as women begin to exceed men's level of education, some men feel threatened by their success in what is viewed as a traditionally masculine domain.

Men are explicit in expressing their fear of domination by wives, or potential wives. To be viewed as subservient to a wife is to transgress gender expectations and be emasculated. Men utilise and reinforce customary gender boundaries to exclude and constrain women. As women resist men's constraints novel forms of control have emerged. I illustrate men's increasing sense of insecurity vis-a-vis their wives and their place in the world by showing how they assert a form of 'masculine power' through a new pattern of public alcohol consumption outside of socially sanctioned times and spaces.

Women protest these configurations of masculinity as we have seen. In the next section I suggest, that in the absence of more powerful means of dissent, that women make sure men know that it is women who are increasingly 'providing what the people need', once explicitly the domain of men. Mostly women are forced to provide out of necessity; however, another intention is to shame men into changing their behaviour. I describe how women are increasingly taking control over children

and their education, which was once an avenue of prestige for men as we saw in Chapter Seven. Women also express their dissatisfaction by criticising men who claim customary rights to leisure and other privileges that ‘warriors’ are entitled to, when, in fact, in the militarised environment men are no longer effective at protecting Zeme territory. Furthermore, women increasingly position themselves as upholders of tradition by utilising the ‘masculine’ broader discourses of ‘identity’ and cultural survival thereby propelling themselves into the public domain. Women make use of moral leverage when they decry the loss of men’s *heleuraube* and thus elevate themselves as the proper bearers and practitioners of it. These are some of the ways they seek to claim equality with men.

The rupturing changes of modernity are causing both crises and opportunities in gender relations, as well as in efforts to establish relations of equality with others.

Modernity and the Zeme gender dichotomy

Zeme engagements with rapid socio-cultural change have meant that customary dichotomous understandings of gender have altered, but in ways that are far from even or homogeneous. Nevertheless, contemporary Zeme gender relations cannot be disentangled from the context of historical gender relations. Rates of change and continuities are varied; however, virtually all my conversations with Zemes about the present gender division of labour greatly drew on the dichotomies of female: private/narrow/inside/encompassed/light, and male: public/broad/outside/encompassing/heavy, that were prevalent during the colonial era, and that I described in Chapter Four and were shown in the practices described in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. The ethnographic chapters also depicted the kinds of rewards and responsibilities men and women expect to achieve and fulfil. This dichotomy of ‘public’ and ‘private’ gendered domains continues to shape Zeme masculine and feminine ideals of personhood and activities.

Photograph 21 Adeule weaving, Laisong

Chapter Eight gave some insight into the processes of modernity and how these are reproduced, often in novel ways (as ‘modernities’), by Zemes themselves. Understanding the interplay of modernity with the traditional Zeme gender dichotomy of labour is crucial to shedding light on women’s perspectives of men not fulfilling their responsibilities. The assumptions of modernity create ‘tradition’ as the antithesis of the ‘modern’. The modern/traditional dichotomy has been inscribed on categories (such as ethnic identities) that were formed as part of the imperial project of imposing modern order on the perceived chaos of ‘the native’. Furthermore, “the very development interventions that are critical to implementing the modernist project have been crucial to sustaining and intensifying these oppositions” (Hodgson 1999: 144) as I indicated in Chapter Eight. Hodgson (2001: 9) explains that the discourse of modernity not only presumes and promotes such binaries as traditional/modern, nature/culture, domestic/public, past/future, but also genders them, “usually rendering the first, devalued term, female and the second, privileged term, male”. These processes have had profound consequences for the customary Zeme gender division of labour.

The feminisation of agriculture and ‘traditional’ forms of labour

The denigration of ‘traditional’ Zeme forms of labour and other prevalent practices and objects are crucial to understanding the increasing gender disparity about which Zeme women complain. The discourse of backwardness and the visibility of unattainable commodities tend to make people think that their way of life is inferior. The discourse of modernity/backwardness lowers the status of *jhuming* and village domestic production, while employment in the money economy, and items produced extra-locally that are only available through it, are more highly valued (at least discursively).

Women’s subordination relative to men in Zeme customary gender configurations means that it is viewed (at least by men) as more appropriate for women to undertake the lower status, ‘backward’ labour of traditional domestic production which increasingly includes labour of the ‘old’ agrarian economy such as *jhuming*. Men, perceived as ‘naturally’ suited to labour in the ‘outside’ domain, and as customarily entitled to ornaments of prestige, ought to align themselves with practices and symbols of the modern economy. There is also less incentive for men to participate fully in the *jhum* and other forms of traditional masculine domestic production (such as weaving baskets) when the rewards for doing so are belittled in comparison with those of more ‘modern’ forms of labour. Thus performing the ‘heavy’ work of cutting the *jhum*, for example, may have less pay-off in terms of sense of masculine identity.

As Tamara Jacka points out (1997: 102) it is not the actual tasks that are considered ‘domestic’ (or ‘public’) that are important but the assumptions and local evaluations of them. The higher status of non-agricultural work (and the simultaneous lower status of agricultural work) means that *jhuming* labour is increasingly left to women to undertake (see also Jacka 1997 for similar, but far from identical, examples from China). *Jhuming* is now increasingly defined as women’s ‘inside’ work, while men’s ‘outside’ work sidelines agriculture. I must re-emphasise that the Victorian gender dichotomy and other binaries that underpinned the colonial project of modernity (as well as contemporary Hindu Indian gender dichotomies) are different from the Zeme constructions in ways that I hope I have shown in earlier chapters. However, in some similar ways, the devaluing of agriculture discursively, and the increasing material poverty resulting from decreased returns from the land, mean that agricultural labour, once reasonably equitably shared, is now becoming feminised for Zemes. Similarly, ‘masculine’ work that does not bring financial rewards or bolster a sense of ‘modern’ identity, such as house-building and repairs, may also be subject to neglect due to the loss of their cultural and economic value.

That agriculture is increasingly feminised in Naga societies is numerically borne out. In 1997 the *Statistical Handbook of Nagaland* showed that the region had 192,623 female cultivators as compared to 178,974 male cultivators (in Khala 2000: 75). Sema Naga researcher Khatoli Khala states that in Nagaland, between 1981 and 1991 more than 4 per cent of cultivators lost their land and joined the ranks of the unemployed or ‘non workers’. However, she gives no explanation for this phenomenon. Nevertheless, she explains that a decrease in the percentage of cultivators affects women more than men, and has led to “impoverishment, inequality and hardship” (Khala 2000: 75). It is clear that, in the Zeme case, women are forced to take up extra *jhuming* and other forms of domestic and ‘traditional’ labour that men are now abnegating in order to support their families.

The discourses and practices of modernity have underpinned these changes that have led to the ‘problem of husbands’ that Zeme women lament. Women experience themselves as victims of men’s lack of ‘care’ in reciprocating women’s labour. However, wittingly or not, many women play an important part in reproducing the customary gender dichotomy. I show below some of the rewards it continues (however decreasingly) to bring for women.

Women’s interests in reproducing the customary gender dichotomy

The traditional Zeme gender dichotomy has, of course, imposed many constraints on women, as I have shown, and about which women are increasingly giving voice. I have also described some of

its benefits for women. However, unlike men, who we have seen must compete with other less marginalised peoples, and find it increasingly difficult to find employment and meet new ideals of success in ‘men’s’ ‘outside’ domain, and to receive the entitlements they expect, women almost uniformly succeed in achieving their society’s feminine ideals through labour within the narrow confines of their domestic domain.

Opportunities to achieve feminine ideals

The other side of the constraint of the continuing ‘traditional’ gender dichotomy on women is that the domestic domain also provides the opportunity for women to demonstrate their feminine prowess and achieve their society’s ideals of womanhood. The nature of women’s domestic work has changed very little over time. Certainly the availability of ready-made clothes relieves women from the time-consuming tasks of spinning cotton and weaving to make everyday clothing (though they still do so for ceremonial and formal attire and especially for their wedding ‘glory box’, as well as sometimes to sell in the market). Numerous metal and plastic utensils also make life easier as they do not have to be replaced as often as bamboo or cane ones. Yet, for the vast majority of Zeme women who live in rural villages without electricity, their household labour of fetching water and fuel, threshing and pounding rice, and producing and preparing other foodstuffs, animal husbandry, tending to small children and cleaning are largely unchanged from the colonial past.

On the other hand, the agricultural labour which they undertake from early morning until evening is more difficult than ever due to the less productive land and other conditions I have already described, as well as having to perform ‘men’s work’. Input in terms of time and energy into agriculture (which also includes men’s input) now often yields little return. Even though men produce food crops as well, it is women who are responsible for getting it onto plates and feeding the family.

While all this labour is, by women’s accounts, exhausting, repetitive and burdensome (though many women also say they enjoy working in the *jhum* very much, except in the wet season), these ‘women’s tasks’, or *mpuime -ta*, give meaning to their lives in terms of providing for their families. Their work does not cease (except briefly during festival times or other religious occasions) and wives do not experience underemployment within the domestic sphere. Importantly here, women’s reputation and a degree of social standing are cultivated and elevated by their adeptness at this labour, especially amongst other women. Demonstrating the capacity for hard work and success in carrying out *mpuime- ta* is a core component of Zeme femininity, as I outlined in Chapter Four. There remains, for women, plenty of scope for them to fulfil feminine ideals and societal notions of ‘success’ within the ‘inside domain’. As Michelle Rosaldo wrote over 30 years ago, “[A]t the same

time that women often happily and successfully pursue their ends... it seems to me quite clear that women's goals themselves are shaped by social systems which deny them ready access to the social privilege, authority, and esteem enjoyed by the majority of men (1980: 395). According to customary gender constructions, Zeme women continue to find plenty of scope to prove themselves 'fit to be a woman'.

Zeme women's domain of power

Serving men food, preparing a husband's clothing and bedding, and waiting on him in many other ways is considered, ideally, proper and admirable feminine conduct, rather than demeaning work. I must confess my surprise at Zeme women's (and many men's) enthusiasm and cheerfulness in taking up and performing many forms of labour. While part of their willingness no doubt stems from concern to be seen as *heleurau*, I was forced to question my own cultural evaluations of activities I had regarded as only dull slog. By serving a husband, parents-in-law or guests in the homestead a wife cultivates virtue and demonstrates a kind of power which men are expected to respect. Of course, many women are now lamenting the lack of respect that husbands are showing them, as I have described. However, the following comments by Mr Ijirangbe Zeme indicate an idealised husband/ wife interaction within the woman's domestic domain in which women are viewed as holding a position of relative authority, even though the husband is acknowledged as the head of the family.

A wife will spell out what is good for the family, and men will listen. A man will hardly do anything in the family without the consent of his wife. For example, I keep pigs and fowl. But if I want to get the meat, I can do it by myself, but men don't practice this. First we must ask the wife, "Can I have chicken tonight?" Wife will say, "Yes, you can take this or that one." When the food is ready the husband will ask, "Can we have food now?" She gives consent. If a husband wants a drink, he knows it's there. But he'll not touch that pot. He'll ask his wife. Wife will say, "Yes, it's ready." We men don't touch it ourselves. Another example, if I need my shawl for a festival I'll say to my wife, "Is it not the day I should wear my shawl?" And wife will understand and say, "Yes, I'll bring it". Men ask very nicely.

The way Mr I. Zeme speaks here about the husband/ wife relationship indicates his belief that women are privileged to serve men and that, within the household, a husband hands over power to the wife. No doubt he was being careful in speaking about Zeme gender arrangements to me as an outsider and a woman, and who was jotting down his every word. Nevertheless, these idealisations continue to shape women and men's expectations of each other, even if these expectations do not always materialise. Such idealisations have contributed to the disappointment of so many wives about the lack of respect they are receiving, as noted in Chapter Four, as well as to men's sense of entitlement to be served by women. Yet it is women who are often most vocal in their insistence

that their daughters and other female kin meet these ‘traditional’ ideals by confining themselves within the domestic domain.

Contesting the boundaries of gendered domains

I have already explained that the money economy is viewed as ‘encompassing’ and incorporated in the ‘outside’ domain; and employment in it is therefore considered properly the domain of men, even though, in reality, both men and women participate in it, as I shall discuss further shortly. Because the household, or domestic economy, is understood as part of the ‘narrow’, ‘inside’ or ‘private’ domain of women they are often discouraged from seeking employment, studies or other activities beyond the household because these are regarded as masculine.

The following interview dialogue shows something of the constraints on women due to the Zeme gender dichotomy that is invoked, not only by men but by women themselves, when particular women attempt to buck ‘traditional’ gender roles. In this situation Ilungluyile, a wife and mother in her thirties, and with a post-graduate degree in Theology, succeeded in leaving her village to gain an education and employment. However, I heard many more similar stories from women who were forced to put aside their hopes and ambitions to live beyond the confines of domesticity once married.

Ilungluyile: An inferiority complex... that is the main problem our women in general are facing. Now, we never want to come out. If I do something different... rather, forget about men, *women* will criticise me. You know, I’m the first woman from our village to go to a city to study there. You know, *how* our people commented on me. “She is a girl, she is going that far!” In our language we say, “Her intestine is *too big*”, that is the comment they make.

Amanda: Her what is too big?

I: Her intestine is too big. That means she has *very big heart*, something like that.

A: What do you mean by ‘big heart’?

I: Big heart means she don’t care about anything. Very, [she asks Adeule for help to explain] broad mind... like a man.

A: Is it a compliment or a criticism?

I: Criticism. As if I am denying my womanhood and doing something extra that women should not do. It is like that. So, if I do something new, they will criticise me. Now I’m married, I go home to my parents’ home to visit them, since I’m from a different place, and a lot of people criticise me now, since I’m doing something new. Our women folks, that’s why we don’t want to do something new, we don’t want to come out of our cocoon, from our own shield ; we want to follow the traditional way of living that our forefathers already showed to us.

A: Because you will get disrespect and criticism if you stray from that path?

I: That’s true. To do something new means there is always criticism. Instead of encouraging things, instead of praising, we get more criticism ... we don’t want to come out and do extraordinary things that women

never does before. It is like that. We don't want to come out. And that is one thing about our women... Men, they are very carefree people. They don't criticise each other very much. Women criticise our own women more. If a man criticises, they think, "Oh, he's like a woman". We women torture ourselves. Even if men don't say anything, the tradition is instilled in us.

Here Ilungluyile shows how the attributes and inclinations that are considered 'natural' to women are appealed to as reasons for women's unsuitability for venturing beyond the private, family sphere. Women are understood as 'chicken-hearted' (cowardly or fearful) despite abundant evidence of what seems, to an outsider at least, to be regular demonstrations of their forbearance and stoicism. They are seen, and see themselves, as appropriately 'selfish' meaning they should be concerned with the narrow concerns of provisioning the family, while men are 'broadminded' and 'unselfish' meaning they should rightly concern themselves with wider socio-political and economic issues and the well-being of people beyond (but including) the family. As Ilungluyile suggested, it is viewed as unwomanly for women to contribute or seek fulfilment beyond the household (and here she would include the *jhum* as part of the household). Most Zeme women do not wish to receive criticism for seeming improper or masculine. They usually view themselves as unsuitable or unable to function in the outside or public domain. They want their daughters to be considered 'good', reputable and hardworking by making themselves 'perfect' women through domestic labour, as some of my research participants explained in earlier chapters. They criticise and scold daughters and daughters-in-law, peers, granddaughters and other relatives when they don't succeed at their tasks (as we saw with the young Ijeile in Chapter Six) or if they possess a defiant or 'lazy' attitude, and reward them when their work is completed to satisfaction. In this way, through labour and manifestations of 'emphasised femininity' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005: 848), women actively maintain the gender dichotomy and the patriarchal conditions that restrict women to gruelling domestic and agricultural labour.

Inequalities among women

The above dialogue also illustrates something of emerging tensions between younger and older Zeme women, as well as others such as between educated/urban and uneducated/rural (though these categories are usually far more complex). Inequalities between women have certainly increased as disparities of wealth and opportunities have grown within the Zeme community as described in Chapter Eight. It is difficult to compare the life of the educated, multilingual Ilungluyile whose husband supports her travelling from village to village (chaperoned by an older male relative) to perform the 'social work' of encouraging and educating women according to her Christian faith and her employment with IFAD, with the life of the young widow, Paujelungle, whom we met in Chapter Six. Like Ilungluyile, the very few Zeme women who are employed outside the home, or whose husbands earn enough money, may appoint an unmarried young woman to help with

domestic chores if there is no daughter or daughter-in-law available. Paujelungle did not have the opportunity for education, and must undertake strenuous labour to support her parents-in-law and son. She is very much confined to a life of domesticity and hard manual work. Nevertheless, after marriage, the majority of Zeme village women generally perform the same sorts of tasks and have a similar life trajectory as their wealthier or poorer neighbours. The experience of inequality among wives, at present, tends not to be as stark as it is among men, indicated in Chapter Eight.

Processes of ‘modernity’ and the devaluing of women’s domestic labour

Earlier I explained that discourses of backwardness, as well as dwindling returns from the land and the higher valuing of cash over paddy and other domestically produced goods have resulted in the devaluing of agricultural labour. *Jhuming* is increasingly viewed as properly falling within women’s ‘inside’ domain of labour, rather than as a shared domain. Women’s inferior status also means that men consider such lower-grade work should be performed by women. Furthermore, as Zeme society is increasingly integrated into India’s economy a wife’s domestic labour is becoming less relevant to her husband’s status which is progressively defined through labour in, and symbols of, the money economy. In Chapter Five I explained that one of the major customary avenues for the achievement of masculine status was the Feast of Merit. A husband was entirely dependent on his wife and other female kin to produce the necessary surpluses and goods. However, as cash and commodities become more important as the basis of the hospitality and social status, described in Chapter Eight, so the labour of women declines in its importance to male prestige (see also Knauft 1997: 244). While the products of a woman’s domestic labour may sustain the family, household labour is deemed less valuable because, as in some Western countries (see Walby 1990), it does not generate much of an income (in terms of currency) and it no longer elevates her husband’s position. With the demise of the traditional agrarian economy a wife loses the former leverage she utilised over her husband of withdrawing her labour and the category ‘wife’ becomes devalued. Wives, such as those I interviewed in the Women’s Societies, felt they were receiving less respect from husbands than they felt entitled to. Knauft (1997: 241) found similar occurrences in Melanesia and Amazonia:

...the cultural value afforded women as producers of food, pigs or valuables for gift-exchange can be undercut by the increasing role of male-controlled cash and manufactured goods in ceremonial and life-cycle transactions. The productive and reproductive capacities of women – important in many indigenous cosmologies – can decline in symbolic value even as the life of communities becomes increasingly dependent upon women’s labour.

Although they may have much affection for them, and are dependent on them for their survival, husbands no longer need to ‘care’ about their wives and to please them with reciprocal acts of

labour. This is one of the ways gender inequality is sharpened. Furthermore, the demise of the gerontocracy, described in Chapter Eight, means that the elders (*katsingme*) are losing their authority to protect wives from exploitive husbands.

Changing relations of care

I showed in Chapters Five and Six that senior men need to ‘care’ for and look after wives and junior adult female kin (including affinal kin) in order to harness their loyalty and labour so that they may procure resources to distribute and ascend in rank. In the past, compared with seniors, junior men had little authority. Young men were totally dependent on *katsingme* to provide the goods needed in exchange for a wife, as well as for other forms of status elevation. In equal bridewealth societies, younger men were given wives by elders (Collier 1988: 78). A senior could refuse to supply the young man with the required valuables if his behaviour was disapproved of. Furthermore, once married, his conduct as a husband was held accountable by the *katsingme*. The condition in Zeme society of women ‘belonging’ to men through exchange of goods between her senior natal and affinal kin means that there is a duty of care towards her, as mentioned earlier (see also Newmai 1998: 43-44). Adeule’s father explained, “Men are the owners of families, and women come from others. So men have to look after them”. As I showed in Chapter Six, a woman may have returned to her father and mother if there was a serious conflict with her husband and he was not fulfilling the expectations of duty. This was considered a profound blow to him and meant intervention was needed. Her parents and his parents traditionally had the power to discipline the husband, if necessary.

Women linked the increase in gender inequality with the growing ‘disrespect’ for elders. One of the main factors in the erosion of the authority of the *katsingme* is changes in the laws of their culture and religion (*hingde*) as I explained in Chapter Eight. Adeule observed:

Men respected women more a long time ago. Nowadays they disrespect their elders. Disrespecting elders has a bad effect on women. Men spend women’s earnings because they don’t respect the law of their own culture; then they disrespect women as well. They disrespect the elders and everything goes wrong.

The loss of authority and wealth of *katsingme* has meant changes to bride-wealth practices. Bride-wealth negotiations gave elders authority over younger men, as well as over women, as described in Chapter Six. However, it is common now for younger men to be wealthier than *katsingme* due to education, employment and other processes of modernity described in Chapter Eight. They tend to be far less dependent on elders for goods, approval and status elevation. In fact, elders are becoming increasingly dependent on the earnings of junior male kin. Elders, derided as uneducated and ignorant of ‘modern’ ways, lose the confidence and clout to discipline sons, grandsons and sons-in-

laws. The relative increase in the power of husbands, in an already patriarchal society where the wife is considered to ‘belong’ to, and ought to be obedient to, the husband, leaves women more vulnerable to exploitation by their spouses⁵⁰.

Even though Zemes of all religions are generally very much concerned with caring for elders and doing other ‘good works’ for vulnerable members of society in general, the positioning of *katsingme* as ‘backward’ in terms of customs, religious acuity, wealth and education weakens their power over the younger and literate. Mrs Pedeichungle of Laisong said, “The old men and women accept that the young people are able to read and write and learn new things. So we don’t really try to teach them much or tell them how to behave properly any more.” Mrs Iheule, also a Baptist, said, “Now our husbands only exist to make laws for their wives and command them to do everything. He is like a judge”. The notion of women as ‘exchangeable goods’ seems to have lost its meaning as entailing a duty of care, and, instead, as so many women declared, underpinned their feeling of being treated as mere servants by their more controlling husbands. In this way, men’s ‘modern’ practices are seen to be ‘disrespecting the law of their own culture’ as Adeule said, and contributing to women’s sense of increasing domination.

Women’s reassessment of mpuime-ta

Engagement with modernity, of course, also changes the ways women think about their own lives and labour. Wives do not question their significance as providers to the family and their crucial contribution to the subsistence of their society’s members. Early in my fieldwork I naively asked the members of a Heraka Women’s Society, and a Christian one, what they thought would be the effect of women banding together to stage a strike, boycott or *bandh* in protest against the men not fulfilling their duties, leaving the men to perform the work instead. The women hooted with laughter and said, “We’d all die of starvation!” However, many women themselves are also reassessing the status of *mpuime-ta* or ‘women’s work’. There are several interrelated aspects to this occurrence. Women, particularly younger women, of course also reproduce the same discourses of modernity and backwardness that position customary forms of domestic production (for example, making rice beer and wine), and particularly *jhuming*, as inferior and backward. It is common for parents and grandparents to lament that once their sons and daughters go to school (and especially if they do well in their studies), once they learn about alternative livelihoods, and witness life in

⁵⁰ I am referring here to the exploitation of a woman’s labour; however, it may be possible that due to the decline in protective mechanisms such as the former gerontocracy provided that violence against women within the home may be on the rise. Zeme women do accept that their husband has the right to beat them within strictly defined parameters (such as a slap on the thigh, or pulling the hair) if they have committed what is considered a serious wrongdoing. This topic was only infrequently mentioned and is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss fully.

places like Haflong, they do not wish to perform the arduous and often monotonous labour in the fields. Ilungluyile said:

Once children are educated... once they go to school, they don't want to go back to the fields. Many of us experienced that one. Even if they cannot study properly, to do some kinds of jobs and all... though they are not well-educated, they don't want to go back and work in the field, that is for sure.

Jhuming is associated with lack of education which is regarded as sustaining backwardness. Adeule said, "Many girls feel ashamed to carry lots of vegetables to sell. They look down on those who sell vegetables. They don't understand its importance. When girls are uneducated they have to work hard, physically, in the *jhum*." Of course, as mentioned earlier, many Zeme women say they enjoy working in the *jhum* beyond mere acceptance of their lot, except for having to do heavy 'men's work' of clearing, carrying especially heavy loads, *et cetera*. Pauramhuile, of New Kubing village whom we met in Chapter Six said, "I love working in the *jhum*. Nature makes us happy". Indeed, *jhuming* seemed to be a mostly cheerful and social affair (for men as well), despite the demands of the work. Women also said they made *jhums* extensions of their homes by planting bright flowers "for decoration and enjoyment". They thought their *jhums* were beautiful and pleasant places to be (in dry weather), as did I. Women such as Pauramhuile received only primary school education and her options were no doubt few. However, even though she may not have cared, she, as the vast majority of other Zeme women I interviewed, was very aware that *jhuming* is viewed with disdain according to the values of the dominant discourse.

Women's participation in processes of modernity means that an increasing number of young Zeme women cultivate a 'modern' identity involving the rejection of Zeme traditional practices. In this way they challenge customary gender divisions of labour. The contemporary discourse of modernity espouses equality of the genders, and accordingly, most girls are now receiving schooling that was formerly preferred almost exclusively for boys. As Obadina (2008) observes, the values and social customs that largely developed in the 'West', such as women's rights, monogamy and individual freedom are "the accepted standard" in most societies that embrace modernity (at least in principle). It is widely known that the Indian State supports a bill to reserve 33% of seats for women in national parliament and state legislatures, for example⁵¹. Also, most development projects in North Cachar Hills are now concerned with training agencies in 'gender sensitisation' and to support women's participation and 'empowerment' (for example, North Eastern Council 2009). Women even in remote areas may be compelled to question the Zeme gender order, and the status of their labour, by such 'interventions'.

⁵¹ However, the extension of this to the Northeast states has been firmly resisted on the ground that it is against 'tradition' (McDuie-Ra 2012 {VAW}:334).

The changes in Zeme cosmology I outlined in Chapter Eight also increase women's desire to explore lives and livelihoods beyond the conventions of custom, thus devaluing women's traditional forms of labour. Some Zeme women, usually Christians whose families have converted because Christianity is regarded as the most 'advanced' and powerful religion, also aspire to employment in the IAS, or to operate a large business, or to become accomplished in some profession. 'Success' then, for some young women, as with men, entails leaving the village to learn new skills. Most wish to return to their village to be of service (for example, as a teacher or social worker) in a professional capacity. Christian girls, as well as boys, are increasingly encouraged, or at least permitted, to study Theology if their parents can afford it. Adeule's younger sister, Takkiyile, studied in Bangalore with other Zeme youths from Laisong and nearby villages. Ameile has studied nursing at the hospital in Haflong. Adeule herself has been able to set up several businesses at different times, undertake salaried work for locally-based NGOs, and run for election in the District Council.

It has been shown that capitalism may weaken patriarchal control over women and has done so for many in other parts of the world (for example, see England and Folbre 2000: 499). Combined with norms advocated through Western-based religions and education, these forms of modernity are powerful in the reshaping of women's desires and labour. The young women above, and a growing number of others, have little intention of labouring in the jhum, except, perhaps, during particularly busy times such as paddy harvest when all village members, including children, are expected to pitch in.

There are other, related reasons women may also find their domestic labour far less rewarding than in the past, even though it provides scope to meet traditional ideals. Poverty due to the depleted land, as I described in Chapters Two and Eight, means hard labour results in mere subsistence, or as "living hand-to-mouth" as it was rendered in English. Surpluses for security, for sharing in festivals and to be able to take time to rest are not materialising, despite promises of 'development'. Furthermore, daughters are often unable to help in the home as much as needed because they are in school. Even more ominously for some women, as they age, more are realising that daughters-in-law, especially better-educated ones, may not be available, due to employment elsewhere, to take over domestic duties and allow for rest and other entitlements of the elderly such as Mrs Paukuisuangle and Mrs Itingrangle (who we met in Chapter Four) expected and enjoyed⁵². Women

⁵² I must re-emphasise that the elderly are never left alone to fend for themselves. There are always kin to look after them, and sometimes it is men who cook and clean for their mothers or grandmothers. The case of centenarian Mrs Heuningrangle Nriame, mentioned in Chapter Four, whose adult grandson tended to her, and with whom she said she was very happy, is an example.

in such situations do not feel they have the moral authority and entitlements of command as they ought over daughters-in-law.

Moreover, the demise of the authority of the elders, including elderly women, means that despite thorough performance of their duties, women may not experience any guarantee that they will ascend the traditional female hierarchy which I outlined in Chapter Four. The phenomenon of 'decreasing respect for elders' is blamed. This affects men's and women's sense of future somewhat differently. Traditionally, in old age women continued to 'earn' their place in the home by performing light 'feminine' duties, but tended to be served more by the younger generations. A woman was not superseded in status or position by daughters or daughters-in-law. Elderly men, on the other hand, no longer able to perform 'heavy' duties, even though they retained their status and continued to display their ornaments, had/have their *positions* replaced within the family by sons through the patrilineal system. Sons, though not usually juniors, become the 'head' of the household. The son will become the 'father of the father' as noted from Mr Ijirangbe Zeme's comment in Chapter Four.

New religions, new women

Chapter Eight described the emergence of the Heraka and Christian religions in the Zeme region as responses to the transformations of the agrarian economy. I showed some of the ways the practice and development of these religions involved significant shifts in relations between men. They also produce powerful changes in relations between men and women. Women's engagements with these religions continue to alter their sense of themselves as Zemes, as women, and as members of their particular religion.

Christianity and women

Christianity has played an important role in producing aspirations for girls beyond labour solely in the domestic domain. While Christianity continues to reproduce patriarchal practices, and all leadership positions within Zeme churches are held by men, a few women (who may be called 'privileged', but it would be difficult to term them 'elite' due to their poverty) say they feel supported and a new sense of freedom as women because of Christianity. Again, Ilungluyile, due to her skills in English and education, was able to articulate some of the ideas underpinning some Zeme women re-assessing their feminine identities.

If Christianity did not come to Naga society then I don't know how we will be transforming... The society who has received the Gospel and the society who has not, there is a *big* difference. Women who have already received the Gospel, their life is quite

different, their understanding of who they are... is different from women who did not receive the Gospel [referring to Heraka and *Paupaise* women]. Because of Jesus I realise that I am an important person. Jesus did not want women to suffer. He showed this in his relationship with Mary Magdalene. When we realise that we are daughters of God, not merely belonging to fathers and husbands, then we see that we are players with a purpose to accomplish a very special task that men cannot do. Then we accept, "I am special, God has given me this responsibility, this thing that nobody else can do". Then we come to know how important we are. In the *whole* world if we search there is nobody like us. We are unique. Once you understand that you are important, that you are contributing something important to your society, no matter how small; once Zeme women accept themselves as important then something is already accomplished. Then only we women will come out.

While not exactly encouraging self-interested individualism, Ilungluyile's comments show how Christianity (or at least her understanding of it) legitimises work and personal fulfilment for women beyond traditional constraints of controls and limitations imposed by fathers and husbands. It is almost a plea to encourage women to honour their own sovereignty. In this way, the demise of the gerontocracy's religious authority, and the discourse of backwardness/progress, appear to have produced a sense of autonomy that women experience as positive. Furthermore, the goal of many Christians was to 'uplift' their society. While this was mostly expressed by young men, a number of young women also articulated their ambitions to help their society 'advance' and 'come up to the standard of others'. Christian parents, many of whom are actively involved in projects to achieve upliftment, are more likely (though not necessarily) to support daughters' aspirations that have not traditionally been viewed as appropriate for women.

As an example of embodying 'modernity', Christian girls (though not exclusively) express their modern identities by more often wearing 'Western' clothes such as jeans, if they or their parents can afford them, and by sporting shorter hair-cuts. I also observed a fashionably-dressed youth 'preaching tour' group from a more cosmopolitan area of Nagaland make derogatory comments about the local girls' less fashionable and cheaper clothing, evoking 'backwardness'. Heraka women are more likely to wear modernised Zeme or other tribal sarongs, and the girls often wear the Indian *shalwar kamiz* (although Christian girls wear them sometimes too as they are very comfortable and considered fashionable as well). However, in church or the *kelumki* all women wear the modified traditional Zeme sarong or *mini* as these are considered formal and respectable attire. Adeule said, "What we wear is an expression of our minds". Zeme young women's attire may well illustrate the facility with which they move between positively valuing 'tradition' in certain contexts (e.g., in places of worship) and projecting themselves as 'modern' in their performance of non-traditional activities. Men, on the other hand, generally wear 'Western' clothes, even in Church and the *kelumki*, emphasising that 'modern' identity is more properly regarded as masculine.

Heraka women moving society ahead

Heraka women also engage with, and reproduce in specifically (and often novel) Zeme ways, the ubiquitous discourses of backwardness and modernity. The Heraka movement has been a resounding success in adapting to the changing world and in modernising their society, although Herakas are more concerned with maintaining certain aspects of Zeme 'identity' than Christians. Mrs Wangsamneule of the Laisong Heraka Women's Society said:

If Gaidinliu didn't advise us then we would continue to suffer as Zemes but now we follow the religion and are becoming better. Gaidinliu visited Laisong seven times and she told the women to organise a Society because it would be better for Zeme society. It is not our culture to organise a Society but there's not any wrong in doing so. So we organised our Women's Society, for the good progress of Zeme society. Gaidinliu said if we follow the Heraka religion and worship one God then one day Zeme people will become great.

Heraka women, it seems, find support and endorsement from the main proponent of their religion, Gaidinliu. Many women had met her, and several I interviewed had served in her retinue. Most ascribed to her magical powers and endowed her with greatness. While all the important positions of the religion are held by men, women draw strength, some motivation to contest men's behaviour as a result of Gaidinliu's leadership and womanhood, and a sense of modern subjectivity from the practice of the religion. Although the Heraka religion has been known amongst Zemes to impede education in the past, the members of the Laisong Heraka Women's Society were highly concerned to attain higher levels of literacy and help their children attend school. They are advocates of the project of modernity's 'will to improve' (see Li 2007) but in many ways that are different from the Christians' project. Heraka women, at least the individuals involved in the Women's Society in Laisong, feel that they are integral to their society's success and future social standing. I will say more about this later.

Shifting gender hierarchies

I have already described some of the ways in which the decline in the patriarchal authority of the *katsingme* has increased the vulnerability of wives to the exploitation of their labour by husbands. However, it has also produced new opportunities for literacy and education for girls.

Modernity and women as exchangeable goods

Bridewealth practices are dwindling, especially amongst Christians who view the tradition as outmoded. *Paupaise* continue the practice but it is not clear to what extent it demonstrates the power of the elders. Herakas also continue bridewealth payments but now limit the amount asked for by the young woman's family and have made other substantial changes. The disapproval and

partial abolition of bridewealth payments as a ‘backward’ or ‘primitive’ custom (Kuame 2005: 51) has resulted in the education and literacy of many more girls in recent times. It is considered a ‘modern’ improvement towards the equality of women to cease regarding wives as ‘exchangeable’ for goods. Mr Ijirangbe Zeme’s comments illustrate this:

Earlier, daughters were taken to be exchangeable property because on her marriage, in exchange for her, property was acquired from the boy’s side – brideprice. But now this generation has completely changed all this. Daughters are no longer considered to be exchangeable goods. Nowadays, boys and girls are regarded as on equal footing – no difference. But in remote villages, still the girls are considered as in the past. That’s why women’s literacy is very less.

The notion of young Zeme and other Naga women as “exchangeable goods” or giveable as described in Chapter Six meant that parents were less likely to send their daughters to school as this education would be ‘wasted’ because, according to the custom of patrilocality and the dichotomised construction of gender, a young woman would go to perform only domestic, agricultural and reproductive labour with another family upon marriage. Usually, as well, in her natal family, daughters were needed around the home to do chores rather than attend school (see also Aier 1998: 98; S. Luithui 1998: 123), while boys, more likely associated with the public domain and ‘modern education’, were seen as better suited for this type of learning⁵³. Furthermore, earlier (and in some villages today as Mr I. Zeme and several other research participants explained) ‘sitting and studying’ was viewed as lazy, as I have already mentioned, as well as unproductive and even immoral. This sort of activity contravened Zeme Naga feminine ideals of the industrious woman that I have discussed. As such, a girl’s capacities as a prospective wife could be devalued, resulting in a poor reputation for her and her family and a lower brideprice. Some girls, then, did not want to attend school (see also Aier *ibid.*).⁵⁴

Literacy and equality

Without a doubt, women’s illiteracy has deepened their sense of inequality in relation to their more educated husbands. Earlier, the coming of literacy increased gender inequality due to the preference of educating boys. Some women say that husbands discourage their wife’s attendance at adult literacy classes in order to keep them ignorant and to maintain power over them. Mrs Iheule of Laisong said, “The greatest gift men can bring to society is literacy for *all*”, indicating that literacy is a resource to be shared equitably between genders and young and old. “We need a good

⁵³ Earlier, many Zemes were suspicious of the colonial (usually missionary) practice of schooling and were reluctant to send boys as well. Later, it is said that Rani Gaidinliu advised her followers not to attend school, but instead to learn by absorbing information from books kept under their pillows.

⁵⁴ This statement is not to detract from understanding that many girls, also, yearned to attend school, but were prevented from doing so by their families.

education to be equal to our husbands”, said Mrs Takheule, casting it as an issue of social justice. However, the dialogue with Ilungluyile showed how difficult it has been for girls, in the recent past, to gain an adequate education. Paujelungle from the *Paupaise* village of Hezailoa, who was approximately the same age as Ilungluyile, described how she was not permitted to attend school.

In my childhood a teacher came to my home and asked me to go to school. I was very happy. But when my parents didn’t allow it I was very sad. At that time there were many restrictions on girls going to school. My parents said that it’s a very bad thing for girls to study at school because you’ll become like a prostitute and be very badly behaved. I really regret my parents not letting me go to school... I can’t read or write. I don’t have the power to change anything in my life.

No doubt Paujelungle’s parents were trying to protect her, and their own reputations, from what was regarded as the corrupting and ‘impure’ forces of practices from the non-Zeme world. The right and proper place for Zeme girls and young women was safely under the care of fathers and fathers-in-law, not to be wantonly exposed to men who are not kin. Her comments also underscore, not only the view that the cultivation of feminine virtue around domestic labour was paramount, but also the rapidity of change in this view. Ilungluyile gave her view of the recent change in attitude towards education for girls:

I cannot fully say women, girls, are not allowed to study. “Girls are not allowed to come out”, I cannot say like that *now*, because many of them understand that women must get the same treatment as our boys. So, now our Zeme society is divided into 50/50 - people who already understand how others are living, and people who are still hanging on to the tribal system of our forefathers.

Education, especially the education of girls, has largely been a question of embracing modernity, such as participating in global discourses of social ‘progress’ and gender equality, and the loosening of notions around women as the ‘property’ of men who are exchanged between families; and that women’s rightful place is not only within the home.

Education and empowerment of women

Gender equality in schooling children now dominates discursively in North Cachar Hills. In practice poverty prevents some parents from sending their children (including boys) to school, and customary understandings of gender persist in reluctance to send girls beyond primary schooling, especially when money is tight. Yet, some people now prefer educated young women to be their daughters-in-law so they can bring more earnings to the family (see also Newmai 1998: 45) as well as prestige. It is widely understood that education has changed women’s position in society. Mr. Ramkhui Newme said, “Men now have sixty per cent of the power and women have forty per cent. Previously only men commanded. *Paupaise* women have less power because they are late to educate girls. But because of education, women’s power has risen.”

In Nagaland, especially in urban areas, the literacy gap between males and females is considerably less than the Indian average (see *The Morung Express*, April 8, 2011), which seems to be a result of the promotion of Christian/Western ideals of this form of gender equality, as well as the alleged higher valuing of girls and women in traditional Naga societies than in most parts of India. There are no comparable available data on the Zeme literacy rate. However, the Peren district of Nagaland shares a border with North Cachar Hills and is mostly populated by Zemes. It had a literacy rate of 79.00% in 2011. The male literacy rate is 83.96% while the female literacy rate is 73.57%. In the last decade, the rate of literacy has increased by 13.09%. Similar to the trend in the rest of Nagaland state, the decadal increase in literacy rates in females was 14.17% which is higher than the decadal increase in the male literacy rate of 11.90% (*The Morung Express*, n.d.). Figures for Zemes of North Cachar Hills are said to be much lower overall.

Anecdotally, however, Zeme girls' literacy, while not yet reaching male numbers, is rising more quickly, along similar lines to the Peren district rates. This is likely because it is now viewed as more acceptable for girls to attend school and to perform activities previously favoured for boys. The gender dichotomy is less rigid for unmarried girls and women. Furthermore, of those girls who achieve higher education many are now surpassing boys in their results. According to Zeme students at tertiary level in Guwahati (Assam's largest city) 60 per cent are female. Some young men express they feel disturbed by this trend. Akum said, "Even though her parents consider it less important for her to be educated than boys, now girls everywhere are higher than boys. We feel ashamed!"

A study by political scientist Duncan McDuié-Ra (2012c) finds a similar situation among young tribals who migrate from the Northeast to Delhi for work or study. He suggests that migration is having a gendered impact: women thrive while men struggle. "Academic success also creates some resentment. Though there is scant numerical evidence to support it, the perception [amongst tribals] in Delhi is that men drop out of university and college far more frequently than women" (2012b: 121). He points out that explanations varied from alcoholism, laziness, immaturity, and no ambition. Being a young tribal man in a big city can be depressing and 'emasculating' because they cannot retaliate in the face of racism and discrimination as they are able to do at home (*ibid.*: 125) as the city is a very different socio-political entity. Furthermore, replicating gender roles from home exacerbates tensions between tribal men and women in the city. Women are gaining a new sense of independence away from the constraints of home, and reject the 'traditional' responsibility of protection from the men (*ibid.*: 123). Young Zeme women studying in Guwahati and other cities may well be behaving in similar ways.

When I asked Akum to explain why he felt it was inappropriate for women to exceed men in education he invoked the customary practice of patrilocality and traditional gender constructions. “A higher reputation in education is not the Zeme future because women get married to other tribes. We are afraid.” He gave an example of a Zeme woman becoming a medical doctor who later married a man from another tribe. “She helps Zemes also, but her sons and daughters will belong to another tribe. Women don’t love their own community!” Akum’s fear here is perhaps more to do with increased domination by non-Zeme others than by women. But these issues are clearly related. Men are threatened by women’s rising success in their ‘outside’ domain and women’s challenging men’s traditional authority over them. Akum, like many other men, married and unmarried, fear loss of control over their most precious resource, women.

Exerting control over women

I would argue, that as the ground shifts dangerously beneath the feet of Zeme men, in terms of their sense of domination in regional and global politics, in terms of poverty and of now competing with women for the scarce resources of quality education and employment to ‘succeed’ as men in culturally acceptable ways, they are tightening their control over wives. I illustrate by describing a relatively new form of displaying control over women through the public consumption of alcohol outside socially endorsed times.

Fear of domination by wives

Both women and men expressed that husbands fear being ‘dominated’ (or being seen as dominated) by wives. This is often expressed as being ‘henpecked’ or bent over in submission. Ilungluyile said, “If at home the menfolk work, their own friends will say, ‘Oh, he is the hunchback of his wife’.” In a rather heated discussion between Adeule and Akum about the changing ‘status’ of Zeme women, Akum attempted to justify the maintenance of men’s dominance.

I feel sorry for Zeme women who have to do a lot of work. But it’s not right to let them dominate. We men must take care of them. But not let them dominate. Because that’s not our real custom. Men dominate because we’re physically stronger. Women can’t tolerate risky things. Men can bear problems better because we’re less emotional, less likely to get upset. Women come from other families so we must treat them well, like guests. Zeme men are afraid to marry a strong, determined woman. Usually the husband dies soon. She captures her husband. But it’s ok for the man to capture the woman.

Of course there is a compelling logic that in a patrilineal, patrilocal society women who ‘belong to other’s families’ should not be *viewed* as the head of the household (even though in reality this may be so) nor should they be regarded as the one in ‘control’ of the family and community resources. Senior Zeme leader, Mr. Ijirangbe Zeme explained, “Menfolk are masters of the community, so a

boy shouldn't be afraid of being dominated by a wife". Mr I. Zeme accepts men's domination (however benevolent) of women as a given. Young Akum, on the other hand, seemed to not feel as secure in his position as male in relation to young females in Zeme society, perhaps suggesting marked generational changes in gender relations. Akum recreates Zeme gender stereotypes of 'weak' women needing overseeing by 'strong' men. Yet, in reality many older women comment that even elderly women are stronger and faster than some young men nowadays; and as everywhere, some Zeme women are larger and stronger than some men. Men repeatedly draw on 'tradition'⁵⁵ or 'customary' constructions, as Akum does. Despite the devaluation of 'custom' in broader discourses of modernity, he utilises it (and the notion of inviting of a customary form of divine wrath) to reinforce the traditional Zeme gender dichotomy and division of labour, and to contest women's foray beyond customary constraints. I will say more about women's contestation of this shortly.

Control without responsibility

Earlier chapters explained that men's control over women is understood by Zemes as a 'natural right' and as a foundation of masculine adulthood as earlier chapters described. Only men are accepted as heads of households. However, as Margrethe Silberschmidt (2005: 195) explains, "Patriarchy does not mean that men have only privileges. A patriarch has also many responsibilities". As we have seen in previous chapters, the traditional patriarchs had responsibilities towards women, children and the whole community, based on forms of masculine service, and experienced as 'care'. The expression of *heleuraube* strengthened one's authority and control. Silberschmidt (*ibid.*) suggests,

The irony of the patriarchal system resides precisely in the fact that male authority has a material base while male responsibility is normatively constituted... This has made men's roles and identities confusing and contradictory, and many men express feelings of helplessness, inadequacy, and lack of self-esteem.

With the erosion of the material base of the gerontocracy by the advent of the market economy into Zeme territory and the gradual dissolution of their authority over younger men, the power of

⁵⁵ Men in the Northeast, and in many parts of the world, invoke 'tradition' to exclude and constrain women. It is widely known, for example, that the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, under which Zemes and most other hill tribal peoples fall in the Northeast, grants autonomy of a limited nature to 'traditional institutions'. Feminists from the Northeast have for some time critiqued the ways tribal men utilise the concept of 'traditional institutions' or 'customary practices' to continue to exclude women from politics and important decision-making bodies. Male-only Village Councils are financially supported and legally endorsed by the State. Zeme men, who perhaps as yet remain largely unchallenged by women in this arena, justify their positions at the heads of religious and political organisations as customary rights and duties, and in which women do not belong.

husbands within the household approaches something like sovereignty, while his wife is left less protected and vulnerable to his demands. In this process affiliations decline in favour of atomised nuclear family arrangements and households become more autonomous⁵⁶ (see Knaft (1997: 238), again undermining protection for wives within their family of marriage. At the same time these same husbands seem to be losing the base of their own authority due to poverty and inability to contribute in a meaningful way to the household economy as described in Chapter Eight. Knaft suggests that male status relies increasingly on material acquisition and success in a cash economy (*ibid.*: 239) which, as I have pointed out, is difficult to attain for marginalised Zemes. While a husband may not be able to ‘supply the needs’ of even his own family he may nevertheless be able to *display* a level of control over his wife and her productive capacities according to the customary norm of men’s entitlement to leisure. Below I explore the use (by a significant minority of men) of public alcohol consumption as a relatively new way to demonstrate a man’s position as the head of the family and that signals deeper shifts in Zeme patriarchy and gender relations.

Changing masculinities and patterns of alcohol consumption

Mrs Takheule and the other members of the Heraka Women’s Society, Dr Newmai (noted in Chapter Four) and Mr Ndaime (Chapter Eight) referred to what is considered the problematic, but increasingly normalised, pattern of alcohol consumption for young men. This form of drinking is a strictly male-only practice and underscores an attempt to assert their dominance over the wife and her domestic production. This pattern departs significantly from traditional, socially endorsed patterns.

The customary drinking of rice beer (*zao*) has been an integral part of Zeme life and culture. It was considered ‘mother’s milk’ and was (and still is) produced entirely by women. It was a symbol of wealth, representing women’s productive capabilities and also the power of senior males to control and distribute life’s ‘blessings’ (see also Suggs 1996: 598). Akum told me that rice beer is a symbol of cooperation. *Zao* was consumed at every public occasion and the lack of it symbolises a lack of hospitality (Longkumer 2010: 130). For *Paupaise* it delineates age distinctions. Only older people (including elderly women) were allowed to drink the stronger *zao* called *duizao*. It was thought it could only be handled by a person of that age. *Paupaise* say ‘it belongs to God’ and it was therefore taboo for non-elders to drink it (*ibid.*). The less alcoholic *tekuizao* could be used by all on ritual occasions. A more watered-down version (*klezao*) is drunk by children and is considered medicinal

⁵⁶ However, the atomisation of the Zeme household, and sovereignty of the husband/father, is a great deal less than we are accustomed to in English-speaking countries.

(*ibid.*). *Zao* represented the basic reciprocities of social life, even more than food. It was the key symbol linking almost everything that people thought important (see Suggs 1996: 598).

While rice beer was a ‘special food’ to be shared in the creation of community, now it, and other forms of alcohol, is marketed as a commodity to be consumed for drinking’s sake (see Suggs 1996: 599). Nowadays only *Paupaise* and Heraka women make *zao*, but Presbyterians and Catholics are permitted to buy it from them. Baptist Christians abstain (though a few may occasionally drink surreptitiously) because inebriation, while once viewed as making a person more open to ‘divine communication’ (Longkumer 2010: 130) is now viewed as a hindrance to religious, educational and economic advancement. As Longkumer (2010: 130-131) explains the consumption of *zao* now reinforces Zeme religious boundaries. I suggest that novel drinking patterns also indicate changes in the patriarchy and reinforce new gender boundaries.

The drinking of stronger brew by non-seniors is clearly an indication of the demise of the patriarchal authority of the elders. The loss of the gerontocracy’s social control means that younger men have no ‘shame’ in gathering to drink with their age cohorts, presumably to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood and to assuage the sense of deprivation and proletarianisation expressed by Mr Chikambe Ndaime in Chapter Eight. Drinking (and gambling) may provide an opportunity for male collectivity now that customary male corporate activities, such as those that took place in the *hangseuki*, are diminished (see Knauft 1997: 250). The introduction of strong alcohol such as rum and whiskey may also be instruments of oppression by the Indian State which encourages its army to distribute these drinks widely (IWGIA 1986: 118). One anonymous informant said in a human rights report: “Traditionally we Nagas had our own rice beer but we were never alcoholics. We did not have whiskey and rum until the early 1960s...Now many villagers feel that their lives are hopeless and without a purpose and they go and drink and then become alcoholics. Some of our brightest young men are alcoholics” (IWGIA 1986: 118-119). I mentioned earlier that alcohol consumption became such a problem in Nagaland and Manipur that they have been legally designated ‘dry’ states. Whereas drinking potent alcohol on ritual occasions was once a symbol of gerontocratic control of production, now younger men claim the same right but also drink outside of ceremonial events. The drinking of non-local alcohol (such as rum or whiskey) may also be symbolic of competition and individual success in a money economy (see Suggs 1996: 597) suggesting display of inequality amongst peers (though it is no doubt shared equitably amongst them). It also demonstrates younger men’s greater earning capacity than older men’s. And it usually demonstrates men’s control over a wife’s wages as Mrs Takheule pointed out.

This novel drinking pattern is a statement of husbands' power relations with wives. As in many other places, Zeme masculine privilege means that when men are relaxing they can rest assured that the demands of everyday home life will be met by women (see Suggs 1996 for an example from Botswana). Such public drinking in groups demonstrates to each other their position as head of the household, in full command over the women who keep the household running. It is the way some men in Zeme society can assert their only form of control. Wives and elders view men's drinking outside festive occasions as 'wasteful' and irresponsible', and as an activity that should *follow* the provisioning of the household. These men, on the other hand, see drinking as a right bestowed, as a *part* of the provisioning of the household (Suggs 1996: 607). While Zeme women are able to be the women society expects them to be through gendered labour, as anthropologist David Suggs suggests, in some societies that have transitioned recently from agrarian to capitalist economies, from men's perspective, a man needs to publicly consume alcohol to be the man (wider / 'modern') society expects him to be. It is an "essential statement of masculinity" (*ibid*: 608).

Public drinking outside culturally endorsed times, is also, as Mr Ndaime implied, a form of protest. Drinking and idleness is not supportive of the family and does not show *heleuraube* to the wife, children or the community. It is perceived as unjust by women and the elderly and causes such families to 'lag behind' in terms of 'development' (see Longkumer 2010: 131). Mr Ramkhui Newme, the Heraka President at the time of his interview, said, "People should be able to prepare rice beer and rice wine, but there are certain rules and regulations – not to become drunkards".

However, approval and praise from elders no longer seem to matter as they provide neither scope nor models for respect and status advancement in the modern society. Approval from wives has become irrelevant because they have lost their traditional leverage over husbands whereby women were able to withdraw their labour if displeased with husbands' behaviour, and thus affect his social standing. Now a husband's control over his wife, and the public consumption of the products of her labour, means he will be recognised as the dominant member of the family. This is in contrast with the feeling of his subordination in the regional and global order. In the past he would have performed masculine duties in reciprocation of his wife's labour. This would ensure an acceptable status in his society. Now, his control and appropriation of her labour is experienced by wives as exploitive, and her work that once contributed to her family's prestige becomes mere drudgery. A wife still expects her labour to be celebrated and to define her success. The exploitation of it is beginning to cut to the core of wives' feminine identity as well as their health.

Women's challenges to domination

Zeme women, as everywhere, are not unanimous in their opinions about their relationships with their husbands, and in their experiences of cultural change. A great many, if not the majority, quietly accept what they regard as their 'duty' to men and society and utter no protest (nor fathom any reason to do so). In Chapter Four I noted, for example, that the women of the Hangrum Women's Society did not view themselves as equal to men, and that was the natural order of things, to remain uncontested. Nonetheless, they did note that they had to work much harder than ten or twenty years earlier, and that men still enjoyed far more leisure than they. However here, and in most of this thesis, I have focused on the women who are agitating, however subtly, for change in men's relations with women.

We have seen that women are vocal in their criticism of what they perceive as the changes in masculine caring practices through labour. However, Zeme women are as yet, relatively powerless to mount any kind of mass protest. Illiteracy and poverty prevent the publicising and dissemination of ideas, and the remoteness of villages impedes forming more major (and regular) alliances beyond local women's associations with more powerful Zeliangrong and other pan-Naga organisations (such as the Naga Mother's Association). Yet this does not mean they are unable to act as agents of change. As Gutmann (2006: 24) writes, "seen as dialectically and not as a dualism, women's initiative – often in the form of arguing, cajoling, and issuing ultimatums – should be understood as part of a process by which women and men creatively transform themselves and their gendered worlds in consequential new ways". What are some of the ways Zeme women we have met here are mounting challenges against their sense of increasing control by men?

Providing what the children need

I have already mentioned that Women's Societies are involved in micro-credit schemes which strengthen their material base, perhaps in very small ways, to provide what they and the children are seen to need. Indeed, Zeme Women's Societies have raised money for village halls, underscoring their abilities and concerns to provision the wider community. In terms of raising money towards the education of their children as Mrs Takheule described in Chapter Four, as well as being a necessity, this constitutes something of a critique of men's performance of provisioning. Chapter Seven showed that caring for and training children and adolescents was a core component of masculinity. Earlier chapters showed men had ample opportunity to mentor, protect and nurture children in the early colonial period. 'Fathering' of the community's children was part of providing what the people needed. While children continue to be understood as precious and vulnerable, and contributing to their happiness is considered paramount by both women and men, the fact that some

husbands did not strive to earn wages for school fees and materials was regarded as ‘uncaring’ by women. How are we to understand this apparently recent turn of events?

Chapter Eight outlined the decreasing resources available to men, especially in terms of education and employment. Men are beginning to question their ability to provide, materially and socially, for their children. Even Jonah (Chapter Seven), who with his Masters degree from a major Indian university is likely to earn more money and respect than most Zemes, obliquely commented on the difficulty nowadays for Zeme men to provide for their children.

In the past I would like to have had lots of children. But now I only want two or three. So I can train them nicely and send them to a nice school. Boys or girls, it doesn’t matter, as long as they’re my children. But if I don’t become rich enough to support my children, then I don’t want to marry.

Not wishing to marry is almost unheard of for a Zeme, particularly a Zeme man, for whom it is a marker of adulthood, security, and command over a household as I have explained. Chapter Seven also showed that men usually wish to have as many children as possible, as they were considered a form of wealth. Two or three children were considered, and still are by most, inadequately few.

Mrs Takheule (and many other women) accused men of not “paying enough attention to the children”, as noted in Chapter Four. Shifts in local patriarchy and regional hegemonic forms of masculinity mean a shift in who is regarded as suitable for the task of educating and training children. Increasing inequalities between men, such as those described in the last chapter, contribute to men’s inability (and perhaps unwillingness) to participate as fully in the rearing of children. The relatively novel rearrangements of child rearing institutions (for example, schools, hostels and youth clubs) depicted in Chapter Seven reflect changes in relations among men due to the economic and socio-cultural changes of the last few decades. These may be leading to the partial exclusion of many men, especially the less educated, from taking a central role in child-raising.

Moreover, as less educated men are excluded from these institutions, and as women contribute more to them; and as children are viewed less as resources for the future security of men, the more the labour of providing for children is considered part of women’s domain. The Heraka Women’s Society saved money “for the education of our children” and many other women worked for wages in other peoples’ *jhums* to send their children to school. This was noteworthy by the women, and thus repeated often, because it was considered somewhat unjust and anomalous that women should do this while many men did not contribute. When I half joked to Jonah that he and his children might be financially supported by his future wife he responded, “It’s a bit shameful for a man to survive on his wife’s income. I only want my family to be supported by my income.” I suggest then, that women use the expectations of the traditional gender dichotomy and its ‘proper’ division of

labour to shame men into changing their behaviour. The power to shame is marked in Zeme society as I explained in Chapter Five. I pointed out that ‘shamelessness’ (*ngamakbe*) is considered the ‘opposite’ of *heleuraube*. To elicit ‘shame’ in men may go some way towards the beginning of reparation for Zeme women.

Challenging patriarchal privileges: militarisation and protection

Women protest that men are claiming patriarchal privileges, when they do not deserve to claim them. Of course, these comments potentially incite the shame of men. The militarisation of Zeme territory has provided the conditions for men to fail at protecting the community, but presents them with a rationale to claim the privileges of warriors of earlier times.

Perhaps to a lesser degree than many other Naga women, Zeme women nevertheless exist in an environment dominated by the nationalist masculinity of the occupying Indian military; the ethno-nationalist masculinity of insurgency and gun culture; and the masculinity of their men more broadly who usually claim women as their property in the broader ethno-nationalist struggle (see McDuié-Ra 2012b: 335). Militarisation has been found to provide continuity to the principle of patriarchy and privilege, especially during times of threat and conflict (see Chenoy 2004). Yet, militarisation of their territory seems to operate as a constraint on Zeme men’s capacity for protection rather than an opportunity for displays of heroism as I explained in Chapter Eight. But despite these constraints, and because of the interplay between ongoing militarisation and Zeme constructions of masculinity, men continue to claim patriarchal privileges, such as leisure and rest, that successful protectors/warriors have customarily been entitled to. Akum said, “Men work less because of the former practice of headhunting. Men had to take rest in order to guard the village well at night. This is no longer practiced, but the tradition prevails.”

Women, of course, feel that where men are ineffective in their duties to protect the village that they should not claim customary rights to leisure and other privileges that ‘warriors’ are entitled to. Paujelungle commented that in earlier times boys and men were given special treatment, “because they were like the police and army”. Adeule added with some irritation, “Women used to prepare the best food for men because they would keep the women safe. But now the men *still* think they’re more important even though they don’t have the duty to protect!” Women clearly suffer a sense of injustice that their hard domestic labour is not being adequately reciprocated by men in the form of

protection. Thus, according to the rights and duties of the traditional gender division of labour, women feel fully justified in vocalising their dissatisfaction with their husbands⁵⁷.

Women as guardians of Zeme identity

Increasingly, where men invoke ‘tradition’ or ‘custom’ to claim rights to leisure and other privileges, and to enforce the exclusion of women from resources and institutions, women claim that it is *they* who are the true upholders of tradition. In Chapter Four, for example, Mrs Takheule positioned the Women’s Society as responsible for safe-guarding Zeme culture from the deleterious influence (gambling and idle-card-playing) of ‘outsiders’. She authorised women’s actions against younger men by gaining the “full support of the elders and the *Gaon bura*” (the village headman). She states that it is women, and not men, who wear “proper cultural dress” and “preserve our culture”. Again, attire is not a trivial matter but rather an important marker of identity. I mentioned earlier that even Baptist (the strongest emulators of Western clothing and other behaviours) women continue to weave and wear modified ‘traditional’ garments to formal occasions more often than men. However, it is Herakas who are more concerned to ‘preserve’ Zeme ‘identity’ and the women position themselves as the ones who succeed in doing so. In this narrative they also transcend matters of labour to utilise broader discourses of identity which have tended to be the domain of ‘masculine’ ethno-nationalist movements. Again, it is women who show they are ‘providing what the people need’ while men are failing. By positioning themselves as the agents of cultural survival women catapult themselves into the public domain as the guardians and protectors of the Zeme way of life.

Women, especially married women, increasingly claim something of a monopoly on that most valued aspect of Zeme culture, *heleuraube*. As an integral part of Zeme ‘custom’ *heleuraube* seems increasingly to be viewed (at least by women) as a part of feminine personhood, and as lacking in men’s. Both Mrs Takheule and Paujelungle mentioned (and is recorded earlier), for example, the importance of the equitable sharing of food between men and women. The provisioning and fair distribution of food is the ultimate caring act. Men claim greater portions due to customary rights of needing to be in good condition for the physical protection of the village. We have seen that women counter men by arguing that men are no longer adequately protecting the village, due to changed circumstances, and therefore no longer deserve extra portions. It is highly masculine and *heleuraube* behaviour to show self-restraint around food and not show hunger. When women accuse men of

⁵⁷ The fact that women are citing their relationships with their husbands as their greatest problem also suggests a much welcome cessation of conflict between various Zeme groups, at least in the last few decades. It also points to the likelihood that men’s inability to ‘protect’ women in terms of military defence is not nowadays experienced as life-threatening issue, but an issue relevant instead to the gender division of labour.

“eating bigger and better dishes than the women” it strikes at the heart of men’s sense of masculinity. After all, it may be more likely that the women had provided all the resources for the meal. Women are suggesting that when men claim customary rights they are no longer entitled to they are not fit to be a man. Shaming may be the weapon of the powerless but here it provides women with moral leverage to attempt to effect changes in their husbands’ behaviour. Zeme men, according to masculine constructions, are supposed to be the most self-sacrificing people who actively show care for the whole community. We have seen that Zeme men no longer have the resources to enact traditional forms of masculinities. Women are assuming the responsibility to ‘care’. When they declare, “We women care more” this is almost a usurpation of men’s role. Increasingly it is they who are safeguarding the future of their children by providing for them through education, and publicly upholding their cultural lifeways through practices of *heleuraube* and other ‘caring’ labour. In a way, women are commenting on the displacement of caring and *heleuraube* as central to Zeme hegemonic masculinity, suggesting that it is time for women to assume at least equality in their relations with men.

Crises and opportunities

I have shown that ‘providing what the people need’, once viewed as a male-only capacity, is a value that is now being enacted by an increasing number of women, especially younger women. Knauff explains that just as women have long exerted counter-pressures against men’s domination – through informal influence, complementary avenues of prestige, and collective opposition or resistance- so, too they can engage with modernity through their own economic initiatives as well as their own demands (1997: 242). Crises of modernity and marginalisation have led to profound shifts in gender relations, but also to new opportunities that women continue to grasp.

My analysis points to an increasing sense of Zeme men’s lack of control over resources and sense of destiny, and by extension, those of their families and communities. By this I mean a reasonable sense of confidence that efforts to control and provide the material and social resources for their community in the foreseeable future will be successful. In other words, to believe that they will have the opportunities to ‘provide what the people need’ and be celebrated as ‘fit to be a man’ for doing so. However, men’s lack of economic and socio-political resources make *heleuraube*, the jewel in the crown of Zeme society with its ethos of self-sacrifice and care, less meaningful and less practicable. In the past, and under normal circumstances, men as well as women could rest assured that by meeting their responsibilities of ‘caring’ for others they would enjoy a meaningful life and the special privileges of seniority and old age. The prospects for old age and the future of their children are now uncertain. The efforts to unify their ancestral homelands and peoples as Zemes,

Zeliangrongs and Nagas (described in Chapter Two) and their concern to adapt their cultural practices and underlying ideologies in order to avert the possible loss of their lifeways (producing ‘modernities’ such as the Heraka movement by reforming religions and their economy); their attempts to ally themselves with more powerful players in the global arena (for example, with global Christian organisations, with national Hindu groups, with national and international development agencies, NGOs and United Nations organisations); increasingly adopting English (the language of ‘power’) as the medium of education and as the official language, as in Nagaland and Meghalaya (see Kelkar and Nathan 2004: 26); and the focus on literacy to gain information to access resources, appear as responses to being culturally, economically and psychologically undermined. Historian Gangmumei Kamei (2004: 1) states that “history and geography have been cruel to the identity of the Zeliangrong people”. The strategies listed above are all attempts to battle their marginalisation and regain a sense of control over their lives and their futures, or, as Kamei puts it, “efforts to...win a place for themselves under the sun” (*ibid.* front cover). Zeme women, as part of this movement, are also seeking their ‘place in the sun’, equal to their men.

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